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**638 Pages of Stories by
Sixth-grade Students of
Berkshire Middle School**

Daniel Fisher, Editor

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TO THE AUTHORS

The choice writing throughout this volume makes for great reading. Mr. Fisher congratulates you on a collection of stories that is nothing short of jagged!

ALL CREATURES
GREAT AND
SMALL

Friendship

*A little dog learns an important lesson about being true to oneself in **FRIENDSHIP**, by Sarah M. Join him in the remarkable adventure where he demonstrates the true meaning of friendship.*

In the town of Happy Thorns there was a big dog named Jaws and his friend Catnip. Catnip was a tall, thin, grayish-yellow colored greyhound mix. Catnip was somewhat smart to be on Jaws's good side. Jaws was big, darkly colored and tough looking—just what you would imagine him to be like. Catnip knew his friend's favorite activity was picking on other dogs. Catnip didn't want to be picked on, so instead he helped Jaws pick on the other dogs.

Now in this town of Happy Thorns there was a sweet little dog named Benny, and his friend Andrea (Andy). Benny did not have any friends other than Andy because Jaws's favorite dog to bully was Benny. Since Benny was the smallest dog in town, Jaws would call him mean names such as "pipsqueak." All the other dogs were afraid that if they were Benny's friends, Jaws would pick on them even more.

Andy knew this, too, and even though she was picked on more for being Benny's friend, her sorrow toward him made her stay his friend.

One day when Benny was on vacation with his owners, Jaws was walking by and noticed he wasn't at home. Jaws found himself sneaking into Benny's doghouse, and he was amazed at all the toys Benny had.

Quickly he went to Catnip's house. Finding a sack and a skateboard at the dump, they headed for Benny's house. They planned to put Benny's toys in the sack and wheel it away on the skateboard.

Now before I go on, let me tell you that the reason there were so many toys is because Andy's owners were building Andy a new roof for her doghouse, so Benny let her keep her toys in his doghouse.

Jaws and Catnip were almost done packing when Andy walked by. Andy wasn't brave enough to tell them to stop, though she wished she were. Instead she hid while they finished working.

When Benny got back from his vacation, he was very disappointed that the bullies were still being mean to him. Andy felt sorry for him. She was going on a walk downtown and asked him to come. He said no, and that he wanted to rest. She said, "Ok," and tried to look happy, but couldn't hide her disappointment.

Because Andy had no one to go to town with, she decided not to go. She soon heard that the bullies weren't at their doghouses and decided to see if that was where they were hiding all the toys they had stolen.

Later Benny was thinking about the sad look on Andy's face. He decided to go downtown to find her. He was looking and looking and was just realizing that she must have already gone home when he ran into Jaws and Catnip. "Well, well, well." Jaws grinned. "What's a little small fry like you doing around town?" Suddenly Benny was off running down the empty sidewalk, passing looming building after building. Jaws and Catnip weren't far behind; in fact, they were getting closer.

At that moment Benny realized how miserable and alone he felt being chased down this silent empty sidewalk; he seemed to be surrounded by gray concrete. It seemed that

everywhere he went Jaws and Catnip were there ruining his life. He couldn't even go to his own doghouse without being reminded of all the toys that had been taken from him.

This made Benny mad. "I have got to lose them," thought Benny. Just then he made a sharp turn to the left around the corner of a building and found himself face-to-face with a dogcatcher, who seemed to be the only human being on the street. Without thinking, he sped right through the man's legs.

Sadly for them, Jaws and Catnip were too big to do that. Instead they were put in cages and taken to the pound.

When Benny got home, Andy surprised him with all the toys she had stolen back from the bullies. Benny told her what happened. They each picked up their favorite toy and ran around with it, spreading the news that Jaws and Catnip were in the pound.

All the dogs in town were so happy that they no longer had anything to fear. Soon Benny had lots of friends, and the little town of Happy Thorns was peaceful again.

Great Wolves

*An evil force is controlling the two great wolf protectors. It is up to Razor and Fang to put things right in **GREAT WOLVES**, by **Renata Laura Burns**.*

“A very long time ago the world was in constant turmoil. That is when God created two wolves. Frost controls ice and helps all animals that are in the cold climate. As for Burn, he tends to control fire and help all animals in the hot climate,” said my teacher. He always talks about the two great wolves.

“Hey, Fang, I wonder why our teacher still talks about those wolves,” said Razor. Oh, sorry; I forgot to tell you about myself. My name’s Fang, and my brother is Razor, and we were both abandoned by our parents.

“Maybe you should respect him more. He seems sad. Maybe something bad happened,” I said.

Later that night one of the royal guards came to our house. Most of these wolves are black, and they only work for the mayor.

“You two need to come with me. The mayor wishes to speak,” said his best-ranking guard.

“Why? Is it really something important?” I blurted out. I can be as impatient as the sea on a windy day.

“Stop fooling around, Fang, and do what he says,” yelled Razor. We went up to the mayor, but I wish I would have attacked those guards when I had the chance.

“In order to protect my people, you two must leave. I have heard that the great wolves are doing the exact opposite

of what they were created for. You are far stronger than all the other wolves here. I think you must respect your world enough to go out and protect it,” said the mayor. It sounded like he practiced that speech a bunch of times.

“There must be stronger wolves out there. We are not as good you think,” replied Razor.

“Ah, but you are, my dear friends. A long time ago your parents put you here to grow, and you did not know that Frost and Burn are your parents,” said the mayor.

“Are you positive Frost and Burn are our parents?” said Fang.

Then the mayor replied, “Yes, I’m positive.”

“Razor, we better deal with this,” I said.

“Wise decision, young ones. You may leave tonight or tomorrow morning,” said the mayor.

Later that night I saw God in my dream. He was a white wolf. This is what he said. “Fang, you might not know this, but you can control water, and Razor can control electricity. You must beat Dark. He is controlling the great wolves. He is one of my prototype wolves that was supposed to get the world out of its turmoil state, but now he wants revenge. You must put him back in his underground prison. You should find him past the river.”

“But how will we cross the river?” I said, confused.

“You can walk on water. Carry Razor on your back.”

The next morning I told Razor about the dream. Next stop: the river.

“Get on my back,” I commanded, “and don’t get mad.”

Once we got out of the river, we were face to face with Frost and Burn. I prepared to run, but every bite did not contact. When I was thinking about my choices Razor attacked Burn and then Frost. They were knocked out of Dark’s control.

“Thank you,” said Frost and Burn.

We continued to travel to find Dark. Pretty soon we were right next to Dark.

“I finally found you little troublemakers,” Dark said.

“Why did you do this? You know we cannot be defeated,” claimed Razor.

“Then I’ll just have to show you how powerful I am.”

Razor leaped up in the air and landed on Dark’s back. I guess I should have attacked. But I knew I could not win. I’m not as fierce and strong as Razor.

The battle went on for hours. It was full of biting, scratching, and leaping. Almost all our strength was gone until Razor turned into a puff of smoke. No, not smoke; a lightning bolt. Razor hit Dark! Then Dark was in a cloud of smoke.

When it cleared out Dark was gone. Once everyone found out all four of us became very famous.

“I guess we can all be heroes even when you’re not so strong,” I said.

The Journey to the Prophet(ess)

*Courage can take you a long way. In **THE JOURNEY TO THE PROPHET(ESS)** by Erica Gardner, a journey measured in miles turns out to be less important than the determination it helps foster.*

The sky was dark gray and frighteningly noisy when Geb the Egyptian Fruit Bat woke up in the afternoon. He immediately fluttered out of his colony's home (a tomb) and peered curiously up at the sky. Egypt was never like this, at least where he lived.

He flew back inside the tomb and squeaked to his colony to wake them up. Since it was the afternoon they'd all be taking the Daily Digesting Nap. Immediately the peacefully sleeping bats became a writhing, squealing mess. Order was only restored when the ancient leading bat, Seth, flapped his wings and screeched. His word most definitely overcame the Egyptian Pomegranate Colony's easily upset tempers.

"Geb!" Seth sternly demanded. "Why did you wake us up in the middle of the Daily Digesting Nap?"

Geb quivered under his glare. "The sky.... It is not blue, or red, or orange like it is at the sunset time! It is gray, and noisy. It goes *grrree! Grrree!*"

The Egyptian Pomegranate Colony shifted back into chaos. They screamed and shrieked aloud, and flitted around in the tomb. The walls shook, and it even seemed the tomb of

the Egyptian Pharaoh wobbled, as if the Pharaoh's Mummy himself was ordering them to stop making the racket.

Suddenly a loud rumbling noise shook the tomb even more. The bats gasped. Seth, though seemingly blinking with a little disbelief himself, remained calm and stretched his fingers out so that the entire colony could see the scars of authority marking his wings. "This is certainly a frightening thought, the sky turning gray and making sounds. I will go outside myself to see." After dismissing several disapproving Seeds of the Pomegranate Council, he took wing and flapped out the door.

The atmosphere in the tomb was tense and frightened. All bats were silent, except for the nursery of bawling baby bats who were just crying because that's what babies do, and the murmuring school of young Egyptian Fruit Bats who were very easily excited. After four edgy minutes, the leader of the Egyptian Pomegranate Colony winged back into the tomb, and was greeted with cheers of admiration for his bravery.

Seth obviously liked this flattery, but he was supposed to be the wise leader among them and shushed them loudly. He flapped to his upside-down throne and perched, his claws gripping the arms, waiting for his people to settle down.

"Now, now, everybody. I shall call a Conference of the Egyptian Pomegranate Colony Council. All Seeds report to the Trap Room!" All the bats gasped as the Council Seeds, gravely followed by their leader, flew into the Trap Room. The Trap Room was for only very serious meetings among the Seeds of the Pomegranate Colony Council. Whatever was going on with this new, noisy gray sky was very important and scary.

In the Trap Room Seth was feeling very satisfied with himself. He had successfully made the Colony think that the danger was very serious. In fact, he knew that it was only a storm. "Council Seeds, my brothers, do you know why we have gathered here?"

A young Seed, the newest to the council, spoke up. "Because the sky is gray and rumbly?"

Seth glared at her. "No, Katts! That is just the beginning of rain. We like rain."

"Then why are we here?" asked Osiris, the oldest and wisest of the council members.

"Because Geb woke us up in the middle of the Nap, and he deserves to be punished. So what we shall do is we make him think it's a danger, and we send him to the Prophet," Seth declared blatantly, very proud of his plan.

The other Council Seeds shifted warily around on the roof. They weren't sure if this were the best idea. After all, Geb was only a youngster who had just learned to fly a month ago, and he hadn't meant to do anything wrong. Finally Osiris spoke. "Lord, are you sure we should do this? It's dangerous."

"Well, of course it's dangerous!" Seth snapped. "That's the point! The more youngsters in the colony we get rid of, the better. The Egyptian Pomegranate Colony is in danger of overpopulation of foolish youngsters!"

All the Seeds nodded reluctantly, even Katts, who was pretty young herself. They didn't like to fight with Seth, even if they thought it was unfair. Only Osiris was still unsure. "I still don't like it..."

"Shut up, Osiris!" Seth barked. "I am the leader of this Colony. My word is law. And if you don't like my decisions, then go to another Colony!"

The Seeds of the Council were so astonished at what he said they couldn't even gasp. Osiris finally broke the silence when he lowered his head and said, "Yes, Lord. Your word... is law."

Seth, smug, grinned wickedly. "Now, I shall go tell young Geb of his mission." He flapped out the door and waved his wings for attention. "We have made a decision. Young Geb, being our hero, shall go to the Prophet to ask about the sky."

The whole colony gasped, especially Geb, and the noise echoed around the room. The journey to the Prophet was so long and risky! Before he could say anything, though, Seth spoke again.

“Farewell, young Geb. We shall pack provisions for you, just in case, and then you will leave to go to the Prophet.”

“T—today?” Geb exclaimed. This was all too much for him.

Seth ignored him and swept back into the Trap Room. “Council Seeds, prepare a...*packet*,” he ordered ominously.

The Seeds were confused. “What do you mean, packet?” Katts asked, befuddled.

“Idiots!” Seth snarled. “A packet of food, and a map that Geb might need. Except bad, spoiled food to make him sick and weak.”

Shivers rippled through the Council. They did not like this idea, not one bit. But they were scared of Seth, so they were going to follow his instructions—with the exception of Osiris. He was going to secretly help Geb survive. Maybe the wise bat would send another youngster... Kiki Isis, his niece, maybe?

“Well, you buffoons, *prepare the packet!*” Seth ordered, scowling. The bats quickly rushed to Seth’s secret extra stores and picked out the most spoiled, diseased fruit they could find. Then they quickly mashed it together and stuffed it in a bag made of weaved weed stalks, which would hang from Geb’s neck while he flew.

Seth beckoned them to the entrance, and they orderly filed out of the Trap Room. Geb was waiting eagerly and anxiously at the front of the crowd, his claws gripping the cave ceiling tightly. The young bat hesitated when the pack was offered to him, but under the urging of his friends he accepted it and draped it over his neck.

“Now, young Geb, you shall start your journey to the Prophet. Your packet contains a map and fruit... fruit from, er, from my breakfast,” Seth told him. “Now, we shall escort you to the entrance of the cave, and you will start flying north, towards the Nile River Delta, where the Prophet lives.”

The bats solemnly formed a circle around Geb and they fluttered out the tomb entrance into the darkening evening sky. Geb looked at his mother, father, siblings, and friends who were twitching and fidgeting anxiously and nervously. They didn't want Geb to go, but knew they couldn't disobey Seth.

The rumbling clouds were still overhead, but they were even darker and scarier. Geb pushed his way to the front of the group, glanced back at his friends and family, and took off into the sky. Soon the tomb he lived in was far behind, and the Nile River closer than ever.

Geb flew for hours and hours, and the sky still grew darker and darker. The sinister gray clouds still loomed above him, and seemed to be following his every dive and turn. A frightened and homesick sensation overcame him, and he flew a bit off his track to a small hut where he could spend the night and eat food.

He flurried into the hut. It was damp and raggedy, with holes and cuts in the side, and obviously man-made. He shuddered at the thought of a human coming in and seeing him, but he was too tired to go flying on any longer to find another place to sleep.

Meanwhile, Kiki Isis was flapping harder than she ever had towards the hut. She was weary and bedraggled, having been caught in the storm, but she had an important mission given to her from her uncle. So she continued on her quest to find Geb no matter how hungry, tired, and wet she was.

Soon her effort paid off, and she was soaring around and around the hut, wondering how she could approach it and tell

Geb of Seth's treachery. Geb was certainly proud of being chosen to find the Prophet, and would hate it if she told him that they didn't need to. Finally she became fed up with all the thinking and barged through the door of the hut into Geb.

"Aahhhh!" Geb hollered. Kiki Isis rolled her eyes. He was a very bad bat to be chosen for this dangerous journey, being weak and easily surprised. She biffed him on an ear with a wing and shuffled till they were facing each other.

Being bats, they couldn't see well in the dark. "Osiris?" Geb asked, squinting at her.

"No, Geb, I'm his niece, Kiki Isis!" she said, hurt about being mistaken for her old, not-so-good-looking uncle.

"Oh," muttered Geb. "Sorry."

"So, are you gonna ask?" Kiki Isis urged.

"What?"

"Why am I here? You're supposed to ask why I followed you!"

Geb ruffled his wings and murmured obediently, "Why'd you follow me?"

Kiki Isis liked telling stories. She grinned happily and spun the long tale of Seth's treachery, including the spoiled fruit, the storm, the meeting in the Trap Room, and her uncle telling her to protect Geb. Though her voice was sincerely convincing, Geb was still doubtful.

"I'm doubtful," he told her. "Maybe your uncle's sliding a bit off his rocker, if you know what I mean. Seth is a wise and kind ruler."

Kiki Isis scowled and fumed. Her snout squirmed irritably. "Stupid! This quest to the Prophet is just as real as Big Foot! And he's not real, so it doesn't mean anything! You don't have to go to the Prophet."

"Well, I don't believe you, and I'm still going. And if you have to protect me, then you might as well come along!" Geb retorted.

Kiki Isis thought about this. No matter how much she wanted to get back to the colony, she still needed to follow her wise uncle's directions, and anyway, she wanted to get away from supposedly wicked Seth. She reluctantly agreed. "Fine, I'll go."

Geb was surprised she agreed so swiftly. He cleared his throat and said, "Well, night is falling. We should go to sleep." Kiki Isis silently agreed and shuffled into sleeping position. As the snow-white moon crept above the horizon and into the deep black sky, the two bats slid into dreamland.

In the morning, the sky was light pink and the sandy dunes of the Sahara desert reflected their rosy tinge through the cracked glass window of the shack. Geb was shocked awake as light streaked into his eye, and he stretched his wings out wearily. For a moment he forgot why he wasn't in his tomb, and almost panicked, but then he saw Kiki Isis and remembered everything, especially her barging into his quest.

He decided to leave Kiki Isis in the hut and continue on his quest by himself. After all, it was *he* who was chosen by Seth, and he didn't need her protection anyway. Confident his plan would carry out well, he swept out the window and soared into the sky. The slight breeze refreshed him and woke him up, and eagerly he dived.

THUD! A small pebble hit his foot and tears stung in his eyes. He dropped down into the sand and slid down a dune. The pain was overwhelming! He felt his whole body go numb, then hurt, then tingle, then sting, then hurt again till everything went black. After a moment of unconsciousness he looked up and saw the silhouette of a male human hiking over a tiny dune towards the hut.

Oh, no! he thought. *Kiki Isis is in there!* No matter how much he despised the nosy, hasty bat, he still couldn't let her be captured by a stone-throwing human. He lopsidedly—

because of his hurt foot—fluttered to the hut and hid himself under the overhanging roof, looking through the window.

Kiki Isis was fast asleep, dreaming of a giant flood and the Pomegranate Colony turning into little fruit seeds and being whisked away. She shuddered in her sleep, hoping she wouldn't be turned into a seed, when all of a sudden she heard a loud, thunderous creak that immediately woke her up.

“Eeek!” she shouted when she felt a giant nose bump her snout.

“Argghh!” she heard from the human.

Suddenly her peaceful morning turned into a chaotic mess of flapping leathery wings, flailing arms, bumping noses, and quickly vibrating vocal chords. She flew in circles around the hut roof, trying to avoid the giant primate with the shack's rake.

Kiki Isis wondered where Geb was. *That stupid bat!* she angrily thought. *He deserted me! In the middle of the desert!* Suddenly another thought hit her. Perhaps the human had captured him, and killed him, and roasted him, and eaten him! The human did have an awful-odored breath, like Geb's smell. Of course she didn't smell bad; her fur had a faint scent of fruit in it.

While she struggled with the human, Geb flapped to the door outside the shack, a plan forming in his mind. He would jump into the human's hair, pull it, allow Kiki Isis to escape, and then fly off after her. And zigzag. Zigzagging always helped in the “Process of Avoiding Humans” that he had been taught in the Egyptian Pomegranate Colony's Public Academy for Educating Young Newly-Flying Bats.

“On the count of three,” he murmured nervously, “I'll carry out my Plan.” He readied himself to fly, located his target, and counted. “One; one and three-quarters; two; three and a half; seven; forty-two... what comes next? Oh, three!” He swooped into the shack and landed with a *thud!* in the

human's fruity shampooed hair. He grinned triumphantly and pulled his hair.

"Urgh, get off my head, you idiot!" screamed Kiki Isis. Geb sniffed again and realized that the fruit-smelling hair was in fact Kiki Isis.

"Sorry!" he muttered through tiny gritted teeth. He leapt off her and swung onto the ceiling with her following. The human raked the ceiling just inches from their wings. Kiki Isis screamed and flapped to the door, but the rake came down on top of her, and she fell to the ground in a crumpled mess. Geb flew down to her and lifted the scruff of her neck with his teeth, trying to lift her up. But despite his great effort they barely lifted an inch.

"Geb..." Kiki Isis moaned. "The hole! Go through the hole!"

Geb peered through the darkness. "Where?"

Kiki Isis rolled her eyes and pointed one of her wing fingers at a dark splotch in the back of the shed. Geb dragged her across the floor as fast as he could possibly go, barely dodging the human's clumsy attacks. Finally he reached the hole!

"Kiki Isis, we made it, we made it!" he exclaimed. *Thud!* The rake came down on his head, and he crumpled next to Kiki Isis. She started to snort at him in both disgust and surprise, but the rake narrowly missed her wing and she shut up, stunned. After a moment of panic her logical side took over. She clamped her jaws on the scruff of his neck and weakly pulled them both towards the hole.

Whack! The rake hit the ground in front of the hole, spraying the two bats with dirt and dust. Kiki Isis bit her lip and squinted, blinking out the sediment. Suddenly a human sandal kicked her and her companion, and they both rolled into the hole.

Geb peered through his left eye warily. His head throbbed like no other, and his foot was bleeding a little and caked with dirt. He lifted his heavy head and peered at Kiki Isis. “Wh—what happened?” he croaked.

“You hit your head,” Kiki Isis told him frankly. She cautiously poked her head through the hole. “The human’s gone!”

“Good,” said Geb. “Let’s go.” He tried to take off but he hit the hole’s ceiling and pain streaked through his body.

“Oh, no, we’re not going anywhere now. We’re staying here ‘til we’re both rested and well again. Now, give me that bag.” She motioned towards the bag around his neck that held the spoiled fruit.

“You said it was old fruit, though!” Geb protested. “I’m not eating spoiled fruit.”

“Just gimme the bag!” Kiki Isis snapped. Geb reluctantly shook it off, and Kiki Isis shook out all the fruit and pushed it out the door. Then she pulled out the map, which she tucked under her wing, ripped the bag into strips, and carefully wrapped them around Geb’s injured foot and head.

Geb looked himself over and declared, “I look like a mummy.”

Kiki Isis giggled quietly. “Hee, hee! You do.”

Geb glared irritably at her. “Never mind. Can we go now? The human might come back.” He took the map and held it in his teeth.

His friend nodded solemnly. “We don’t want to get into that fix again.” She and Geb waddled out the hole’s entrance, through the hut, and climbed onto the doorframe where they could take off. They each took one last glance around their temporary home, and then flew back into the brisk morning air.

Even though both Egyptian Fruit Bats were weary and sore, they bravely continued on the quest to the Prophet. With

the map clamped between Geb's jaws, and mummy-like bandages on their injuries, the pair was a very strange sight to humans.

"Look, Mom! Mummy bats!" shrieked a little American tourist as they passed over a crowded city.

The lady patted her son on the head and said, "Silly dear, there aren't any mummy bats. Maybe it's time for your nap."

Geb and Kiki Isis rolled their eyes. "Kiki Isis, let's land after we pass this village and look at the map, shall we?" asked Geb.

"Sure," agreed Kiki Isis. They picked up their speed and settled in the branches of a tree. Geb unrolled the map and they looked at it together.

"It's right-side up," said Kiki Isis.

"Oops!" exclaimed Geb. He flipped the map upside-down so they could read it.

"Hey, look! The city we just passed is on the map!" Kiki Isis pointed out.

"It says 'Cai-ro,'" Geb read. "Hmmm, isn't that the human capital?"

"Yeah, but that doesn't matter. We should be right around the Prophet right now! The Prophet should be in this forest!"

Geb studied the map. "You're right! We could be standing in the Prophet's tree right now!" Both bats immediately fluttered off, for it was disrespectful to be in an elder's perch or home.

"O Wonderful Prophet and Predictor," began Geb, loud enough so that any bat within four yards could hear him. "I was chosen to come ask your help, for the sky was gray and rumbly. Is it any danger to the Egyptian Pomegranate Colony?"

"*Sí, mi amigos,*" said a strange light voice. A fluffy straw-colored bat appeared.

“You can speak Spanish!” cried Kiki Isis incredulously. “I’ve always wanted to speak Spanish.”

“*Sí*, I can speak *Español*, but for now I will speak your language,” said the straw-colored bat. “And I am the Prophet, or rather, Prophetess, as you have probably guessed.”

Geb nearly fainted. “You’re a girl!” he said wondrously.

“*Sí, mi amigos*. I am a *chica*. But that is not a problem, is it?”

“No, no, *Señorita*,” Kiki Isis assured her quickly. She glared at Geb. “C’mon, Geb, ask your question and let’s go home.”

“Oh, no need for that, I already heard it. And *sí*, your home is in danger. The rumbly gray sky was from a storm, and the storm caused a flood that will soon fill your tomb with water! You must go home and evacuate the other bats, or else they will float away like little pomegranate seeds.”

This time it was Kiki Isis’s turn to almost faint. That was just like the dream she had; all the bats turning into seeds and floating away because of a flood. “That’s just like my dream,” she croaked.

“Well, then, maybe the Pomegranate Colony has the privilege of a young Prophetess!” smiled the Prophet.

Kiki Isis beamed dreamily. She imagined herself as grand and beautiful as the Prophet, with silky straw-colored fur with a flower wreath woven through it, and a flowing white robe that gracefully swirled around her.

“Snap out of it!” Geb pinched her. “Stop dreaming! If we don’t go back home soon, our families will drown.”

“I wouldn’t mind if you drowned!” snapped Kiki Isis. “Just let me rest for a sec, okay?”

Geb looked around for the Prophet to see if she would back him up, but she had disappeared. “Fine!” he said to Kiki Isis. “I’ll go back alone and save the Colony—alone, without you, and won’t your Uncle Osiris be disappointed in you!”

“Oh, pooh, that old bat!” Kiki Isis retorted.

Geb shook his head in disappointment and started flying south back to his home. He wondered why Kiki Isis was acting so strangely all of a sudden. Maybe she was just a greedy old pig the whole time, and he just hadn’t realized it.

Suddenly he felt a wet sprinkle on his back. He craned his neck to see what it was, and felt a large, plump raindrop plop onto his nose. Oh, no! It was raining! That would speed up the flood destined to destroy his home! He flew as fast as he could, but the rain weighed his wings down, and it was almost no use. His fur became damp and heavy, and some drooped onto his eyes so he couldn’t see.

Geb struggled bravely in the sky, swerving and dropping in the rain. An unexpected breeze swept him backwards, tumbling through the sky. Between the rain, wind, and the loss of Kiki Isis, he became too weary to fly, and dropped into a sandy dune. Then Geb lay there, half conscious in the damp sand.

“Geh- eb!” called a familiar voice. “Geh- eb! Where are you?”

Geb looked up and spotted a small dark spot looping around in the sky. Was it Kiki Isis? “Here!” he shouted. “Help! Help!”

The dark spot lunged towards the bedraggled bat, and the next thing Geb knew was that he was being jerkily carried through the sky by Kiki Isis. “Kiki Isis!” he exclaimed.

“I’m sorry, Geb. I guess I was so frustrated with so many adventurous things happening all so fast that I took my anger out on you,” she murmured apologetically.

“I’s all right,” Geb told her. “I was kind of being bossy at the beginning, too.”

“Yeah, you were,” agreed Kiki Isis.

“You weren’t supposed to agree with that!” Geb scolded. “Hey—look! It’s our tomb! Let me fly now!”

Kiki Isis let go, and Geb immediately flapped his wings and flew up next to her. He suddenly noticed the afternoon sun was out and there was no rainstorm. Would there really be a flood? Nevertheless, he still should deliver the message from the Prophet. He propelled forward with a strong beat of his wings, and soon the tomb entrance was looming in front of him. He fluttered to a halt and gripped the top of the door.

“Hello?” he called. “Hello?”

“Wha—who’s there?” replied an irritated bat. Geb sighed. He had forgotten—it would be time for the Daily Digesting Nap.

“It’s me, Geb! And Kiki Isis is with me, too!” he cried.

“Geb!” A tiny bat flew toward the weary messengers. “You’re back! GEB’S BACK!”

A chorus of ‘yaays’ grew and thundered through the tomb. A group of young, newly flying bats rushed to the tomb entrance and crowded around Geb and Kiki Isis. Shouts of joy came from their families and friends. Soon almost the entire Egyptian Pomegranate Colony had woken up from the Daily Digesting Nap and had raced towards the arrivals. The only bats that hadn’t gone to greet them were Osiris, who was feeling ill and weak and had only just woken up from his nap, and Seth.

Seth couldn’t believe his eyes. Stupid Geb and that idiotic female who he figured Osiris had sent were standing at the cave entrance, crowded by fans and flatterers. He had to put an end to this—but how? He glanced around and noticed Osiris smiling at his niece and fellow bat, his face crinkled with happiness and pride.

Ah-ha! he thought triumphantly, a plan forming in his mind. Seth looked around to make sure no one was looking, and flapped silently over to Osiris. The next thing the poor old bat saw was the floor of the cave rushing towards his snout.

Seth smiled and made a small cut on his wing, making sure some of the blood dripped onto the unconscious Osiris's claw. "Osiris!" he shrieked, his voice filled with convincing—but fake—terror, anger, pain, and grief.

The other bats turned around, puzzled, at their seemingly distraught leader. "Seth? Osiris? What happened?"

Kiki Isis gasped. She saw Seth, his wing bleeding, and her uncle crumpled on the ground with blood on his back claw. It looked like Osiris had attacked Seth, and Seth had pushed him down, but she knew better. Seth was setting something up. Before anyone could respond, she had pulled Geb with her down to Osiris.

"Uncle!" she cried. "Are you all right?"

"Dear little one!" Seth exclaimed with fake concern. "Do not venture near that wicked old bat. He treacherously attacked me!"

"What? Osiris attacked you?" a Seed of the Pomegranate Colony Council asked incredulously.

"I was pleasantly watching our heroes at the door, and was about to greet them myself, when old Osiris flew towards me and scratched my wing. I reflexively hit back and knocked him down," explained Seth. "I feel so horrible! I didn't mean to hit him unconscious."

Kiki Isis turned towards him and was about to hurl herself at the immoral leader, but before she could even spread her wings Geb had caught her by the scruff of her neck.

"Shhhhhh!" he hissed. "Listen!"

Kiki Isis cocked her head and listened intently. A deep rumbling noise suddenly filled the tomb. Another storm? Or...water? Her thoughts were soon answered as a bat near the cave entrance shouted, "*WATER!*"

The rest of the bats voiced similar shrieks.

"Water!" called a buff young bat.

“Flood!” screamed a baby.

“Save the children!” a mother yelled.

“I can’t get my feet wet! I just had a pedicure!” shrieked a teenage bat with a lemon tattoo.

Geb and Kiki Isis immediately flew up, pushing and shoving through the writhing clump of bats. Both had the same thoughts rushing through their minds: *We’re too late! The flood is here!* Their fears were confirmed, too, as they stared out the doorway.

A colossal blue wave as tall as the Sphinx was thundering towards them. It was rushing to the tomb as fast as the world’s swiftest cheetah. The colors ranged from dark blue, to teal, to even a muddy brown from the Sahara sand, and it was sprinkled with boulders, wood, and objects from the human village just north of them. If that collided with the tomb—which it most definitely would, they would have no chance.

Kiki Isis promptly rushed to her uncle, and Geb promptly panicked. How could they save the colony? Kiki Isis was distracted about her poor uncle, and he was no leader. Suddenly he felt a tiny claw tap his shoulder. It was a little bat child with large, scared eyes.

“Is this what the Prophet told you about?” she squeaked.

Geb nodded numbly.

“Aren’t you going to save us?” the itsy-bitsy bat asked, glancing over her shoulder to watch the wave.

Geb wasn’t sure what to say. He looked at the frightened crowd in front of him. They had fallen silent after the bat’s last question, and were staring at him hopefully, counting on him. Geb half-wanted to scream and fly around in circles of fear, but with so many bats’ lives at hand, he knew he had to stay in control and deal with the problem. He was about to say yes, and announce an evacuation, when Seth spoke.

“Geb!” he snarled angrily. “What have you brought here? A flood? We sent you for help from the Prophet, not more danger.”

“No, you don’t understand!” Geb protested. “The rumbly gray sky was a storm! All the rain caused a flood! And the flood has arrived!”

“You lie! You have used dark magic to create a flood to destroy us all!” Seth shrieked.

The bats suddenly stared at Geb with newfound horror. The weight of their glares was almost enough to knock the young bat off his perch. Just when Geb *was* about to scream and fly around in circles, Kiki Isis appeared at his shoulder to back him up.

“Seth, you nasty bat! You sent Geb on a risky quest with *spoiled, diseased* food because of a small *storm*! And you did it on purpose, to place him in danger and kill him! How dare you accuse him of dark magic, when you are the one guilty of wickedness!” she forcefully barked at the leader. “Bats of the Pomegranate Colony, listen to us! Geb is innocent, and there is a giant flood approaching.”

Seth was so surprised by the strength in her voice that he fell off his perch and landed next to Osiris. Geb immediately took the opportunity to take control. “Pomegranate Colony! The flood is coming! We must evacuate the tomb!”

