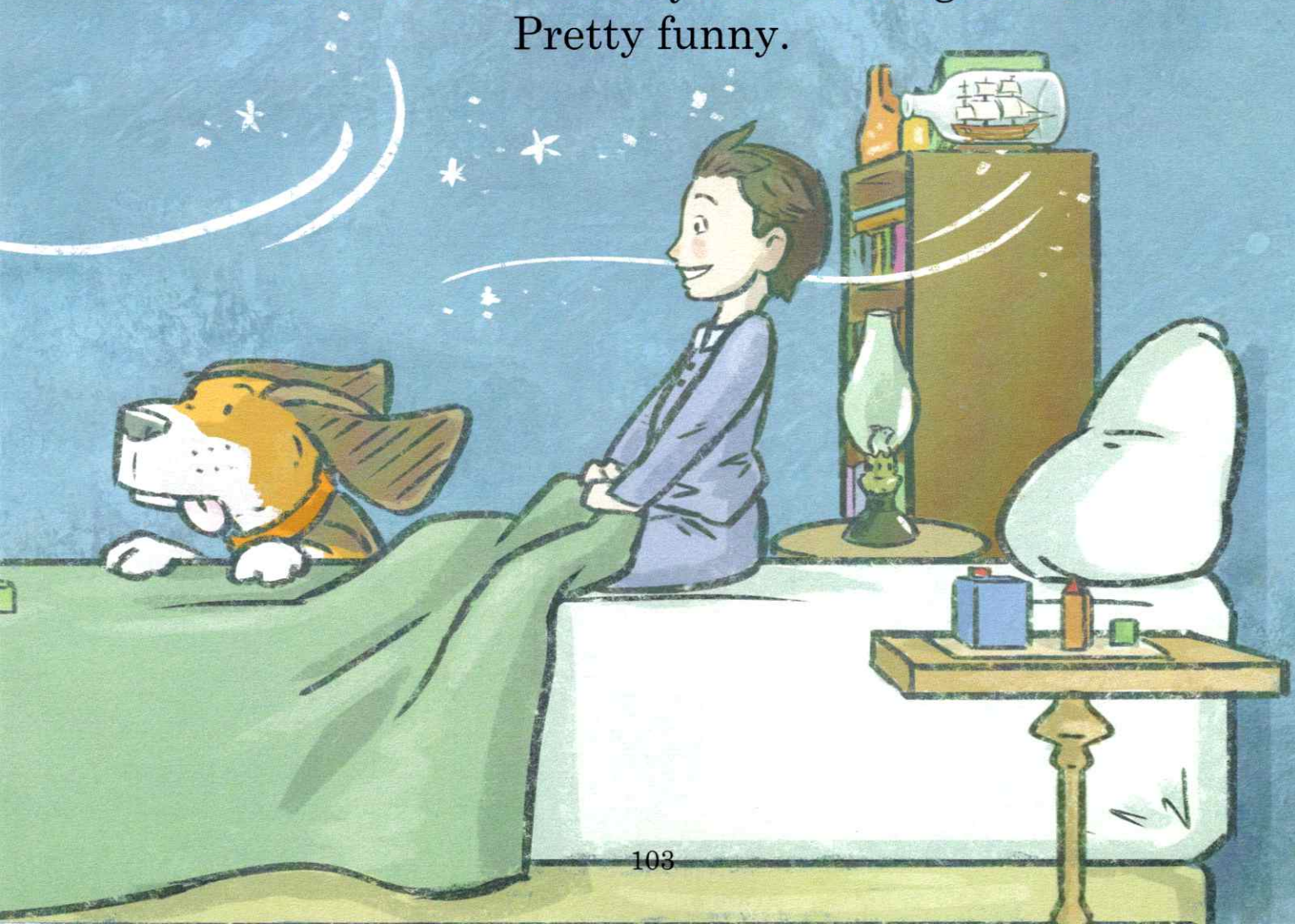


Poodle smiled. "Of course.
This is my rattly friend Burgull," he said.
"He's a consonant monster."

"I love consonants!" said the boy.
"Hi, Burgull. I like your scratchy consonants."

"And this is Dickinson, the Blue Mountain monster,"
said Poodle. "He nearly blew us off the mountain
when we first met him. He's a tough guy.
He gets loud like a fountain. We're friends now."

Dickinson hummed and murmured and whirred
a smile and blew the boy's hair straight back.
Pretty funny.





“And this is What?,” said Poodle.

“That’s what I want to know,” said the boy.

“He’s What?,” Poodle said. “He’s a beagle.
He can talk, but he often just barks.”

