



**KEY
HUNTERS**
**THE
SPY'S SECRET**

by Eric Luper

Illustrated by Lisa K. Weber

SCHOLASTIC INC.

*For Jenne Abramowitz, who gave me
a shot at writing some fun books*

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Summary: In their second trip through the enchanted library, the new key lands Cleo and Evan in the middle of a spy story, where their impossible mission is to stop a traitor who calls himself Viper—and they find themselves working with the replacement librarian, Ms. Crowley, whose exact role in their adventures is becoming increasingly mysterious.

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CHAPTER 1

“Ugh, why does Mrs. Cabanos always give us boring crossword puzzles for homework?” Cleo asked Evan across the library table. “What’s a four-letter word for ‘fake butter’?”

Evan didn’t look up from his math. “Oleo,” he said.

“What about a three-letter word for ‘anger’?”

“Ire.”

“‘Sea eagle’?”

“Erne.”

“Jai—”

“Alai.”

Cleo dropped her pencil. “How do you know all this stuff?”

Evan shrugged. “My parents do the crossword every weekend.”

“I read the comics every weekend,” Cleo said. “How come we don’t get homework about that?”

“Don’t you get a great feeling when you finish a puzzle?” Evan asked. “Like you can accomplish anything?”

Cleo shook her head. “Puzzles give me headaches. Anyhow, no one says that.”

“Says what?”

Cleo made a serious face and sat tall in her seat. “‘Honey, would you please pass the *oleo*? I’d like to spread it on my toast.’”

Evan laughed. “I don’t think it’s a word people use anymore.”

“Then what’s the point of giving us homework about it?”

“I have no idea,” Evan said.

“I . . . have . . . no . . . idea!” a voice said mockingly. It was Ms. Crowley, their not-so-nice librarian. She walked up behind Evan.

A few days earlier, Ms. Crowley had led them to the magical library hidden under their school. It was she who showed them that any book they opened would sweep them off to the world inside that book. It was because of her that Evan and Cleo felt they might find their first librarian, Ms. Hilliard, who had mysteriously disappeared into one of those books.

Each word Ms. Crowley said was punctuated by the sharp click of her pointy,

uncomfortable-looking high heels. “What do you ‘have no idea’ about?”

“I just said ‘oleo’ isn’t a word people use anymore,” Evan said. “People say ‘margarine.’”

“Or they don’t say it at all,” Cleo said. “Margarine is bad for you.”

Ms. Crowley circled their table like a hungry wolf. “Maybe *I* use the word ‘oleo,’” she said. “Why don’t you ask me?”

“Umm . . . okay,” Evan said. “Ms. Crowley, do you ever say ‘oleo?’”

“This is a quiet study period!” she barked. “Two days of detention for both of you!”

“But . . .” Cleo said.

“Quiet!” Ms. Crowley barked again. “Now it’s four days!”

Evan raised his hand.

“Yes?” Ms. Crowley said.

“I was just wondering . . .”

“I told you to be quiet,” Ms. Crowley said.

“That’s eight days!”

“But I—”

“Sixteen days!” She bent down so her face was close to Evan’s. “Do you want to try for thirty-two?”

Evan began to open his mouth, but closed it again.

“That’s better,” Ms. Crowley said. “Now, there may be something you could do to get me to forget about all this detention. One of you holds a key that unlocks a certain book. If you gave me that key, I might forget about your sixty-four days of detention.”

“Sixty-four?” Cleo burst out. “It was sixteen!”

“Now it’s one hundred and twenty-eight!” Ms. Crowley bellowed. “Won’t Principal Flynn

be disappointed in her star pupil and her star athlete? Won't your parents be upset?"

"I . . . I . . ." Evan's hand moved to his pocket. He felt the lump made by the key they had gotten at the end of their last adventure.

Cleo stood. "I left it at home."

Ms. Crowley smiled a toothy grin. "Be sure to bring it tomorrow," she said. "A strange underground library is no place for children."

Ms. Crowley clicked back to the front desk and began stamping books loudly.

Evan wiggled his fingers into his pocket. The key was warm from pressing against his leg all day. He pulled it out by its chain and held it up. As it spun, the key glinted in the light from the window.

Cleo snatched it and darted between the bookshelves.

“Wait!” Evan hissed.

“Wait!” Ms. Crowley called after them.

Evan chased Cleo through the maze of shelves until they reached the nonfiction section. Cleo scampered up the bookcase, stretched as high as she could, and grabbed hold of the huge, dusty, boring-looking book titled *Literature: Elements and Genre from Antiquity to Modern-Day*.

The book tipped forward. The secret bookcase swung open.

Evan followed Cleo down the stairs into the magical room beneath their elementary school. Even though he'd seen it before, the library amazed him. The shelves, sliding ladders, and spiral staircases were made of dark wood and stretched into darkness above them. Catwalks and balconies reached around corners and across gaps to let readers

explore every nook. At the back of the library, over a stone fireplace, hung a tapestry that showed an image of an open book with people swirling into it among a sea of colorful letters.

The fire in the fireplace burst to life, sending out a warm glow.

“We have to hurry,” Cleo said. “Ms. Crowley is right behind us.”

“There are thousands of books in this library,” Evan said. “How do we know which one to choose?”

“Any of them,” Cleo said. She grabbed a book off the shelf. The title read *The Jumpy Puppy*. The cover had a picture of a brown puppy sitting in its water bowl. “Let’s go here. There’s nothing scary or dangerous about jumpy puppies.”

“Jumpy puppies aren’t potty trained,” Evan said.

“That’s simple compared to a chandelier almost falling on our heads like in *The Case of the Mysterious Moonstone*.”

“Good point,” Evan said.

Cleo jiggled the key against the tiny keyhole. “It doesn’t fit.”

Evan heard a metallic clank. A rolling ladder with brass rungs slid along a track and stopped in front of them.

“I guess we go up,” Evan said.

Cleo grabbed the first rung and started to climb. Evan followed. As they reached the top of the ladder, sharp heels sounded on the stone floor below.

“Come down this instant!” Ms. Crowley hollered.

“Hurry!” Cleo ran along a metal catwalk that wrapped around several walls of bookshelves.

Evan followed her. “Where are we going?” he asked.

“Away from Ms. Crowley!”

They reached the end of the catwalk. Evan felt dizzy. The ground was thirty feet below them, and he hated heights. Cleo grabbed a rope that was tied to the railing. It stretched into the darkness above them. She stuffed it into Evan’s hands.

“Hold on tight!” she said.

“What are you do—”

But before Evan could finish his sentence, Cleo had flung them out into open space. Air whooshed past Evan’s ears. His stomach flip-flopped. They swung across the library and landed on another balcony.



“There!” Cleo pointed to a small desk. A lamp shone on a blue book with a silver lock on the cover. The title read *The Viper’s Secret*.

“That’s it,” she said.

Evan’s heart was still pounding in his chest. “How do you know?”

“The key matches the lock.”

“Lots of things are silver,” Evan said.

Cleo ignored him and slid the key into the lock. It fit perfectly.

“Stop!” Ms. Crowley screamed from the catwalk behind them. The rope was swinging back and forth. Ms. Crowley reached for it each time it came close. “Don’t turn that key!”

Cleo grinned. “I’d never disobey my school librarian,” she said.

She held the key tight and spun *The Viper’s Secret* on the desk. The lock popped open. Letters burst from the pages of the book

like a thousand crazy spiders. The letters tumbled in the air around them and began to spell words. The words turned into sentences, the sentences paragraphs. Before long, they could barely see through the letter confetti.

Then everything went black.