With their leader on the ground and accused of...everything he was accused of, the bats decided to listen to the two people who seemed to have an idea. They gathered up their belongings and crowded near the cave entrance. Geb rushed over and, with the help of some of the Seeds of the Pomegranate Council, filed them into a line.

“The babies!” someone shouted. “They can’t fly yet!”

Geb kneaded his forehead. “Everybody grab a baby! I repeat, EVERYBODY GRAB A BABY!” he paused. “I never thought I’d say that.”

Everyone flew to follow his directions. Geb, too, flew to the nursery and scooped up a bawling baby by the scruff of her neck. The only bat who wasn't shuffling towards the babies' area of the cave was Kiki Isis. She was sobbing next to her uncle.

"Wake up, Uncle Osiris! Wake up!" She shook the wrinkled old bat.

Seth had been lying next to the pair in shock, but now he was sitting up. "Stupid girl, he's out cold! He won't wake up if you shake him."

Kiki Isis glared at him. "Shut up!" she snapped. "My uncle's strong. He'll wake up, won't you, Uncle?"

Geb saw his friend sitting next to her motionless uncle. He had to get her out of the tomb, but his mouth was full of baby fur. He flew to a nearby bat who was trying to sneak away with no baby and shoved his burden into him. Then he flew down to his friend.

"Kiki Isis, we have to get out of here!" he urgently told her.

Kiki Isis shook her head. "What about Osiris?" she asked.

Geb thought for a moment, and then grabbed the scruff of his elder's neck. "Gwab iz fut!" he said.

"What? Oh, grab his feet!" Kiki Isis obeyed immediately, and the two flew towards the cave door, waiting until everyone had evacuated safely—even Seth. Then they winged onto the roof where the others were sitting.

The flood was rushing towards the tomb with tremendous speed. In a minute it would hit the tomb. Geb watched it seemingly grow larger as it neared his home. Suddenly a thought hit him.

"It's higher than the tomb! Even if we're here on the roof we're in danger!" he shouted above the roaring of the approaching flood.

Immediate chaos followed. Bats once again gathered up their belongings and babies, and tried to fly away. But there were too many struggling to escape, and they only succeeded in bumping into each other. The wave came closer.

Ten... nine... eight... seven... six... five... four, thought Geb in despair as he watched the wave approach his home. *Three...two...one!*

The impact was stunning. The water hit the front of the tomb and continued to cascade onto the roof. Foam and mud sprayed everywhere. An amazingly tall teal wave thundered over the bats. The poor little mammals were swept into the water and immediately carried away with the current.

Geb and Kiki Isis felt Osiris being tugged away from them. They were submerged underwater, straining for breath, surrounded in bubbles and bats and babies, and yet they still bravely tried to hold onto Osiris and swim to safety. Despite their efforts, though, the old bat was carried away. Kiki Isis let out a sob of despair, and water filled her mouth. Geb saw this and rushed to her side. He grabbed her back leg and struggled towards the surface. Finally, after what seemed like hours of painful lungs, he succeeded, and both of their heads bobbed over the water.

“Osiris!” Kiki Isis choked, only thinking of her uncle. She straightened out like a plank of wood and let the current carry her past other bedraggled, struggling bats. She was about to reach her uncle when a large wave pushed her underneath the water again.

Bats all around were trying to swim or fly to safety. Most were jostled around in the flood, some more were pushed underwater, and two managed to fly away with a couple of babies. Osiris was one of the unfortunate bunch pushed underwater. He unconsciously swallowed the overwhelming liquid and was about to drown when teeth grabbed the scruff of his neck and pulled him up, breaking the surface. The

sudden rush of air in his lungs woke him up, and his train of thought immediately followed this railroad: *Wet. Water. Flood. Drown. Safe. Savior. Family. Kiki Isis?*

The first five thoughts were correct. There was a wet flood made of water, and he nearly drowned, but he was saved. But the savior was not Kiki Isis, or any relative.

I can't believe I'm saving him, thought Seth, flopping onto the warm sand. He had been carried next to Osiris off the roof of the tomb and onto the safe, hot desert on its right. The water had quickly been absorbed by the sand, and he and his burden were now safe.

Soon the wave of water and terror passed. The bats, bedraggled, fluttered and thumped into the sand, relieved to be alive. The whole colony had survived the flood, and was taking a deserved rest. Kiki Isis and Geb crawled over to Seth and Osiris.

"Uncle!" Kiki Isis hugged Osiris while Geb stared, puzzled, at Seth.

"Why did you save him?" he asked.

"I guess I'm a bit nicer than you thought," grumbled Seth. "And I may be evil, but I'm still the leader of this Colony, and it's my duty to protect my bats."

Geb tried to understand how someone evil would act like that, but failed. He decided that it didn't matter because everyone was okay anyway. He then turned his attention to the six Council Seeds to his left.

"What do you want? Everyone's okay, right?"

"Yes, everyone's okay," said the tallest member. "But we have decided something. After your courageous and wise efforts, we want you to be our leader."

This shocked Geb, and he promptly fell over. Osiris, coughing slightly but already feeling better, helped him up. "I'm not surprised, Geb," he said. "You are a very clever and brave bat."

“Hey!” protested Kiki Isis, her old attitude coming back. “I am, too!”

“Yes,” agreed the Council Seeds. “And that is why we want the three of you—Kiki Isis, Osiris, and Geb—to rule together along with us Seeds!”

Geb and Kiki Isis fell over. Osiris laughed. “Get up, you two! We have a long, long job in front of us!”

The two friends sat up and looked around. The tomb was only just draining out the last of its water. Bats were scattered across the desert like stars in the sky. The pair sighed dramatically. They really did have a long job in front of them.

The Leader Dog Goes to School

*Not everyone believes in destiny. A little dog takes matters into his own hands—feet?—when the student becomes the teacher in **THE LEADER DOG GOES TO SCHOOL**, by Lily Doolin.*

One snowy morning in Marysville, Michigan ten little puppies were born. They were all born in the Leader Dog facility. Five of them were yellow labs, and the rest were black labs. They were born to be leader dogs. But there was one black, chubby, brown-eyed dog the handlers were worried about. The puppy was named Earl, and the worker most concerned about him was Alex. She was concerned about him because he would run out of his box all the time, bark constantly, and nip at his brothers and sisters. From Earl's point of view, he hated seeing her face every day, and he wanted her to put him down so he could play. Anyway, Alex's concern about Earl had changed everything.

She went to the boss and arranged to be Earl's daily trainer. Earl was going to go crazy when his brothers and sisters got the good, laid-back trainers and he didn't. But that was the way it was, and he couldn't change it.

The next day was amazing and horrible at the same time. As soon as he walked outside into the real world there were colors everywhere. He felt a nice breeze in his

face, a million different smells, and saw people right and left. He wanted to go visit a bunch of different places. He could smell food, animals, and most of all the little kids on the playground. Alex got in the way, though. He got yelled at and choked when he pulled the leash to visit these places.

One night after his hard day of training he was sick of being hurt every day. He was going to make the next couple of days the hardest for Alex.

He knew the first day was going to hurt the most with all the choking. The first day he ran among the pokey, tall bushes over and over and went to the bathroom all the time. Alex would yell, “Heel!” (which means slow down to trainers) and “Stay!” The second day he went to say hi to people, and the third day he went in the trash! Earl was pretty proud of himself.

Then the fourth day he gnawed his green leash to pieces and ran away. He was hurt at night, but every step he took during the day was victory. That set Alex off so much that she finally quit. Earl was so happy to see Alex actually sad instead of him. And even better; he got to go with a family. Visitor dogs always said that families were great to live with. So the next day he went to the “Adopt a Dog” room.

The first family of the day came in, and it ended up being a married couple that he didn’t really want to be a part of. Well, thankfully, he didn’t get picked. The next family that came in had three little girls that looked excited. This time Earl liked this family, and once he got to know one of the little girls better he really wanted to be a part of it. The little girl mentioned him to the family, and they really liked him, too! They paid for him at the front counter, ready to take care of him forever. He could see

Alex looking in the window from outside, and she even looked happy.

Now Earl was excited to do whatever he wanted without Alex getting in the way. Earl got picked for a caring family that to this day loves him as much as they did when they bought him.

Maui the Dog's Vacation

*A curious dog accompanies her owner to Hawaii for a peaceful vacation. When Maui the dog's curiosity gets the best of her, how peaceful will it be? Deanna Kapitanec tells the tale in **MAUI THE DOG'S VACATION**.*

It was a cool morning on Sunnycrest Drive, and Maui the dog was talking to her other dog friends, Lily, Bailey, and Addison. "How was your vacation to Maui, Hawaii, Maui?" asked Lily.

"It was a great adventure," said Maui.

"Tell us all about it!" yelled Addison.

"It all started with a flying machine that flew in the sky and across a lot of water," started Maui. "I was in the back of the flying machine where it was dark, and I was in a small cage. You all know my owner, Isabel?" asked Maui.

"Yeah," answered the other dogs.

"Isabel went to the front of flying machine and left me all alone!" yelled Maui.

"How unfair!" yelled Bailey.

"Back to the story. I was so cramped in the cage that I couldn't move anywhere. It felt like forever until light filled the end of the room and someone picked up my cage. Then the person put me down, and Isabel came running toward me. 'Let's go to the beach, Maui, I bet you can relax there', Isabel said to me.

“Isabel took me out of the cage, and I stretched all the muscles in my body. Isabel showed me everything, like these huge, brown balls that she calls coconuts.”

“Are they bouncy balls?” asked Lily.

“No,” Isabel said, “they’re hard, and you wouldn’t want to get hit on the head with those. Anyway, then we got to the beach. Isabel pulled out her blue polka dot chair, put on her sunglasses, sat down, and got out a magazine. I lay down on a towel next to Isabel.

“I was bored. All I was looking at were birds flying around picking up garbage.

“Then I smelled something! The smell was hard to ignore. So I decided to leave Isabel for a few minutes.

“I followed the scent to a cart that a man with a beard and big muscles stood behind. I tiptoed to the cart, and I stopped in my tracks when the man yelled, ‘Get your hot dogs!’ I was like, ‘Dogs! How can people eat dogs?’ So I ran.”

“I thought people were nice,” cried Bailey.

“Don’t worry. I watched Isabel the rest of vacation to see if she ate a dog, but she didn’t,” said Maui.

“Go back to the story,” said Addison.

“I kept on running till I got to a platform above water. I saw water squirt up. So I went to the end of the platform to investigate. There was some kind of creature in the water with a round nose, and it made clicking sounds. I barked at it, and it squirted water at me!”

“I don’t want to meet any of those things in my life,” Lily said frantically.

“Did you go after it?” Bailey asked.

“No,” Maui said.

“Why? Were you scared to jump in the water?” Addison asked.

“Yes, but I was shocked by the water being squirted in my face, so I backed up, and I didn’t know where I was going. Then I hit something hard.

“All of a sudden, coconuts are falling everywhere. One coconut fell and cracked open with something squirting out of it. It was scary, and I did not want a coconut falling on my head. I took my chance when it seemed the coconuts had stopped falling and ran.”

“So you’re saying it was raining coconuts, Maui?” asked Bailey.

“I think she hit a coconut tree,” said Addison.

“Whatever it was, I kept on running. I couldn’t remember where I left Isabel, but I remembered she put on a lot of sunscreen that smelled like watermelons. I sniffed the air and tried to find the track of watermelon sunscreen.

“I got a scent and followed it till I got to Isabel. I lay on the towel and closed my eyes to pretend I was asleep. Isabel looked up from her magazine and said, ‘What a good dog you are, Maui.’”

“You mean she didn’t know what happened to you?” yelled Lily.

“Nope, and I’m never running away again!” said Maui.

“You know what I don’t get, Maui?” Lily asked.

“What?”

“Why would someone name a place after you?”

“That’s another story.”

Pawsteps to the Heart

Ah, love! **PAWSTEPS TO THE HEART** by *Flaminia Carfagna* tells the story of a cat who seeks not only a stolen diamond collar, but the heart of his true love as well.

It was dark, like a freshly new-asphalted road. I could hear the rain dripping in the puddle next to me. My tail was all tangled in my little feet. I, of course, was alone, the only cat in sight. I had to solve my newest mystery. It was cold, and there it was, my new destination....

My name is Magic. It's a girl's name, but at first my owner thought I was a pretty girl. I'm a little black kit. My snow white feet are like little socks on my black body. Some say I'm bratty and selfish. I just like to think of myself as "lucky," and *very* handsome. My owner's name is Betty. She lives in a mansion, and I live in a small mansion in the big mansion.

I'm a kitty who LOVES mysteries and adventures. I'm not yet known as the animal detective in the neighborhood, but I soon will be! How I got into mysteries is when I started watching TV with Betty. Betty also loves mysteries. That's why we both always watch all the spy TV shows. So far I have solved many mysteries, but mostly just about myself, like the one when my food disappeared, or why my coat was grayer. I'm not an indoor cat, but I still can't cross the street. I'm not allowed, and so it prevents me from solving really hard mysteries. All of the good mysteries are on the other side of the street.

I don't usually tell people this, but I'm in *love* with the sweetest kitten who lives across the street from my house. But how can she love me back if I'm not even allowed to cross the road? She's a fluffy, white, pretty Persian. Her name is Cheriee. Isn't her name beautiful, too?

One day when I was purring on Betty's lap, I heard a noise and a soft knock on the door. I ran to the door like usual and went out through the kitty door. And there it was, the biggest, meanest dog I ever saw. As I first looked at him, I was already in my fighting position, but I froze in front of him. The enormous dog told me that he came in peace. He also told me that Cheriee needed my help. Why would the dog deliver the message? I asked him. He said he was the only animal available.

I knew I had to cross the street, and break the rules, but I'll do anything for Cheriee. I told the dog I would be at Cheriee's the first thing in the morning, but right now I had to watch my favorite movie *Cats and Dogs*.

You might be wondering why I'm still at home all cozy, while my dream cat needs help. Well, it's very easy: I'm scared! It's too spooky out at night. Yes, I know, it doesn't sound like the behavior of a good detective. It's just that my whiskers and ears twitch when danger comes. My fur stands straight up on my back. It happens to all cats and kits when they are very scared.

I always keep my promises, though, so the first chance I got, I ran to Cheriee's. She told me her precious, pink, heart-shaped collar went missing. It was a present from the famous Santa Paws.

First, we searched her house and her owner's house. As she let me go in her house I noticed the outside. It was covered in pink frilly things.

We looked through her stuff for hours. We checked her owner's house, too, and it wasn't there, either. Maybe she lost

it somewhere else, but if anyone found it, they would keep it, of course.

I told her to retrace her steps. “But I took way too many pawsteps. I forgot.”

She seemed depressed. I HAD to help her! I kindly meowed to her to just try. We went to the cat salon by our house; we didn’t go in, of course. We just looked through the window, and it wasn’t there. Then one of the employees let us in. She loves cats. That’s why we searched inside also, but the collar was nowhere to be found.

Unfortunately it was getting dark out. I had to go home before my owner got worried. I escorted Cheriee home. Then I ran toward the direction of my house.

I ran as fast as I could, and then suddenly, I fell into a hole on the ground, although not all the way in. I managed to hold myself on a tree’s root, and then I just pulled my black body up. I’m guessing it was a fox’s home, but there’re no foxes where we live. I’d be too scared if they really did. Maybe the collar fell in the hole. It was too late to tell Cheriee. I didn’t want to disturb her and give her more worries.

I told Cheriee about the hole in the ground the next day by breaking the rules *again*. We both jumped in the stinky hole.

I tried not to sniff around like usual, but the smell was so bad I couldn’t ignore it. We squeezed through the small, dark passageway. Then we entered a bigger tunnel.

I finally figured out what was so stinky in here: rats! Everywhere! I know every cat hates those disgusting creatures, but I’m not just a cat. I’m a fancy kitty. I know the rats were more scared of us than we were of them. I could see Cheriee was scared, but so was I. I told Cheriee to act tough.

As we kept looking straight the rats all around us were staring, but it seemed like their red eyes and their naked tails

were, too. We just kept on marching through the stinky crowd. The walls were covered in a weird, green slime.

We came through the other hallway. At the end of it was some kind of throne room. The “throne” was made of sticks and mud.

On the “throne” was the biggest rat in the hole. He was wearing a sparkly thing around his neck: Cheriee’s diamond collar. It was quite beautiful. I could tell why Cheriee wanted it back.

“*How can I help you two tresspassersssss?*” His voice was creepy and screechy.

“But I thought rats weren’t good enough to talk to cats.” Cheriee’s beautiful voice made me like her even more.

“*Only I can talk to catss, because I’m their leader. And what are you talking about? Ratss are way more intelligent than catss.*” What was *he* talking about? Cats are the best living things in the universe.

“Give me back my collar, you stinky furball!”

After Cheriee meowed that out loud, the leader rat ran away. Of course cats are much faster than any rat on earth. It doesn’t matter if it’s the biggest rat ever. When we reached him, we jumped on the muddy body, which was now rolling off. When we pinned him down on the floor, he managed to break free. He bit my leg. I let out a yowl of despair. I hit him with my paw. Cheriee had sharper teeth, so when she bit him it hurt more than what I could have managed to do. As the leader fell on the floor in pain, Cheriee grabbed the dirty collar and put it on.

We ran up the hole in the ground before the leader got up. We used the root of the tree to help us get up and block the hole for the rats. The other rats just stood there waiting for him to get up. We were both dirty with mud and rat hair.

I invited Cheriee over to get cleaned and eat something, and so she did. We licked and licked each other until we were

the cleanest cats on the block again. The sparkly collar was full of dirty hair, but it could easily be cleaned. When I offered Cheriee some of my treats Betty came back from her shopping trip.

“Magic, looks like you got yourself a girlfriend!”

Betty thought Cheriee was so cute she finally said I could cross the street just to see my new girlfriend, Cheriee. My life was even more wonderful.

I still solve mysteries all the time, but now it’s not just me alone in the dark. It’s with company: Cheriee, her sparkly collar, and let’s not forget my wonderful detective skills.

Second Chances

*Lack of attention can lead to dangerous situations. Much to her distress, a dog named Lucy discovers this in **SECOND CHANCES**, by Jacqueline Feist.*

It was dark, and the stars were still out, but this did not matter to Lucy. She heard something move. Like every dog, she likes to investigate things—things that smell, things that make funny noises, and other stuff like that. Although tonight didn't seem like an irregular night, Lucy still wanted to investigate. So she sat still in her bed and sat very quietly, just listening.

There it was again. CREAK. It was nothing: just the simple creak of a bed when one of the family members shifted in her sleep. Lucy heaved a sigh, curled back up in her bed, and fell back asleep.

When she awoke again it was morning, and Mom was bustling around the kitchen. Lucy got up from her bed in the laundry room and trotted to the door. Then she peeked around the corner, looking into the kitchen. There was Mom putting away the dishes. So she rounded the corner and trotted in.

"Hi there, Lucy. Water?" said Mom. Lucy perked her ears, wagged her tail, and let out a small "ruff" in reply.

"Ok, Ok. Don't get your shorts in a bunch. Or maybe I should say tail in a bunch, I don't know. You're the dog."

So Mom filled Lucy's water dish and set it next to her food. Lucy sniffed the food and then decided she wasn't

hungry yet, so she lapped up some water. Then she went around sniffing for fallen people food, which is twice as good as dog food. Then she scratched and whined at the back door.

“I’m coming,” Mom said walking towards the door and opening it. Lucy took a quick potty outside and came back inside. There were Ryan, Scott, and Jacqueline racing down the stairs and into the kitchen. Ryan is in fifth grade, Scott’s in third, and Jacqueline’s in the first.

“Lucy!” they cried, running toward her, pushing each other out of the way, and trying to get to her first. They leapt on her, hugging her, petting her, and scratching her ears. Soon they left for school, and Dad always left for work before Lucy woke up, so now it was only Mom and Lucy. Lucy went back outside and chased a chipmunk around the yard.

“That’s right. You stay out,” thought Lucy. For the rest of the day Lucy lounged around and lay in the sun. It was a luxurious life.

“The kids are coming home soon,” thought Lucy, and they did. The day went by fast, as usual. Now it was dark, but it was only 6:30. Lucy went back outside to go potty.

“What’s this?” thought Lucy as she looked at a freshly dug ditch leading right under the fence. She could fit through there and there would be all that glorious new territory to explore. Lucy’s tail wagged at the thought. She crawled right through the ditch and under the fence.

It was so exciting! Lucy darted from yard to yard sniffing every possible smell she could sniff while at the same time taking in all the new sounds. Lucy started to dart across the road when she stopped in the middle of the road and turned to a new sound: It was a kind of metallic screech. She saw two blinding white lights. The lights were coming closer and closer. At the last possible second Lucy decided to jump out of the way, but she wasn’t fast enough. *WHAM!* She was hit

in the lower half of her body. Lucy flew through the air and landed in a heap.

She couldn't see a thing because her eyes were tightly shut. There was an enormous searing pain in her left leg. The pain was unbearable. She couldn't stand it. She let out a whimper. If she could cry, there would have been tears rolling slowly down her cheeks.

Then she felt her weight leave the ground, and she heard a doorbell, and then voices.

"I'm so sorry. There was nothing I could do. Her spots blend in so well. I didn't see her until the last second," said a panicky voice that Lucy did not recognize.

"Very well, I understand. Just, well, give her to me. I'll take her to the vet," said Dad's voice.

"Is there anything I can do? I feel so horrible, and I'd love to help."

"No, just thank you for bringing her to us. Bye then," said Dad again. Then the door closed, and she heard Dad carrying her through the house.

She heard a car door open, and she felt Dad set her down in the back of the minivan. The car started, and they drove for a while. All of a sudden Dad turned and pulled into a parking lot. They were at the vet. Lucy could always tell when they were at the vet. It was like a second nature to her. She could smell other dogs, hamsters, bunnies, and cats—especially cats.

The car door opened again. Lucy was lifted out of the car again, through a door, and another, and another, and another, and finally laid down on a table. A doctor walked up and prodded and poked her leg with his hands and fingers. Lucy squeezed her eyes shut in a vain attempt to stop the sharp pain in her leg, but she knew it was no use.

"Yep. It's definitely broken. She'll need surgery. We're free now if you like. There's nobody here at this time of night,

and the other doctors haven't gone home yet," said the doctor.

"All right. Just do it now and get it over with," replied Dad.

"Righto!" said the doctor, and with that Dad pushed the door open and walked out of the room.

Three more doctors came in and placed something over Lucy's mouth and nose. Lucy started to get very sleepy. She tried to keep her eyelids from drooping. She just had to see what they were going to do, but it was no good. Soon she found herself in a deep, dreamless sleep.

When she awoke again she was in the kitchen lying in her bed by the window. She awoke to find twenty stitches and a painkiller patch on her half-shaven left leg. Lucy sniffed at them. It was a bit of a shock to find them there, but she got used to it.

She got regular walks to the bus stop (in a wagon), she got to sleep in the kitchen, and she got to stay inside all day. She had trouble walking, though, and something happened to her bladder when she got hit by the car. So sometimes she accidentally leaks where she is sitting without knowing it because she can't feel it.

Over time she healed and got better, even though she's still a little sensitive on her left leg. Lucy may have been in a tough spot once or twice, but she enjoys life at the Feist house.

Hello, my name is Lucy.

Webster the Turtle

*From industrial accident victim to all around good guy, Webster travels a strange road. **WEBSTER THE TURTLE**, by Wesley Evans, is the story of a new hero for a new time.*

Once upon a time, there was a turtle named Webster. Webster swam into radioactive waste by accident. The waste made him sick and unable to move. A man named Frank rescued him. Frank took Webster home and placed him in a fresh bowl of water.

After a couple of days, Frank saw that Webster was getting better and stronger. Webster himself noticed that many different things were happening to his body. Totally by accident, Webster broke the glass bowl that was used to make him better.

Frank thought that this turtle was strange, because of some weird things happening. Frank thought he heard someone talking in the other room when no one was there but the turtle. Also, he found the turtle in several strange locations like on the top of the refrigerator, on the computer desk, and on the second floor. Frank did not put him there, and no one came by his home that could have moved the turtle.

Frank decided to take the turtle to the vet. The vet examined him and said that nothing was wrong with the turtle.

A few days later, Webster was gone. Frank checked all over his house but could not find the turtle anywhere. He posted signs all over, but Frank never heard anything.

It was a cold and dry day. Webster the turtle needed water to drink and to swim in. Also, he needed some fish to eat. On what he thought was his last night to live, Webster discovered that he could fly. He used this newfound ability to fly to a different pond so he could catch some fish to eat.

The next day while checking out his new home, he ran into a snake. The snake was mean and hungry. He tried to eat Webster, but Webster took a big bite out of the snake and it began to bleed. The snake screamed like a baby, and then he just lay there. So Webster tasted the snake and decided to eat him. He loved it so much that he wanted more. Soon the word spread that a turtle ate a snake. This was very unusual, and all the animals became scared.

The pond was paralyzed with fear. Now no one felt safe, so all of them went to the woods or hid under rocks and the mud. Webster noticed that there was no one in the pond. The fish were gone, and food was scarce. There was no one in the pond. The tadpoles were also gone. So then he got very hungry and decided to find another pond that had some fish.

This time he was flying for a long time throughout the city. As he was going throughout the city, he saw a man who was stealing money from a bank. Webster has seen many movies where robbers rob a bank. He knows that there is something wrong. So he does know that people will die if he does not act fast.

He broke through the window, and then bit the guy and flew away. He did the same thing that he did to the snake, but the man did not die, and Webster did not eat him. The people inside the bank were surprised to see a turtle almost kill a man. They were speechless and were unable to move. They were all surprised: the people in the bank, the bank robber, and Webster. This was very embarrassing for the bankers. Webster was so happy that he could help someone. He then flew away from the crime scene. He was happy all night that

he was able to help someone. He will have a new adventure another day, but he decided to call it a night.

The next day in his new pond when Webster awakes he finds that everyone in the pond was screaming in joy. Then a frog went into the fisherman's shack and took out the TV. He plugged it in, turned on the TV, and showed the news: "Wes News on the 2. This just in: Last night there was a robber that robbed 5 Wes bank. Then a turtle popped out from nowhere and bit the man. The guy almost died, but was treated at the hospital. Then he was taken to jail."

It was the first day at the new pond, and people loved him. He was so happy that he got up and flew in circles. Everything that could clap did clap. It was big for the animals to see that a turtle was flying because they had never seen a flying turtle. Plus they had basic cable, and there were no cartoons channels on it.

That day went on well with Webster playing with his fans. That night Webster asked, "Where did you get the TV?"

Someone said, "Someone threw it out, and we pulled it up and it turned on. Then we stared to watch it."

The next day he was going in the city to find some more crime, but did not see crime. So he went to a new city call Freelances.

When he got to Freelances, the place was nasty, ugly, and nothing was good about. He went about trying to clean the place up, but it did no good. So then he went back to the pond and tried to think of something to help that old and ugly city. Ten minutes later he thought that he could go to the mayor about these problem.

When he got there, Webster was mad how the person at the font desk treated him. She acted like he was an outlaw, and she called security. So he just went to the mayor's office.

But when he got to see the mayor—Chris F. Deodorant Stick—his room was covered in darkness, files were all over

the floor, and the chair was turned around. The place made him happy that he lives in a nice pond.

The mayor said, "Are you here to complain some more?"

Webster answered, "No, I want to make a solution to the problem."

The mayor turned his chair very fast to see who said that. When he saw that it was a turtle, he asked, "Are you that turtle that almost killed that robber?"

Webster answered with a yes.

"You can talk! What can you not do?"

"Well, I cannot lie on my back..."

"Never mind that. Now what is your plan?" the mayor said. "Do you have a plan?"

Webster said yes.

"What is your plan? And it better be a good one to put my money into."

The next day the mayor had a big news conference. The whole town was happy to know that a hero was helping the town.

They started an environmental club. They started by clearing the streets up and making gardens. With Webster helping out the city was getting safer by the second. The banks that were being robbed a lot were now safe. Webster was stopping crime all over the city by catching the bad guys. He was the most famous guy on the street.

After a month the city was better then Springfield, IL and rich like them, too. It was so much better than before. The mayor gave Webster a mansion to live in, and everything was going well.

Two days later Webster sees Frank at a speech. He said "Frank!" out loud. Then he flew to him and said, "I miss you so much." They then went to Taco Bell to eat, and they talked about what had happened. But when Frank said, "Let's go home," Webster said, "NO. I want to live by the pond."

Frank said, "Why the pond?"

"It's bigger to swim in and my friend are there."

"If we move there, where will I sleep and live?"

"The fisherman's shack. It is bigger and better than your house."

Then Frank said yes. They lived happily every after.

This is story of Webster the Flying Turtle.

CUT TO
THE CHASE

Bounty

*A young man is fascinated by the world of street racing. In memory of the father he lost at a young age, the man takes up this dangerous life in **BOUNTY**, by Jack Mentag.*

Here's a kid who wants to become part of the road: street racing. Jullio is a foster child. He lives in a foster home on the east side of Atlanta, Georgia. Both of his parents died. It's been very hard for him to overcome that, especially because his mom was killed right in front of him outside of the little market in town.

He was only seven when his mom was killed. His dad died while working as a cook at a restaurant called Spinners, so it's been pretty hard for him. Jullio works at this trashy car shop. He doesn't like it, but since he gets paid, he does it. He is trying to save up for a 1979 Corvette.

That trashy car shop is the only place he really can work. It's because he's been to jail once before. Before he worked at the car shop, he tried to break into a bank. It turned out he got a bigger punishment than he thought. He thought that he would have just gotten half a year in jail, but instead he got a year and a half.

It turned out that the rules at the shelter where he had been living were no going to jail or getting in trouble. So he was kicked out, and had to live on the streets.

Jullio never went to school except for about a day. He was in kindergarten when he was kicked out. He was kicked out after stealing the teacher's money, throwing Play Doh, and ripping up books. After that, since his parents died, he couldn't go to school.

His dad used to street race before he died. He even started to teach Jullio when he was smaller. Jullio decided that when he got that car he would use it not just for driving, but also to race.

It's been about a year, and Jullio has saved up enough money to finally get the car. Right now the only thing that Jullio was mad about was that he had to walk to the other side of town to get the car. It turns out that was the only place that sold a car like that.

After a little while of walking he came by an alley. There was a gang of people in there. So he said, "What's up?" One guy started to laugh, another guy threw a bottle at Jullio, and the rest just stood there and looked like they were about to chase him.

Jullio said, "What?" After that they did chase him, and with bats. Jullio ran for his life. While he was running some of them threw bottles at Jullio. He got hit but never stopped running. They stopped chasing him, but Jullio never stopped until he was sure he lost them.

Jullio realized that he was just a few blocks from the shop that was selling the car. So he just walked, admiring the graffiti on the walls. There was one that freaked him out the most. It was a picture of President Bush. He decided not to look at that one anymore. When he looked up he noticed that he was right in front of the shop.

He went into the shop, and he didn't see anyone there. He was looking around. *Clang!* It sounded like someone took an aluminum bat and hit a metal pole with

it. Then a guy rolled out from under a car. It turns out he dropped a wrench. The guy said, "What do you want?"

Jullio said, "I am the one who wants to buy the Corvette."

The guy said, "Ok," and then told Jullio to follow him. They went into the back room where the car was. Jullio thought the car didn't look too bad. All he had to do was put a new coat of paint on, clean the windows, and replace the tires.

Jullio got in the car and drove off. On the way back to the other side of town, Jullio noticed that it wasn't as far away as it seemed, probably because he was driving instead of walking.

When he got to the other side of town he thought that he should start looking for someone to race against. He thought that he should start looking down in the south.

While he was driving down south he saw some people sitting outside of an ice cream store. Jullio saw that they had pretty nice cars, so maybe they would want to race. Jullio pulled over and parked next to the guys. He got out and said, "I was wondering if one of you wanted to race."

Most of the guys laughed, but one guy spoke out and said, "I'll race you."

Jullio said, "Can you race?"

The guy said, "Well, why would I be asking if I didn't know how to race?"

Jullio said, "You have a point. When would we race?"

The guy said, "Tomorrow, 7:00 p.m., South Street." Jullio said that if he raced it would only be for money. The guy said, "Ok."

The next day Jullio got ready to race. He got in his car and went to the road where they were racing. He got there but didn't see anyone. He thought that he might be a little early. He waited for a while until the guy finally showed

up. The guy got out of his car and walked up to Jullio and said, "Show me your money." He flashed three 100-dollar bills. Jullio counted his tens and twenties in front of him. He nodded.

The guy said, "Ok, let's race." Jullio got in his car and drove to the starting line. A guy from the other racer's team went out onto the road, and said, "On your mark, get set, go!" The other racer took off while Jullio was left in the dust.