“Wait,” said Robert. “What’s his name?”

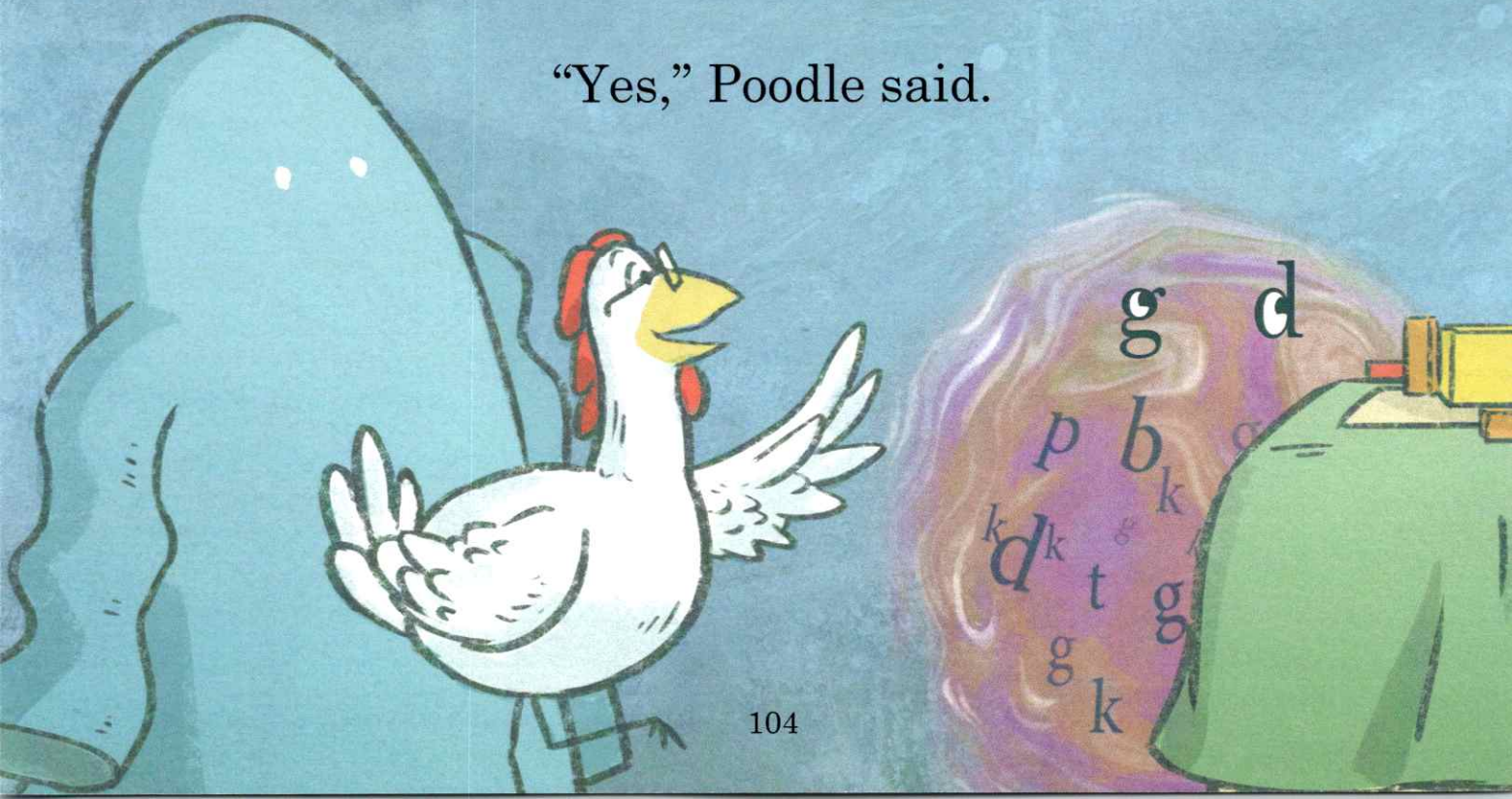
“Yes,” Poodle said. “What?’s his name.”

There was an awkward pause,
and Robert looked perplexed.

“I’ll explain later,” Poodle whispered.
He did not want to embarrass Robert.

“What?” asked the boy.

“Yes,” Poodle said.



It was time to change the subject.

“Did you write this poem?” Poodle asked.

“Yes...well, my grown-up self did,” the boy said.

“I wrote my boy self into my own poem.
I write novels, too. I wrote *Treasure Island*.”

Poodle was impressed by that.

Pirates, argh, sez you!

