



Seedling Sleuth Challenge: The Introductory Story

Carla's voice could be heard throughout the house.

"Maaaark!" she squawked angrily, stomping into the living room.

"What is going on? You're louder than the school fire alarm," her sister Mimi said.

"You know our neighbor, Mrs. Tingle? She gave me a big barrel flowerpot so I can grow yellow tulips for Mom's birthday," Carla started to explain.

Mimi interrupted, "It's been sitting next to the house for months. It is still there."

"I know it's there! Listen to the whole story. Mrs. Tingle helped me roll the planter over because it was too heavy to carry. We fixed a hole, cleaned it, and filled it with brand-new potting soil. I finally got the tulip bulbs today, but when I got home to plant them, the whole planter was full of weeds. It looks like someone planted the whole thing with weeds," Carla sighed.



Mimi asked, "Why are you yelling for Mark? You think he planted the weeds?"

"He was playing basketball with his friends across the street when I was working on the planter. I bet he did it to play a joke on me," Carla replied.

Mark strolled into the room, looking at his phone. "Did what? What are you accusing me of?" he asked.

"She thinks you filled her new planter with weeds as a prank," Mimi said.

"Weeds are surprisingly good at growing without help. No one has to plant them. They just show up. I've been way too busy practicing for tryouts to dig up weeds for a prank," Mark replied.

Carla's arms were crossed tightly. She thought about the weeds in her planter. Mrs. Tingle has a garden, and Carla's mom has three flower beds. Carla helps pull weeds all the time for

allowance money. The weeds in her planter are not like any of the usual weeds that pop up. The stems on the mystery seedlings are thick. She thought about Mark. Would Mark buy seeds for a prank? If it wasn't Mark, who would have planted these mysterious seedings?

That night, Carla had a dream. She was talking to Mrs. Tingle in her garden when suddenly, a tree started growing out of the ground at incredible speed. The tree had wide leaves unlike anything she had seen. It grew and grew before her eyes, until it was taller than Mrs. Tingle! The tree was suddenly swarmed with flying things she thought were birds. One of the birds landed right next to her, but it was not a bird. Carla was so excited.

"Look, Mrs. Tingle! It's a bat!"

Mrs. Tingle started swatting at the bat. "Go away! Shoo! Get out of here!" she exclaimed.

The bat looked quite offended and said, "Actually, I am a fruit bat. My name is Monty, and I suppose my friends and I can leave, but none of your fruit trees or flowers will grow."

Mrs. Tingle stopped swatting and looked at Carla. "Did you hear that, or am I going crazy?" said Mrs. Tingle.

Carla opened her mouth and said, "Monty."

Monty replied, "Yes, keep up, child. Bats are power pollinators, just like bees and butterflies. In fact, hundreds of plant species rely on bats to pollinate them, including fruits like bananas, avocados, and mangos! The bats then poop out the seeds, helping to disperse new trees. Plus, bats all over the world eat millions of insects every night, like pesky mosquitoes, protecting people from diseases. Those are the facts. I came to tell you this because I don't think you understand the secret friendship between plants and animals. I know you are dealing with a plant mystery."



"My tulip planter!" said Carla.



Monty nodded his head with approval. “You need to do some research at Zoo Atlanta if you want to find out the truth about seed spreaders. You may owe your brother Mark an apology,” Monty said.

Carla had so many questions. She knew about pollinators but not seed spreaders.

A loud sound that seemed to be getting louder prevented Carla from hearing Monty. Carla opened her eyes, realizing it had been a dream. She remembered her science class and made the decision to research fruit bats for her next research assignment.

The sound of the lawn mower was coming from outside. She looked out the window to see Mark mowing the lawn. She scanned her eyes to the side of the house and saw the planter dumped over on its side. “NOOOOOO,” she yelled, running down the stairs to the door.

“My planter!” Carla yelled as she ran to the dumped planter. Mark shut off the mower and walked over to Carla who was hovering over the planter.

“Thought I would help you dump out those weeds so you could plant your tulips,” said Mark.

“So, you DID plant these weeds? This was a practical joke after all?” asked Carla.

“No. I did not do anything, but I decided to be nice and rip them out for you since I am already out here working.” said Mark.

Carla looked surprised. She said, “I appreciate that, but look at this. This one has a bud. I am curious about these mystery seedlings. Mrs. Tingle will let me plant my tulip bulbs in her yard if I ask her. I need to solve this mystery. If you want to help, can you drive me to Zoo Atlanta? I need to do some research and find out more about seed spreaders,” Carla said as she smiled at Mark.

Mark looked confused, but said, “I have no idea what you’re talking about, but I can take you to the Zoo this afternoon.”