He had some troubles starting the car, so he kept on slamming the pedal and turning the key. Then the car jerked forward and took off. The other racer was very far ahead of Jullio.

Jullio noticed that the other racer had nitrous oxide. No wonder he was so far ahead. Jullio was coming up on the first turn. The other guy was still ahead. It looked like Jullio was gaining ground on the other racer. Jullio saw that the guy wasn't using his nitrous oxide at all.

Jullio thought that maybe he ran out of nitrous oxide. Jullio was coming up on the second turn. He had a perfect turn. But the other racer didn't. Jullio took the lead.

Jullio was thinking about what he would use the money for if he won. Then he started thinking about his parents. He tried not to, but somehow he still did. He was trying not to because he was trying to concentrate on the road.

Jullio got his mind back on the race. Then he looked at his rearview mirror and saw that the other racer was catching up. So Jullio swerved over and cut him off. Somehow the other racer just turned over and pulled right up next to Jullio.

The last turn was coming up. Jullio thought that if he had a perfect turn he could win the race. The turn was coming up. Jullio turned, he started to drift, and he drifted

too far! Jullio smashed into the wall on the last turn! The other driver flew past him and won the race.

Jullio was crushed under the car. The airbag was in his face, and the seat was smashing Jullio up against the airbag even harder. Jullio started to have flashbacks about his parents. He was thinking about the time when his mom was murdered right in front of him. He even started to cry.

No one came for Jullio for a long time. While Jullio was waiting, he couldn't really move because most of the broken glass was under him, and if he moved, the glass would dig into his skin even more.

Then Jullio saw someone jogging. Luckily they saw Jullio under the car. Jullio couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman at first until the person ran up to him. The jogger said, "What happened?" Jullio couldn't really talk, so he just groaned.

The lady called 911 and said there was an accident on South Street. In a couple of minutes the police, an ambulance, and a fire truck came in case the car started on fire.

One of the medics gave him a shot that knocked him out. The next thing Jullio knew, he was in the hospital. Jullio looked at himself and saw a cast wrapped around one of his arms. The other arm was covered in bandages.

Jullio was too afraid to look at his face, so he didn't. The doctor walked in and said, "So how did this happen?" Jullio was afraid to answer him, because street racing is illegal. So Jullio tried to lie, but the doctor already knew.

Then a policeman walked in and said, "You won't be street racing for a long time." Jullio was mad because of two things: one, he couldn't street race anymore, and two, he was in big trouble.

Three months later, after he was healed, he was put in jail for a year. Jullio wondered where the other racer went. Jullio thought that he was never going to see him again.

It turns out the other racer was caught during another race and put in jail. A week after Jullio was sent to jail, a new guy was sent into Jullio's cell. Guess who it was - the other racer.

Can a SEAL Save the World?

*Chris, a Navy SEAL, must destroy an island before a deadly disease spreads to the world. He may have to face a deadly obstacle to fulfill his mission in **CAN A SEAL SAVE THE WORLD?** by **Justin Brink**.*

B-R-R-R-I-N-G! B-R-R-R-I-N-G! I stuck out my hand from the warm bed into the cold room and turned off my alarm clock. My name is Chris Grillo, and I am a Navy SEAL.

I sat up in my bed and put on my shoes. As I was going to the kitchen my phone rang. I picked it up, and I said, "Hello."

"Is this Chris Grillo?" the person asked. I knew that voice. It was Captain John from my squadron in the SEAL program.

I replied, "Yes."

"We need you down at the base immediately," he said.

I got dressed, ate a quick breakfast, and went outside to my car. I looked up in the sky. The clouds were white as marshmallows. I was glad. I hate working on rainy days. They make me feel gloomy inside.

I got in my car and drove to my base. When I got there, I went to my office. Waiting there was my boss and three other captains. I saluted all of them. When I lowered my hand my captain said, "We have a mission for you." I nodded. "You

MUST destroy a very small island off the Coast of Ferdinand Island in the Galapagos Islands. There is a deadly disease on it that could spread to the whole world. I ask you to do this job because I believe you are the most capable.

“When you reach the island I want you to carry the bomb to the middle of the island, so the bomb blows up the whole island and not just some of it. We have been informed that there are cannibals on the island. Keep your distance from them, or you won’t make it off the island. After you set the bomb make your way to the southernmost point of the island, swim one mile, and waiting there will be a zodiac boat to take you back here. Good luck, and God bless you.”

I got all of my gear together. I put on camouflage. I got a knife, an M -16, and a pistol. I also brought water and a radio. I then went to a platform where a helicopter was waiting for me. I climbed in and took off.

It didn’t take too long to get there. When I finally spotted the island we were about a mile away. I grabbed onto a ladder and was lowered into the water. When I reached the water the ladder pulled back up, and the helicopter flew away quickly. I then swam to the island.

When I reached the island, I looked around. There were trees, bushes, and overgrown grass everywhere. I saw a rabbit hop across my path. I walked cautiously about a mile to where I thought was a good place to set the bomb so it wouldn’t be found. I set it to detonate in five hours.

As I was heading back to the beach, I saw a flash of something before my eyes. I halted, and then I saw it again, and again! Then it jumped out of the bushes and attacked me. I tried sprinting in the opposite direction, but I didn’t get far. A poison dart was shot into my neck, and I fell down stunned.

* * *

When I woke up I was hanging from my hands and feet, and two shirtless men were carrying me. I realized these people were the cannibals. There were skulls of humans everywhere. I closed my eyes in disgust. Then my eyes shot open. They were going to eat ME!

The cannibals set me down and went back in the forest to get wood with the rest of the tribe. I thought of how long I must have been there. I checked my watch, but it wasn't on my wrist! In fact, none of my things were on me! I looked up in the sky. The sun was starting to set, so that meant I must have been there for almost five hours!

I knew I had to get off the island before it exploded. I looked around. I was on a beach. I also smelled smoke, so I knew there must have been a fire somewhere around there. I kept on looking around until I spotted a knife and some other tools about a foot from me. The only problem was there were two guards watching me. I slowly inched toward the knife, and when the guards turned their heads looking and talking about something else, I jumped to the knife. I was able to take the knife in my right hand. Just before the guards turned back their heads, I cut the rope off my hands and legs. I jumped up, grabbed a pot, and smashed it on one of the guard's heads. He fell over, knocked out.

When the other guard realized what was going on, he tried to stab me in the stomach with his spear. I sidestepped, grabbed the spear, and broke it in half. Then I ran.

I ran as fast as I had ever run in my life. I ran to the southern part of the island. I heard from behind me the other guard calling for help, and before I knew it, it seemed like the whole tribe was right behind me.

I finally reached the water. I jumped in and swam as fast as I could. I didn't know it at the time, but I had about three minutes until detonation. I swam as hard as I ever had in my life. From behind me, the cannibals were throwing spears at

me. THE BOMB, I thought in my head, and then as I got a little farther away from the island I heard from behind me...*BOOM!*

It was the loudest explosion I had ever heard! Pieces of the island were flying everywhere. I swerved and dove around them. It was an extremely close escape, but I MADE IT! I drove the zodiac back to my base barely harmed. I couldn't believe it.

Because of my dangerous mission, my captain awarded me the next day with the medal of courage for saving the world! I thought to myself, not bad for a day's work! I looked up...not a cloud in the sky...perfect.

Far From Where I Was

*In **FAR FROM WHERE I WAS** by Nathan Gaenssle, a boy accompanies his father on an archeological expedition. The danger is fast and furious as father and son explore where no one has set foot for millennia.*

It was the beginning of summer in Arizona, and I had nothing to do but be bored. I mean, you would be, too, if you were sitting on the couch watching TV on a hot summer day. I was in the sunroom watching the news with my dog. My dog is a Labrador retriever. His name is Sherlock Holmes, but sometimes I call him Sir Sniffs-a-lot because he's always sniffing in people's pockets.

"Temperatures in the high 100s and low 90s," the weatherman said flatly. "So make sure that you have sunscreen on because it's hot, hot, hot out there."

"Oooooooo," I groaned. I could not stand another heat wave. It's bad enough being bored. But with heat, man, that's just painful. You see, my dad's job requires traveling, so I am not around the neighborhood to make friends. My mom died. She died in a car accident by a drunk driver. Since then, life has been nothing but boring.

"In other news..." I turned off the TV.

My dad is an archeologist who studies temples and little statues and other cool stuff. So again, he travels a lot. We've been to Rome, Egypt, and the Middle East. My mom was a home person, so she didn't go with us to those places. When I

was home she would home school me. Now I have a tutor come and teach me stuff.

Right now my dad is studying an ancient temple in Africa that's in the middle of this jungle full of different animals, and some are very dangerous. My dad thinks it's for a god of bad luck or of the underworld, and they made the temple far away from the villages.

"Hey, Danny, can you get the mail for me? I'm expecting something in the mail today, and the mail truck is right outside," my dad yelled.

"Sure, Dad. I don't have anything else to do," I said. I walked to the door, with Sherlock barking at the mailman. "Settle down, it's just the mailman. He comes here six days a week," I said right before I walked out the door.

"You got a package today, Mr. Williams," the mailman said. "A special delivery, too."

"Thank you," I said as I walked through the door. "Hey, Dad, you got a delivery," I yelled.

"Bring it in," he said. He took his car keys and cut the tape. In the package were two plane tickets to Africa and a check for one thousand dollars (which was my dad's paycheck).

I quickly got upstairs to my room to start packing everything I needed: ten pairs of every article of clothing and a hat. I also packed my pocketknife. After I jammed all of it in one suitcase, I ran downstairs to put it in the car.

I haven't gone anywhere since my mom died, and, man, am I excited to leave. "Get a good night's sleep because we're getting up early," my dad told me.

By six in the morning, we had already left for the plane. Sherlock was in his traveling crate.

Not a lot of people were on the plane, but it was going straight to Africa. As we took off I dozed off from not getting enough sleep.

“Wake up! We’re here.”

“Already! We’re already here?” I said in astonishment.

“Yep, where here,” he replied.

As we checked in I noticed that barely anyone was here. It was just a small building with some seats and two desks.

When we got to camp, there was only a temple with dry ground around it, and then jungle. The temple was built on a hill. A landslide had come down on it.

“You set up camp. We’re going into the temple,” my dad told me.

As I set up camp, my dad was looking for something to open the door. When I finished setting up camp, I walked over to him.

“Hey, Dad, I think you press this stone.” As I pressed the brick, the door slid open. When the door slid open, my dad jumped to the side, as did I. I heard a humming sound, and then a storm of mosquitoes came rushing out. I quickly closed the door and sighed in relief.

“I think that’s the first trap,” my dad said.

“I think I’m going to lie down for a bit,” I said in shock.

My dad continued working. After a while he came back.

“Do you want to go in with me?” my dad asked.

“Yeah, sure.”

When we went in, we saw a stairway going down. The stairs were as steep as a steep icy hill in the winter, but we could walk on it. There were statues on both sides of us. Sherlock was in front of us so he could sniff the stairway. When I looked up I saw a long crack in the wall.

Sherlock started to bark behind us at a rumbling sound. When I looked back I saw a bunch of rocks about the size of

my head coming down the stairway, and as they came closer it got as loud as a truck's horn.

"RUN, DAD, RUN!" I said as loudly as I could.

As we ran for our lives, we were stumbling to keep on our feet, and all of a sudden the stairs got a lot steeper. Just seeing my dad's face worried me. He was making his own rainstorm over there. His face was as red as an apple, his face was as wet as if he just went swimming, and yet he kept on running. I also noticed that Sherlock was at the bottom of the stairs already, and there were two other hallways. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that there was a fork in the hall.

"GO RIGHT!" Dad yelled.

I started to stumble. All of a sudden I was diving head first down the stairs, and then I landed right on my stomach. All the air was knocked right out of me. I started to roll down the stairs. When I got to the bottom, I wasn't able to move.

My dad grabbed my hand. I was stumbling to get up as fast as I could.

"GET UP, DANNY, GET UP!" my dad yelled

When we got about five feet away from the hallway with the stairs, I turned around I saw the rocks crash into the wall. It was almost like seeing a car crash right before my eyes. It sent a chill down my spine to see that that could have happened to me.

As we kept walking we were more cautious about our surroundings.

My dad didn't look so good. He was still sweating two hours after the rocks came down. His face was red, and he was mumbling to himself.

"That was way too scary..." I said.

"Yeah, that almost gave me a heart attack."

Oh no, not that. Please not that! Please not that. Please not that!

After that, we just wanted to get out of there. We kept on walking till we saw a way out, and at the very back of the hill there was a way out and a turn left.

“Let’s go down there. Then well go back to camp, ok?”

“Are you sure you’re up to it, Dad?”

“Yeah, why not?”

“Ok.”

We started down the hallway. I saw that where the corners met there was a hole, and I heard this insane buzzing. All of a sudden I saw a fuzzy black cloud. My dad started to run. I bolted after him. The roof suddenly came down.

“THE TEMPLE IS COLLAPSING!” I yelled.

I found myself in the same situation again, being chased by rocks and bugs. I thought that this was the end. “There’s no way out!”

“Just run!”

Suddenly we came to a stone door. Sherlock was still right beside me. My dad was struggling to open the door.

“HURRY, DAD.”

He finally opened the door. “IN, IN!” my dad yelled.

Yes, it was a way out! All we needed to do was get to the other end of this hallway. As the rocks and bugs kept chasing after us, I saw that my dad was running slower than me. This is weird because he was always faster than me.

“We’re almost there, Dad,” I said.

Almost there...and...what? This is not the door. It’s a-a-a treasure room!

“OH MY GOSH! Dad, do you see this? GOLD, SILVER, JEWELS, DIAMONDS...Dad? Dad... D-Da-Dad?”

He was lying there, on a pile of gold, like he was sleeping. Or was he? I started to look for a way out.

“Come on, Dad. Wake up. Wake up.”

“Huh? What?”

“Come on. There’s one more hallway.”

He got up. “Let’s do this.”

As we walked down the hall, I saw that there was a ladder up ahead. There was a door up there. Dad had to climb up and drop a rope so I could make a seat so we could lift Sherlock up. As I climbed up through we saw our camp. We marked the door.

“I’m going to go to sleep now,” I said in relief.

“Me, too.”

Sherlock followed me into my tent.

The next morning was nice and cool. But nothing changed that I know of. I changed my clothes and walked to my dad’s tent. He was still asleep, so I didn’t bother to wake him up.

I climbed the stairs to the top of the temple. It seemed to be a workout just to the top. When I got there I sat at the top of the stairs. I was finally able to see my surroundings. I saw trees that were four stories high and hills long and high. I saw some birds, and everything looked so peaceful for a second.

I went back down to check on my dad. Man, was he hot! He was sweating and laughing. “Oh, poop,” I thought.

I ran to the car and turned on the radio.

“Hello? Anyone there? Hello?” I said into the microphone.

“We hear you. What do you need?”

“When I radioed them they said they would be there in a couple of hours. They also said to keep you cool and calm until they come,” I said to my dad. I knew he couldn’t hear me, but I needed someone to talk to.

Hours seemed to have passed and yet no sign of doctors. His pulse was low. He was barely hanging on. I realized I, too, had malaria and was not able to help myself. I decided to give up. I soon passed out.

The next thing I knew I was in the hospital. They told me I was suffering a minor case of malaria, and my dad had a more complicated case. I was out of the hospital faster than my dad.

I thought that we would go back, but my dad's boss sent in two different guys to get the treasure. We got medals for courage and bravery and 98 percent of the treasure.

Girls Locked in the Museum

*A trip to the museum should be a pleasant outing. It is anything but for two sisters in **GIRLS LOCKED IN THE MUSEUM**, by *India Gordon*.*

A girl named Crystal and her sister Emari loved to go to the Art Museum. At the Art Museum there are a lot of artistic paintings and drawings, too. On a sunny Sunday in 2008, Crystal and Emari asked their mom if they could go to the Art Museum. Their mom said yes.

They went upstairs and did their homework. When they were finished they left and walked to the museum.

When they arrived there they walked around. They saw a lot of beautiful paintings and drawings. They remembered that it was Sunday, and the museum closed at 5:00.

They went to the bathroom before walking back home. When they came out, the lights were turned off. They ran very rapidly to the doors, but they were locked.

Crystal told Emari that she was terrified. Crystal grabbed her phone, but the batteries were dead. They ran to all the other exits, but they were locked, too.

Crystal said, "How about we split up and find things that we can use to break down the door with?"

Emari said, "We will meet at the main door."

Crystal said, "Okay."

When they came back Crystal had a shovel, and Emari had a brick, but they both didn't work. They knew that their mom would come and get them, so they sat down took a nap.

Their mom got so worried and called the police. When the police came, their mom told them the problem. The police asked what museum it was. She said, "The Art Museum."

The police and the mom went to the museum. When they got there the doors were locked. So they called the manager to open the door.

Their mom woke them and told them to get in the car. When they got home they thanked the police. Crystal and Emari told their mom what happened. When everyone was okay they went to sleep.

The Huge Funnel

*Vacation: a time to relax and have fun—and avoid killer tornados. See for yourself in **THE HUGE FUNNEL**, by Cain Pauley.*

On a bright, sunny day, Dave and his family were on vacation in Dallas, Texas. He heard that he and his family were staying at the fanciest hotel in Texas, the Dolphin Hotel.

They walked up to the receptionist with their luggage. “Hi, how may I help you today?” said the receptionist. Mom had already scheduled two rooms online for the family. The receptionist gave the adults the paperwork. It took a while to finish because the hotel was “jam packed.” The receptionist gave them the two keys to their rooms.

When they got to their rooms, they were surprised because they had never seen a hotel room this neat and cool. Dave and his parents’ room was large. It had two king-sized beds and a huge flat screen TV. Mom and Dad liked the room.

Grandparents’ room was large also. It had two queen-sized beds, a balcony with a good view of the ocean, and a medium-sized TV.

Later, Dad showed his family three tickets to a huge magic show. They were so excited. Dave put on his lucky tuxedo that he had gotten from his Dad when he won the lottery for six million dollars.

They were all ready to go to the show. While they were gone, Dave's grandparents and his aunt were going to the movies.

Dave and his parents walked inside the stadium, gave the worker the tickets, and walked down the hall to the show. They sat down in row two.

The magician was beginning to do a trick. The magician was making a Ferrari F50 disappear. Everybody watched. The magician put a huge blanket over the car, tapped it with a finger, and quickly took off the blanket. It was gone.

The next trick he was performing was the sheep trick, where he turns a sheep inside out. He put the sheep in the box and closed it, tapped the box, and opened the box. The sheep was gone.

After the show, they went back to the hotel. They went to the room. Dad turned on the TV and watched the news. Dave and his mom sat next to Dad. The weatherman said, "It's going to be very cloudy with 80-mile-an-hour winds because there's going to be a storm."

Dave was tired. He went to bed. Then, in the middle of the night, his Mom woke him up and said, "Get up! There's a tornado!"

SKRRRRR! The tornado hit the building next to the hotel. Cars were being thrown, buildings were being destroyed, and people were screaming. *KKRRRRR!*

The tornado struck the hotel. The family went in the closet because that's the safest place. The tornado crashed everything in its path. The huge funnel got louder.

Three hours later, it was over. They stepped out of the closet, and half of the hotel was demolished. They were scared. Thousands of people died, but they had survived the huge funnel.

Mr. McDonald

Mrs. Peters's class always has it easy. Then the arrival of a substitute teacher turns the class upside down in
MR. MCDONALD, by *Lilly Elliott*.

Mrs. Peters was the best fourth-grade teacher ever. She let us sit wherever we wanted to on Fridays, she let us have two recesses a day, and she never fought with us. Since Mrs. Peters was the best teacher, we were upset to hear that we were going to have a sub the next day.

My friends and I were wondering who the sub was going to be. We had been hearing that there is this really nice teacher named Mr. McDonald, so I wasn't very worried about the sub.

The next day when I walked into the classroom I saw this man with black eyes, a black suit, and black hair. It was a little weird, but then I saw the name on the board that said, "Mr. McDonald." I remembered that was the nice teacher everyone was talking about. This was going to be an easy day. Then everything changed.

I sat next to my friend Alex because it was Friday. Then the teacher went to the front of the room and said in a very loud voice, "Why is everyone out of order!" I explained to him that on Fridays, Mrs. Peters let us sit next to our friends. He stared at me for a while with his deadly eyes. It felt like he was looking inside of me. Then at the top of his lungs he screamed, "Mrs. What's-her-name isn't here, so you will obey my rules and my rules only!" I wanted to die; I was so scared.

The rest of the day didn't get any better. Rob sneezed and got a detention. Grace laughed and had to go see the principal. I was scared to even breathe without getting in trouble.

During recess the whole class met by the school bleachers. We had to come up with a plan to get rid of our substitute. Then Molly said, "If only Mrs. Peters were here, this wouldn't have happened." And then I got this amazing idea. If someone dressed up as Mrs. Peters, the sub would have to leave.

But who was going to take the risk of getting in a lot of trouble? My friend Alex and I were going to do it, with her on the bottom and me on the top.

When we walked into the classroom (we were dressed as Mrs. Peters), we were really wobbly and couldn't stand still. We went straight up to the sub and said that he could leave. And our plan worked! He actually left!

The rest of the day was awesome. We ran around the room and got to color on the big chalkboard! If only every day were like this.

The next day when Mrs. Peters came back she was happy that we SAID that we liked the sub. And she asked us if she wanted to make him our permanent sub. And we said definitely yes!

Night Visitor

In NIGHT VISITOR by Alexandra B. Wilamowski, a thief tells an exciting tale of mystery and shadows. In the end, everything has a consequence.

I crept down the silent hallway dressed as black as a shadow, but more silent. I went silently up the stairs to the first room that was there: the girl's room. The door was open, but only by a sliver. I dared to poke my head in, and there on the bed was Ann.

With her silvery hair she looked like an angel, but I had no time for her beauty. What I did have time for were dragons: not real ones, but clay ones. Why my boss needed one I did not care or know.

Looking around the room, I quickly lost hope. You see, there were fifty-plus dragons in this room. I only needed two.

I looked around the room for what felt like five minutes before an alarm pierced the air like shattering glass. As fast as I could I ran down the stairs and out the door. The night visitor was gone as if swallowed by the twilight shadows.

I went to the house five nights in a row—five unsuccessful nights. On my sixth return, however, luck found me. I was about to give up when luck found me. I saw them: the dragons!

But there was still a catch. She had made the dragons into a necklace with a circle of lace that she was wearing!

After some careful thought I knew what to do. I pulled out my knife, looped the lace around it, and pulled.

The moment the lace broke, Ann's eyes fluttered open. "NO!" Ann cried out. Without thinking, I looked into her ice blue eyes. I tried to take in a breath, but it got stuck in my throat. Looking into Ann's eyes was like being pushed into deep pools of ice.

Another one of Ann's cries took me back to earth. I tore my eyes out of Ann's and ran. I ran down the stairs and out of the house.

Once I was in front of my boss I held out the dragons. "Smash them," he said. I smashed the dragons on the floor. "Bring me the tooth" was his next order. Like a well-trained puppy I brought him the tooth. "Go," he said.

As I left the room, I thought I saw a flash of ice blue and heard Ann's soft voice in my head saying, "No! No! No!"

That is my story, and now my every thought and dream is haunted by the suffocating ice blue eyes of Ann.

Regaining File 235a

*American spies take the fight directly to their Russian foes in a future war. Will they find the important documents they are seeking in **REGAINING FILE 235A**, by *Chad Fillmore*?*

The US and Russia are at war, and it's not going so well for Russia. On the night of January 25, 2050, Russian spies Jesse, Jaque and Daniel are making a plan to sabotage an American flight to Russia. So far they have three phases of sabotage. Phase One is to capture the four Americans coming into Russia by plane. Phase Two is to get file information. Phase Three is to get a ransom for the Americans.

In America, technology is getting better and better. Little did the Russians know that the Americans that are coming to Russia are all army trained.

"JONNY!" yelled Brad. Both Jonathan and Brad are spies and marines.

"Yeah," said Jonathan.

"Get on the plane."

"I'm coming, Brad," said Jonathan.

"Jonny, sit next to me," demanded Brent.

As the plane taxied down the runway, a message came in saying, "You are clear for takeoff."

When the plane was officially over Russia, Brad had a bad feeling. He was correct.

Beeeeep went an alarm that detected missiles locked on the plane.

“Everybody, please put on parachutes immediately. Open the rear door,” said the pilot.

* * *

“Is everyone okay?” Jonathan asked. He continued, “That must be where the plane crashed a few moments before. See that cloud of smoke?”

“Everyone but Brad,” someone said.

“Was Brad still on that plane?” said Captain Smith.

“He was my best friend,” said Jonathan.

“Where are we?” said Brent.

“Well, I don’t know.... Hey, look, there’s a car,” said Jonathan

“It looks like we’re somewhere in the country. But I think that we might be near the city with the Casino Spindle,” said Smith.

“Look, a civilian car is coming. Hide your parachutes so they don’t know that we’re from the plane crash,” said Jonathan.

“Let’s ask for a ride,” said Brent.

“Pack up. We’re going to the Casino Spindle to get those spies,” said Captain Robert Smith.

Brent flagged down the car. “Can you take us to the Casino Spindle?” asked Brent.

“Yah, I can take you there,” said the Russian man in broken English.

At the Casino Spindle the American spies saw five shady characters. After looking at mug shots given to them by the FBI, the Americans recognized the shady characters as Russian spies.

“Guys, get your Tasers ready. Robert, get your cable ties ready to cuff those morons,” commanded Jonathan. “On my

signal, everybody rush in and take a guy down...one...two...three...go, go, go!"

Back at the Hotel

"Give us the plans for the new Spy Car 235a. We need the plans now! As soon as you give us the plans, we will let you go," demanded Captain Robert S. Smith (code name Eagle).

"I don't have the dang plans," said Daniel, the Russian agent that was captured in the casino.

"We don't have all day. If you can tell us where they are, we will let you go. We can even draw up legal document and sign it," Jonathan (code name Panther) stated.

"Well... the plans are with Jaque, Julian and Frank. Julian and Frank are French spies," said Daniel.

"Let's call Dimitri," Brent said. Dimitri is the U.S driver who has a fancy Russian car. "He can pick us up and take us to the station. We really need to get going, so cuff Daniel and grab your gear," said Brent.

"This is not going to be easy for you guys. The three I speak of have heavy weaponry and are completely barricaded in a house," said Daniel.

Dimitri is as hardcore as it gets. He has been in the FBI for 25 years. When he got to the hotel, he had a new ride. This was no ordinary car. This car had ten hidden rockets and two machine guns all throughout the car.

When they were in the new heavily armored vehicle, they searched for the nearest airport. Once they found the station, they had to buy tickets and find directions. The station was about 45 minutes or about 50 miles away.

"We're almost to the station," said Jonny.

At the airport they loaded the car into the back of the airplane, and then they went to their seats. They passed through quite a few cities before they got to their stop, unloaded the car, and headed out again.

Once they located the house they uncuffed Daniel and sent him out to get the plans from Jaque, Julian, and Frank.

He went to the door of the house, knocked, and gave a password. After a few minutes he came out with a stainless steel briefcase.

He approached the car with the briefcase and got in the back seat with Brent. Then all of a sudden the car drove off, and the Americans did not let him go.

“What are you doing? You said I could go if I got you the plans.”

“Well... we lied,” said Brent.

Back at the hotel the men were talking about what had happened to their airplane.

“Man, it’s too bad that Brad died in the plane crash,” said Captain Smith.

“We’re going to have to move on and capture Jaque, Julian, Frank and Acadia,” said Brent. Acadia was one of the five Russians that were at the Casino Spindle.

“Call Dimitri once more to get some tickets for the airbus and to bring the car,” said Captain Smith.

Once at the station they took their seats, and once again got off the airbus to go capture the four Russians. At the destination they saw the four sitting outside playing cards, so they drove by and took pictures to make sure it was them. It was. Dimitri pulled over to the side of the road and turned around so that the machine guns were aimed at the table where they were playing cards. The guns were loaded with non-lethal sleeping projectiles. Once the four fell out of their chairs onto the grass, all of the men from the car ran in and cable-tied the Russians’ hands.

* * *

A couple of years later in the year 2053, the war was over, and the United States, Russia and France made a peace treaty. The final plans of the car were eventually awarded to the United States. Julian, Jaque and Frank all died sometime throughout the war. No one really knows what happened to Acadia, and the world may never know.

There were many casualties during the war including two out five American spies involved in the original conflict. They were the brave men Brad Thompson and Brent Charleston.

The war lasted three and half agonizing years, during which 1500 U.S troops were killed, and a total of 3500 troops from France and Russia died. May we salute all of our heroes from this sad time of war.

Spy in Training

*Tad and Angie meet, and sparks fly—the kind of sparks that can burn down a school. In **SPY IN TRAINING** by **Katie Bick**, two perfectionists reluctantly work together to crack a tough criminal case.*

Angie:

“Take out your homework and flip to page thirty-four,” Ms. Smith said in her usual monotone. All the other kids in the class groaned. I have no clue why, though. It’s just advanced math; it’s not like it’s hard. I looked at the clock: twenty-four minutes until lunch. Slumped in my seat, I waited for all the “my dog ate it” excuses to end, thinking about finally getting out of this boring town, or at least this equally boring math class. Oh, look, only twenty-three minutes left.

“Angie,” Ms. Smith said sharply, realizing I was not paying attention. “What is the answer to question four?”

“What...what question four?” I exclaimed, snapping out of my trance. The other students giggled seeing me in trouble.

“The question four on your homework, *that’s* the question four,” Ms. Smith growled, putting her hands on her flabby hips. I looked down. Right in front of me was my work.

“Oh, sorry. The answer is...” but I never got to say it. The bell rang, signaling it was time for lunch and a riot.

As I slowly proceeded into the hallway, I noticed Ms. Jones, our school’s newest teacher, take out a tube of lipstick, but instead of reapplying, she began to mumble something in it. I inched closer and closer until I could hear clearly what she was saying. “Of course... I know I’m right.... Trust me, he’s here.... Just do what I say and bring in 240092875.”

I sucked in my breath. There is a mystery going on, and I am going to solve it.

“Students,” Principal Humphrey said in her way-too-deep-for-a-woman’s voice. “We have a new student. I hope you will all make him feel at home and show him our Viona hospitality. Now, Tad, go find an empty seat.”

I watched as the new kid walked in. He had long blond hair tied back in a ponytail and big green eyes. All of the kids gave him phony smiles and acted like they actually cared about him coming here. He began walking down the aisle, searching for a seat. As he began to sit down, I saw every item of clothing he had on, and all of his binders, had the same number on them: 240092875.

Tad:

Nobody was onto me. I played my part perfectly. This mission is terrible. Nothing could be better than Aruba. I mean, what can beat playing a royal from the US -- definitely not a high school jock. The CIA needs me. I’m probably their top agent. Seriously, every hard mission they

receive is always given to me. I really wish I had an identity keeper this time, although no dull Viona student would catch on to me. So, really, I don't have to worry.

This brunette in the back of the class keeps staring at me. She's probably just not used to seeing any people that aren't wearing straw hats and overalls like the rest of the hicks at this school. Okay, well, maybe that's an overstatement, but still, how does anyone stand those accents? Like a pen is not a pen -- it's a *pin*. The worst part is, I have to act like I actually like these morons and become popular among them.

It's almost time for class to let out, which means I have to go meet agent 177071, or in her mission name, Ms. Jones, in our meeting room (sorry, location is confidential) and discuss the news we have on the serial killer. Sadly, I have none. Yeah, that's our mission here, to find a serial killer. That's kind of stupid if you ask me. Come on, I defuse bombs and take weapons of mass destruction away from other countries, plus I'm probably the only teen that actually knows what went on at Area 51. So, a serial killer is no big deal. They probably just sent me here for a relaxing mission. No robot donkeys are after me.

Class ended, and it was time to go meet 177071. As I walked out the door trying to seem all "new-kiddish," the brunette stopped me in my tracks. I smiled at her, trying to seem like I was trying too hard to be nice. The brunette's face remained indifferent. She followed me as I walked down the hall, and eventually when we reached the deserted hallway, she pinned me against my locker and told me what she had to say.

Angie:

I feel like an idiot. I was right, but a total idiot. I don't know what came over me; curiosity just controlled me. One minute I'm just walking like any normal person would, and the next I'm attacking the poor guy. "Listen, Tad," I said harshly without releasing my iron grip on him. "Something is up, and I can tell. You are involved in it, and so is Ms. Jones." I tried to continue but Tad began to sing "Me and Mrs. Jones."

