The Goloknip Stories

by Roderick Ramage

fractions are fun

'Must I?'

Ben hated homework, especially when the sun was shining and his Mum made him stay in and do his homework. It was arithmetic. He hated arithmetic. It was factions. He hated fractions even more.   He had a page of arithmetic on the kitchen table and it was full of fractions.

'Can't you do for them for me?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'Because you've got to do them.'

It did not make sense at all. If he has got to hand them in on Monday and if his Mum can do them and if he cannot do them (or does not want to), then she should do them and he could go out to play. It was, Ben thought, a mad world.

'Now I've got to pop round to Aunty Jane's next door and I want to see them all done by the time I'm back. And woe betide you if they're not.'

Poor Ben. He knew she meant it, so picked up his pencil and chewed the end in case it was poisonous and made him ill so he didn't have to do his factions. Nothing happened, so he heaved a sigh and read the first question.

'Here goes. "A fraction is a part of a number. If you cut an apple into two pieces each piece is a part of the apple. One part is half the apple and the other part is half the apple. There are two part so we call them halves. If you put them together you have one apple. One half add one half makes one. If there are four pieces we call them quarters or fourths." I know that, silly. If you cut off a small bit of the apple. You still have two pieces, so they are halves, so … It doesn't sound fair.'

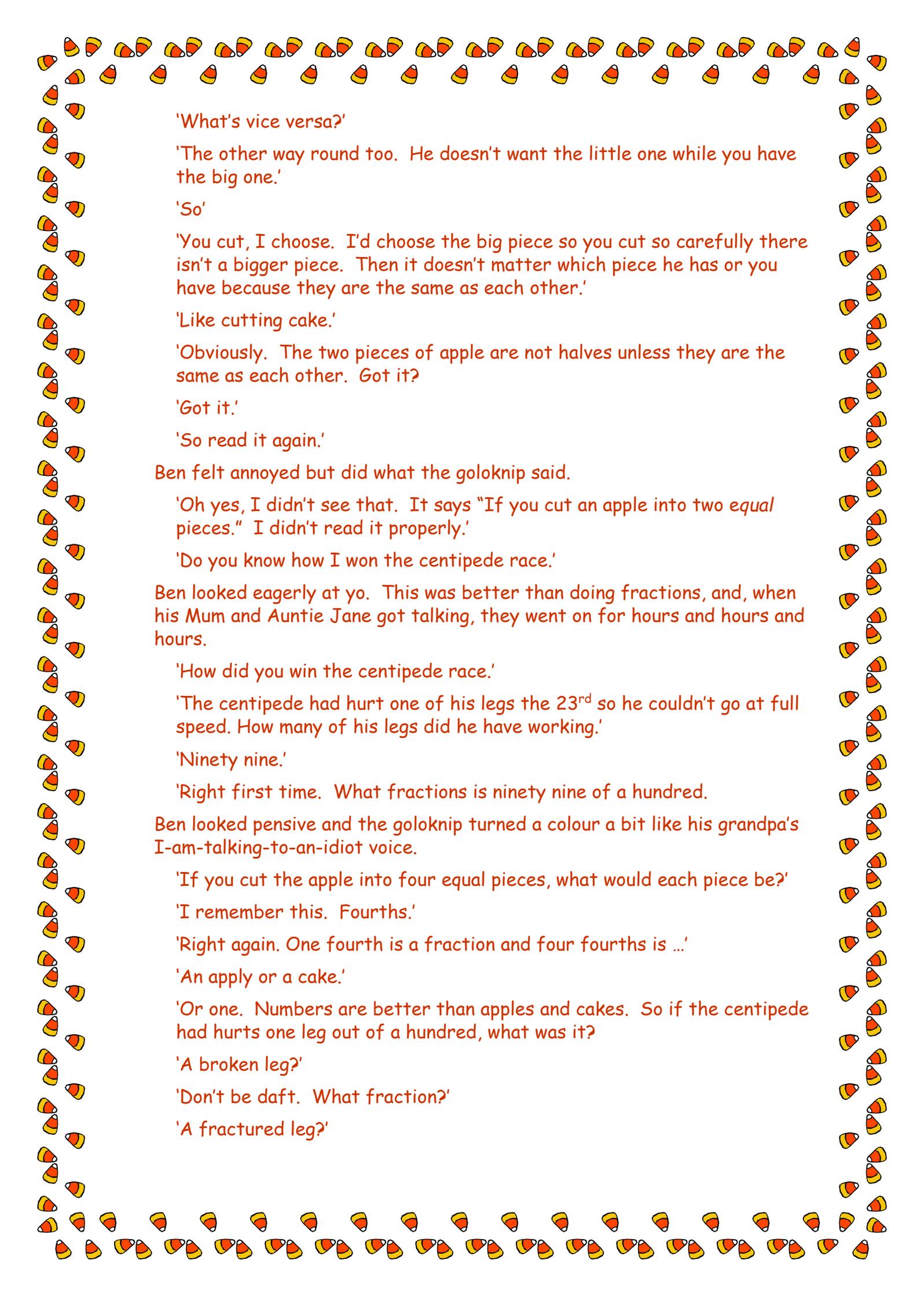'It isn't, Ben, read the question again.'

