



Collins

# THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARING PEOPLE



Written and Illustrated by  
**ISHAAN GAEKWAD**

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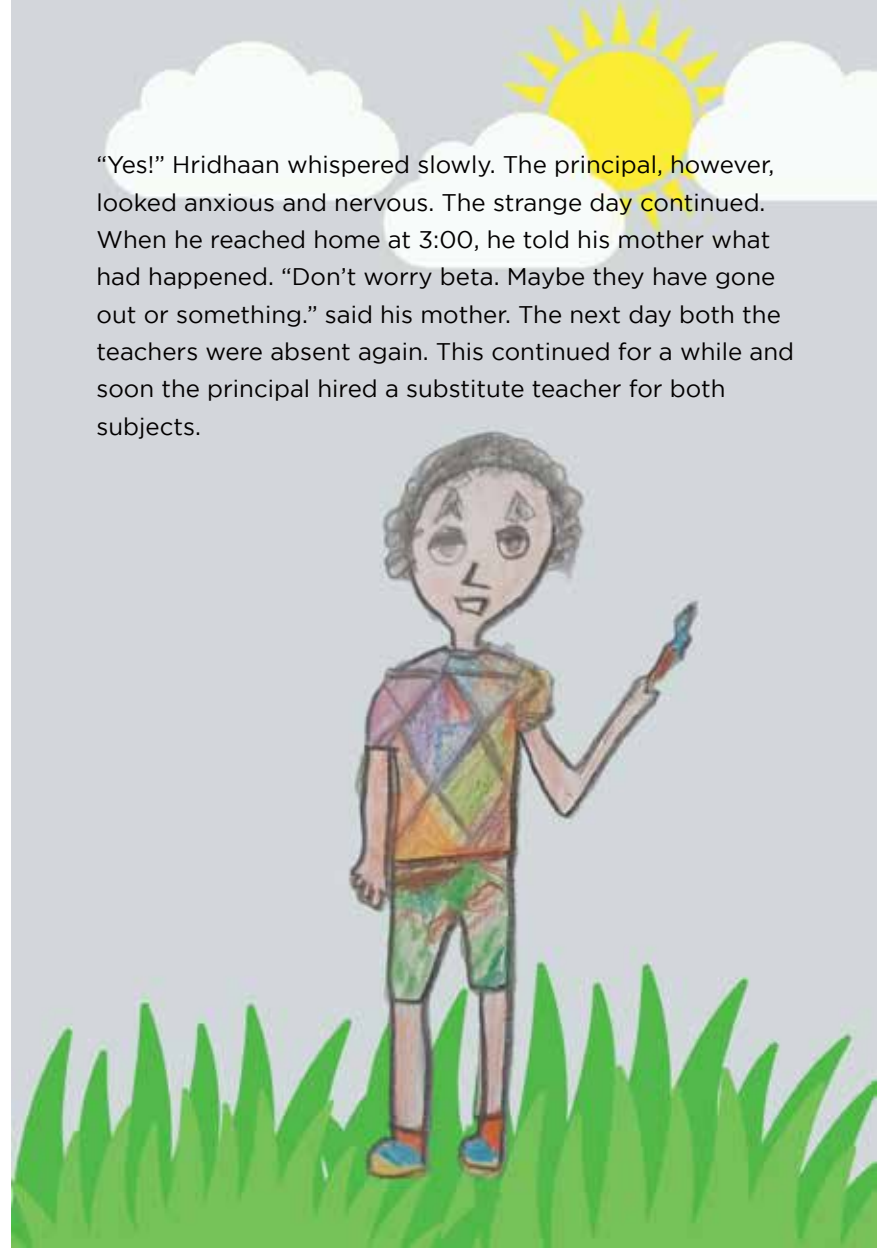
There once was a brave boy who went searching for disappearing people.