"Cut it out," I yelled, with more power than I thought was possible. "I know I'm on to something. Is it about all the deaths going on around here? Because if it is, you better tell the Mayor, and seriously, I don't think there is 'a thing' going on between you and Ms. Jones."

After I finished, I released Tad, and he sank to his knees. As he rose, I saw that he was carrying in his hand a crisp white pen, which was perfect for writing history papers, but not exactly perfect for this situation. "Listen," Tad said, confidently pointing the pen right at my forehead. "I can hurt you." All I did was laugh. Like a pen is going to threaten me – I don't think so. I am *so* scared. Not! I don't think there are many ways to be killed by a pen, but you never know.

Oh, wait.... He took his eye and put it up to the pen, which automatically scanned it? Suddenly the pen changed into a contraption that looked just like a handgun. My eyes filled with terror as he raised the gun to my head. "You know way too much," he said, his voice still confident but shaking. "Come with me, and I'll see what we should do

with you.” He put the pen/handgun in his backpack and left the building, pulling me behind him.

Tad:

Well, I’m stuck with her. Angelina Destiny Harris is now my certified identity keeper. Too bad I can’t make her get twenty kegs of Diet Coke in the middle of a desert, but I have to act like she is my, ugh, friend and keep her at my side always. Pretty much like my sidekick, but she can’t let anyone know what we are up to. Honestly, the girl is smart, but she can’t even say “pen”! When I took her to 177071, 177071 just laughed and said I finally got an identity keeper (IK for short), so I can stop complaining and work on the case.

Angie just stood there, her eyes flickering around, looking at her surroundings, like a little kid on its first Fourth of July party. Thinking back to my first time at the CIA center, acting like that really is not unusual. When you walk in, there is all of the security stuff just like you see in movies—eye scanners, hand scanners, and many different keypads. When you finally get inside, you’re speechless. The walls are all made of glass that glimmers in sunlight, but even though we can see outside, nobody outside can see in, like a weird illusion. There are many—at least 12—floors, and over 1,000 rooms. Right when you take your first couple of steps in, there is a huge marble staircase that leads down into our training center, which can be changed with the level of the person training. Random bolts of light and other things of that sort appear from the gadgets being used by agents in training.

Agent 177071's office is full of articles of her achievements, and pictures of Luke Wilson. Nothing special compared to the other offices, but to Angie it was amazing. "Kids," 177071 said, "Let's get down to business." And with that we all took a seat and began to discuss our topic.

Angie:

The next day we walked down to the cafeteria and sat down at an empty table. "Look," Tad said, pointing at the lunch menu. "Drumsticks! Yum! I am going to get some. Want one?"

Ugh. I've been through this conversation millions of times before. "No, thank you, Tad," I said in a proud voice. "I'm a vegetarian. I don't eat meat."

I watched the blank stare Tad was giving me turn into a smirk. "I cannot believe I'm stuck with a vegan as my keeper," Tad said as we walked down the hall.

My eyes bulged. "Um... excuse me?" I said. My anger was up to an uncontrollable level. "First, I'm a vegetarian, and second, you have only been at this school for a little while and already you have to diss my choices! I cannot believe you!"

"Chill, Ang," he said. "Can I call you Ang? That was a test to see if you will defend what you feel strongly about. And by the color of your face now, you passed." I shot him a dirty look. These next couple of months will not be easy.

Tad:

“Seventy-seven,” I chirped, not remembering to raise my hand in class, again. Whatever. It’s like these hicks, even in advanced math, can figure out what one plus one equals, at least without using corn or beef jerky to count. I mean, what is it with this town and corn? Like every five streets you pass there will be one cornfield and millions of signs telling you to try Auntie Em’s sweet corn on the cob, or something stupid like that.

“Take out your red *pins* and homework so we can check it,” Miss Gullument, the science teacher, said. I tried not to laugh as I added her name under the “yes” column. “Yes and No.” Those are the two ways to either pass or not pass the hillbilly test. Like if you ask someone what she’s holding, and, of course, she says *pin*, she’s a hillbilly. If she says *pen*, like a human, she’s normal. So far, I’m the only one in the normal column.

Angie shot me a look of death. She was the only other person who knew about the hillbilly test, and as you can tell it ticked off this no-no-nonsense-look-of-death-giving-way-too-serious-girl. Ugh, I cannot believe that she was put in the exact same classes as me. I mean, I know that with her being my identity keeper, I should be with her at all times. But having to be with her every day—yes, every day—even on weekends, it is kind of crazy considering we hated each other. The look on her bony face was definite proof of that. I wish this mission were over and the serial killer would just walk in front of us with blinking lights overhead and do a tap routine for us. Too bad this is real life.

Angie:

Still no luck finding the killer. The only thing that happened is that Tad took my spot as the top student in math, science, and language arts, which contributes to why I hate him. Also, he has managed to make Pamela, the most popular girl in school and my personal bully, fall totally head-over-heels for him. I seriously don't know why. He's not even that cute. Except for that hair that I still wish was mine.

"Ang," he said, poking me in the side with a pencil. Sadly, the nickname he made for me on his first day sank in. "Ang, pay attention, this is your favorite subject."

"Yeah, Tad, I'll pay attention," I said sounding bored. I knew he could see right through my act of not caring. He knew I was totally mad.

"Angie," he said, surprisingly calling me by my real name. "It's okay to be upset; just tell me what's wrong. Maybe I can help." I took a deep breath. I was ready to tell him the problem, that he was a self-centered jerk who felt he had to upstage me in everything. I was so ready to tell him how I felt, but I never got to. I was interrupted by the loudspeaker. "Ms. Angie Harris, please report to the front office immediately. I repeat: Ms. Angie Harris, please report to the front office immediately."

Tad looked at me smugly, ready to do his part of this drill. His hand automatically shot up. "Ms. Smith, may I go to the bathroom?" Tad said in his most innocent voice.

"Why, yes Tad you may go." Ms. Smith replied. "Because you are my *favorite* student and can never do anything wrong, you can go to the bathroom anytime you want." Well, okay, it didn't go exactly like that, but Tad

always kisses up to the teachers, and they always lap it up. Instead of actually going where we were supposed to, we went to the meeting room (sorry, location is confidential) to tell 177071 our news on the murderer. Sadly, we have none.

We walked down the hall to the meeting room in silence.

“Thank you for coming,” 177071 said as we took a seat. “We have good news on our case. We have finally located the murderer.” Tad and I looked at each other in shock. “The murderer is,” 177071 continued, “Kimberly Smith.”

Tad:

No. That was the only word going through my head as she said that. Ms. Smith was Angie’s favorite teacher. No one on earth could be more of a role model to her. She would be crushed. I was immune to stuff like this. Trust me, I’ve already been let down by my role model big time.

It was five years ago on my first big mission for the CIA Gavin and I were instructed to go to enemy territory and blow up one of the enemy’s spy bases in a desert. It was great smiling, laughing, eating, drinking, sleeping, talking, even riding on a camel while trying to reach the base. Gavin was seventeen, the exact age I am now, and I worshipped him. He had piercing blue eyes that seemed to look straight into your soul. He was bigger and stronger, not to mention way more experienced, than I was at being a spy.

When Gavin and I finally reached the foreign spy base, I was too weak to fight. Gavin had put poison in all of my food and water. I, an innocent twelve-year-old, was oblivious to that. I remember mustering up all of the strength I could and ended up making it through the fight while getting all the weapons, but Gavin didn't. A spy came and shot him from behind his back.

The last statements he made to me before taking his last breath were, "You do what you gotta do in this business. I don't know how many more times I can say I'm sorry, Tad, but just remember that I will always, *always* be devoted to my C.I.A. And yes, I've done a stupid thing, but they bribed me, tortured me to do it. You, you, Tad, will be my perfect replacement. And I know even in my afterlife I will never, ever forget" I could pretty much finish the sentence from there. And those were the last words Gavin ever got to say.

Now, whenever I think of the jerk's face, I wince and want to knock someone out. But back to Angie. "What proof do you have that Ms. Smith was the murderer?" Angie said rather rudely.

"The murder weapon was found in her desk drawer, and the fingerprints match," 177071 said as if nothing happened and we were just discussing the weather.

"She's innocent," Angie said venomously. "You can not do anything to her. I know her. She is not a killer. She can't be!"

"Angie, Angie, Angie," she said as if Angie were a sad mistake. "Killers come in many shapes and sizes. They are great actors, too. She can build up trust in anyone. Even though they are evil, they are smart, and this is not her first time."

I'm probably softening up, but really, how could 177071 even talk like that as if it were... skydiving! I mean, 'it's not her first time'—this is a murder, not a stupid bowling game.

Angie looked at me for back up, but my eyes would not meet hers. She looked at the room one last time and angrily stormed out.

Angie:

“Want a fry?” I said gloomily, passing my lunch to Micha, my best friend since first grade.

“No thanks, Angie. If I want to get back to a size 10, I better lay off the fried food.”

I suppressed a laugh as she poured a whole bottle of dressing on her salad. “Well, hey, it’s Friday,” I said. Then I asked, “Want to come over my house tonight?”

“Sorry, Angie, but no can do, I’ve got...things to do.” I was ready to tell her off, but of course I got interrupted by her cell phone—again.

Micha gave me an I-have-to-take-this-call look, and I just rolled my eyes. As Micha scampered off into a corner talking rapidly, I thought about Tad. Why was I mad at him? After all, he was just doing his job. It’s not like he could help what was going on.

Lost in thought, Micha returned. “Change in plans,” she told me. “Meet me at the pool at 10. That’s when swim practice ends. Then we can have our sleepover.” I smiled at her. At least I had one true friend.

It was 10:15, and the pool was totally deserted. If Micha ditched me, she is so dead.

“Angie, over here.”

I turned and saw an overweight girl dressed in a red swimsuit drying her hair with a towel, her back turned to me, which of course had to be Micha. (Who else has such a bad taste in swimsuits?)

“M, I am so glad to see you.” The smile on my face instantly turned to a frown when the body faced forward and revealed an overweight lady in an ugly red swimsuit with a ski mask on—holding a gun.

The lady took a step towards me. No terror ran through my whole body. I closed my eyes and counted to ten, hoping when I opened them it would just be Micha holding a squirt gun, laughing out loud. No such luck. The lady inched closer and closer. I opened my mouth and just screamed. I tried to run, but something hit me. I saw blood and then slipped into the pool, blacking out.

Tad:

It was a dreary Friday night. The sun was down, but the intense heat still bore down on my already sweaty back. It seemed like the moon was radiating heat and glowing, as if smirking at me for finding it unbearable. Anyway, as I sat down in my office at the Spy Center (how many kids do you know who can say that?) something caught my eye. The tracking device monitor lit up, signaling that one of our agents was in danger. Let it go, I thought to myself. Some other agent would try to save the idiot agent who put himself in so much trouble.

Twenty minutes passed, and the monitor would not stop beeping and flashing. It's probably just a S.I.T. (Spy In Training) who can't handle rescuing a puppy from a tree. "Somebody just save the poor guy!" I screamed so someone in the office could hear. I got no reply.

Wait... it's Friday night at ten o'clock. Nobody was here. They all started their weekend and would not return until Monday. Shoot. I sprinted to the monitor, only to find out this suffering agent was not just any agent; it was Angie!

I threw on my jacket, picked up my keys, and ran to the car in hope of saving Angie.

Angie:

"Ang," a familiar voice said.

"D-Dad, is that you?" I said groggily. I heard a laugh I would recognize anywhere. "Get out," I yelled, finding it was harder than it usually is. "Leave, now!"

"That's very nice to say to the person who just saved your life from three different types of deaths," Tad said, still laughing.

"Wait, what exactly happened there, Tad?" I asked on account of not remembering anything.

"Well, first of all, that was not Micha," Tad said, stating the obvious. "You were going to be another victim of the killer, which we know is not Ms. Smith. But thanks to your clumsiness, you missed her bullet by falling into the pool, cracking your head on the floor and almost bleeding and drowning to death. The pool's security system goes off when anyone gets in the pool after hours, so she ran when

she heard the alarms, and sadly got away. I got to you because your tracking device said you were in danger.”

“Wait, I have a tracking device on me? Where? Get it off!”

“Your tracking device is in your bracelet, and mine is in my watch. Don’t take it off; it’s for your own good,” Tad said seriously.

“But what happened to Micha?” I asked quickly, not wanting anyone to make another false assumption. “I saw the killer, and it is definitely not her.”

“Micha was not even at the pool, Angie. You either missed her, or she set up a trap.”

I looked around the hospital room. There were flowers everywhere, and the whole right wall was a window looking out on the busy streets with people walking at different paces, each going somewhere, not worrying about catching a murderer. Wait. Micha would want to kill me? But that’s impossible. We’ve been best friends since forever. She had to be tricked, but just like I found out with Ms. Jones/177071, people are not always what they seem.

Hours later, I heard voices outside my door. The first two voices were my parents’, who have not left this hospital since I came. The second was none other than Micha’s. Though I could not leave the bed, I could make out most of the conversation.

Mom: Sorry, Angie can’t have visitors at this hour. She needs her sleep.
(Liar! I need to talk to Micha to ask what is going on.)

Micha: Please. It’s urgent.

Dad: You heard my wife. We did not even let Tad or her grandmother in. Well, we had them wait until visiting hour.

Mom: We are happy that you are concerned, but come back at eight, Micha.

Micha: It's 7:45!

Mom: Sor --

Dad: What the --

With that, Micha came bursting in carrying a Taser gun. "Micha," I began, but she cut me off.

"Look Angie, I'm sorry, but there is not much time. I'm being threatened to do this. If I don't, well, deadly consequences. They are tracking me as we speak, Angie. If you value your life, if you value Tad's life, we can not be near each other anymore. I have to run, so bye." Trying to make a grand exit, she ran towards the door but was stopped by 177071.

"Wait!" 1770711 said. "I can help. Just come with me." But she exited the room.

These doctors are giving me way too much painkiller.

Tad:

You know what's awesome about being with the CIA? It's that those gadgets you see in television shows come out of cartoons and into real life. Like did you know that you could brainwash someone into believing what you want her to? Trust me, it's a way cool process. Micha got taken into

an off-limits lab where they erased all traces of the murderer from her mind, took the tracking device out, and made it so she never worked or associated with the woman who tried to kill Angie. Micha would just be her best friend and nothing more. So no other semi-spies will be in our lives, I think.

Angie:

I've only been out of the hospital one day, but I already have to go back to school. It's not fair, but that's life. Anyway, as Tad and I walked into the cafeteria I noticed something. Our Lunch Lady looked oddly pretty today. Her boring brown hair was streaked with gold, the wrinkles on her face were gone, and her lips looked extra puffy. "I wonder how she does that?" Tad whispered in my ear.

"Does what? Look decent at fifty?" I asked, tearing my gaze from the Lunch Lady to Tad.

"Affords the plastic surgery. I mean, come on, Ang. We both know she did not get beautiful overnight."

I thought about what he said. Even though it's dumb, I have to go over and talk to her.

"Excuse me, but where did you get you hair highlighted? It looks so cute the way you have it now. I may want to do that to mine." I know that sounds dumb, but I was investigating. It will make sense later.

"Oh," the Lunch Lady said happily. "I get it done at Joli Cheveux." I knew that Joli Cheveux is the ritziest hair salon in town.

“But how do you afford to go there? I mean, this job can not pay enough for five-thousand dollar hair cuts.” I know that was rude, but once again I was investigating.

“I have a second job. I run a posh funeral home. Oh, look, the lunch mob is here. Got to split. Ta-ta.”

I looked at the grace of her motions but then saw the fat all over her body. I see her smoky blue eyes, and then it hits me. “Tad,” I said slowly, “I think we’ve just found the killer.”

Tad:

After we talked it over we decided that Angie was right. Aoni Lowa (yeah, that is her name; she changed it last year) kills people and then has the families use her place for the funeral. It costs a lot. That is how she affords to make herself look beautiful and tries to reach her goal of being a model. Sick, isn’t it? We cannot tell 177071 because she will totally scoff at the idea and say it is too far out. But I know for sure Aoni is the one we want.

We made a plan that we will catch her in the act. I managed to station CIA agents like me all around the state to catch her when she strikes next. Angie and I will wait at the ice rink because that is the only place where no deaths have happened. The plan is foolproof. At least that is what I hope.

Angie:

Tad and I got out of the taxi, and it drove away quickly. I put my hand on the doorknob ready to pull. “Wait,” Tad said quickly. “If we die in here, Angie, I want you to know that you are way more than an identity keeper to me. You are my friend—no, my best friend, and there is nobody else I would want to risk my life with.” I saw a tear drop from Tad’s big green eyes, and I found my own eyes watering, too.

“Tad, we are not going to die, but if we did we wouldn’t go out without a fight. Win together or lose together, we’re a team.” I gave Tad a hug, and then opened the door to the ice arena.

We lay on our stomachs in the stands, barely moving and barely breathing. A young girl about 14 stepped onto the ice in a revealing pink and gold costume. She began to skate when a figure dressed in all black with a ski mask covering her face tiptoed onto the ice. “Tiffany,” Aoni Lowa said, trying to sound like a little girl. I pulled out a video camera and began to record.

“Lisa, you came!” Tiffany cried happily just like me. But her smile disappeared when she saw the lady holding a gun instead of her friend.

“Stop right there!” Tad screamed. “The cops are on the way, and you are going to jail.” I stayed on the floor, still recording Aoni.

“Oh, you think you can stop me?” Aoni asked. But before we could reply, she pointed the gun at Tad’s forehead, hand on trigger, ready to shoot. Then 177071, surrounded by cops, took the gun from her. “Thank you agents,” 177071 said, and with that we left the arena.

So here is the wrap-up of the story. Tad and I are best friends, and I am now a proud member of the CIA. Aoni Lowa is in jail for life, and her funeral home got shut down and is being taken over by a Target. Agent 177071 retired and now is permanently working as a teacher at Viona High. Micha lost the weight she wanted to lose with an additional twenty pounds. And, even though this is cheesy, we all lived happily ever after.

Survive

*When a spelling bee winner is thrown into a harrowing situation, his ability to handle pressure is tested in a new way. The phrase “field trip of a lifetime” turns out to have a double meaning in **SURVIVE**, by Collin Ebbing.*

We were on a field trip of a lifetime. Three students that won a spelling bee got to fly for a competition to Italy. It was incredibly exciting to fly on a jet for the first time ever in my life.

The morning of December 8 was clear and crisp. My parents dropped me off at Metro Airport in Michigan. I found the two other students and the two chaperones that I was going to be traveling with.

Our flight took off without a hitch. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Unfortunately halfway through the flight the pilot mentioned there might be some turbulence. After about five minutes the lights started flickering, and there was a terrible sound coming from the back of the jet. All of a sudden the jet felt like it was falling from the sky. Everyone was screaming at the top of their lungs. As I looked out the window it was as if the jet were crumbling into pieces.

Everything that was not secured was flying through the air. I saw the cart that the flight attendant used to serve drinks zoom past me. I moved out of the way of the cart. After, I turned around and found out that one of the chaperones, Mr. Connors, had been killed instantly. I felt sad that Mr. Connors died and how hurt his family was going to be. I felt so alone

and couldn't stop shaking. The smell of the jet fuel was so strong I could hardly breathe....

When I woke up I found myself lying on the edge of the water on some deserted island. Next to me was the pilot who died from the impact of the crash. There were pieces of the jet spread out as far as I could see. The beach looked like there was a train wreck. I could see some people just lying there not moving at all.

I got up and searched for my friends Jack and Andrew. I was thrilled to find out that both of my friends were alive and not badly injured. My heart was beating a mile a minute. I felt so lucky to find both of them alive. We found the other chaperones near each other. They both had died from the crash. It was hard to look at the face of death. Their eyes were wide open, and their bodies were in pieces

The three of us searched around for a radio or a cell phone. We didn't find a cell phone, but we did find a radio. The bad part was the radio was broken, and none of us knew how to fix it. We also found a flare gun that we hoped would be very useful.

The next step was to find some food and water. We were determined to survive. After a long search we found a refrigerator filled with water and food from the jet. Although the food would help out, it wouldn't last long.

That night Jack and Andrew and I found a great big tree to sleep under for the night. It was cold and very dark. We were all pretty scared. All of us took turns watching for some type of rescue boat or helicopter.

The next morning we looked around the island in search of some type of life. The island was deserted. There was not any sign of life for miles and miles. We realized we were stuck on an island without food or safe water to survive on. Our only water supply was from the ocean, and it was not safe to

drink. The water from the ocean was not safe because it could get us very dehydrated.

As we were searching for some type of life we heard an extremely loud explosion. I looked at everyone's faces, and there was terror in their eyes.

There was lava sliding down the mountain. We didn't know what to do. The only thing we could do was to run—run for our lives. We headed to the beach. My friends and I made it to the beach, hoping the lava would not run that far.

We talked to each other and decided the only way to stay alive would be to go out into the water. We bundled up some parts of the jet that would float. We got all of the food and clothes we could find, making sure we didn't forget the flare gun.

We headed for the water and paddled as far as we could go. We were out there for hours. We watched the hot lava continue to flow over the island. The lava destroyed everything in its path.

As night came we felt as if we might never make it home alive. Jack and Andrew fell asleep from the exhausting day. When I noticed movement in the water I screamed “Shark!” It was a shark! It woke them up, and we all screamed in terror.

The three of us huddled together and prayed for help. The shark was curious and it kept circling our floating device. The shark eventually swam away. We fell back asleep and woke to a hot sunny morning.

We didn't have anything to drink, and we were getting thirsty. The little bit of food we had taken with us was going to have to be rationed. We decided to eat a little bit to keep strong and not get sick. Everyone was getting dehydrated.

We didn't want to just die without trying to survive. So we decided to paddle around the island looking for help. We noticed that the other side of the island was not affected by the volcano.

We made our way to the beach. This looked like our one chance to survive. I told everyone this might be our one chance to rest before nightfall.

We gathered wood from the island to make a fire. At night it got cold and dark. We took turns watching for a rescue plane again. Instead of a plane we discovered a blinking light in the distance on the ocean. We screamed with delight. This may be our only chance to be rescued. We began to make a plan on how to get them to notice us. We pulled out the flare gun.

We all decided to use the flare gun when the lights got close enough to see it, hoping the boat would continue to head toward the island. It was about an hour after we noticed the boat coming toward us. We all decided to use the flare gun. We shot it and said a prayer.

After a few minutes the boat turned in our direction. We were thrilled. When the boat reached the island, we could not have been happier. They gave us food and water. We could finally relax and feel safe.

The crew treated us like family. They wrapped us up in blankets and called home to our parents. That night we were rescued was the best day of my life. I will never forget my first spelling bee field trip. I survived!

Toxic Fishing

*Fish, fish, and more fish is all Jimmy can think about. But in **TOXIC FISHING** by **Spenser Robnett**, Jimmy looks at fish in a whole new way that he never knew was possible.*

I've heard the weirdest stories at Washington Middle School. They say that he was the one who set the mayor's house on fire the night of the riot. That's not true. They say he ate Johnny Freeman the night he went missing. That's not true. Now, this would make a pretty good horror story, if it were real. The truth is that these stories have been made up to scare the kids in this area.

The man they were talking about was Ol' John Cooper, and I know the truth. Well, Ol' John Cooper is so nice that he's never harmed a fly.

You see, my parents were killed by an idiot drunk driver in a car accident. When we were in the hospital before they died, they told Ol' John to take care of me. My parents told me that he helped them out in tough times. Since I don't have any relatives, now I live with him.

By the way, I'm Jimmy. I've had a really tough life. The kids at school always make fun of me because I live with Ol' John. It makes me want to punch everyone who calls me a creep. There are not a lot of good things in this mess of sorrow. Well, at least there's fishing. I love fishing. John owns a small fishing boat, and sometimes I get to go fishing. Fish, fish, fish and more fish is pretty

much all I think about. There's just one problem: He usually never lets me go fishing. We only go to Memorial Lake, and I've probably gone fishing six times and only with him. This one Saturday I was determined to go.

You know, you don't get very far in life by begging. Trust me. Once I saw Ol' John carrying a shotgun, a video camera, and two ice cold Coca-Colas on to the boat. I was suspicious and was determined to go. My plan was to hide under the net next to the poles. It was executed perfectly.

One thing you should know is I'm probably the most ticklish person in the world, so when he reached for the net I might have had a couple giggles.

"Holy cow! Why are you here?" Ol' John exclaimed. "Whyyyyy....!" CRASH! A huge tail split our boat in half. It literally looked like a box of Corn Flakes exploding. This happened faster than you can say superduper-califragalistic-expialidocious. As I hit the water I saw a huge creature. If you've ever seen the movie *Jurassic Park*, it looked like the *T. rex*, but with 100 eyes and spikes around its back. I was doomed.

Boom! Crack! I heard the shots from his gun.

"Unless you want to become a peanut butter and Jimmy sandwich, swim!" Ol' John cried. I swam as fast as I could. I heard this huge slash and I thought it was the *Titanic* sinking. A crab boat picked me up about 30 minutes after the splash.

We searched for about ten minutes and found Ol' John. He had a couple of broken bones, but besides that he was mostly AOK.

He told me how he saw the monster in a nuclear tank up at the Memorial Lake Power Plant. He wanted to videotape the monster and send it to *National Geographic*. We ended up taking underwater pictures of

it, and then we sent it into the magazine. They paid us \$375,000 and we got to name the species. I named it the Ol' John Fish.

So trust me, if you want to become a hot fudge sundae for an Ol' John Fish, be my guest. Just remember, I told you not to go to Memorial Lake.

What Next?

*A little boy and his pet lamb go on an adventure together. There is a challenge nearly every step of the way in **WHAT NEXT?** by Sydney Moosekian.*

“Let’s be off.”

Johnny and Sam, Johnny’s woolly white sidekick, were off on another one of their spectacular adventures. Johnny and Sam were lifelong friends who had been on many adventures together to discover new lands and meet new people. This time they were going to China. They had strong feelings this adventure was going to be the best one yet.

As Johnny and Sam were sailing along in their little sailboat, the cold ocean water and the crisp wind were striking their faces. The sun was just about to set when—*FLASH*—the worst thing that can happen when you are out at sea happened to them that very moment: a storm.

“We’d better get our life preservers,” said Johnny frantically.

Johnny put on his life jacket, and then helped Sam get on his specially made life preserver to fit his little lamb body.

At first it was just a little drizzle, which wasn’t too bad, but then the storm finally was coming down hard. It was miserable.

“Take cover!” yelled Johnny.

It was probably the most devastating storm that they had ever been in, with the rain twisting and turning like they were in a hurricane. The storm was violently thrashing them

around. The rain was turning into hail, and lightning bolts were coming down everywhere as the thunder was roaring with rage. Johnny grasped Sam tight to his chest. Water was pouring into the boat, and the rushing wind started viciously rocking the boat. Johnny was afraid the boat was going to tip, so he made the decision to abandon ship. Johnny jumped out with Sam tight in his arms.

Just moments after they jumped the boat tipped and sank to the bottom of the deep, blue sea. Johnny quickly looked to see which way the waves were rushing. "That is the way we will go," said Johnny. He began to swim as fast as he could with the waves to make it to shore.

The spine-chilling waves pushed them in all directions. Hail the size of golf balls beat down on their heads giving them bruises all over. Johnny could see Sam's face turning blue when finally they made it to shore. They started a long, miserable walk to find civilization.

As the days went by they just kept getting more miserable.

On the tenth day they came upon a big city. They were worn out just like Johnny's clothes, but they realized they had made it. They were in Beijing, China.

"The suspense and the days of misery have finally ended," said Johnny. Sam just stood there and smiled at his trusted friend with his wool dripping with rain.

Luckily Johnny still had money left in his pocket to buy food and a new set of clothes. Once they were fed, warm and dry they continued with their adventure.

In Beijing, they enjoyed everything that was around them. They loved all of the spectacular buildings and the many different people.

Their first stop was the Great Wall of China. They climbed it and played the lamb version of catch. When Johnny and Sam got so tired that they could not play any more they

lay down and took a nice, peaceful little nap on a peaceful little day by the Great Wall of China.

Then it happened. In the very midst of their nap they were awakened by a noise that sounded like rolling, raging thunder. As they opened their eyes Johnny realized they were being surrounded by Chinese soldiers. They tied them up and carried them away. Johnny struggled to get free, but was unsuccessful.

The soldiers took them to the Emperor's palace, and the people of the village surrounded them yelling, "Get rid of the lamb!" Johnny couldn't figure out why. They were raising their fists and chanting, "No lambs allowed. No lambs allowed!" Johnny and Sam were chilled to the bone. They were so scared. Johnny's mind raced trying to figure out how to escape while wondering why they hated Sam so much.

Suddenly, a giant of a soldier came out of the crowd and grabbed Sam from the other soldiers.

"NO!" Johnny cried. "You can't take him! That's my lamb. That's my FRIEND!"

The soldier lifted Sam high above his head, and the crowd cheered wildly. He pointed his finger at Johnny and roared, "No lambs allowed in Beijing!"

The soldier turned and walked through the crowd still holding the trembling lamb high above his head. Johnny had tears running down his face as he watched his best friend go. The soldier disappeared into the palace.

"I'll miss you!" Johnny screamed as he was struggling to get free.

The other soldiers carried Johnny off and threw him into a dark jail cell. Johnny curled up in the corner of the jail cell and began to bawl. He was beginning to lose hope thinking he would never see his friend again.

Then Johnny heard a quiet whimper in the other corner of the jail cell. He approached the sound cautiously, wondering what it was. The sun shone through a crack in the wall, and with the little bit of light Johnny could manage to see the shadow of the creature. He realized it was Sam!

He ran over and picked him up in his arms. He was surprised to see that they ended up in the same room.

Johnny sat with Sam stroking his wool to help calm Sam down. Then he heard the soldier's footsteps down the hall. Johnny curled up in a dark corner hoping the soldier would not see Sam and him. The soldier opened up the cell door and grabbed the lamb from Johnny.

Johnny pushed the guard, and the guard tripped over an unseen bench. The guard roared with rage, "Give me the lamb!"

Another guard heard the commotion and came racing towards the cell. When he saw Johnny had the lamb he raced over. Johnny threw the door open as the guard approached knocking the guard over. Johnny raced out with the guards chasing after him yelling, "Get back here!"

As soon as Johnny was far enough ahead he slipped behind some bushes. The guards did not see where he had disappeared. The guards ran all over the place looking for Johnny and Sam. When the guards finally gave up and went back to the palace and Johnny was sure that they were safe, he tucked Sam under his shirt and ran as fast as he could.

After what seemed like hours of panting and running, Johnny stopped in a rolling green meadow and lay in the warm grass to catch his breath. Johnny tried to get Sam to relax with him, but Sam seemed very excited. The lamb kept licking Johnny's hand and nudging his cheek trying to get him to open his eyes. Finally, Sam was able to get Johnny to sit up.

As Johnny rubbed his eyes he came to focus on what seemed like a sea of white just up one of the hills. He squinted harder and realized it was a flock of sheep. Johnny realized they had run far enough and were out of Beijing in a place where they allowed lambs. They walked to the flock and found the sheep herder who told them how to get to his small village of Jing-Jing.

Jing-Jing was a nice little town where finding work was easy for Johnny. As soon as he made enough money to get back to his homeland he quit his job and set out to find the next boat home.

It was many hours before he finally found a cargo ship that would take him and Sam home. Johnny happily paid the captain for his fare and got on the boat with Sam.

As the boat sailed out of the harbor, the sun shone down brightly on their faces, and the two friends were off on another adventure back home.

Zero

*The mission: Blow up a heavily-guarded weapon of mass destruction. **ZERO**, by **Brian Jelinek**, is a story about two brave pilots who have to fly straight into the heart of the enemy.*

It was a cold, crisp day in the North Sea. The three super carriers Buzzard, Kestrel, and the Vulture were sailing on practice missions around Avalon Dam. Sixty Osean pilots were on these carriers doing nothing, but what none of them knew is that they would be taking part in a huge mission to save Osea.

“Hey, Pixy.”

“Yeah, Cipher.”

“How did you get to this part of the Osean Army?”

“Cipher, I got here because I wanted to be a soldier, but not one of the guys who is on the ground. I wanted to be a pilot because I wouldn’t get all dirty and sweaty. What about you?”

“When I was a kid, war was common in my land.” Cipher was from a small country in the middle of countries that are always fighting. “I always looked up in the sky and said, ‘I want to be a fighter pilot when I grow up,’ and here I am.”

“Dude, we are on the North Sea sailing to wherever. So cut the dramatic talk and start talking and thinking like the ace you are!”

“Ok, ok, ok.... I’m scared of what Captain Anderson has to say in the briefing room.... It is a surprise mission.”

When Cipher and Pixy were walking to the briefing room they were talking about a lot of stuff to keep their mind off of what is going on.