Ben started. For once he was concentrating on what he was meant to be doing and did not notice the shimmering or the quiet pop before the goloknip spoke to him.

'Hello. I'm glad you've come.'

'You cut I choose.'

'What do you mean?'

'If you are going to share the apple with a friend you don't want the little bit while he has the big one, and vice versa.'

'What's vice versa?'

'The other way round too. He doesn't want the little one while you have the big one.'

'So'

'You cut, I choose. I'd choose the big piece so you cut so carefully there isn't a bigger piece. Then it doesn't matter which piece he has or you have because they are the same as each other.'

'Like cutting cake.'

'Obviously. The two pieces of apple are not halves unless they are the same as each other. Got it?

'Got it.'

'So read it again.'

Ben felt annoyed but did what the goloknip said.

'Oh yes, I didn't see that. It says "If you cut an apple into two *equal* pieces." I didn't read it properly.'

'Do you know how I won the centipede race.'

Ben looked eagerly at yo. This was better than doing fractions, and, when his Mum and Auntie Jane got talking, they went on for hours and hours and hours.

'How did you win the centipede race.'

'The centipede had hurt one of his legs the 23rd so he couldn't go at full speed. How many of his legs did he have working.'

'Ninety nine.'

'Right first time. What fractions is ninety nine of a hundred.

Ben looked pensive and the goloknip turned a colour a bit like his grandpa's I-am-talking-to-an-idiot voice.

'If you cut the apple into four equal pieces, what would each piece be?'

'I remember this. Fourths.'