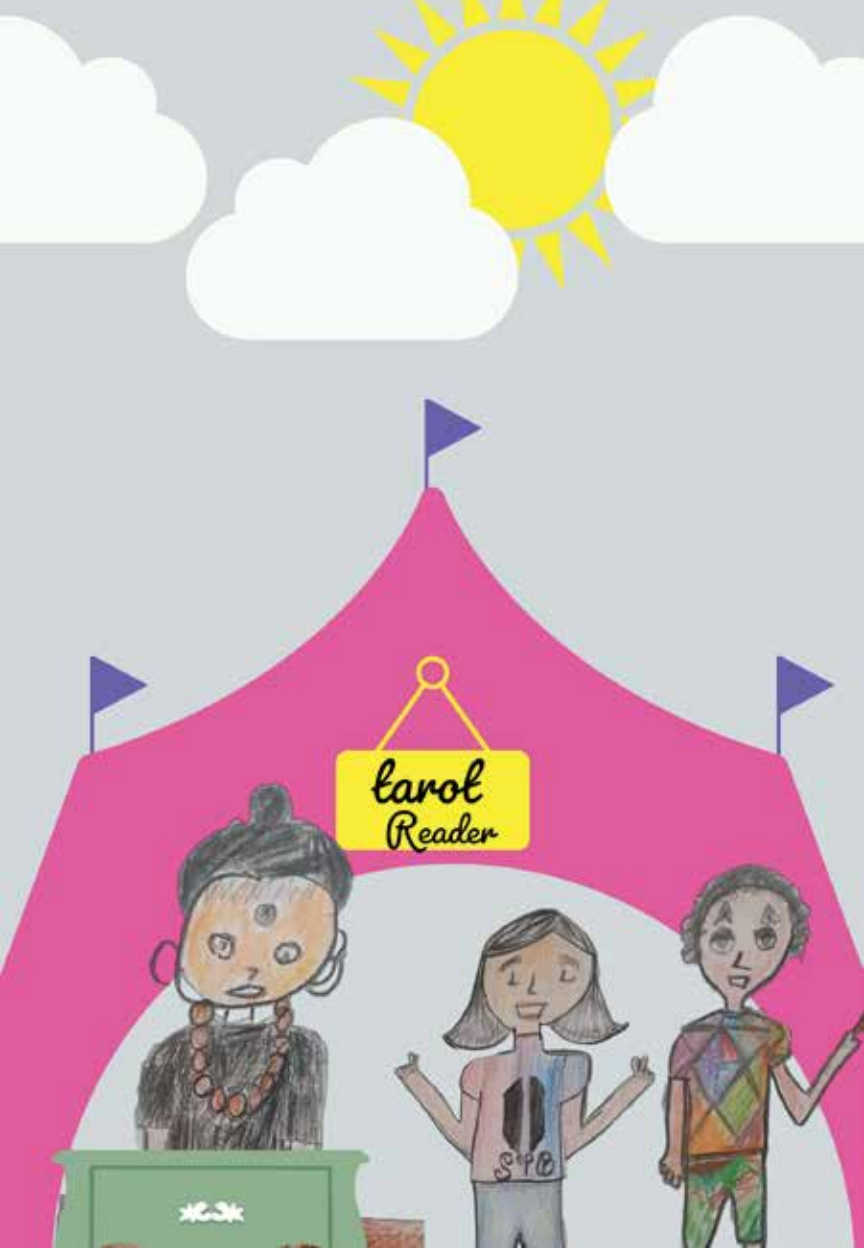
I know this may sound impossible, but it was not for Hridhaan. He was a 12-year-old boy, 5 feet 2 inches tall and rather peculiar looking. Hridhaan had strange angular eyebrows that made him a difficult person to forget. His hair reached his ears and he was often found wearing his favourite tie-dye shirt and camouflage pants. He had solid fists and was acrobatic. Hridhaan was, however, a kind hearted person who always carried a small wavy dagger given to him by his father.

Hridhaan had a twin sister. She was normal looking, had long hair and was always giving make-up tips to anyone she met - even to their dog, Spark. He was a cute little pug. On that day, Hridhaan had the strangest dream ever and woke up early. He woke his sister up to tell her all about it. She didn't like being woken up so early. She gave him the meanest look she could and they raced towards the bathroom. Spark barked and won the race. This day was definitely going to be weird. They both brushed and got ready for school. Their mom and dad were making breakfast for them. It was poha and milk. The day was not promising at all.

They reached school and leapt into the class shouting excitedly, "Mornin' people!" To their horror, the principal was already there talking to the four students who were sitting in class. "We'll just go and sit in our place," they said quietly after the principal gave them a look. "Let me repeat," said the principal taking Hridhaan and his sister Saanvi into consideration. "Today's Maths and Science classes will be cancelled due to the absence of Mrs Saini and Mrs Chawla."