“At ease, people, but don’t get comfortable. We have a grave situation on our hands. Let’s get this briefing started. At Avalon Dam there is an experimental weapon of mass destruction called V2! V2 is being housed there. What you don’t know is that V2 could destroy Osea and its allies everywhere around us. The bad thing is that we’ve just discovered V2, and we don’t know much about it. All we know about the weapon is that it is being launched tomorrow, and we need to stop it or a bunch of people will die!

“The mission tomorrow is a joint operation with the carriers Buzzard, Kestrel, and our carrier Vulture. All the pilots will launch at three o’clock tomorrow except Cipher and Pixy. You men will launch at four o’clock. You men have been chosen by the Osean government to blow up the three control stations inside Avalon. Cipher and Pixy, you know what the round table is.”

“Yes, sir, we remember. The round table is where the fierce fighting Wizards are stationed.”

“Cipher and Pixy, you guys are now called the Galm team. Ok, all. I wish you all the best of luck in battle!”

The next day Cipher and Pixy were checking their F-15 Strike Eagles. Cipher kept saying to Pixy, “Check your planes” again and again.

Pixy said, “Look up to the east.”

They both looked up and saw sixty Osean planes vanish into the foggy day at sea.

“Pixy, check your plane one more time, and then review your flight plan. Then strap into your Strike Eagle and fly for your country.”

“Got it, Cipher.”

“Cipher, this is base control. You are sitting in alert five. Fire up you engines.”

“Got it. Firing up my Strike Eagle.”

“This is Captain Anderson. Which one of you fly boys wants to go up first?”

“I will, Captain,” Pixy said.

“Ok then, Pixy. Go up the elevator. Then follow the grounds crew orders.”

“Pixy, you hear me? This is First Private Alvin Snow, second in command. The man in charge is out for the day because he is seasick. Ok, let’s get started then.”

While Private Snow was saying, “You’re good, you’re good, you’re good,” Pixy was turning his aircraft into the direction he was supposed to be in to launch. Cipher did the same thing as Pixy. When the Galm team was in the air and was about half way to the round table they ran into trouble...

“Cipher and Pixy, this is Captain Anderson. Here is your forecast over the round table.... Warning, warning, five high-speed enemies. It’s probably the Wizards!”

“Dang it, enemy Wizards, twelve o’clock!” Cipher shouted.

“This is Wizard One. The Galm team has entered the net.”

“This is Wizard Five, let’s begin, and get them.” The Wizards were thinking that this would be a breeze since they were outnumbering the Galm team five to two. What the Wizards did not know was that the Galm team was carrying long-range missiles.

“Hey, Pixy, say the magic words, please.”

“I’d be delighted to, Cipher. Ok, then, missiles away and fox three.” The Wizards were shocked because they saw two planes hit and trailing smoke with four parachutes in the air.

“Pixy, this is Cipher. I’m going to go for Wizard Five. You go for Wizard Two.”

“Roger, Cipher.”

“Cipher here, I’m going for the shot, but I can’t get a good tone... wait, wait, wait. I have good tone and I am... firing. Yes, I got my first kill of the day. Pixy, how you doing?”

“Oh, I’m just doing fine. I got the fist kill of the day. That means before you!” Cipher and Pixy were on a roll. Because they had killed two planes there would be one left, the leader. Cipher and Pixy argued over who was going for the shot. A couple of minutes later Cipher won the argument and was targeting the leader.

“Pixy, this is Cipher, I’m going to get the kill in five, four, three, two, one! Fox Two!”

“Cipher, this is Pixy. For the excitement, I am going to hit the brakes real hard.”

Cipher was saying, “Your going to do what?”

“Cipher, let’s go blow up V2!”

“Yea, Pixy, let’s!”

“This is Avalon Base security. Two planes approaching at high speed. It’s the Galm team. Start firing the AA weapons.”

“Cipher, they have AA weapons. Be careful buddy.”

“Ok, Pixy, I’m going in the dam. This is so small inside and difficult to drop my first wave of bombs.... First wave of bombs have blown up the first control station. Pixy, it’s me. I am so scared that my hands are all wet from sweating.”

“Same here, CIPHER.”

“Dropping second wave of bombs now.... That control station is gone, too. Pixy, the place is starting to fall down around me, but I still have to drop the third wave of bom—” CIPHER’S radio got cut off.

“Cipher, Cipher, no!” Pixy burst into tears because he had just lost his best friend. All of a sudden there was a voice on the radio. It was Cipher!

“This is Galm One. I have made it out alive, and V2 is destroyed. Ha! I got you!”

“That’s not funny, man, stop laughing, stop, it’s not funny at all.”

Back on the carrier Vulture, Cipher and Pixy were awarded the Medal of Honor because of what they went through blowing up V2. Cipher and Pixy wanted to get home and celebrate with their friends. They have just saved Osea and all the other allied countries!

THE
GRAVEYARD
SHIFT

Adoption

*Ideally, the day of adoption should be a happy time as a child gains a new family. However, in **ADOPTION** by **Madeline C. Torres**, an orphan girl finds that there is much to fear from her new mother.*

I sat in the back of a blue minivan. My neighbor Grace and her husband and her kids were driving me to an orphanage. Why, you might ask? Well, my parents were in San Francisco at an art gallery on the top floor. There was a huge earthquake, the building collapsed, and they died.

When we got there I said goodbye to George and Grace. Then Ms. Thompson, the lady in charge, came over and said, "Today is open house, so you may go outside, hang out in the electronics room, or swim in the pool." I chose to go outside.

On my way out I heard, "Millie, wait." I turned around and Ms. Thompson came over and told me that after two months of being there I could get adopted. Until then I had to stick to the same routine every day: Wake up at 6:30, eat breakfast at 7:00, do chores until 8:30, then once a month there is open house until 4:00, but when it's not open house there's school until 4:00. Then there's dinner, and then sports, and then bed.

After two very slow months went by I was finally allowed to get adopted! But a few months later no one had adopted me. I was beginning to feel sad and lonely.

One day while I was sitting outside the phone rang. It was Ms. Thompson's neighbor, Evelyn. Evelyn said that she

wanted a little girl to keep her company because her husband had just died.

About five minutes later Ms. Thompson came outside and asked me if I would like to meet her neighbor and possibly live with her. “Sure,” I said. Anything is better than here.

The next day Evelyn came in, and we all had an interview. During the interview Evelyn kept looking at me with an evil look on her face. “This is totally freaking me out,” I thought to myself. While I was thinking, Ms. Thompson set this next weekend so we could get to know each other a little better. When I got back I would make the choice whether I would stay with her or not.

On Friday night my bags were packed, and I was ready to go home with Evelyn for the weekend. Finally she showed up, only one hour late.

“Sorry I’m late. On my way here I had to pick up some things at the store, and there was a commotion.”

“It’s okay.”

When we got to her house she showed me the midnight black room I was staying in. I’m serious. EVERYTHING in that room was black. Anyway, after she showed me my room she said, “Be to the kitchen at six sharp. If you are not there you will not eat, understood?” I nodded.

At six we had some chicken thing. Then out of nowhere she said, “Go get my sweater in your room.” So I got up and went into my room to look for the sweater. I looked in all the drawers and I searched the closet like 20 times. Finally I thought to look under the bed, and I saw a...a...a...gun! “Oh no, oh no, oh no, she has a gun.” I quickly walked out of the room, forgetting the sweater.

When I got to the kitchen I saw Evelyn on the phone. So I ran back to my room and picked up the other line.

Evelyn: You will never guess what happened today.

Voice: What happened?

Evelyn: On my way to pick up the twerpy kid I stole a watch, two pairs of earrings, and a diamond bracelet. But the thing is I almost got caught this time.

Voice: Wow! Guess what I stole today.

Evelyn: What?

Voice: A rhinestone gun.

Evelyn: I have one under the bed in the kid's room. I think I'm going to use it tonight, if you know what I mean.

After I heard that, I hung up the phone and pulled out a quarter and slipped out the window, forgetting that I was on the second floor until I landed on the ground. My hands and knees were stinging like crazy. They were covered with blood, and my right ankle was hurting like heck. But I got up and hobbled over to the pay phone, inserted my quarter, and dialed 911. "What's the emergency?" asked the man on the other end of the phone.

"Hi, my name is Millie, and I'm spending the weekend with Evelyn Lee for an adoption process, and I found a gun under the bed, and I listened in on a phone call, and she said she was going to, well, shoot me."

"Calm down. Where are you?"

"I'm at 1195 West Hills Lane."

"All right. We will be there in five minutes. Be calm."

A few minutes later I heard, "Hey, kid, where are you?"

I sucked in my breath. *She's going to find me*, I was thinking.

Just then a police car pulled in the driveway. The policeman jumped out of the car and ushered me into the car.

After I climbed in I looked up and saw Evelyn run around the side of the house. Then the policeman came right behind her and caught her. He put handcuffs on her. Right behind the police car I was in, another one pulled up and the policeman shoved her in that one. Then the policeman got back into the one I was in.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Call me Phil, and you are welcome. You look all bloodied up, and your ankle looks swollen. Do you think you need to go to the hospital?”

“Well, my ankle does really hurt.”

So Phil drove me to the hospital. When we got there I got an X-ray. Twenty minutes later we got the results. I just had a sprain. The doctor gave me an Ace bandage and told me to rest it and not walk on it very much.

Phil drove me back to the orphanage, and on the way there he called Ms. Thompson and told her what happened. When we got there she gave me a big hug and told me just to relax.

About a week later I was on the hammock reading *People* magazine when I heard a familiar voice say, “Millie.” I looked up, and it was Grace! I stood up and gave her a big bear hug.

“Millie, I worked it out with your Ms. Thompson, and she said that if you want to live with us, you can.”

“YES!”

“All right! Let’s go.”

So I limped over to the minivan, got inside, and drove to my new home.

The Baconater

*Who would have thought to add pork products to the list of potential natural disasters? Evidently **Kevin Simpson** did, judging by **THE BACONATER**, his story of a rampaging strip of bacon that threatens Washington, D.C.*

It was an extremely stormy night when all of a sudden—*PAPOW*—went a lightning bolt, hitting an exterior electrical outlet on a house. This bolt of lightning caused the microwave to power up dangerously high—so high that it was a thousand-fold what it typically was.

At that very moment that lightning struck, Alfred Robertson was cooking a piece of bacon. Alfred was a short and fat man; he loved to eat bacon for breakfast because of its juiciness when it touched his taste buds.

WHAM-BAM went the bacon, and out of nowhere there was a giant piece of bacon that was at least 100 feet tall and 50 feet wide. It had two arms, two legs, and a face.

“What in the world is that?” stuttered the man.

He was so scared that he got in his car and drove to California all the way from Washington, D.C.

“I am the Baconater! Show me your leader! RRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAWWWWWW!” yelled the giant piece of bacon.

The bacon went into a rampage, destroying everything! He ripped up houses, stores, and buildings, throwing them clear across town into the ocean.

Then he saw the White House just beyond a giant pile of rubble. He charged at it and was going full speed. People guessed that his speed was at least 50 miles an hour.

All of a sudden, the sun came out and shone very brightly. Its blistering hot rays hit the bacon straight in the stomach, causing the Baconater to burn to a crisp. The bacon fell to the ground as it died. *Boom!* Luckily it landed right next to the pile of rubble about six feet away from the White House.

That next day the president gave a speech starting like this. "I am proud to announce that the giant so-called Baconater is gone. I am not quite sure what actually happened out there, but since this almost futile blow in American History and government was avoided, I am proud to announce that from now on, this date will be remembered as National Bacon Day...."

And from then on they remembered November 29, the day of the bacon attack that nearly destroyed the White House, as National Bacon Day.

The Creeper

*A boy and his friends go to a Halloween haunted house in Detroit expecting to have a good time. But someone else has more disturbing plans for them in **THE CREEPER**, by Trevor Garr.*

“Aaaaaaah!” I yelled as my two friends and I ran through the alleys of Detroit. We were running to the grand opening of the Ripper, a new haunted house that just opened on Halloween night.

My friends and I waited two hours for the Ripper to open. Because of all the sneaking out my friends and I have done, if we got caught we would never be trusted by our parents ever again. My little sister was covering for me at home. She was finger painting with my parents.

My friends and I were next in line. A guy came up to us. He had dark blond hair and was wearing a brown trench coat. He asked us for some spare change. We told him to leave us alone, and he ran away.

We finally got to go in: the moment of faith. We ran so fast through the house that you couldn't see us. We came to the end. There was a room with dead people and blood. In another room we tried the door, and it would not open. My friend ran at it, and still nothing. I was surprised.

I remembered we were the last ones in line. If there had been people behind us, they would have come through already.

We ran back through the 44 rooms all the way back to the beginning. We tried to barge through that door. It would not open, either.

Boom! All the lights turned off. They turned back on, and there was a guy standing right there in front us. We screamed like little girls.

Boom! The lights turned off again. When they came back on, the guy was gone.

We ran like lightning to the end of the haunted house. This time we were able to open the door. The guy was right there!

“Aaaaaaaaah!”

We ran all the way back home. I ran in my bedroom, shut the door, and just sat there.

My door opened. The lights had been off, but they came back on faster than lightning. The guy was right there! He had a knife! *He sliced my head off with a knife!* Then he walked away as my head went rolling on the ground.

Bam! Something broke. It sounded like a cup shattering on the ground. It was my mom. My little sister told my mom I was out last night. Snap, then it came to me: It was a dream. My head didn't get chopped off. It was a dream.

“But how was I out last night?” I said to myself. “It was real. I *was* out last night.”

My mom screamed, “Trevor! Get over here!”

“Oh, crap,” I said to my self.

I went downstairs. Someone tapped me on my shoulder. “Aaaaaaaaah!” The guy was there!

My mom hit him in the head with a pan. He hit the ground so hard that he was knocked out instantly.

We called the police. They put the guy in the back of the cop car. He kicked and screamed a lot. They had been looking for that guy for six years.

They gave my friends and me a reward for catching the guy. I also was grounded for six weeks straight.

I should have thought twice about leaving without permission. I'll never do it again.

The Curse of the Graveyard

*A shortcut through a graveyard seemed like a good idea at the time. Unfortunately, this little trip sets into motion a series of unwanted ghostly encounters for three kids in **THE CURSE OF THE GRAVEYARD**, by Aaron L.*

If you don't like scary stories, you should probably not be reading this. Stop reading. If you are still reading this, then too bad for you. Well, here goes nothing.

It all started on May 23, 1998 when Yellow Bridge Graveyard was created. From that day, the city of Santa Anna, North Dakota was never the same again. Legend has it that the first person buried in a cemetery will haunt that city for all eternity. Well, on May 24, 1998 Martin Gible was buried right in the middle of the graveyard.

One day three kids walked through the cemetery to get some pizza because it was the shortest way. They saw Martin's grave and said, "Ha, Gible, what a stupid name. I bet he was made fun of as a kid."

"I know I would have made fun of him," said one of the kids. These kids' names were Aaron L., Billy H., and Stephan A. They were all about four feet eleven inches tall. They were the neighborhood pranksters.

Right as they passed the grave, they heard a voice, and believe it or not, it was Martin. They were like "Holy crap!"

He began to say, "How dare you defile my name like that. You shall all pay for your behavior."

"What are ya gonna do, call our mommies?" said Aaron.

"You will all see; you will all see!"

"Whatever," Stephan said.

After they got some pizza, they went to Stephan's house to play Guitar Hero 3 on X-Box 360. But a huge three-eyed monster popped out of nowhere and slashed Stephan to pieces.

"I got dibs on 360," said Billy.

"Oh, whatever," said Aaron. "Let's just beat the crap out of this guy." So that's what they did. They killed the monster like in a video game, with a gun and karate moves. They both thought the monster came from the Nether realm. The Nether realm is a world that has monsters, zombies, and all that other scary stuff. It exists inside each planet, and the only way the creatures can exit is if they are sent by the king of the Nether realm, which is Mr. D. Nobody knows what the "D" stands for, but some people believe it stands for death.

Soon the ghost of Stephan started to haunt them, so now they were really ticked. Why would their old friend haunt them?

"Now we really need to be aware of what's going on," Aaron told Billy on AIM.

They went to Gameworks to get all of this pressure off their heads. But of course Stephan and Martin were there, so they left and went to bed.

The next morning they went to school and tried to explain to their teacher that Stephan was dead, but of course he didn't listen. Then Stephan appeared, and the teacher fainted. The boys pulled out their ghost defying guns and zapped him, but it didn't work, so they said, "Hey, what is your problem? What did we do to make us your enemies?" He didn't respond. Then he disappeared into thin air. They

looked around and saw everyone's jaw was hanging down in shock.

Eventually they fought a two-on-two battle that lasted four hours. There was blood everywhere, but Billy and Aaron won. How they won is too hard to explain, but they won, so that's over.

One decade later they were at Applebee's when the ghosts appeared. They screamed, "NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

The Curse of *The Ocean Crusader*

*Pirates and ghosts can certainly liven up an ocean cruise. Two ordinary tourists find themselves caught up in a supernatural struggle at sea in **THE CURSE OF THE OCEAN CRUSADER**, by Julia Wang.*

Prologue

With wind like a blizzard and rain coming down like bullets, captain Blue Beard sailed away from civilization, into the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, with his treasure.

“Ha, ha,” laughed Blue Beard as he chugged down rum in celebration. “This be the biggest loot I ever stole.” His eyes were a mischievous brown, his beard dyed a pure blue, and he always wore a blue coat with golden trim and a black vest. His hat was a traditional black pirate hat with a skull and cross in the middle, and his boots were a tire black color.

Then all of a sudden, the alarm bell rang.

“Captain, we got cops on our tail!” yelled the lookout man.

“What’s the name of the boat?” asked Blue Beard, sounding concerned.

“It’s *The Ocean Crusader!*” answered the lookout man. A large, wooden ship was heading toward the pirates over the fierce waves.

“Get to your stations!” ordered Blue Beard. The crews quickly grabbed their swords and prepared to fight. *The Ocean Crusader* docked next to Blue Beard’s ship, but no police blew cannons or throw down planks for bridges. Strangely, there was no one on deck, but they didn’t check if there was anyone on top of the mast.

“Above us!” yelled a crewmember. The police swung on ropes high above the crews’ heads. The police came down, falling onto the pirates, striking them to the floor.

A young man with a little beard and mustache wearing an official blue police uniform stalked toward Blue Beard. “Blue Beard, you’re under arrest for robbery. And I, Jack Martian, will make sure you’ll stay in jail,” said Jack.

“I will have my revenge!” yelled Blue Beard as the police put him in handcuffs.

“From this day, June 22, 1920 at 8:00 p.m., you’ll be in prison, so I don’t see how you’ll be getting revenge,” said Jack.

The police threw Blue Beard in jail, and took the treasure out. Blue Beard died without tasting freedom again.

80 Years Later

It was a pitch-black night with howling winds. The little town of Razz Burn was getting ready to sleep. But in a little bar, four young men were still awake, watching TV at tables. Two men were in the far corner of the bar, while the other two were right in front of the TV.

“That’s a great story, Max, but it’s time to announce the winning number for two tickets for the cruise that’s leaving for the Atlantic Ocean tomorrow,” said the TV man.

“Finally,” the two men in front said together. One was wearing a brown vest covering his bare chest, which showed his rippling muscles. He wore black pants, and had black hair

and a goatee. The other was wearing an orange T- shirt with tan pants, and had bright blond hair. Both of them entered as a team to get those tickets.

“The winning number is...93857,” the TV man said.

The two men looked at their ticket where 93857 was printed in fine blue ink.

“We won! Paul, we won!” the man with the goatee told his partner, jumping up with happiness.

“I know, Dan!” Paul replied.

“HEY!” a booming voice came from one of the two men sitting in the corner. “Our number is 93857, too.” He came walking toward Paul and Dan with his much shorter partner following him. The man was wearing a camouflage shirt and pants, and his partner was wearing the same thing except in smaller size, and they were both bald.

The man held out his ticket to show Paul and Dan. It was true: Their ticket said 93857, too.

“My name is Tom, and this is my twin brother, Tim. Don’t mind him being short,” Tom said in a hushed whisper. “What are the odds that we have the same number?”

“Highly unlikely,” said Paul. “But I have a plan to solve our problem. We’ll play a game of cards.”

“OK, we’ll meet tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. in this bar,” said Tom.

“But that’s an hour and a half before the cruise leaves tomorrow,” said Dan. The two men ignored him as the TV man said, “The winner will have until 7:45 tomorrow to claim the prize.”

So the four men agreed to go together to the TV station, get the tickets, and then play for them.

Morning came quickly with a bright sun. The four men got the tickets and headed for the same bar. Dan was wearing the same clothing as yesterday, while Paul wore a green polo

shirt instead of a T-shirt. Tom and Tim wore all red today, including pants and shoes.

“Are you sure this won’t take long? Because our houses are far from the dock,” Paul asked Tom.

“Let’s begin. The game is poker,” said Dan, ignoring Paul’s concern. They started playing.

About an hour passed, and it was only about half an hour until the ship left. It was a showdown of stares. Each man was eyeing the other as if expecting a fight.

Then Paul finally jumped up and yelled, “We won!” Dan and Paul jumped together in joy while Tom and Tim grunted, angry that they lost.

Then the old grandfather clock in the bar rang nine times.

Paul and Dan sprinted back to their houses, packed quickly, and sprinted to the dock. They finally found the ship they were looking for eight minutes before the ship left. The ship was white and large, but anyone could see that the ship is just painted white because you could still see wooden parts.

“Did we make it?” Paul asked the captain, who was a young man no older than 25, with a little mustache. He was wearing a milk-colored uniform with a golden eagle badge pinned to his shirt.

“You sure did,” said the captain.

Paul and Dan went on deck. The captain reached for a microphone on deck and said, “Welcome aboard *The Ocean Crusader*. I’m your host, Jack Martian. Our cruise helpers will show you where your rooms are. Remember, have fun, and enjoy the cruise.”

Paul and Dan entered their room, which was an old-fashioned room with a bunk bed, boards for the walls, and shaggy red carpets.

“Pretty classy,” said Dan.

“Yeah, but the wall boards are loose.” Paul pushed in a wallboard and it creaked in. “It even sounds hollow.”

Paul and Dan started to explore the cruise. Dan was left at the exercise room, lifting weights, and Paul was left at the spa room, getting his shoulders massaged.

They thought that nothing would go wrong on this cruise.

Hours passed quickly. After dinner, Paul and Dan went for a walk on the deck. They watched as the moon reflected off the ocean as they stood with their arms on the railing. Only one cloud was seen in the sky.

“Hey, what’s the date and time? I have to reset my new watch I bought at the ship’s gift store, and I keep forgetting the date,” asked Paul.

Dan looked down at his watch. “Today is June 22, 2000, and it’s 8:00 p.m.”

Then all of a sudden, Dan felt a chill go down his back. “Brrr. Do you feel cold?” asked Dan.

“No, I... Whoa!” yelled Paul.

“What?” Dan asked startled.

“I thought I felt something cold on my shoulder.”

“You’re probably cold from all the frozen yogurt you ate at dinner.”

“Uh, Dan,” Paul said frightened as a large, skeleton-like, pirate figure loomed over Dan. The figure was wearing a faded blue coat with gold trim. He had a sword and a bluish beard.

“I know you’re smart at other things, like making surprise plans, but you’re not smart at what you eat.”

“Dan.”

“I mean, five cups of frozen yogurt? That will make you really cold.”

“DAN!”

“Yeah?”

“Behind...”

Dan turned around.

“I be looking for Jack Martian. This be his ship, right?” asked the pirate. His breath smelled like rotten fish mixed with seaweed. “Talk, or else.”

Paul and Dan were too stunned to talk.

“All right, then, throw them away!” said the pirate.

Out of nowhere, dozens of skeleton pirates grabbed Paul and Dan.

“Unless...” said the pirate, “you tell me where Jack Martian is.”

“Why do you want to know?” Paul said, frightened.

“So I can get revenge for what he did to me,” replied the pirate. “If ya don’t, I’ll cut you with my sword.” The pirate took out his sword and pointed it at Paul.

“Don’t hurt him! Jack is hosting the dance night in the shuffleboard arena half an hour from now,” Dan said, hoping his friend would be spared, but Paul just looked at him with angry eyes.

“Ha, ha. Since you been so kind, I’ll spare ya. Throw them into one of those rooms,” ordered the pirate. “Finally, I, Blue Beard, will have my revenge!”

Paul and Dan were carried over to a door, which the pirates opened. They were thrown in and found themselves face-planted in their own room.

Dan jumped up quickly and ran to the door, trying to open it, but the door was locked.

“This is just great,” said Paul, sounding angry.

“What, that we’re locked in?” asked Dan.

“No, that you gave away Jack’s location to that Blue Beard guy.”

“You’re saying it’s my fault we’re here?”

“I guess I am, because you always stick yourself into messes without thinking about the consequences. And now, your mouth just talked without thinking what to say.”

“Hey! Didn’t I just save your life?”

“Yeah, but you destroyed Jack’s life. You also destroyed our life, because now we’re trapped in here.”

Then Dan lifted his hand, and punched Paul in the cheek.

“Oh, is that how you want to play? Bring it,” said Paul as blood trickled out of his jaw.

They were soon punching each other in the gut. Paul picked up Dan and rammed him against the wall. The wall fell in, and they were in a dusty room lit by only one lantern hanging from the ceiling.

“Wait,” said Dan. They stopped fighting and looked at the room. “Where are we?”

They started walking around, looking at the old papers on the floor.

“Whoa,” Paul said, picking up a paper, “check out the date: December 12, 1919.”

“What does it say?” Dan asked as he ran to Paul’s side.

“It says, ‘Today I have captured Rockwood, the infamous pirate. Hopefully I will capture Blue Beard, for he has caused robberies everywhere. I’ll search for Blue Beard everywhere on my boat, *The Ocean Crusader*, until the day I die.’ Here’s another entry, dated June 22, 1920: ‘I have finally caught Blue Beard. He swore revenge on me, and I fear my family will have a curse now. This will be my last entry, for I am retiring tomorrow. I made sure Blue Beard was the last pirate I ever caught.’” Paul was stunned at the words he just read.

“So, Jack caught Blue Beard?” asked Dan.

“Looks like it. But Jack looks too young to be over 80 years old,” Paul replied.

“Hello, who are you?”

Paul and Dan turned around, searching for the speaker. They came upon a ghostly figure. The ghost almost looked like Jack.

“Who are you?” the ghost repeated.

“I’m Paul, and this is Dan,” Paul finally said.

“I’m Jack Martian, renowned pirate hunter,” said the ghost. Jack held out his ghostly hand to shake. Dan reached for it and expected his hand to pass through, but remarkably, the hand seemed solid.

“What’s going on?” Dan asked as he took back his hand.

“I should probably start my story,” said Jack. “The Jack you know is my grandson. His real name is Jack Martian III. I made sure he had my name once I captured Blue Beard. Let’s talk about whom Blue Beard is.

“Blue Beard is an infamous pirate who stole treasure. I finally captured him and took away his gold, and he is angry with me for what I did. He swore revenge on me. His curse came true 80 years after his capture, and since I was dead and my grandson never used his full name, he took my grandson as me and hunted him down.”

“But how could you and Blue Beard come back to life?” Dan asked.

“Blue Beard came back to life because he made a curse. I came back to life because you two disturbed my death spot,” answered Jack “Come, we must save my grandson from Blue Beard.”

“How do we do that?” asked Paul.

“We’ll sword fight,” Jack answered.

“We can’t sword fight,” Dan said.

“No worries.” Jack grabbed Dan’s arms. They glowed bright blue, then morphed into different arms.

“You now have the arms of one of my best swordsmen,” Jack answered to Dan’s stunned face.

Jack did the same to Paul, and then he handed them swords.

“How are we going to get out, though? The door is locked, and you can’t pass through it to unlock it,” Paul said.

“Not a problem.” Jack exited the room and entered the bedroom. He took out his sword and started cutting the door. It soon fell backward into pieces.

Paul and Dan were stunned at Jack’s sword abilities.

They quickly exited the room. As they turned a corner, they saw Blue Beard holding up the present-day Jack.

Paul said in a hushed whisper, “Here’s the plan, one person will sneak over to the other side...”

“I’m not waiting. I’m going in now!” Dan ran toward Blue Beard with his sword up.

“Dan, wait!” Jack yelled.

Blue Beard caught Dan before he got hit.

“I thought you were thrown away,” said Blue Beard.

“Let them go. It’s me you want.” Jack stepped out of the corner, followed by Paul.

“Ahh, so you’re Jack. No wonder this bloke doesn’t remember a thing about me.” Blue Beard walked away from present-day Jack. “It’s time for my revenge. Get those two landlubbers. I’ll take care of Jack.” Then lightning crackled and rain came down like bullets. Waves picked up and rocked the boat back and forth. “This is just like how you imprisoned me, Jack. But I have my crew, and you don’t.”

Soon, dozens of skeleton pirates came toward Paul and Dan.

“You’re right, but I have Paul and Dan,” said ghost Jack. Blue Beard just laughed thinking that Paul and Dan were no match for his pirates. But Paul and Dan’s arms reacted, and they were soon fighting the pirates.

After each hit to the pirates, they were nothing but bones.

Dan was almost hit by a sword. He was cornered, but Paul slashed the pirate to bones.

“I owe you one for that,” Dan said.

The pirates kept coming, and each one got tougher and tougher.

Blue Beard hit ghost Jack near the ribs. The ghost felt the pain, and retreated to recover. He then found present-day Jack hiding behind the corner.

“Grandpa?” asked present-day Jack, sounding like he didn’t believe it. “I thought you died ten years ago.”

“I did,” said ghost Jack, “but I’ve come back to life.”

“How touching, a little reunion,” sneered Blue Beard. “I’ll be ending it soon.”

Blue Beard then ran toward the two Jacks. Ghost Jack drew his sword and blocked Blue Beard’s sword. They fought away from present-day Jack.

“We’ve got to help him,” Paul said, though he couldn’t figure out how to get past the pirates

“No!” Jack yelled, “This is my battle. It’s my fault he’s here.” He paused for a moment. “Goodbye.” He rushed to the railing and prepared to jump.

“Goodbye is right, Jack,” Blue Beard said as he swung his sword at Jack. He missed, but Jack still jumped over the side. He grabbed Blue Beard’s boot before falling. “What? Nooooooooooooo!” yelled Blue Beard before falling with Jack.

A splash was heard. The waves became silent. Everything seemed to stop. The rain stopped coming down and the waves became gentle. The pirates all turned to bones and no more came to attack.

“Grandpa,” was the only word that came out of Jack’s mouth as a single tear ran down his cheek.

Paul and Dan’s arms changed back, and they had no skill of sword fighting whatsoever.

Jack was the first one to talk. “We better clean up the bones.”

And so, they got brooms from a supply closet and started sweeping the bones into the ocean.

“Paul, Dan, can you promise not tell anyone about what happened on this cruise? If people find out, then they’ll

rampage my grandfather's boat to find his body. He was the most famous pirate hunter, and people will want to bury his body in a graveyard to honor him. But before he died on this ship from old age, he told me to keep his body in this boat forever. You see, he could never part with this boat. And so I promised that."

"Okay," said Paul and Dan together.

"Thanks," Jack said.

The Ocean Crusader went back to Razz Burn. Paul and Dan never spoke of Blue Beard. They all lived on peacefully. Jack got married and made sure his son had the name Jack Martian IV.

His Attempt of Murder

*When trouble comes to Lucky Aide, will Tibby and Kevin be able to survive it? In **HIS ATTEMPT OF MURDER** by **Rennie Pasquinelli**, not all of the customers come to Lucky Aide for groceries alone.*

“Jerry, clean up on aisle 8A, darlin’,” moaned the cranky register lady. She always said “darlin’” and “sweetheart.” It grew to be sort of irritating.

“Hello, I’m Tibby. Welcome to Lucky Aid,” Tibby said in a low whiney sort of voice.

“The ‘L’ stands for Value,” stated her pin.

“Hey, Tibby, the Tibmeister, Tiber, Tibrila, Tib...”

“Please be quiet, Kevin,” said Tibby.

“Sorry, Tiboriela, I got a little carried away. Anyway, when does your shift end?” asked Kevin, Tibby’s best friend. Kevin was also the stock boy at Lucky Aid, the massive general store that they worked at. Tibby had been the employee of the month for several months, but never really did anything that important. Lucky Aid was pretty pitiful.

“In about ten minutes, Bleek.” Bleek was short for Bleeker, Kevin’s last name. Tibby always called Kevin “Bleek.” It was always her thing.

“Good, I get off in ten minutes, too,” he said.

“Ten minutes till closin’, ten minutes till closin’ time,” moaned the register lady, again.