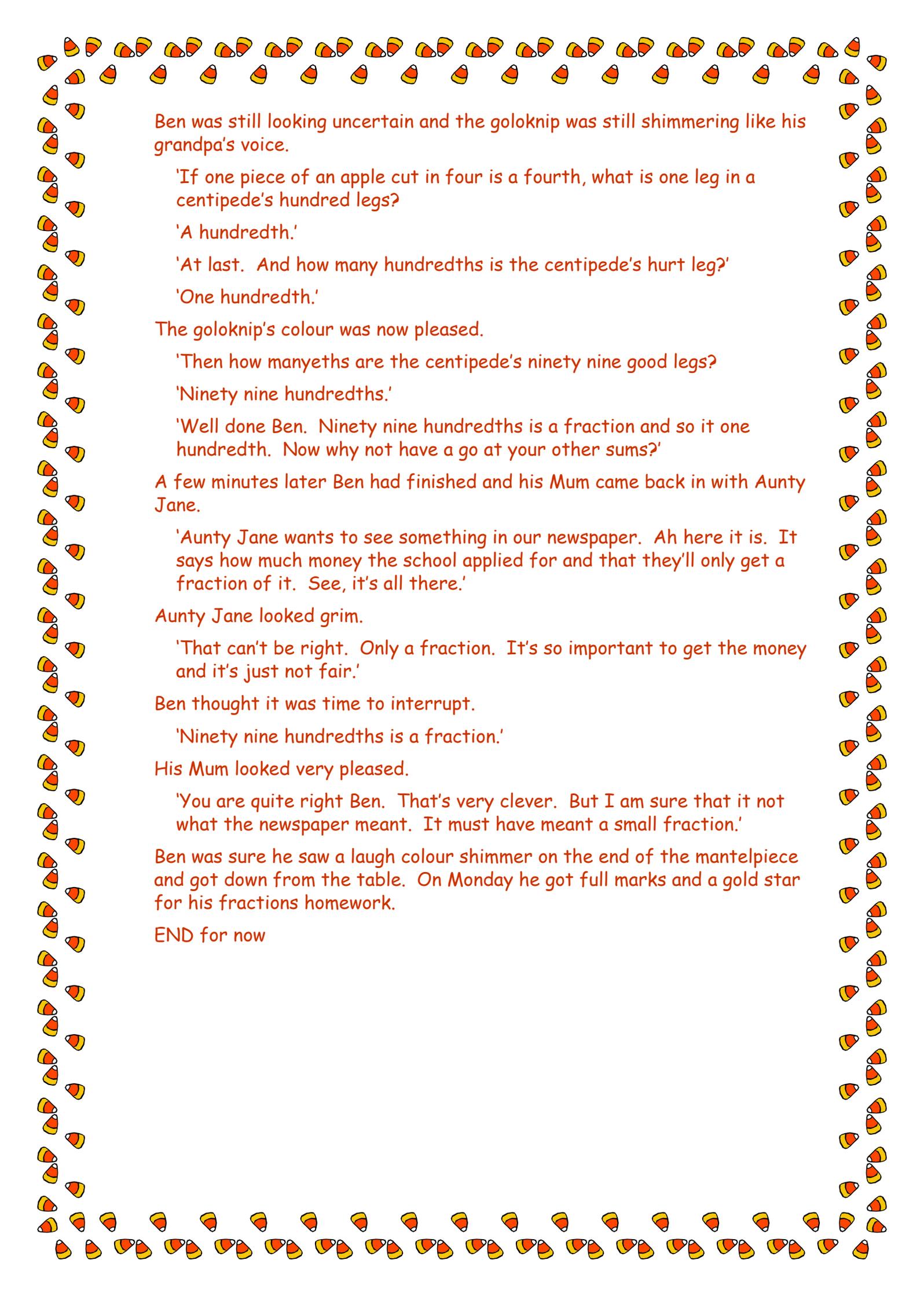'Right again. One fourth is a fraction and four fourths is …'

'An apply or a cake.'

'Or one. Numbers are better than apples and cakes. So if the centipede had hurts one leg out of a hundred, what was it?

'A broken leg?'

'Don't be daft. What fraction?'

'A fractured leg?'

Ben was still looking uncertain and the goloknip was still shimmering like his grandpa's voice.

'If one piece of an apple cut in four is a fourth, what is one leg in a centipede's hundred legs?

'A hundredth.'

'At last. And how many hundredths is the centipede's hurt leg?'

'One hundredth.'

The goloknip's colour was now pleased.

'Then how manyeths are the centipede's ninety nine good legs?

'Ninety nine hundredths.'

'Well done Ben. Ninety nine hundredths is a fraction and so it one hundredth. Now why not have a go at your other sums?'

A few minutes later Ben had finished and his Mum came back in with Aunty Jane.

'Aunty Jane wants to see something in our newspaper. Ah here it is. It says how much money the school applied for and that they'll only get a fraction of it. See, it's all there.'

Aunty Jane looked grim.

'That can't be right. Only a fraction. It's so important to get the money and it's just not fair.'

Ben thought it was time to interrupt.

'Ninety nine hundredths is a fraction.'

His Mum looked very pleased.

'You are quite right Ben. That's very clever. But I am sure that it not what the newspaper meant. It must have meant a small fraction.'

Ben was sure he saw a laugh colour shimmer on the end of the mantelpiece and got down from the table. On Monday he got full marks and a gold star for his fractions homework.

END for now