"Yes!" Hridhaan whispered slowly. The principal, however, looked anxious and nervous. The strange day continued. When he reached home at 3:00, he told his mother what had happened. "Don't worry beta. Maybe they have gone out or something." said his mother. The next day both the teachers were absent again. This continued for a while and soon the principal hired a substitute teacher for both subjects.





A couple of months later, Hridhaan almost forgot about the teachers. But on the last day of school (before the summer holidays commenced), his mother asked him about the teachers. Hridhaan was worried about them again but forgot about them soon, after all they were going for a vacation to Goa the next day. They had booked a nice cottage right near the beach. The first day was spent at the beach. Later that evening, Hridhaan, Sanvi and Spark explored the place. They saw a shack where a woman read Tarot cards. All of them went there. The woman wore a long black dress with a necklace of big beads. She suddenly shouted, "What are you kids doing at my lair!?" "We want a sneak peek into the past." Said Sanvi immediately. "Can you afford my fee?" she asked. "I heard you are not certified." Said Hridhaan "Shhhh. Okay! Okay! Free of cost for you. What do you want to look at in the past?" She asked. "Disappearing teachers." Said Sanvi. "We got information on the school WhatsApp group that every 10 years some teachers go missing and it started in 2002." The tarot reader picked a card and looked at it in horror. "Oh no! This is very, very bad! They are in a closed place where there are no doors to get out." boomed the tarot reader. "They need help." She continued. This information depressed the two of them and neither could sleep that night.

The next day, their father took them to a nearby restaurant for breakfast. Hridhaan noticed a woman who was talking animatedly about something to her friend. He could hear words like 'lost' and 'never found'. After convincing Sanvi to come with him, they both bravely walked towards the table and questioned "Excuse us, ma'am," said Hridhaan. "We think we heard you mention something about disappearing people from you."

"Yes, my child," said the old lady. "You see, my daughter was a teacher at Star school in Mumbai. One day she went to the school as usual and never came back." "What subject did she teach?" Interrupted Sanvi "Science. She was teaching there since 2000. One day, she went to the lab with her fellow teacher. She taught Maths. They went into the lab together and have not come back since." said the old woman. She began to sob. "Oh, my child. Will she ever come to me?" "Don't worry ma'am. We study in the same school and our Science and Maths teachers have disappeared as well. We are trying to find out where they went." Said Hridhaan supportively.

"Please come with me." Said the old lady. Both got permission from their parents to go to the old lady's home. But their parents insisted on coming with them. They hopped in the car and reached the old lady's home. "Water?" asked the old lady "No, thank you." said Hridhaan, "Please tell us all that you know." "You see, at that time, I was at home sleeping. My daughter's husband, Sumit, was in his office and my grandchild, Raghav, was at school. When my daughter did not come home even after Raghav did, I was scared. I called the school. It was around 8:00 at night. They told our family to come to the school. When we reached there, the principal told us to follow

her. We went to her office and saw the unbelievable CCTV footage where my daughter and her friend vanished into thin air. I was speechless at what I saw. I rewound the footage but it was the same. We searched the school but it was of no use. She had just disappeared."

Hridhaan was horrified and so was his sister. "The principal, what was her name?" asked Sanvi. "Mrs Gupta. Heena Gupta." said the old lady. "That is our current principal!" said Hridhaan. "Excuse us, ma'am." Both of them said together. All of them got into their car. "Dad, we are going back to Mumbai." said Sanvi.





Once back, they met the principal and told her their story. “That is true. I did not know what to do. After a year the students forgot about the incident.”

“On what date did it happen, ma’am?” asked Sanvi. “On 5th March” replied the principal sadly. “What do you think happened to them?” asked Hridhaan. “I don’t know. Even the police investigated but had no answers.” Replied Mrs Gupta. “Can we go to the place where, you know, they disappeared?” Sanvi questioned. Mrs Gupta agreed and they went to the school.

The lab was heavily locked and very well secured which was pretty weird. Would they need superpowers like telekinesis or superstrength which would help them open the door? Hridhaan thought. The principal, with trembling hands, brought out a bunch of keys to open the lock. “Oops! Wrong key.” Exclaimed Mrs Gupta. Eventually, she got the correct key and the door slowly opened with a signature creaking sound. “That thing needs some oil” Hridhaan spoke to lighten up the mood but it did not work. The lab had paint peeling off its walls and pretty dirty and messy tables. The test tubes had gathered dust. “Let us investigate!” Sanvi exclaimed. Hridhaan took a closer look at the test tube but it slipped from his hands. “Hridhaan! Don’t touch anything!” Sanvi said sternly.