The ten minutes flew by, and Tibby and Bleeker were on their way out.

“Excuse me, but we are CLOSED,” Tibby said to a man.
“I know,” he said in a “Get off my back” sort of way.
“Let’s go, Bleek. That guy’s weird. What door did he take?” asked Tibby. “Unless he took this door, which he didn’t, he must be taking some weird way,” she said.
“Tibby...? Movie, remember?” asked Kevin.
“But he...”
“Is not here,” said Kevin. “Come on, movies.”

* * *

“That movie was great last night, wasn’t it?” said Tibby.
“Yeah, the popcorn was perfect; the staff understood the ‘Light Butter’ part for once,” Kevin said.
“Yup,” Tibby replied. “Hey, I’m staying late tonight. You in?”
“Tibby, this guy that you were looking for left. He must have found some back door or something. Maybe he’s an old employee. Ok?” said Kevin.
“No! I swear he didn’t leave, and if there was a back door I think we’d know about it. Now, are you in or not?” Tibby asked.
“Fine, the things I do for you...” he said.
“Thank you!” she said.
Everybody was gone. This was Tibby’s favorite part of the day. It was nine o’ clock, and there stood Tibby and Kevin.
“The customers were so stupid today,” said Tibby. “This lady came up to me today and actually asked me ‘Do you know where Lucky Aid is? I heard it was pretty close to here.’ I stared at her and asked where she thought she was. She replied, ‘Kmart’.”
“Well, at least you don’t have to put bras on the shelves,” said Kevin in complete disgust.

“Ok, help me look, Bleek,” said Tibby.

They looked everywhere in the store. They searched every aisle in the entire store. Then they heard a cell phone ringing. It was Tibby’s.

“Hello.”

“You are close...” said the voice on the phone, and then whoever it was hung up.

“What, hello?” said Tibby in a scared voice.

“Who was that?” asked Kevin.

“I’m pretty sure it was the guy. He said ‘You are getting close,’” she said.

“Prankster,” Kevin said.

“No, Bleeker, this is no prank,” she said.

“BOO!” yelled a creepy voice.

“Ok, I believe you,” Kevin said.

“Hello, Tibby. Do you happen to have any of that popcorn left? You know from the movie?” said the man.

“What? Are you spying on me? What do you want?” Tibby asked.

“I want to see you and Bleek die,” said the man.

“1, 2, 3...run!” said Tibby. “Hide, give me your phone. Hello? 911? Come to Lucky Aid immediately!” Tibby whispered.

“We’re on our way,” said the policewoman.

“You can run, but you can not hide,” said the man.

They were in hiding for ten minutes, and then the police pulled up. They ran in. “Everybody stay calm. The police are here,” he said.

BANG!

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” screamed Tibby.
“Who did he shoot?” she asked.

The police found him. He didn’t shoot anybody. He just did it to scare Tibby. The police found a small hutch on aisle 8A, covered by a rack of balls, with food, a pillow and a

sleeping bag. They put him in the police car and told Tibby and Kevin everything.

Then, he got out of the car and hit Tibby in the face.

“You imbecile! Get in the car!” screamed the policeman.

* * *

“Hello?” Tibby was alone in the hospital. She got out of her bed and couldn’t find anyone. She went back in her room.

“AAHH!” The strange man got her and tried to strangle her.

Then she woke up. It was just a bad dream.

“Tibby? What happened, Tib?” asked Kevin.

“Where is he?” she asked him.

“Who?”

“The guy, the guy at Lucky Aid!” she said angrily.

“He’s in jail. He tried to kill you and me, Tibby,” he said.

“That will not keep him away! AAAHH! Do something else. Keep him in a room with no food. He wants to kill me!”

The police walked in, and told her everything was going to be fine. She was screaming and yelling and freaking out. Tibby’s life was changed all because of one man....

Jeremy's Haunted Move

In **JEREMY'S HAUNTED MOVE** by *Caleb Pilukas*, a boy moves into a new house. Little does he know there are some scary surprises waiting for him.

I was riding through the countryside, watching the swaying hills go up and down as if I were riding through an ocean of grass. I was thinking how my seventh new house would be. I was thinking what my new school would be like, and what kind of friends I would make. I was thinking about a lot of things. One thing I didn't think of was what trouble I was about to get mixed up in.

My name is Jeremy Seirs. I'm eleven years old. A lot of people would say I'm tall, but I don't think I am. I have my parents' blue eyes, and my dad's brown hair. A lot of adults say that I'm responsible, too.

Finally, my chaperone and I arrived at my new house. It was a grey, three-floor Victorian style house with a wrap around porch, many windows, and navy shutters on all of those windows. I walked through the large double front doors into the enormous foyer. There were probably ten to fifteen doors in the foyer, not to mention the five or so archways. This was the first time I had really seen the house. When my parents bought it, I just saw a virtual tour.

I think I forgot to mention something else. My parents are what you may call "ridiculously" wealthy. They own a company called Seirs Co. together. That's the reason that I had to move. A new branch of Seirs just opened in the area.

That's also why my parents weren't there with me then. A huge thing had come up that they hadn't scheduled, and they both had to go as fast as they could.

My first couple of days went well; I started at my new school, I learned my way around the neighborhood, and I even met a kid named Clay that lived down my street. Things were going pretty well; until one day Clay was talking with some kids. I noticed them glancing at me, so I asked them what they were talking about. They told me that the house I was living in was haunted.

They said that the man who had built the house was crazy, and that people would watch guests and cleaners go into the house, but never come out. Most people in the town guessed that he conducted experiments on the unsuspecting people, and that's where the ghosts came from. Of course I didn't believe the stories they told me of the different people that lived in the house. But even after I told them that, Clay still warned me to be careful at night.

After my parents got home that day, I told them what the boys had said. They didn't believe any of it, either.

That night I went to bed as usual. I read for a while, and then turned off my bedside lamp. I realized it was twelve o'clock already, and I had school the next day.

Just before I was about to fall asleep, I heard footsteps going through the stairs at the end of the hall. I thought it was my parents. Even though it was late, I sat up again and turned on my bedside lamp to read some more. I fell asleep about a half hour later.

The next morning I asked my dad why he and my mom were up so late the night before. He looked at me with a funny face and asked what I was taking about. He just smiled and said that I must have been dreaming. That was when I started to worry a little bit. Little did I know that I was about to worry a lot more.

The next night I turned off my light as usual. I rolled over as usual. But what I saw was not usual. A tall, grey, glowing woman was standing next to my bed. From what I saw she was dusting something. She seemed completely unaware that I was there, but as quickly as I got my senses back, she was gone.

I high-tailed it to my parents' room, but then I remembered that they were going to be out very late that night on business. I quickly grabbed the phone on their nightstand and called their cell phones. Neither of them picked up.

I stayed in my parents' room with all of the lights on. That didn't help, though. I heard screaming. That screaming was the most horrifying noise I have ever heard. I had to know if someone was in trouble.

I ran towards the screaming, fighting all urges to run out of the house. I followed the sound into the kitchen. I had already heard the most horrifying noise in the world, and now I saw the most horrifying thing in the world. An old man with a scalpel crouched over a terrified young woman.

I woke up on the living room couch. My mom and dad were sitting next to me. They told me that they found me on the kitchen floor when they got home the night before. I explained the night's events to my parents. They had worried looks on their faces. I couldn't tell if they believed me or not.

Although my parents were not the superstitious type, they decided that the environment around the house was making me feel uncomfortable. They together thought that it would be better if we moved. I didn't object at all.

A couple of weeks later, new buyers were closing the deal on the house with my parents. They thought that it was a great historical monument, and they couldn't wait to move in. We forgot to mention the haunted part. I had never been so happy in my life.

Things Always Happen for a Reason

*A series of seemingly disconnected events bring two teenaged cousins together for an otherworldly adventure. Sara Pawloski connects the dots to show how **THINGS ALWAYS HAPPENS FOR A REASON.***

Prologue

“What are you doing? Why aren’t you in Jandala?” The girl looked up. She dropped the book that she was holding from the sight of Anonda.

As she picked up the book she said, “I’m dropping this cursed book off at a child’s house. When the book is opened the child will die.”

She was lying. She would never do such a thing. All she wanted was to be back home with her mother and father. She wanted to be in the real world. Although, sadly, she hadn’t a choice to go back where she belonged.

* * *

Sam seemed like all the other girls in seventh grade at West Coltsin Middle School to people that didn’t go to her middle school. To people that did go to her school, she was an outcast. Nobody ever seemed to accept Sam. She had really never had a true friend.

Sam had plain, straight brown hair. She often thought that the only thing special about her was her flashy green eyes, although her eyes always seemed to frighten people as she passed them. Nobody ever took a second glance at Sam. All they saw was a girl.

The day had been the same as all days: sitting at a lunch table all alone; slumping down on a picnic table at recess; not talking to any of her classmates the whole day. Then, at the end of the day she missed her bus, even though she was almost positive that she was ready and waiting for her bus two minutes before the time it normally leaves.

Sam was forced to walk home alone in the rain on the dark, dull day. Without thinking she put her hood up and started running home.

After five minutes something made her stop in her tracks. She felt like she was being watched. After listening for a few seconds she decided that she was just tired, and was imagining it. She started walking again, though she didn't get far. After a few steps she tripped and fell to the wet pavement.

She got to her feet and looked down, realizing that she had tripped over a book. She reached down to pick up the mysterious book. The cover was blank. She knew as soon as she felt the damp, rigid cover that there was something different about this book. She zipped it in her backpack and continued running home.

After dinner was finished, it was 8:00. Her family members were fans of eating late. Sam stood up. "I think I'm gonna go upstairs to clean my room," she said, leaving out the part about examining the book.

"Sounds good, sweetheart," Sam's mother replied. Her father nodded his head in agreement. Her mother was very kind. Anybody could tell that from her big, brown, friendly eyes. There was always a nice big smile on her face. Sam's dad

was also kind, but sort of shy. His smile only appeared occasionally.

Sam stepped into her room and started cleaning it. She finished cleaning her room after 30 minutes.

She reached into her backpack and got the book. “Finally I get to read th—” *Ding-dong*. Who could be at the door this late at night? Sam thought to herself.

She put the book down on her wooden desk and shuffled down the stairs. She saw her uncle Mike and her cousin Jake from California standing in her doorway. What could they be doing here? Why would they come all the way to Chicago from California unexpectedly?

“Well, this is unexpected,” said her mother.

“Yes, well, Melissa, Jeremy, can I talk to you in private, please?” asked Uncle Mike.

“Of course,” her mother said. Her father nodded his head as if to say certainly.

“Jake, just stay here with Samantha. I’m sure she won’t mind,” Uncle Mike suggested. Jake’s face turned a shade of red. Sam’s mother led her uncle Mike into the kitchen.

“Hey, Sam, how’s everything?” Jake asked.

“Everything’s fine. What are you doing here?” she accidentally thought out loud.

“I’m not sure. All my dad said was that I might be staying for a little while.”

“Oh. That might be cool...,” she tried.

“Yeah, I guess,” he went along with it.

About ten minutes later the adults came out of the kitchen. “Jake, you will be staying here for one month while I travel to Japan on a business trip,” said Sam’s Uncle Mike. Sam’s mom nodded her head in approval.

“Kay,” Jake said. Sam was surprised how easily he took the news. Uncle Mike always did travel a lot for his job. She assumed it was nothing new for him.

“Sam, will you please show Jake the guest room? That will be his room until he leaves in a month,” Sam’s mother said.

“No problem. Come on Jake,” she said, signaling him to follow. They walked downstairs, through the hallway, and into the guestroom. “Well, here it is,” she sighed.

“Nice. A room all to myself,” he said.

“Yeah, it’s all yours,” she assured him.

“I’m gonna go get my suitcase.”

“Ok. It’s late. I’m going to bed. Night.”

“Kay. Night,” he replied.

When Sam got back to her room, she went over to her desk and looked at the top of her desk. No book. She started rifling through all of the drawers in the desk. She couldn’t find it. She was making a huge mess out of her room as she searched for the book.

“Where is it?” she asked herself. She didn’t want her parents to know about the book. She couldn’t ask them if they saw it anywhere. Before she could tidy up her room her mom stepped in.

“What happened in here?” her mom questioned her.

“I couldn’t find my social studies book.” She held up her book. “I found it under my pillow,” she lied.

“Umm...ok. Next time, try not to throw everything all over the floor.”

“I’ll try,” she laughed, although she wasn’t in a laughing sort of mood.

“Go brush your teeth and hop in bed. I’ll come back to say goodnight in five minutes,” said her mom.

“Kay,” she said. Sam brushed her teeth and got in bed. She was too tired to think about the book anymore. After lying there for thirty seconds she fell asleep.

When Sam woke up she got ready for school and slipped downstairs after checking her room for the book again.

That day at school everything was different. Jake was in all of Sam's classes because the school wanted her to show him around and introduce him to people. Sam knew that she wouldn't be good at introducing him to people. She had trouble introducing herself to people. Lucky for her, she didn't have to introduce him to anybody. The girls were all over him after first hour! Everybody in the seventh grade and even a few eighth-graders wanted to be his friend.

During third hour, Sam overheard Carly, the most popular seventh-grader in West Coltsin Middle School, talking to her best friend, Amanda. Carly was talking about Jake, of course.

"Jake has the most gorgeous blue eyes. The way his blond hair flips to the side is adorable! Do you think he likes me?" She rambled on and on about his "hotness."

Jake was too busy talking to one of his new friends, Austin, to hear what Carly was saying. Sam didn't know if Jake liked Carly, but she was definitely going to find out.

After lunch all the seventh-graders went to noon recreation. in the gym. "Sam, isn't Jake your cousin?" asked Abby Neon, a rude little brat who was a big follower of the popular girls.

"Yeah," Sam replied.

"That is so cool!" Abby exclaimed. "Do you want to hang out after school?"

"Uhh...no, thanks. I'm probably gonna be hanging out with Jake. He wants me to show him around the city," she lied.

"Oh.... *Lucky*," Sam heard her whisper under her breath. Sam knew that Abby only wanted to hang out with her to get to Jake.

Next, Carly and Amanda went up to Sam. "Hey, Sam. What's up?" Carly asked.

"Nothing really."

“Do you want to come over to my house tonight? We can do each other’s nails. If you have a lot of homework, we could do it together,” Carly suggested. It sounded fun to Sam. She couldn’t remember painting anybody’s nails, including her own since forever.

“That sounds fun. What time should I come over?” she asked.

“How about four-thirty?”

“That’s sounds good. I need to leave by six o’clock for dinner, though,” she partially lied. She assumed they wouldn’t be having dinner until around 7:30. She was just saying that in case she wasn’t having a good time.

“Okay, great!” she said happily.

Sam could not believe it. She was going to the most popular seventh-grade girl’s house after school! Then she remembered that Carly was probably only using her to get to Jake. Oh, well, at least it would give her something to do after school. Then she could just come home, talk to Jake for a little, eat dinner, and look for the book. What a great plan, she thought.

Throughout fourth, fifth, and sixth hour everybody was talking to her! Some said a quick “Hi” or “Hey.” Some people even started a conversation with her! This was great! She would find a friend easily. It was all because of Jake. “Thanks, Jake,” Sam whispered to herself.

After the bell rang in sixth hour, kids started racing to the doors. Before getting on her bus, Sam waved to Carly and mouthed, “I’ll be over at four-thirty.”

Carly mouthed back, “Kay.”

Once Sam got home, her mother greeted her, telling her that her father wouldn’t be home until seven. That reminded her about Carly. “Mom, I am going to go over to a friend’s house at four-thirty.”

“That sounds fantastic! What friend?”

“Carly Tiar. Were gonna get our homework done at her house.”

“Great. Have a good time,” her mother said.

“I will. See you at six!” Sam said as she ran out the door with her backpack and hopped on her bike. She was on her way to Carly’s house.

Sam approached the big brick house and rang the doorbell. After a minute Carly answered the door. “Hey, Sam! It’s great to see you!”

“Hey, Carly, I brought my books.”

“Great. Let’s do our homework to get it out of the way, and then we will do nails.”

“Kay,” Sam agreed.

Carly led Sam up the steps to the second room on the right side of the hallway. On the outside of the door it said “Carly’s Room” in big letters. They walked in the room. The room was good sized and very elegant looking. Its walls were painted purple, and all the furniture was white. There were a few purple things like her Apple laptop, lamp and chandelier for the back splash. “This is an awesome room,” Sam told her.

“Thanks. I designed it myself.”

“That’s cool.”

“Let’s get to our homework,” Carly suggested.

“Good idea.”

After they finished their homework they did each other’s nails. It was the most fun Sam had had in a while.

“That was a lot of fun, Carly. We should do this again some other time,” Sam suggested.

“Yeah,” she agreed.

“Well, it’s six o’clock. I better leave. Thanks a lot for having me.”

“No problem. Bye,” she assured her.

“Kay, thanks again. Bye.”

As soon as Sam got home she went to find Jake. She found him in the guest room, lying on the bed. “Hey,” she exclaimed.

“Hey.”

“How do you like school?” she asked.

“Oh, it’s fine. The kids are cool.”

“Yeah. So, what do you think of Carly Tiar and Amanda Silope?”

“Amanda’s nice. She would be nicer if she didn’t imitate Carly’s every move.”

“Yeah. So, what about Carly?” she asked anxiously.

“Every time I see Carly, she comes up to me and starts talking in a high-pitched voice about stupid things. It’s annoying.”

“Good. You don’t like her. She has a big crush on you. I heard her telling Amanda in third hour.”

“Oh. That explains the high-pitched voice. I don’t like her, though. She isn’t my type.”

“That’s good. Enough guys like her anyway.”

“Yeah.”

“Woahh! Jake, what’s that on the desk over there?”

“I’m so sorry. I forgot to tell you. I was looking for a book to read last night, but I couldn’t find you. I took the first one I saw. I’m almost done with this one. It’s really weird,” he explained.

“Oh, it’s okay. I was just worried that I had lost it.”

“Kay, well, can I have it until after dinner? Then you can read it,” he told her.

“Sure.” Sam went to her room and sat there in her fuzzy green chair. She kept thinking about the book and what could be so weird about it.

“Sam, Jake! Dinner’s ready!” she heard her dad call.

After dinner Sam went to get the book from Jake. When she got to his room she asked him for the book.

“Here, I just finished reading it,” he said.

“Kay, I’m gonna go start reading it.”

“Kay,” he said.

She got into her room and sat down in her green fuzzy chair. She opened the book and read the first paragraph out loud. “Hello. I am Paige Nobler. I died in 1990. My father used to abuse me. One day he killed me. I wrote this because I need help from two living beings, a boy and a girl. Help me. Free me.” Wow, that’s creepy, she thought.

She kept on reading until she finished 15 minutes later. The book had told her to just put on the ring and to free her. What ring was the author talking about? Who was the author? She flipped through the pages, not seeing any names except Paige Nobler. Could Paige Nobler be the author? Could this book be true? She knocked the thought out of her head. “Stop thinking crazy,” she reminded herself.

She walked into Jake’s room. He was listening to his iPod on his bed. “Can we talk about the book?” she said in a rushed voice.

“Yeah. I was gonna ask the same thing,” he told her.

“Okay, we know that it’s about a girl named Paige Nobler. She died in 1990. And her own father killed her. She was almost 13 when she died. She wants a boy and a girl to free her. I guess she means that she wants them to bring her back to life, somehow. The book kept on saying to ‘just put on the ring.’ I don’t know what they are talking about, though.”

“I don’t know, either,” he said.

“Yeah, and I think that she wrote it. Either she is alive and is pranking people, or she is alive and trying to send us a message. It is possible, because the author isn’t written down anywhere, and that is the only name in the book. Paige Nobler.”

“I think you’re right. She has to be the author. I think that she wrote it to send a message to us, though,” he exclaimed.

“Maybe. That does make sense. Who else would write about that? Maybe when she says to ‘free her’ she means to actually free her from somewhere. Maybe she isn’t dead. Maybe that was just to test our ability, to see if we could figure it out. To prove that we could accomplish what she is going to have us do. It makes perfect sense!”

“You might be right. But we have to make sure,” he reminded her.

“Good point,” she sighed.

“What about the ring?” Jake wondered.

“Maybe she was just using that as a de—,”

“WHAT’S THIS?” Jake exclaimed, interrupting her. He was waving the book in the air.

“It’s the book, stupid,” she said irritatingly.

“NO. LOOK INSIDE THE BACK COVER! IT’S THE RING!” he exclaimed while handing her the book. She looked in the inside back cover.

“OH MY GOSH! YOU ARE RIGHT. IT IS THE RING!” she screeched. She tore it off the inside cover really fast. The ring was really big.

“Come on, Jake! Put your pinkie in it. So will I,” she exclaimed.

They both put their pinkies in the ring. As soon as their pinkies went in the ring, a head appeared in front of them. The head had brown curly hair and brown eyes.

“As you both know, I am Paige Nobler. I do need your help. I am not dead. I am trapped in a place called Jandala. The ruler of Jandala, Anonda, took me away from my home, but she made it look like my father murdered me.

“Sam, when you found the book, I was there. I was hiding behind a bush. Anonda thought I was dropping the book off

at somebody's house. I told her that when a child opens the book, the child would die.

"Anyway, I need to get back home. I don't have much time. I snuck out of Jandala. Anonda is probably searching for me right now. That's the same thing I did when I dropped the book where Sam was walking.

"This is what I want you two to do. When I count to three I need one of you to throw the ring right at my head. It will transfer me to where you are. After that I need your help to kill Anonda. We need to free all the other children she is holding captive. Anonda is really 'The Children Killer.' She is the one that kills all the children, except they aren't really dead. They are all in Jandala, doing her dirty work. When we turn 18 she really does kill us. I am 17 now. There isn't any time left. I need to get out. Are you ready?" She was talking in a rushed voice.

"Ye-e-s-s," Sam stuttered. Ring in hand.

"Okay. One...two...three!" Paige shouted. As Paige said three, Sam threw the ring. All of a sudden—*BOOM*—there she was, standing before them.

"I'm here," she said, smiling.

"Uh, hi," Jake stammered.

"How are we going to kill Anonda?"

"We are going to use bait. You are both still considered children. She comes after the children who are 'asking for it.' Jake, you will be the bait," she said slyly.

"What? Why me?" screamed Jake.

"Because Anonda takes turns killing boys and girls. The last child she killed was a girl. That's why I needed help from a boy and a girl. I wasn't sure what gender was going to be killed next."

"Oh. If I have to, I will."

"Ok, start making jokes about how stupid and lazy the rulers can be. That's how I got killed," she told them.

“Wait! How are you going to make sure she doesn’t kill me?” Jake asked.

“Before she makes her move, I will throw this ring at her. I created it so that it would kill any evil ruler of a place.”

“Ok. Good. So you’re sure the ring works and that you can throw the ring at her before she kills me?”

“Yes. Don’t worry. I’m sure!”

“Okay. I’m ready. Rulers of places are so lazy that they buy a cushion just for their ‘special chair’ so that their butt doesn’t hurt from all that ‘work’ they must have to do. IT’S REALLY HARD TELLING PEOPLE WHAT TO—” He stopped. A gust of wind made the window fly open.

“YOU ASKED FOR IT! NOW YOU WILL D— ” said Anonda. She didn’t finish. Paige had thrown the ring at her. It hit her right in the face. The window closed. Anonda was getting smaller. All of a sudden, she dissolved.

“YES! WE GOT HER!” Paige screamed.

“Good job, Jake!” Sam told him.

“Thanks,” Jake said.

“No, thank you. This wouldn’t have worked without you guys! Now I can go back home to my parents. I will tell them what happened. Don’t be surprised tomorrow when the news is talking about how all the dead children from the past ten years all came back to life last night.”

“We won’t be,” Sam said, smiling.

“Wait. Did you pick us to help you for a reason?” Jake asked.

“Yes. I knew that you both are dedicated to what you do, and very smart. I knew you would be the perfect people to help me.”

“I’m glad we could help,” Sam said happily.

“I’m glad you could help, too. Right now I need to go back home. I have missed my parents. Maybe we will meet again. Thank you again, and good luck,” she smiled, opening

the window. She climbed out of the window and waved from the ground below. Then she was off.

“Wow,” was all they could say.

Friday came very quickly. Sam and Jake hadn’t gotten much sleep. They were too busy helping somebody in need.

After school Sam and Jake walked home together. When they got home Sam’s mother was watching the news.

“Honey, have you heard about the miracle that happened last night?” her mother asked her.

“Yup,” she grinned.

“And another thing; Mike was never on a business trip. He is in California. He is having money troubles and can’t take care of you anymore, Jake. My husband and I agreed to look after you. Your dad told me to tell you when the time was right. I figured since you have made friends, you and Sam are getting along, and you are happy, that it was the right time,” she said quietly in a rushed tone.

“I have known that all along. I knew my dad was having money problems when he yelled at me for asking if we could go to Dairy Queen after school. Then when he took me here and said that he was going on a business trip, I knew for sure. He never goes on business trips that far away.”

“Oh, I see. The good news is that you can stay here until your dad comes back to get you,” she said, smiling.

“That’s cool. I’m happy here. Sam and I are having a good time together.”

“We are having a great time!” she agreed.

From then on Sam and Jake were inseparable. He was Sam’s true best friend.

Trapped in Meijer's

*Don't get locked in, or you may never come out. The danger is just over your shoulder in **TRAPPED IN MEIJER'S**, by Colin Shea.*

One night, three boys named Joe, Bill, and John were at a sleepover and decided to ditch the sleepover and go to Meijer for a midnight snack. On the way, they saw a Taco Bell and stopped there and got tacos. Once they ate their tacos, they went on to Meijer's. But now, it was almost closing time.

Once they got to Meijer, they all split up to get food. After ten minutes the voice on the intercom said, "We're closing in five minutes." The three boys finished up, met up, and were on their way to check out when the voice said, "We're closed."

All the boys started to freak out. "What are we going to do?" said Joe. Bill said that all the boys should split up and try to find a way out.

About one minute later John heard a scream. "AHHHHHHHHHH!" It sounded like Joe.

Bill and John met up and were freaking out. Bill said, "Where's Joe?" John said they should look for him together, so the boys were running to find Joe.

As they were running they heard a screeching sound. They got so scared that they both wet themselves. As they both were running they saw the thing that was chasing them. They tried to run faster, and John tripped and fell. John said, "Go on!"

Bill reached the door and managed to pry it open. As he ran home he was crying hysterically.

When he got home his mom was waking up. She saw Bill crying and said, “Why are you crying?” He started to tell his mom, and she called the police.

The police searched for months for the boys, but they never found them.

When Marshmallows Attack!!!!

Suppose marshmallows don't *like* to be roasted. **WHEN MARSHMALLOWS ATTACK!!!!** by *Ryan Shea* serves up a *snack that bites back*.

It was a peaceful night. A guy named Jack was roasting some marshmallows with some friends. When Jack was done with the marshmallows, he accidentally left the bag of leftover marshmallows outside.

The next morning Jack woke up and got dressed. He was hearing strange noises from the kitchen. When he was done with brushing his teeth he went into the kitchen, and that bag of marshmallows was in the house now.

As Jack was walking closer to the bag, it jumped close to him, so he backed away. The bag burst open, and all of the marshmallows fell all over the floor. One by one they all got up, and they started hopping toward Jack. Soon they started to sprout legs and arms, and then eyes and mouths. Pretty soon they looked like little fluffy human-like things.

One of them jumped on Jack and bit his hand. Jack grabbed a baseball bat and tried to hit them, but they were too fast for him.

They all hopped in the mallow bag and then started to drive it like a car. They started to fire little sugary bits at Jack, so he ran to the back room, grabbed a broom, and took one

hard whack. They all flew into the microwave and were trapped.

But one was not in the microwave, so Jack took a fork and stabbed it. Then he ate it for breakfast. Jack turned on the microwave, and all of the marshmallows were dead. That was the end of the mallow men.

Jack went back to sleep shortly after that and slept for the rest of the day.

IN YOUR FACE

All Star

*A boy named Austin wants to play sports, but no one will let him play. See if he can break into the lineup in **ALL STAR**, by **Timothy Austin**.*

Once upon a time there was a boy named Austin Johnson. He went to Berkshire Middle School. He was 12 years of age. Austin wanted to be a professional basketball or football player. But there was just one problem: All the coaches and kids at Austin's school thought that Austin stunk at sports. Even though he was really a good player, none of the coaches would let him try out.

Austin got beat up by jocks every day. His parents did not respect him because he did not play any sports. They loved him but thought that Austin was just lazy. Austin's parents and teachers bought tickets to see him get beat up. Austin always asked them to help, but they just said, "If you were a jock you would not have this problem." Austin tried to tell them that none of the coaches would let him try out, but they never believed him.

Austin had one friend. He was in a wheelchair. He had no right ear, no arms, and no legs, but he did have hands and feet. The funny thing is that he was the captain of the football team. Austin never understood that.

Austin's friend's name was Trunks. Trunks played center, QB and running back. Come to think of it, he played every position. Two days ago all the other players' parents followed

the example of one student's mother, who took the player off the team because of his last report card.

One day Austin went to the Y.M.C.A. to brush up on his basketball skills. Austin knew everything on the court, like dribbling behind his back and between his legs, and doing 360s. But what Austin didn't know was that the basketball coach from his school was there watching him.

When Austin stopped playing, the coach asked, "Don't you go to Berkshire Middle School?"

"Ye-ye-yes," Austin mumbled

"You're pretty good! Why didn't you try out for the team?" said the coach.

"You wouldn't let me, sir," Austin replied.

"Really? Oh, yeah, sorry about that. If you want, you're on the team. Number 43," said the coach.

"Really? Ok," said Austin.

"You are pretty big; do you play football?" said the coach.

"No," said Austin.

"How about this? You play basketball for me, and I will talk to the football coach about you playing for him," said the coach.

"Really? Deal!" said Austin with a smile!

The Big Basketball Game

In THE BIG BASKETBALL GAME by Christopher Johnson, three boys are determined to show that the neighborhood basketball court is where they belong.

It was a Friday at 2:30 p.m. The bell rang its *ding, ding, ding*. Chris Johnson was leaving Spanish, and Chris Ferguson was leaving French. When they got home, they rushed to change their clothes. They ran to the basketball court that was two blocks down on 24th street. Remember, they are in New York.

When they got there they were playing peacefully until three other boys came along. One was Aaron Tellis, another was Aaron Collins, and the last once was Aaron Jackson.

Aaron Tellis came to Chris Ferguson and said, "Move out my way, you little scrub."

He replied, "Why, when we were here first?"

Then Aaron Jackson said, "You heard what he said. Move!"

Chris Johnson said, "We were here first. Why don't y'all just go down there and play?"

"So what?" Aaron Collins replied.

Then Chris Miller said, "We challenge y'all to a three-on-three match. Y'all versus us, this Tuesday at this court."

Aaron Jackson said, "Fine then. You made yourself a bet, scrub."

Chris Ferguson and Chris Johnson said, “What are you doing? We are going to get killed out there. We’re not playing.”

He replied, “All we have to do is ask Dad to help us out a little like a coach.”

“Hey, all right.” So the boys rushed home.

“Dad! Dad! Three boys came and were trying to push and shove us, so I said, ‘We can play you. The loser can’t come back to this court.’ They said, ‘Deal.’”

“All right, boys,” Dad said.

So every day until Tuesday, Dad made them run, run, and run. They had to shoot 100 shots and do push-ups.

Finally, it was game day. When they got to the court, the triple A’s were already shooting around.

It was jump ball. They are playing for two minutes.

The Triple A’s won the tip. Aaron Jackson got the ball. He ran up the court like a bullet. Chris Johnson was running right on the side of him. Chris Miller reached over and hit the ball. Chris Ferguson saved it from going out of bounds and threw it to Chris Johnson, who laid it up. “Two points,” the ref said.

This time, Aaron Collins pushed it up, drove, passed Chris Johnson, and laid it up. The score was 2 to 2.

Chris Miller pushed it up. He got fouled. It’s a one and one. He went to the line and missed.

The other team got the ball. They went up court and shot a three. It’s in! The score was 5 to 4.

There were two seconds left. The Triple C’s throw it in and throw it up. They made it. The buzzer went off.

In the second quarter, the Triple C’s took it out because the Triple A’s won the tip. So Chris M pushed it up and pulled up for the three. It’s in.

They are only playing two quarters. Chris Ferguson gets it up court. He tried to lay it up, but he missed. Aaron Jackson

grabbed the ball and threw it up the court to Aaron T. He put it up and got fouled. He went to the line and made it a three-point play.

Now it's 11 to 6 and Triple C's ball. Dad called a timeout. Dad said, "You have one minute to come back and win. I'm going to let y'all just play how you play. Go out there and show them whose court this is!"

