



The classroom screen glowed. Cy pulled on his headphones.

“She’ll forget,” he said. “Mom gets busy with her job and forgets me.”

“Good morning, class,” a voice blared into Cy's ear. “Today is Friday, September 13, 2019. According to your seat detectors, everyone is present today. Today, spaghetti cubes will be served for lunch. The temperature on the playground is fifty-two degrees, so jackets are required at recess. Today is Cy Martin's birthday.”

Cy felt a swat on his shoulder. “Hey, Birthday Boy,” Zeke said behind him. “Do we get birthday treats today?”

“Sure,” said Cy. “My mom said she'll bring some.”

Up front, the day's schedule appeared on the screen.

“First read pages sixty to seventy-five on your desk screen readers,” said the headphone voice. “Touch any word you can’t read and the computer

will pronounce it for you.”

Words appeared on Cy's desktop screen. Over and over, he hit the Page-Turn button, scarcely glancing at the story.

Miss Jenson, the Roving Teacher, walked into the room. “Any questions on your reading, class?” she asked.

Cy pressed a button, and a plastic hand rose from the back of his chair.

“Yes, Seat Twenty-One,” said the roving teacher.

“Was anything left for me in the office?” Cy asked.

Miss Jenson talked into her wrist intercom, then shook her head. “I'm afraid not,” she said. “It's now time for writing, class. I'll return in an hour. Remember, too much talking will set off the noise alarm.”

Cy slid open his desktop, and a keyboard popped up. He wanted to write about his birthday, but after the first sentence, half the words on the screen flashed.

The headphone voice said, “Many misspelled words, Seat Twenty-One. Also capitalize the first word.”

Cy struck the delete button. “Right, right,” he muttered.

Finally, the lunch buzzer rang. The classroom door slid open, and Cy stepped into the moving hallway. He hated how slowly the floor moved, but he knew it was against school rules to walk in the hall. As he passed the lunch counter, he grabbed a spaghetti cube and wolfed it down. At the office

door, he called to the computer secretary, "Was anything left for Cy Martin, Room Eighty-Six?"

"Nothing, Cy," the computer answered.

"Just as I figured," Cy said. "She forgot all about it."

The afternoon began with the headphone voice saying, "Put on your virtual reality goggles. We shall take a trip to Africa."

Cy pulled his VR goggles over his eyes and ears. At once, tall grass surrounded him. Two giraffes stood in the distance. For the next half-hour, he felt as if he were walking through the African savanna. A herd of zebras raced in front of him. Elephants passed on both sides. Hearing a roar, he spun around. Two lions crouched in the grass behind him. The sights, sounds, and smells all seemed so real.

Afterward, he checked the digital clock on his desktop. In twenty minutes, school would be over. His heart sank. Too late, he thought. Another birthday missed.

"Your homework will appear on your home computer screens at six o'clock this evening," said the voice.

But Cy didn't hear the announcement. He was staring at the doorway where his mother stood. She walked into the room and placed a tray of homemade brownies on Cy's desk.

"Bet you never knew I could bake," she said.

"Happy birthday, Cy!" the class shouted.

The noise alarm sounded.