While looking around, Hridhaan noticed a door. He felt drawn to it for some reason. He was so curious that he could not control himself and opened it.

He was now in a narrow passage. "Come on, let's check this." He spoke loudly. They all fitted inside the passage and started walking forward. It was very dark and felt as if it were a six-hour walk. All of them were tired of walking just a few meters in. Suddenly, the passage became very bright and the light hit their eyes "Ouch" said Hridhaan as his eyes were pricked by the sudden bright light. They could not see anything. Everything was bright. "NOOO" Hridhaan yelled. "I am too young and cute and fabulous to die!"

But when his eyes adjusted to the brightness, he found himself in a hotel-like corridor "Oh!" he spoke in realization. "I wonder where this door leads," Hridhaan exclaimed, walking towards one door. He twisted the knob and another bright light pricked his eyes again. After a second or two, he saw what looked like a hotel room. There were two women there. He could not process what was happening. They had a blackboard. "Yessss. A way to get out" said one of them. "Ummm. What?" he enquired. Hridhaan got aside as the two women ignored him and the other people. They knocked at the two other doors present there. The doors opened quickly and 4 other women of different ages came out of the rooms. "Let's hope this works." Said one of them. They all got into a huddle and looked at the time.





“Ugh! 2 more hours as per our calculation!” said one of them. They noticed Mrs Gupta and looked surprised, happy and confused at the same time. “Mrs H!!! What are you doing here? Who are these people? What year is it? Are our families worried about us? Is the school still running? Are these kids the students of the school? Are you still the principal? What is a dog doing here? Has the school spread all over India? Are we still the best school in the world? Does anyone remember us?” They all asked “Whoa, whoa, whoa! Slow it down! I will answer your questions one by one.” Said Mrs Gupta. And then slowly all their questions came to an end.

Then it was the visitor’s turn to question. “Who are you?” Hridhaan asked. “We are the teachers who taught at star school.” They answered “I know Mrs Saini and Mrs Chawla but I don’t know about the rest of you” said Sanvi. The teachers proceeded to introduce themselves excitedly.

“It’s time, we can trick the portal into opening and we can get out!” Hridhaan looked very startled. “Quick, quick make the formation! Make the formation!” yelled Lakshmi Ma’am.



All of them formed a huddle again but this time, the visitors also joined. “No! Not here! There” pointed Anu ma’am. They all went into a huddle again and then the teachers did some calculations and marked a spot. The young students didn’t understand anything so, Lakshmi Ma’am explained. “We have studied the events and concluded that every ten years, there is a portal that bends space and time and sucks anyone in its path at that precise moment. The portal opens in the lab of Star School. Our calculations say that we are very close to getting out through it now.” Suddenly the narrow passage lit up at the spot they marked and all of them ran very hard to reach there in time. They felt a sudden adrenaline rush as they ran and ran and ran and reached the portal just in time. “Whew! Just in time.” Sanvi exclaimed. Everyone was relieved. They all put up a board about the portal and got out of there. All the teachers went to their respective families. They thanked Hridhaan and Sanvi for their amazing work and everyone lived happily ever after.

Well, only till the portal was opened again.....



Ishaan Gaekwad loves reading books, playing chess and cricket and eating almost everything. If he could have a super power, he would want to help the environment in all the ways he could. He would particularly love to save animals from poachers. He would do that by whipping vines out of his hands and having a very long jumping range. He would entangle the poachers with vines and help Shikari Shambu keep the jungle safe. Ishaan aspires to become a Cricket Player, an IAS officer, a Chess Player and an Author, all in one. He would like to reduce global warming and make our planet a better place to live. He has participated in many Reduce, Reuse and Recycle activities and also in tree planting activities.

**Mentor**

Poonam Dasilva

Dhanashri Ubhayakar

# THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARING PEOPLE

Teachers in the school are disappearing one after the other. Is it a coincidence, a killer on the loose, or something paranormal? Join Hridhaan and Sanvi as they unravel the mystery.