Chris J passed to Chris M. He passed to Chris F. He shot the three. It's in, so it's 9 to 11. It's Triple A's ball. They came up the court. Chris J stole it and took it and laid it up. It's 11 to 11!

The Triple A's get the ball with 20 seconds on the clock. Aaron T comes up and pulls the three. It's in and the score is 14 to 11.

Chris M passes it in to Chris J. He went up court with three seconds on the clock. He pump faked. Aaron Collins jumped. Chris J makes the shot with a foul. It's still a tie game at 14 to 14.

Chris J is at the line. He shot. It's in! They won!

Triple A's took it out, but the buzzer went off.

Triple C's won, and the Triple A's never came back to that court.

Catch Him If You Can

*When Nate tries a new sport, he runs into unexpected trouble. He faces a dangerous situation on wheels in **CATCH HIM IF YOU CAN**, by Allison Knox.*

Nate needs to try a sport because he is a couch potato, but he does not know what sport. He tried all these sports and never found one that he liked until he tried inline skating. He loved it so much that he was going to go skating on the weekend for the second time. Nate lives in the country so his mom trusts him that he won't get hurt or in trouble.

On Saturday he goes out to skate. While he is skating he notices that some people that are walking are following him. He has seen them on the wanted list.

He takes some sharp turns to try to lose them. They keep following him. He gets so scared that he starts to panic. He has no idea why they are following him. He is going faster than he thought he could. They keep gaining on him.

He is looking everywhere for a place to hide. There are rocks and stones all over the street. Nate is jumping over the rocks and stones and also tripping over them. He finds a deserted barn next to a large field that he hides in when the kidnappers are around the corner. Five minutes after he gets in the barn he looks out the dusty old window and the kidnappers are going the wrong way looking for him.

He gets back onto the road and skates the other way. The kidnappers turn around and see him getting away. He sees them coming towards him. When he was looking he didn't see

a big rock in front of him. He falls over it and gets hurt. He can barely get up because of the pain, but he does. He was trying to hold back the tears. He thought he was too old to cry.

When he gets up, he gets on the main road in town and looks for help. He sees a police station. When he gets in the station he tells them all about what happened. The police officer is surprised that someone was doing that because he hasn't seen any action in months.

The kidnappers see him at the police station and run away. The police told Nate that they would keep an eye out for the kidnappers.

Nate went home and told his parents all about what happened. They were shocked! They almost never let him go out without a grown-up again.

Eight months later the police find the kidnappers trying to get another kid, and they were put in jail. Nate still inline skates, but he is a lot better. He always keeps an eye out for anyone who is following him.

Double Gold

*Two runners compete for the highest prize in track and field. In **DOUBLE GOLD** by *Sterling Ducker*, both give it their best effort.*

There is a boy named Cody. He's an eleven-year-old who practices for the Kid Olympics. He loves to run. Cody won every gold medal in the Olympics from 2001 to 2006 for the 100-meter race.

There is another boy named Zack. He is also an eleven-year-old who practices for the Kid Olympics. From 2001 to 2006, Zack won every silver medal.

For 2007, they are both ready to race. Cody's mom drove Zack and Cody to the Kid Olympics.

In the 100 meters, the announcer said, "On your marks, get set, GO!" Zack, Cody, and all the other competitors started to run. Zack and Cody were leading the race. They were both tied up near the last 20 meters, and both were running at lightning speed. They crossed the finish line at the same time.

They both were awarded a gold medal!

Go Long

*A teenager wants to instruct his younger brother and nephew in the finer points of football. In **GO LONG** by **Chris Miller**, he does such a good job that the students outperform the teacher.*

I remember when I was a thirteen-year-old boy. My name is Chris Miller. I was teaching my cousin and my brother to play football.

When I started they were five and three years old. My brother Collin was the youngest. My cousin's name is Elijah. When I was thirteen, Elijah was eleven and Collin was nine. They were playing football on the little league Lions team. They said when they grew up they want to play for the pro Lions.

Since I was a good player when I was little, I wanted to help my relatives learn how to do well and be as good as possible. So we worked hard every chance we could. I enjoyed watching them become better players.

Elijah played quarterback. Collin played wide receiver. Sometimes we practiced plays in my back yard, because I have a full-size field.

One night when we practiced, I understood how good they really were. Elijah called, "Hike!" and the wide receivers went out heading toward the end zone. The blitz was coming. Elijah did a pump fake, making people dive to block the pass. But then finally Elijah passed the ball to Collin. Collin "joked"

the first person he came up to and spun past another into the end zone.

They decided to go for a two-point conversion to win the game. Elijah called, “Hike!” The left tackle was heading for the ball, which Elijah had. The wide receivers sprinted as fast as possible. When they finally got past the defenders, Elijah pump-faked to Roy, and passed the ball to Collin. He was juggling it for a second, and he tripped, but he was lucky that when he tripped it was into the end zone. He dropped the ball, but the ball fell into Collin’s hands.

The crowd went wild. Almost everyone ran out on the field.

About five girls were kissing Collin on the cheek. But Collin wasn’t the only one getting girls; Elijah was, too. He had about six girls hugging and kissing him. He said to himself that hard work paid off.

When they went to Groves High School, they won the championship, the school’s first in years. Then they got a scholarship to the University of Michigan.

They helped Michigan win the championship, too. After graduating they went straight to the draft. Elijah was the first pick. He was picked up by the Patriots. Collin didn’t show up until the last pick. But it was the Patriots’ turn again. Elijah told his new coach how good he was, and once again they were on the same team.

They won the championship four years in a row! They both retired at the age of 40.

Every once in a while we still get together and play in my back yard. But now we bring our sons and invite their friends.

Then the game begins again.

Golf Dreams

*Dreaming is one thing, but making a dream come true is even better. A boy tries to save his mother's life by playing golf in **GOLF DREAMS**, by A. Dominic Gutierrez.*

“Set. Hike!”

The quarterback gave me the ball and I ran. All I remember next is that I was in the car heading somewhere. When I woke up I was in a bed in my room. I was trying to get up, but pain shot throughout my body like lightning, so I lay back down. Then dad came in and said, “How are you feeling?”

In a weak voice I said, “Okay. What happened?”

“You got a concussion,” said Dad.

All I know is I am not playing football for a long time. That is how I got into golf. My name is Joey, and I am eight years old. I live in South Carolina. I was born in 1978, and I love sports.

The spring after my accident, my dad said, “Hey, there’s a golf class in one week.”

“Golf is so boring!”

“But you love sports!”

“No, it’s boring.” But he left the paper just in case I changed my mind.

The next morning, I went to my friend’s house to play. His name is Michael, and he plays all the sports I play. I still had a sprained leg, so we could only play low-key games—like

golf, come to think of it.... I was thinking about this golf idea, so I asked Michael, "Why don't we ever play golf?"

"Golf's no fun," he said.

"Well, I think I'll try it," I said.

When I left, I went to a field behind my backyard and walked about 200 yards out. I dug a hole big enough for a golf ball to go in. Then I took a stick, put it into the hole, and walked back. I took my dad's golf club and a ball and went to a good spot to put the ball down. I swung at the ball and missed. I thought, "This is harder than I expected." I swung at it again and missed again. Then I hit it, but it only went one foot. Then Dad came outside and said, "What are you doing? You changed your mind?"

I jumped. "No," I said, "just trying it."

"Well, you're going to have a tough time swinging like that." He took the club and swung it so perfectly that the ball went 200 yards, and landed right next to the hole I made.

"Wow," I thought, but didn't say it out loud. I took the club and tried again after getting the ball. It went about 150 yards and rolled to a stop near a tree.

Before Dad went back inside, he said, "Keep working if you want to get good at it."

It was getting dark, and I went to dinner. As we ate, I said in a quiet tone of voice, "I want to play golf. It is more fun than I thought."

The next few days I found as much time to do golf, play golf, watch golf, and think about golf as I could. It was such a fun game of concentration and thinking. And I still didn't know the difference between an iron and a driver.

One day I made a hole farther away. I made a shot six feet from the hole and putted the ball in. For some reason I felt good at this sport. I liked it. It was meant for me.

My friend Michael hated it. He was like, "That is such a dumb sport."

I said, “Just try it,” but he walked away. So I was like, “Oh, well, his loss.”

Then something terrible happened—something that would change my life forever. My mom got really sick and was taken to the hospital. When she came back, I found out she had cancer. I went to my room and cried. I cried for a long time. Then I saw a newspaper. It said, “Five golfers to be invited to play against the world famous golfer Mr. Smiles for \$100,000.00 in a golfing tournament.”

I took it downstairs and showed it to my dad. He said, “You are not going to get in. Besides, if you did, you wouldn’t win. You haven’t played enough.” But I went outside anyway and practiced every day for a month.

On the last day to enter to be considered for an invitation, I put my name on a paper, filled out the form, and put it in the mailbox. The next week they would announce the winners who would be invited to play. I went on practicing. I was so worried about getting in that I didn’t even remember to tell my dad I entered.

The day came when the contestants were announced. There on the letter it said, “Joey No Last Name, you are invited to play with Mr. Smiles. We are including one youth contestant in the tournament.” I was so awestruck that I dropped the letter in a puddle. They said all five contestants should meet at the South Carolina Golf Course.

When I got there, the other four contestants were about in their twenties or thirties. I was only eight. Mr. Smiles looked at me said, “This is really for adults. Okay, I have to have a kid. I just didn’t realize that you were only eight. Next time there will be an age limit.”

“Just let my try,” I asked.

“Okay, but you might embarrass yourself in front of those people!” he said.

“I don’t think I will,” I said.

The hour came and we went for the first hole. People looked at me with interest. “Here is Joey, the fifth contestant, an eight-year-old.” I was scared, but I put my hand up and waved at the crowd. First they looked at me like I was stupid, but then someone in the crowd cheered. Then they seemed to realize at least I was trying, and were patting me on the back, and clapping, saying, “Good job,” and telling me to have fun. Then I saw the first hole, three hundred yards toward a sand trap. I was ready.

Then I thought about my mom. And I was determined to win. I was here for my mom.

Mr. Smiles took his shot. It was good! It went 300 yards and the wind carried it around the turn and landed it ten feet away from the hole. The other contestants went, but they didn’t do very well.

When it was my turn, people went silent. I swung just like at home. The ball went 300 yards, did the same turn as Mr. Smiles’s, and hit his ball into the sand trap. My ball was three feet away from the hole.

Mr. Smiles’s mouth dropped. The crowd was silent. Then there was uproar, and the crowd went nuts.

For the next ten holes things stayed the same. The P.G.A. took out their cameras and said, “Joey, eight years old, is beating one of the best golfers in the USA.” Then my ball went into a sand trap, and I had to chip it out. I really hadn’t practiced this, but I tried and it went onto the fairway. Then I was good.

On the last four holes only Mr. Smiles and I were left. He had a sixty-one and I had a sixty-two. I am still just a kid, but I know you want a low score in golf.

As he swung, the wind carried his ball to the right, and it landed in a sand trap. He had to chip it as far as he could, and it went 200 yards. He had to make a fifty-yard putt or chip it

forty-eight yards and roll down a hill. He made the shot and we were tied.

We played the last holes. He ended with a sixty-six and I had sixty-four. On the last shot, I swung at the ball, and it flew like an airplane! It rolled and swung left and made a hole in one that made my score a sixty-five. I had won the game.

The crowd cheered for five minutes. Mr. Smiles gave me the money and walked away. The TV crew tried to talk to him. "How do you feel about the game...?"

"Get that camera out of my face!"

The P.G.A. gave me a spot in their golf tournament. As I ran home I thought of my mom and of how she would be so proud of me. I burst through the door. Dad was crying, "Where were you?"

"I won the game over Mr. Smiles," I said.

"You won? I told you not to go!"

"But I won!" I said.

"Where did you get all this money?"

"I told you, I won it in the contest. Now we can pay the bill for mom's cancer." He looked at it and smiled.

"Yes, you can," he said.

We went to the hospital. My mom was in bed. She looked sick.

My dad told me, "The doctor said they're doing their best, but she might not make it."

I went down to pay the money and said, "Here's the money for the treatment."

They said, "We might not be able to help her." I sat blank-faced. I ran to the car, hopped in and cried.

Dad came and said, "It is late. We have to go home."

"Will she be okay?" I asked.

"We will see in the morning," he said.

When I got home, I fell asleep very fast, thinking it was just a dream. When I woke up, Dad was crying, and I knew

MY MOM WAS DEAD. Other people were with their moms, with their hot cocoa and blankets, but my mom was not with us anymore. I cried for such a long time. I didn't even know how long.

We had a funeral two days later. A few people came. It was so bad that I'm not going to tell the rest.

All the money in the world couldn't save her or make me feel better. If it wasn't for golf, I don't know how I would have gotten through those days. I golfed every day that I could until I graduated from high school ten years later. I played in tournaments every summer. One day, I read the headline: "Joey Is the Best Golfer in the World." I smiled and thought of my mother and how proud she would have been to see me now.

The Greatest Sports Incident

In THE GREATEST SPORTS INCIDENT by Kevin Berkowitz, the high school lacrosse team has an imposter in its midst. How long can this go on?

“Mom, can you believe that I was the only girl that signed up for lacrosse?” said Abbie.

“Well, why don’t you ask your cousin Tim if he wants to play lacrosse with you right now?” said Abbie’s mother.

“Mom, this is so unfair, though. I was really going to play on a team this year,” said Abbie.

“Why don’t you get a petition, then, and make a unified team?” said Abbie’s mother.

“Who would sign it if I was the only one who signed up? Who is going to sign it if we’re the only school for forty miles? There are 1,255 kids at school, and half of them are girls,” said Abbie.

“Abbie, go next door now, and go and play with Tim,” said Abbie’s mother.

“Hey, Abbie,” said Tim.

“Hey, Tim,” said Abbie.

“My mom is making me sign up for lacrosse you know,” said Tim.

“What do you want to do?” said Abbie.

“Do you want to play lacr—? Scratch that idea. Let’s play basketball instead,” said Tim.

“That is fine with me,” said Abbie.

“Hey, Abbie I was wondering. Do you think you can cheat in the tryouts, and go in as me?” said Tim.

“Well, it will get me practice and games, so sure,” said Abbie. “I will get my mom to help somehow. My mom won’t tell your mom. Then my mom will videotape the games so you know what happened,” said Abbie.

“Hey, Abbie, are you ready to go to school now?” said Tim.

“Yeah, I’m ready. Don’t forget you have tryouts tomorrow,” said Abbie sarcastically.

“You will do fine as me,” said Tim.

“I know I’m ready,” said Abbie.

Abbie got her stuff on for tryouts and headed outside. Tim was at a club meeting at his school, so his mom thought he was at tryouts.

Abbie was the best person there. Everybody was shocked how good Tim was doing because he is so uncoordinated. Abbie—or as everyone thought, Tim—made the team.

The next day Tim figured out why everyone was talking to him. It was because Abbie did very well at lacrosse as Tim. Abbie never got nervous, though, about someone finding out the secret because it was so well done no one would find out.

Every day Abbie would go to practice as Tim. Of course Abbie told her mother where she was, so she would always be at the games.

The coach videotaped games and practices. Tim asked for some copies. Tim watched the practices and games every night so he would know what to talk about to the other lacrosse players.

You should have seen Tim, or really Abbie, play. Abbie was able to block any ball thrown at her. It was as if she didn't even need her defense, or midfielders, to help her out. She would clear the ball all the way down field before the other team could get back to her side. They caught the ball, shot, and scored every time. That is how Abbie's team kept winning.

It was a hard season for the team, and they were finally about to win the championships for it all. Everyone was nervous that day. After school when the bell rang Tim got on his bike. The rest of the players asked him where he was going. Tim replied, "I am going home as usual." Not now, they told him, because they had a game to play. "All right. I will be back in a few minutes."

Abbie got her things on. There were ten minutes gone in the game so far, and Abbie was in goal. Then all of a sudden it happened—the unbelievable. Tim was at the game. Abbie was confused why Tim came.

There was only one person on the team who knew who was in the goal and why Tim was there. It was Joe. Joe's family was the richest in the state. He knew there was no way that Tim could be this good at lacrosse, so he paid Tim one thousand dollars to tell him the truth and be at the game.

One of the players on the sidelines saw Tim sitting there. He went over to Tim and asked why he wasn't in goal. Tim said, "I have never played goalie." Then they realized someone was an imposter. They did not know, though, that Abbie was the imposter.

Abbie realized what happened. She started running with her equipment on so no one knew it was her. When she got to her house nobody was behind her for about another seven minutes, so she hid the lacrosse stuff. Abbie had to keep this a secret.

Abbie realized there was a problem. How come Tim had come to the game?

The next day Joe told Abbie he wouldn't tell anyone that she was being the goalie, and in return Abbie needed to practice with Joe. Abbie never figured out how she was double-crossed by Joe. Tim never got the guts to tell her. It did work out, though, because Abbie found out that Joe couldn't play lacrosse. It was his short 16-year-old cousin playing as him.

Hoop Dreams

*It's definitely a dream, but is it a dream come true? In **HOOP DREAMS** by **Danny Schwartz**, the realization of a basketball fantasy is just a phone call away.*

Have you ever had a dream that really was beyond your wildest dreams? The kind that makes you stop and think, “Did that really happen, or was I dreaming?”

It was a Friday in April. I had basketball practice after school for my school team. The coach worked us really hard, and I was totally exhausted. He kept telling us, “C’mon, guys, if you ever want to play in the pros, you gotta hustle.” I started wondering what it must be like to be in the NBA. When I got home I fell asleep and had the greatest dream a kid could have.

It all started with a phone call. My dad called and told me he had tickets to a game, and he wanted to take me.

My dad and I were at a Pistons game. We had seats that were at center court, five rows up. Suddenly I heard the announcer say there was a contest tonight. He explained that he was about to pick a winner. He would call out a seat number, and that person was the winner. I was so excited to hear this! I crossed my fingers and prayed it would be me. I felt so nervous and excited while I waited and listened. The announcer went on to explain that the winner would have an opportunity to be a ball boy and travel on the team plane.

I hear the announcer's voice say, "The winning seat number is section 201, seat number 23." My dad is holding our tickets and says, "Danny, Danny, that's YOU!"

I am in shock, and I feel like I am going to faint. They ask me to come down to the floor. They are asking me all kinds of questions. "What is your name?" "How old are you?" "Have you won a lot of contests before?" "What will your friends and coaches think of this?" "Have you ever played on a real court before?" I can see cameras flashing and people cheering. It is such an unbelievable feeling. I can feel the blood rushing to my face, and my heart is beating so fast. Everyone wants to talk to me and get my autograph. I motion to my dad to come down and help me.

Little kids are handing me pieces of paper to sign. It feels so good to be in the middle of all of this.

I find out that my job is to be a ball boy for the team. I can sit on the bench and give the players drinks and towels. I will also help the players warm up.

During one of the pre-game warm-ups, the players ask me to take a few shots with them. I shot ten shots and made nine of them. All the coaches and players were cheering me on. After that the coach came up to me and said, "You looked great out there!" The coaches and players decided to extend the contest for the rest of the season and even let me play.

The next game is against the Celtics. I am in the starting lineup. I can't believe the players are treating me as a teammate and not as just a kid.

The game was 99-97 Celtics and 11.0 seconds were on the clock. I was dribbling down the court and shot a three to win the game. "NO!" I said as it rolled out of the basket.

I heard the ref's whistle blow, and he said, "FOUL." My team jumped up and down as I was getting ready to shoot three free throws. I swished the first free throw. I shot a

banker for the next shot. I thought to myself if I made the next free throw then we would win the game! I MADE IT!

Suddenly, I heard the phone ring and my mom yelled upstairs, “Danny, the phone is for you.” I guess you could say this is where the dream ends, or does it?

Making It to the NBA

In MAKING IT TO THE NBA by Adam (A.J.) Mial, a young man goes through tragedy. Will he also experience triumph?

Five, four, three, two, one...AJ puts up the shot. “Eeeeeeeeh!” The loud ringing of the buzzer knocks AJ off of his feet. *Swoosh.* The ball goes in and hits nothing but net. “It’s good!” said the announcer in a loud, excited voice.

“Yeah!” said AJ in a loud excited voice. AJ is a high school basketball superstar with dreams of going to the NBA. He averaged 50 points a game.

Soon after his senior year in high school AJ got a scholarship to UCLA. AJ soon moves in to the dorm with great excitement.

“Hey, my name is Reggie.”

“Hi, my name is AJ,” said AJ in a very non-deep voice.

“You’re on the basketball team, right?” asked Reggie.

“Yes, I am. Are you?” asked AJ.

“Yes, I am I play shooting guard.”

Soon after AJ was unpacked and they had their first game. “It’s the fourth quarter. UCLA is down by 2,” said the announcer. “They pass it in to AJ. He runs, crosses over—five—he spins—four—he jump--three—he shoots it—two—it’s in!” said the announcer. “AJ has won his first college game.”

“Hey, Reggie, let’s go celebrate,” said AJ.

“Cool,” said Reggie.

AJ and Reggie changed, got in AJ's car, and drove off. "AJ, your engine's smoking," said Reggie.

"I will take a look," said AJ. AJ pulls over and opens the hood. *BOOOOOOOM!* The car burst into red and orange flames. The smoke coming from the car was pitch black. AJ flies back and land on his leg.

"Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!" AJ said. His leg was touching his shoulder. AJ calls out "Reggie!" but Reggie is in the red, blazing hot flames. He was still in the burning car.

EEEEEEHHmm! stops a red car. "Oh my gosh! Are you okay?" the man asked AJ.

"No!" said AJ. "Go help Reggie!" said AJ. Then the man called 911, and the ambulance picked up AJ and went to the hospital.

AJ woke up the next day in the hospital. "Ouch," ached AJ, rubbing his head. "Where am I?"

"You are in the hospital," explained the doctor.

"Where is Reggie?" asked AJ.

"I don't know how to tell you this, but Reggie is dead."

AJ breaks out in tears running down his face. "I have some more bad news," said the doctor.

"What?" said AJ.

"You cannot play basketball for one year."

"What?" said AJ.

After AJ got out of the hospital, he started going to physical therapy. AJ lay down on a comfortable couch while they massaged his leg. This went on for three months. Then AJ started walking again. "Time to get started," AJ said.

AJ went to his school gym and practiced with his team. AJ shot 1000 shots each day for the next nine months.

Next year he is ready to go. He gets his jersey on, goes out on the court, and starts the game off. "Get ready *for* a great a game," said the announcer. The game starts. "Here is the tip.

AJ catches it. He runs down the floor. He shoots. Oh, he misses.”

The game goes on. “It's the fourth quarter. The score is 100 to 100. AJ dribbles. One second left...AJ shoots. *EEEEEEEEEEAAAAAAAAA!* The bell knocks AJ off his feet. *Swoosh.* The ball goes in.

Soon after AJ was drafted to Detroit Pistons. His dream finally came true.

The Motorcycle Race

*Get ready for action. In **THE MOTORCYCLE RACE** by Aaron Tellis, the racing is not for the faint of heart.*

There was a kid named Allen. He loved to motorcycle race. His pet's name was Wacky the penguin. He would help him race. They always wanted to enter the pre-tournament race and go to the national event, and today was the day. They got to enter the race because Allen was eight years old.

They would go where the tournament was and go around the laps. He would also go to the Indiana racecourse, but the hardest course was the Miami, Indiana race court. It was the hardest, most dangerous course ever. No one has ever gone through the whole thing.

Allen just got home from school, hoping that he could go outside. At his house he fed his penguin and did his homework. Once he got done, he rushed outside to the park to sign up for the race. When Allen went to sign up, Billy the bully was on the list.

Allen turned his head and saw Billy getting an ice cream. Allen went to Billy and said, "So you are entering the race?"

"What's it to you?" said Billy. "Are you in the race? If you are, I'm going to crush you like a twig. Just remember to wear your helmet. To make thing interesting, let's have a wager. Whoever wins gets a month's supply of ice cream."

"Deal!"

Allen practiced day and afternoon to win this race.

It was the first day of the race.

“People, start your engines. On your mark...get set...go!”

“They’re off! Here they go around the sharp corners.”

Billy and Allen are right next to each other. A person comes right up by Billy and drops marbles behind him. The person crashes and the crowd goes ballistic with excitement. It was wild out there. Billy and Allen come in first and second place.

After the first race, Allen and Wacky the penguin go to their hotel and go to sleep.

That morning Allen puts some clothes on and goes straight to the track. Before the race started the announcer said, “This is a volcano cave race. First you’ll drive around lava, and then you’ll go in a cave. The first one out wins. Ok. On your mark...get set...go!”

Lava came rushing out. A lot of people were getting burned. Billy was first so far. Allen was right behind him. Allen pressed “Turbo.” He got in front of Billy! Allen went in the cave. He came out first, and Allen won. “It’s over, folks!”

“Allen wins! Here’s your trophy, Allen!”

“Thanks!” said Allen. Then he went home, watched TV, and enjoyed ice cream.

Play B

*Can a team of misfits seriously compete with the traditional high school football teams of the town? In **PLAY B** by Noah Zabawa, the Mud Dogs give it a try.*

On April 1, 2007, Coach Mike formed a new football team called the Mud Dogs. Coach Mike and his son, Chris, started up the football team.

Chris was a very quiet player and had a lot of talent. One thing Chris was good at was football. He had a passion for football.

The start of the football team was a huge mess. They began recruiting players from all over, but mostly from nearby high schools. Chris was basically the best player on the team. The team went through great struggles, and because they plucked several good players from local high schools, every time the Mud Dogs went to an opposing stadium they got sworn at, had pop dumped on them, and were booed.

Chris had a difficult time adjusting to his new school. The only friends that he had were Carter, who was a small five-foot nine-inch powerful running back; Ray, who was an incredibly fast wide receiver; and Ben, who was Chris's closest friend. Ben was a huge lineman, who had a deep affection for Chris. Carter had blue eyes, brown thick hair, and reddish pinkish lips. Ray had red hair, brown eyes, and incredibly long legs. Ben was the best friend anyone could have. Almost every day he would wear blue jeans, Adidas shoes, and black and white t-shirts.

“Hey Chris,” Ben said. “Coach told me that he wanted everybody to come to a special meeting today.”

At the meeting Coach said, “I called this meeting today to tell all of you that we need to step it up the rest of the season.” That’s exactly what they did.

The final piece of the puzzle was when the Mud Dogs found a new kid named Charles in a junkyard playing football with two of his friends. Charles had the longest arms I’ve ever seen. Charles had long braided hair, dark blue eyes, and an orange tank top on. Charles had flunked his current grade in high school. He hated high school so much that he just stopped going there. He didn’t have any parents that wanted him anymore, so when he was little they put him in an orphanage. He immediately accepted the offer to play football, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Charles was very tall. He was about six foot three inches, with light tan skin. He played defensive end. He was an incredible player that had the record for the most tackles, sacks, caused fumbles, caused interceptions, and blocks. Everyone called him the “Big Blue Monster.” He is just like Mike Hart, the running back for Michigan: the heart and soul of the team.

The season had just flown by before their eyes. They had barely squeezed into the playoffs. In their first playoff game they played a very tough team. The Mud Dogs won in a nail biter 17-14 on a field goal with 47 seconds left in the game.

Next up was the heavily favored Eagles. There was so much pre-game talk, and bets and everything were being put on the line. The Mud Dogs won the game 21-10 in a surprising victory. They had made it to the championship game. They had surprised everyone, including themselves.

People starting making bets, some over five hundred dollars, for the Mud Dogs to lose the big game. On the day of the big game all of the seats were sold out. The crowd was on

its feet, stomping, yelling, screaming, and even cracking peanuts on their heads. The announcers, Tom and Matt, were barely being heard. Tom was predicting Mud Dogs 41 and Broncos 47. Matt was predicting Mud Dogs 27, Broncos 14. The crowd was so excited that the stands swayed like they might come down.

The team was all ready for the biggest game that they were ever going to play. They had practiced three times a day for two hours each practice.

It was a sunny day in Copperville and 75 degrees, with a slight chance of rain. The grass was freshly cut. There was fresh paint on the field, and the fans were already booing the Mud Dogs.

Charles was so tough and brave that he got the fans fired up enough to start chanting and yelling. The teams met on the field to shake hands and to see who would win the toss. The Mud Dogs won the toss and were going to receive.

Boom. The kick was off. Schneider, their backup kick returner, was there and pumped. The ball was kicked exactly to the right of him. He caught it and ran wherever he found open room. He had gone untouched. Schneider jukeed the last man in his way and made him fall over. “He’s to the 40, the 30, the 20, the 10—touchdown Mud Dogs!”

It went back and forth after that. Charles made a great one-handed diving interception with the Mud Dogs down 35-30 to the Broncos. But the Broncos fought back and in their next series brought the ball to the Mud Dogs’ five-yard line.

Both teams were on their feet talking trash and yelling. The quarterback had a man in motion. He stomped his foot twice and breathed heavily on the warm April day. The linemen and linebackers shifted to the right side.

“Time out,” called the Mud Dogs. “We need a plan.”

“Yeah, we do,” said Charles. After the Mud Dogs broke the huddle they had the smallest smirk on their faces.

“Hey, Tom, what do you think the Dogs will do to keep the Broncos from scoring?”

“Well, I don’t know, Matt. I think they will have something special up their sleeves.”

They had a whole new setup. The Mud Dogs had four safeties spread out all over the field, three linebackers about to blitz in, and four linemen up in the front. “Hike.” The Mud Dogs linemen, instead of blocking, moved out of the way so that the offensive line would fall over. The Dogs ran towards the quarterback. But Charles was already there. He rushed in on the blitz. There was a blocker right in front, but he didn’t care one bit. He juked him and jumped and stuck his arm up. He just tipped the ball backwards to himself and ran 95 yards for the win. Just as he was about to score he showboated like it was no big thing.

The Mud Dogs ended up being the most famous high school team in the state. Everybody was going nuts running, drinking and just being out of control. That’s how the Mud Dogs won the biggest bowl game of their lifetime.

Charles went on to be a pro on the Kansas City Chiefs, and holds the most records in NFL history.

The Shot

*What's a basketball-playing girl to do when there is no girls' basketball team? Find out in **THE SHOT**, by Imani Mims.*

Alison walked to school. She went in and asked, "Excuse me, is there a girls' basketball team?"

Everybody stared.

Ding, ding, ding.

"That's the bell. Now I'm late again," said Alison. Second hour was already here. It was time for gym class.

"Hey, Coach. Do you have a girls' basketball team?"

"No, sweetie, I'm sorry. We only have a boys' basketball team."

"Coach," Alison said, "can I try out for the boys' basketball team?"

"I guess," the coach replied.

So Alison tried out for the boys' basketball team and made it. But the boys didn't want her on the team.

"The big game is coming up," the gym teacher said. "It will be tomorrow at 8:15."

"The game will be in one minute," the coach said.

"Ooooooooooooh," Number 12 said. "I'm hurt, and I will not be able to play in the game."

"Alison," the coach said, "you're in. Go win the game."

There were five seconds left in the game. Alison has the ball.

"SHOOT THE BALL!"

SWISH.

They win the game!

SK8 AMERICA

*It looks like a tragedy for skateboarders when a group of adults seeks to ban skateboarding in they city. But three boys decide to stand up and fight city hall in **SK8 AMERICA**, by **Christiana Smith**.*

One day, three middle school kids named Nick, Tristan, and Jake were on their way to school. The only way they got to school was by skateboarding, which wasn't so bad since they only lived a block away from school. The only passion in their lives was a sport called skateboarding. They loved skateboarding so much they said it felt as if the only reason they were born was to skateboard.

One day they had this little dare. It was a little course for skateboarding. The area where they had to do this stunt was right outside of the teachers' lounge. Tristan and Nick dared Jake to do this course. Jake said, "I love a good dare. Let the games begin!" The challenge was to Ollie the six stairs, backside tail slide the ledge, shovit off of it and then tre-flip onto the picnic table, from where he would kick flip off and land in the primo.

These were no just ordinary stunts. For instance, an Ollie requires that you stomp the tail of your board, slide your front foot up to the nose of the board, and be able to put your front foot down. Trust me, that's not easy! To backside tail slide the ledge, you would have to Ollie and then do a 90-degree turn until the tail of your board hits the ledge, and then you slide on the board. A shovit is when you Ollie and your board

does a 180-degree turn. Kick flips are simple because all you have to do is Ollie and kick your front foot so your board doesn't flip. When you land in a primo from a kick flip, your foot is actually on the board when the board is right side up. That's a lot to handle.

Well, they dared him, and guess what? He did it. But right when he was going for that kick flip off the table, the principal, Mr. Hateskate, came out of the lounge. This caused Jake to mess up and fall. Jake saw it coming but couldn't do anything about it, so he apologized before it even actually happened. "Sorry, Mr. Hateskete."

The skateboard went flying, and take a wild guess who it hit. Hmmmmmm. Oh, yeah: the principal! He got really angry and said, "All of you are banned from skateboarding on school grounds forever!"

The kids couldn't believe it. They felt like their lives were doomed. School was their favorite spot, so they had no place to skate anymore.

Then this new deli opened across the street from school. Oh my goodness, it had the best skate obstacles ever. All the concrete was smooth, and the rails were nice and shiny! The boys loved skating there. The boys skated there for a while, but didn't know it was illegal to skate there. Then they got kicked out of there, too. From schools to stores to mall parking lots, they just kept getting kicked out. It didn't matter if it was public property or private property. They just didn't seem to have a place to go.

The adults wrote a petition to ban skateboarding everywhere. The adults got twenty-three other angry adults to sign the petition. They sent it off to the mayor of the city.

So now you probably know what the skateboarders were going to do. If you were guessing that they were going to write a petition not to ban skateboarding in this city, you were right. The skateboarders made a petition. They took it to

their different schools for lots of other kids to sign. Remember, the adults could only get twenty-three people to sign. Well, the kids got more than one hundred other kids to sign.

As a compromise, the mayor of the city decided to get the parents and the skateboarders together. They talked it out and decided to let skateboarders use public sidewalks but not private property to skateboard until the city could build a skateboard park.

Nick, Tristan, and Jake became legends in their city because they were known as the kids who got the city to build its first skateboarding park. Every skateboarder in the city knew their names and wanted to be their friend.

Soccer Dream

*In **SOCCER DREAM** by Alistair Lockyer, a promising soccer player and his local team are watched by a scout from a national franchise. Can he take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity?*

Oliver Angelo was a kid of 17 growing up in London, England. He lived in a very small house because his family was poor. Oliver loved soccer and was a very good soccer player. He played soccer for free for a really good soccer team with a paid coach because he was really good, but couldn't afford the fees. If his team hadn't let him play for free, he wouldn't have been able to play for them.

One day a scout for West Ham was scouting his team. He came to watch his team play five games. The players did not know this until they started playing the game. Oliver was one of the players the scout was told to watch carefully.

On the first game the scout was watching, Oliver played a bad game. Oliver was so disappointed with himself; he'd worked so hard to get this far and now he was sure his dream was gone. He felt his lips starting to quiver, he kicked the clumps of mud in the air, and he tried not to cry, but his disappointment was too strong. He couldn't hold it in, and he started to cry. He knew that it was his chance that he blew to be a professional. Now, the scout probably wouldn't take much interest in him.

The next day, Oliver went outside into his small backyard, which only had a soccer goal in it, with a ball. He started

practicing everything he could to prepare for the game until it was too dark to see the ball, and he felt weak with hunger. He pushed himself to keep practicing. He desperately wanted the scout to notice him.

The next week he went to the soccer field his team was playing on two hours early. Since his team had the first scheduled soccer game at 11:00 a.m., he had the field to himself. He had been practicing for an hour and a half when his coach showed up. His coach asked him why he was so early, and he said, "To practice."

Although Oliver had been practicing for two hours before the game, he still struggled at the start of the game. Oliver was struggling because of a heavy rain shower. The pitch was very wet and slippery. His cleats got full up with mud, and the cleats weren't gripping the ground like they should.

At halftime, Oliver cleaned off and scraped his cleats to get every last piece of mud out of the cleats. Because of this, he got used to the conditions of the pitch, and he played really well in the second half.

The scout went to talk to Oliver and said, "Give me one more good game, and if you do that, you will get a trial for West Ham."

Oliver was so happy and proud of himself. His heart was beating so fast he could hardly breathe. It almost seemed like his legs weren't strong enough to walk home. Oliver was closer to his dream of being a professional soccer player, and he couldn't stop smiling.

That night, Oliver was practicing up until he had to go to bed, again because he wanted a trial so badly.

The next game Oliver played really well, possibly his best game ever. Oliver scored five goals, one from a free kick, and he had two assists. The scout then came over to him. Oliver was watching him nervously and excited at the same time, waiting for what he was about to say to him. The scout told

Oliver, "Congratulations on your game." He said, "You have earned a trial for West Ham."

Oliver and his family were so ecstatically happy for him that they had a party for him. The party wasn't much because they couldn't afford much. It consisted of drinks, friends, chocolate cake, and presents.

On his way to the trial, Oliver was just trying to keep calm about getting a trial. West Ham paid for his bus ticket to get to the trial because his family didn't have a car. During the trial, Oliver played really well, even better than some of the team's substitutes, and because of his performances, he got a contract to play for West Ham.

At first, Oliver played for the West Ham reserves, but for the fifth game of the season he was named in the first team squad. Then, when a teammate got injured, the coach put Oliver on. He played a good game, considering it was his first game for West Ham, and because of his teammate's injury, Oliver stayed as the starter.

In the seventh game of the season, Oliver's teammate was fouled just outside of the 18-yard box. The referee blew his whistle for a free kick. Oliver took the free kick; it went over the wall of defenders, and into the goal. Oliver had just become the Premier League's youngest scorer in history.

During the season, Oliver scored three goals. With fifteen games left, Oliver broke his foot when a player slide tackled him with his studs up. The team doctors said to Oliver that he probably wouldn't be able to play in any more league or cup games that season.

After the doctors started doing treatment on Oliver's foot, the league finished. One of the doctors said to him, "Your foot is healing very fast. You might just get to play in some of the cup games."

The next month the doctors took the cast off, and Oliver decided to put more ice on than the doctors recommended

and rest it so that it would heal faster. The next week the doctor said, “Your foot is healing way faster than we thought it would. You will be able to play once it has healed, and at the rate your foot is healing it will be healed by the finals.”

The league had just finished, and West Ham finished third behind first-place Arsenal and Chelsea in second place.

The FA cup has several knockout rounds played throughout the regular soccer season; the final is the last competitive game of the year. West Ham had won all of their FA Cup matches, so they had reached the final. Oliver’s foot had healed completely, and he was going to start in the final because the normal starter got injured.

Before the game, when they were just coming out of the tunnel, Oliver was surrounded by an atmosphere of 70,000 fans. In one half of the stadium were all people wearing red and white supporting Arsenal, and in the other half were people in claret and blue supporting West Ham. It was all a sudden rush for him, and his dream-come-true at the same time.

The pitch he was playing on was perfect, and the turf had been re-laid just for this game. At the start of the FA Cup final, Oliver played very well and scored 35 minutes into the game. His goal was from five yards outside the 18-yard box. In the second half he scored again, after 77 minutes from a free kick. After the game, he was voted player of the game. The final score of the game was West Ham 2, Arsenal 0.

After the team celebrated, Oliver went home where he had a message. The message was from the owner of Arsenal. The message said, “If you are interested in playing for Arsenal, give us a call, and we will try to get you a contract.” He called them and they said, “We’ll give you a two-year ten million dollar pound contract, and a signing bonus of 500,000 pounds if you join Arsenal.”

Oliver took the contract and was happy for himself for turning his life from poor to a pro soccer player. Oliver then bought his mom and dad their dream house and a car, and bought himself a good-sized house and a car.

A Wild Trip to Downtown Detroit

*A boy goes on a trip to downtown Detroit, where he gets separated from his family. His adventure is one for the record books in **A WILD TRIP TO DOWNTOWN DETROIT**, by **Brendan Dwyer**.*

Have you ever thought of going on a wild trip to downtown Detroit and playing ice hockey with the Detroit Red Wings? Well, I haven't, but it happened to me!

Hello, my name is Brendan Dwyer, and my family has a fun tradition. On the day after Thanksgiving my family always goes to downtown Detroit. We always try a different restaurant, usually of a different culture. The first year, we started out with Mexican village. This year it was a German restaurant.

We start the day by meeting at my grandparents' house with all the cousins, and then we carpool downtown. This year we had really nice weather. It was sunny with a few clouds, but really cold! Last year we had the worst time. It was rainy with heavy clouds, and way colder than this year.

We got downtown really early this time so we could do everything. First stop was Campus Martius for ice-skating. It was my second time ice-skating, and my cousin Gordy and I were racing around the rink like professional ice skaters. We had the most fun pushing my uncle into the boards and knocking him down. He couldn't catch us after we pushed

him down because we are a lot better than him at ice-skating. After about an hour of ice-skating we got hot chocolate and headed to the German restaurant, Jacoby's. We sure were hungry after skating.

The restaurant had just opened, and it was really cold. We all sat at a big long table and ordered a lot of food. There were fifteen of us, and we basically took up the whole restaurant. It was fun goofing off with all of the cousins. Next we went to the Renaissance Center.

At the Renaissance Center we went up to the second-to-last floor in the glass elevator, which is 72 stories high. I could see all the way to Canada. It was a clear night, and there was a full moon. We like going up to the top for the view of the Detroit River, Downtown Detroit, and Windsor, Ontario in Canada. We always sit in circular booths and drink Shirley Temples. After our drinks, my family gets on the People Mover for a round trip of downtown before going home. This is when it happened.

We got on the train and started going around. I looked at the river, and saw this huge chunk of ice. Then I started looking at the casinos in Canada. There were spotlights everywhere, so I thought there was a celebrity or something, and kept my eyes on the spotlights. Of course my family was getting off at the next stop (Cadillac Center stop), but I was interested in the spotlights and stayed on. I realized soon that I was alone when I turned around to talk to my mom. Everyone was gone. I was kind of in shock, but I said to myself, "It's okay. I'll just get off at the next stop," even though I knew it wasn't okay.

The next stop was Joe Louis Arena. I got off. The doors to the Joe were open, so I went in. I saw people walking around, and I followed them. They went down some stairs. I saw a door and opened it. It was the Red Wings locker room!

I heard people coming, so I moved fast and put Chris Osgood's equipment on. The people coming were the Detroit Red Wings!

Dominic Hasek said, "I thought you were sick?"

I thought quickly again and said, "No, I feel better now."

Then Pavel Datsyuk asked Henrik Zetterberg, "Are you ready for the big game?"

Zetterberg said, "Yes."

This worried me because I didn't know there was a game that night, and I was playing!

I didn't know what to do. Before I knew it, I was on the ice playing goalie. I wondered if they would figure out my identity. Should I stick with it and keep playing or leave and tell them my identity? In the end I stuck with it.

The first period just started. I didn't really have to do anything because we were playing a team with bad offense. Finally they broke through the defense on a break away and I actually saved it. I didn't figure I could because I have only played street hockey.

Before I knew it the first period was over. I went back into the locker room, and unexpectedly Chris Osgood showed up. He had strep throat but wanted to watch the game. He talked to the coach and asked why there was two of him.

The coach came over and pulled my helmet off. He had discovered my ID! The coach looked angry, but burst out laughing. I guess he was happy because I only let them score once, and I'm eleven. He told me I could go to any hockey game for free.

The coach called my parents. They came and picked me up. I was tired and slept all the way home. When I woke up, my parents were proud of me. I had a great day.

A Wish Come True

*The idea of a story about a great football player may seem commonplace. But in **A WISH COME TRUE** by **Kevin Chien**, that player is unlike any football star you have ever seen.*

There he was in the middle of the field in the middle of campus catching that ball. It was a great catch, and a one-handed catch at that. Heck, if you think about it, Adam always got a one-handed catch. Most football players had problems with speed, catching, or not having a good arm, or one good arm at that. I know what you're thinking by that. Huh? Yeah, it's what everybody says when they hear that part. Well, one good arm? Hmmm...what does that mean? Could it be a one-armed football player? Correct! So a one-armed football player. That's amazing, huh? Actually, Adam had to deal with this problem since birth.

Many years earlier...

“Go long! Andddd touchdown!”

Let's get to the basics. Adam was the quarterback for the LSU Tigers. Everybody loved him, but cared more about the star receiver, Freddie Schwartz. Adam was a great passer and threw all the passes to Freddie, but it was Freddie who always got carried away by the fans and the team. Adam hated his team and especially Freddie.

Adam always got into arguments with his coach and usually lost them big time. Coach was a big, mean coach but was really nice to Freddie.

Adam didn't really know why coach hated him so much at the start. Adam actually tried to be nice when he joined the team, and coach was actually nice back—all up until the day Freddie joined the team. Well, it had been pretty good having Coach being nice for all of, ummmm, five seconds!

Fast forward to almost the present day. Life at LSU was pretty horrible still. Adam wanted to quit the team, but apparently Adam was nothing without football. In fact Adam had been playing for thirteen years now—almost fourteen. The only good thing that came out of that week was his birthday the upcoming day.

Adam wished on his candles the next day at his surprise party thrown by his best friend Alex Cooper who hated Freddie and coach just as much as he did. (And, yes, at his age he did still wish on his candles ...pathetic, isn't it?) Alex was the running back for the team. Adam was now 19 years old and in his sophomore year of college. He had many football-playing friends who were unfortunately all at Ohio State, unlike Adam and Alex. Adam went to bed straight after blowing out the candles.

Adam's wish was to get asked to join another team, but like always, his wish did not come true. The next day Adam just got sadder when Alex got asked to join Ohio State. The thing was that Alex was going. He just couldn't pass up such an offer, and so he went. Adam spent the next couple of weeks just lying around, having nothing to do without Alex to fool around with.

The next evening Adam had yet another argument with the coach and, well, got kicked off the team. That was that. His life was ruined and ripped apart at the seams. There was

nothing left to live for. Adam was so depressed to not go to football practice after school and not have anybody to talk to.

This was the day that a miracle happened that probably made Adam the happiest man on earth. Adam was asked to join Ohio State. Adam didn't even have to consider leaving, having already being kicked off the team. The great thing was that every last one of his football-playing friends was there, including Alex.

Adam got there one night and was so happy to see all the friends he hadn't seen since high school. Finally when Adam settled down in his dorm, he went to the first Ohio practice he'd ever been to. Practice was really great for Adam with a perfect coach and a good team.

Three months later Adam was the *star* QB (with emphasis on the "star")! It was so good for it to be the other way around. The best thing was being on the number one college team ever. How cool!

The Tigers were number two and were pretty good. Adam was excited about the first game for him coming up against the LSU Tigers! Actually Adam couldn't wait to crush them and show what he could really do.

It was three quarters into the game and the score was 37-24 with LSU in the lead. Adam threw a touchdown pass!

It was 37-30 with ten seconds on the clock. Hike! Adam was sacked onto the cold, hard field. Adam couldn't give up, though, and got back up for another play. This was Adam's last chance, but win or lose he had still done pretty great. While waiting for a receiver to get open Adam found an opening and ran in a touchdown with one second left! With the extra point it was 37-37. They hadn't won yet, but overtime was just another word for a second chance.

Adam and the Buckeyes wanted to take that second chance and win, but it was not going to be easy. The whole

beginning of the game was pretty hard itself, and overtime was going to be harder.

Two minutes had passed, and the Buckeyes had the ball. Adam threw the football to a wide-open receiver. They had won and the Tigers had lost. They were pretty mad at Coach for taking Adam off the team.

For the first time in Adam's football playing life he was lifted by the roaring fans and happy players. That was the last game of the year.

Four years later....

Adam was the most famous QB ever. All of his former Ohio State team members were also part of the team. Adam was getting ready to play in a game against the Cowboys. They were good, but not good enough for their team. Adam ran it in for a touchdown! 37-33! Hmm...sound familiar?

KISS AND TELL

Enemy Lovers

ENEMY LOVERS, by *Colleen Feola*, is a story of despair, anguish, and romance. In one life-altering event, both Rosalina and Ricardo learn how quickly circumstances can change.

It all began with a naughty preschooler. Rosalina was relaxing on her nap mat, peacefully munching on some frosted animal cookies, while Ricardo was plotting out the most evil plan a four-year-old could commit. He lurked around the teacher's desk, tumbled over the reading carpet, and in the blink of an eye he swiped a cookie.

Rosalina didn't notice at first, but when she reached for another one, nothing was there. She stood up, looking for the one child with frosting on his or her face. She realized Ricardo was the criminal. Rosalina screamed and declared from that point on Ricardo was her all-time archenemy. "I will never forgive you!" she cried.

Over the years Ricardo often tried to apologize for his mistake back in preschool. But he had left a lingering attitude in both of them even after 12 years. Rosalina held a grudge; she never even ate another animal cookie again. Still the world around them continued to revolve. They graduated 12th grade, and both had four-point-zero grade point averages. Nevertheless, their past differences were still too strong for a friendship to form.

Five years had passed, and their paths never crossed. This all changed on the morning of March 31, 1999. Who knew

Rosalina and Ricardo were applying for the same position at the same company? They recognized each other without a doubt. They both revealed smirks. They darted for the office's thin staircase, both reaching the top within milliseconds of each other.

Rosalina's interview was first. Her interview was followed by Ricardo's. The C.E.O. was torn on whom to hire, because their résumés were practically the same. Unfortunately for them, she decided to hire both of them. She had no idea that they had been archenemies practically their whole lives. Ricardo was secretary number one, and Rosalina was secretary number two.

Mrs. Conway decided to take all employees for a cruise over the Bermuda Triangle for the company's 50th annual business anniversary. It was an eight-day, seven-night cruise, but Conway told everyone to only pack the necessities. The employees boarded the ship, the ship sailed off, and vacation began.

The sail started off smoothly. It was relaxing and beautiful. But as often happens, when life seems easy, a disaster is waiting to strike.

Mrs. Conway noticed that the sky started to darken, and the ship was rocking back and forth rapidly. The employees heard thunder and saw lightning. Funnel clouds started to appear, and tidal waves battered the ship.

Rosalina felt queasy. She tumbled to the floor and slowly rolled off the ship. Luckily Ricardo noticed, and dove in after her. He dove about 50 feet beneath the ocean's surface. Ricardo arrived back at the ocean's surface about 60 seconds later. And he was just in time because Rosalina nearly reached hypothermia. He gave her the first dry garment he could put his hands on.

Rosalina was grateful that her all-time archenemy saved her life. Ricardo was a hero.

Ricardo and Rosalina opened a new chapter in their lives. They were finally growing up. They looked at each other with passion instead of contempt. Their differences many years ago were in the past, and they were looking toward their future, together.

Their life in the future was great. They dated for a year and a half. They got married, had seven children, and most importantly lived happily ever after.

National Spelling Bee

In NATIONAL SPELLING BEE by Adam Katzman, a young man competes in a spelling competition. The spelling bee itself may not be the most important challenge he faces that will determine whether he considers himself a winner.

“Tremendous.” Ok, I thought to myself, just spell this word and I will be able to compete in the National Spelling Bee.

“Can you give me the word in a sentence?” I asked.

“You have tremendous amounts of fear because of this competition,” the announcer said.

The announcer could not have described my feelings any better. My face is dripping with sweat and my whole body is shaking as I reply, “Tremendous. T-R-E-M-E-N-D-O-U-S.” Finally I heard the buzz of the buzzer. I got it right, and now I will be able to compete in the National Spelling Bee.

The next week I walked into the spelling bee and was excited to meet some of my competition. There was Seymore Butts from Loserville, Tennessee and Anita Bath, the reigning champ, from Uglyhill, Washington. Seymore was very quiet. He was shorter than I was and had bright yellow hair that lit up on the stage. Anita was your average nerd with broken glasses, a pocket protector, red pigtails and freckles. She reminded me of the girl from the Wendy’s commercials.

First, I started talking to Anita Bath. She seemed pretty nice. I really didn’t want to sit next to her because she had a lisp, and every time she talked she’d spit all over my face.

“So, are you ready for the spelling bee? I am. I know every word in the dictionary! Did you know ‘brouhaha’ has no definition in the dictionary?” Anita said.

“Yeah, I think I’m ready but...” I tried to reply.

“Hey, are you guys talking about ‘brouhaha’? I tried calling Webster to add it into his dictionary, but I couldn’t get an answer. I can’t believe they don’t have that, but that they have ‘bootylicious,’” Seymore interrupted.

Before anyone had a chance to say any more, the announcer told us all to get into our seats. When it was my turn I got up and slowly walked to the front of the stage. I walked up to the microphone and noticed it was too tall. Then, when I tried lowering the microphone it made a loud screech. Everyone in the audience covered their ears. It was embarrassing.

My word was “fergalicious.” I started to spell out the word into the microphone, “F-E-R-G-A-L-I-C-I-O-U-S.” The announcer told me I was correct, so I walked back to my seat. On the way to my seat I heard Anita and Seymore whispering.

“I told you he would get it right,” Anita said.

“Maybe he’ll get out on the next word,” Seymore said while shrugging.

As the rounds went on, the words got harder. More people were being eliminated. Seymore, Anita, and I did not get out.

“Misspell,” the announcer said out loud for Seymore to spell.

“I hope he misspells this one,” Anita said with her lisp while spitting all over my face. Then, she did something that turned my face redder than a tomato. She took out her handkerchief and wiped her spit off my face. Could Anita like me? I wondered until it was my turn again.

“Misspell. M-I-S-P-E-L-L,” Seymore replied.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Butts, but that is not the correct spelling. You are out, and Adam Katzman is next.” The announcer looked at me, and sweat started to drip down my back.

“Your word is ‘beautiful.’” The announcer asked me to spell.

I looked over at Anita and then began to spell, “B-E-A-U-T-I-F-U-L.” She must like me, I thought, as the butterflies were flying in my stomach.

“Correct. Now it is just between you and Miss Anita Bath. Miss Bath, your word is ‘desert,’” the announcer told her. I looked at her, and she didn’t look confident at all. I wanted to whisper the answer to her but couldn’t because she was my competition.

“Desert. Ummm, D-E-S-S-E-R-T,” Anita said out loud.

“I’m sorry, please take your seat. Adam must now spell it correctly to win,” the announcer told her while she was looking at me.

So now I had a decision to make. Should I spell it wrong and let her win, or should I spell it right and take home the trophy? As I was trying to make my decision, I looked at her and realized she spelled the word wrong on purpose. She whispered to me to let me know that I should win.

“Desert. D-E-S-E-R-T. Desert.” I spelled it right and won the trophy. After, I put the trophy in Anita’s hands. I realized since she had studied harder, she should have won.

I learned two lessons that day. The first lesson I learned is that sometimes you can do something good for others and for yourself at the same time. The other lesson I learned is that it is ok to like a nerd because now, Anita is my nerd.

Romance

ROMANCE by *Stephan Reamey* is the story of a boy who is trying to attract a particular girl. He learns the meaning of the expression “you get more flies with honey than with vinegar.”

The story starts with a boy named Troy. He lived with his mom and dad in a two-story house. He was an ordinary boy who did things a regular boy would do. Troy was a good student in all of his classes, especially in science class where he got A+'s all the time. He was the type of boy that got nervous when he saw a hot girl. He also had problems in school that a regular boy would have (with a crush on a girl).

Troy was a nice and friendly guy. Even though he was a nice guy, it took him time to make friends. Troy was outgoing around people he knew, but kind of shy around new people.

Troy was in a new school. He began to notice a beautiful girl who seemed to be popular. Every time Troy saw her he became more and more attracted to her.

Her name was Miley. Troy thought she was the hottest girl in the whole school. She sometimes had a smart mouth when she wanted to get her way. She was nice when she wanted to be nice. She liked clothes, tank tops, skirts, phones, and shoes. She was like a queen or a goddess in the eyes of all the boys at school.

All the boys at school liked her. Troy would tell his friends, “I’ve got to get her to like me. I just have to get her to like me. It’s got to happen! What am I saying? I’ll never get her to like me!”

Troy's best friend Bobby told him, "Just be yourself. You are a good guy, and if she got to know you she would like you." Bobby also told Troy that Miley would be nice all the time if she hung out with a guy like Troy.

Then right when he turned around Miley was coming his way. She was talking to her friends (the popular kids). "Oh no, she is coming this way." Then the bell rang, so he went to his science class.

Miley was in his science class. That day the class had to do a project about planets with a partner. The teacher picked Troy and Miley as partners. The teacher said that if they didn't know their partners very well, they should get to know each other. So Troy said, "Why don't we come to my house?"

Miley said, "Sure," in a dull way.

After school they met at Troy's house. When they started the project Miley didn't know what to do. Troy thought he would make her a little bit more comfortable. He gave her a snack and began to ask her about the things that she liked to do. Miley changed the subject and asked if she could see Troy's room. Troy said, "Sure."

When they went to Troy's room, Miley was surprised at how neat it was. Miley was impressed when she saw all of Troy's football trophies. She said, "I didn't know you were a jock."

Troy grinned and said, "I don't consider myself a jock. I just enjoy playing football and being part of the team." Miley was surprised by Troy's response because all of her popular friends never miss a chance to brag about playing sports.

Then Miley looked in his closet. Most of his clothes were brand new and still had tags on them. She asked, "Why don't you wear these to school?"

Troy replied, "The clothes I wear to school are comfortable. These clothes are for when I go out to parties and with my family."

“What about dates?” Miley asked.

Troy smiled and said, “Let’s get back to work.”

They began working on their project, and at the same time they were telling each other things like their favorite color, sport, teacher, and all that kind of stuff. Then Troy helped Miley get some information from the Internet.

After a few days of getting to know each other, suddenly a weird thing happened. Miley began to realize that she and Troy had a lot in common. She respected Troy because he did not act stuck up like her so-called popular friends.

Miley began to think to herself, “He is so smart, cute, and talented.” Miley started to like Troy.

Two days before the project was due, Troy realized that Miley really liked him. On the day the project was due, they both got an A+ on the project. “This is the day. It’s the day when I get a chance to ask Miley out on a date,” Troy said to himself.

Troy said to Miley, “Would you come to my house and help me pick out something for me to wear on a date?” Once at Troy’s house, Miley picked out one of the new outfits that were hanging in Troy’s closet. Miley asked Troy who he was going out with.

Troy said, “I would like to take you to the movies Friday if that’s okay with you.”

“Yes, YES, a thousand times, YES!” yelled Miley.

“I’ll pick you up at 7:30,” said Troy. And as far as I know how dates go, let’s just say they had an awesome time that night.

They went dancing, went to see a movie, and took a walk in the park. They ended their little date with a kiss good night. When Troy got home he went to his room and went wild that he got his first kiss. That he celebrated by himself. (I can tell you this: Troy and Miley had the best school year ever.)

Troy's friend Bobby was right. Miley was nice all the time ever since she became friends with Troy. At the same time Troy began to have more confidence in himself. Ultimately Troy and Miley were able to help each other through their friendship.

Seventeen Months for Nothing

In SEVENTEEN MONTHS FOR NOTHING by Kristen Trogu, Nick Williams and Kate Liddle think they have found love at first sight. Perhaps love has a different idea.

Berkshire's Annual Homecoming Dance took place on a beautiful fall night in October. Most people had a date, and everyone was having fun. There were two people, though, who didn't have a date for the dance. Those two people were Nick Williams and Kate Liddle. Back by the snack table, Nick and Kate, unknowingly, both reached for the last cup of punch. Their hands barely touched, but once they did, they both pulled back quickly, their arms falling to their sides. They turned and looked at each other with no expression on their faces, and no words were spoken.

After what seemed like an hour, Nick finally said, "Oh...um, you can have it. I'm not really that thirsty anymore." He was practically stumbling over every word he said.

"No, it's fine. I'm not that thirsty, either. You can have it. I'll see you around," Kate replied.

They both went back to their group of friends but never told them about their meeting. Throughout the rest of the night, they occasionally caught each other's eyes, but quickly turned around when they locked eyes. After that night they

didn't speak for a couple of months, but they thought about each other every day.

Two months after his first moment with Kate, Nick's birthday rolled around, and all he wanted for his birthday was Kate. He had been practicing asking her out in the bathroom mirror for a month now, and he had finally gotten the courage to ask her on a date. That night he drove over to her house, walked up to the porch, rang the doorbell, and waited.

She finally answered the door, and he spit out, "Hey, um...I've never done something like this before, but would you like to go out with me sometime?"

"Sure," said Kate with great excitement. She had been waiting forever for Nick to say that to her. She was glad that today was the day.

Ever since then, they would hang out all the time, spending every day they possibly could with each other. They did everything together: went to movies, had picnics, went out to dinner, and went shopping together. You could say they were the perfect couple. They went out for a total of seventeen months before that dreadful day came. It was both Nick and Kate's longest relationship. It was also their very first relationship, but it was soon to end.

The day came when Nick had enough, and he needed to see other people, but he didn't know how to tell Kate without breaking her heart. Nick just didn't want to be with one girl for a long period of time. He wanted to meet different people and see their unique side. He was scared to talk to her, so he did the best thing he could think of and started ignoring her calls and text messages.

When Nick finally ended things with Kate, she was devastated. She never saw it coming. Kate changed after that. She acted like she was okay at school, but she came home each day and cried herself to sleep. Kate was flooded with memories of everything they did together. She thought about

the first time they met and all the times they hung out. Kate ripped out all of her memories about Nick in her diary. That really didn't seem to work, though.

Both Nick and Kate want to try and forget about their painful breakup. It was in their past, and they never want to relive something like that again. They never were as happy as they were together, but at least for now, they're going to be okay. Today, Nick and Kate are friends.

RED HERRING

Backstage Murder

*It is opening night at the theater when the leading lady is found dead. In **BACKSTAGE MURDER** by Merrill Watzman, the drama is no less exciting for taking place offstage.*

It is opening night at the McCarson theatre in California. The cast of the play and the crewmembers were having a party before their show. The party was almost over when Annie had to use the restroom. As she was walking down the hallway, she was surprised to see the star of the show, Kathy, on the ground. Then Annie walked up to Kathy. She put her hand on Kathy's heart to see if she was breathing.

There was an ear-piercing scream, and all of the cast members came running to Annie.

"She's dead!" screamed Annie.

"This is horrible!" cried Roger. "I wonder who would have done such a cruel thing."

"Well, we have to find out who murdered her," said Angeline.

"I'm calling the police!" said Roger.

The police arrived with an ambulance. A group of paramedics ran some tests on Kathy to see if she had a pulse. There was no pulse. There were two policemen dressed in navy blue uniforms with badges on their shirts.

"Hello, my name is Officer Frank," said the first policeman, who had dark hair and glasses.

“I’m Officer George,” said the second officer. “We need to ask you some questions about the theatre. What is your normal routine around here?”

“Well, the show usually starts at 7:00, so we get into costume at 6:00, then we do makeup at 6:30,” said Roger.

“What were all of you doing at the time of Kathy’s death?” asked Officer Frank.

“We were all at a party, but Annie was going to use the restroom,” said Alice.

“Annie, can you show us where Kathy’s body is?” asked Officer George.

Annie led the officers to Kathy’s body. The officers examined Kathy’s body to see if there were any clues that would lead them to finding out how Kathy died. They did not see any blood, bruises, or bullet holes.

“Angeline, why is Kathy’s makeup on so early?” asked Annie.

Angeline gave her a dirty look then said, “Um...well... Kathy asked me to put it on early.”

“Angeline, why didn’t you tell us that you put on her makeup early when we asked what the routine here was?” asked Officer Frank.

“I guess it just slipped my mind.”

The police went back to examining Kathy’s body. After a little while, Frank said, “Wow Angeline, you and Kathy look an awful lot like.”

“We used to jokingly call Kathy and Angeline sisters,” said Annie. “We all knew that they weren’t sisters. We were just joking around.”

Angeline was starting to look nervous now.

“Angeline, can you show us the makeup you used on Kathy?” asked Officer George.

“Okay...um...I guess I’ll lead you to my makeup vanity then.”

Angeline led the officers and the cast and crew to her makeup vanity. When they got there, Angeline started to look through her makeup drawers.

“I’m sorry, I guess I misplaced the makeup.”

“Okay, then I guess we will take a sample off Kathy.”

“Wait!” said Angeline, grabbing a random makeup container. “I found it.”

Officer George took the makeup from Angeline. He walked over to Kathy’s body and looked at the makeup she was wearing. She had on a shade of brown, and the makeup that Angeline gave him was hot pink.

“Angeline, where is the real makeup you used on Kathy?”

“Um...well...I...sort of.... Okay, I did it! I killed Kathy!”

“But why would you do that, Angeline?” asked Officer Frank.

“It turns out that Kathy and I were really sisters, but we were separated at birth. I was the only one who knew, though. Our parents were billionaires and left us behind everything they had when they died in a fire. With Kathy out of the way, I get all the money to myself. I was also envious of her great acting skills. She got to be the star of the show while I had to do makeup. That little brat makes me so mad.”

“Angeline Adams, you are under arrest for the murder of Kathy Murray,” said Officer George.

Clue

In CLUE by Kaitlin Flaherty, someone is purposely disrupting a wedding in a disturbing way. It is up to the groom to find the guilty party among the wedding party.

Early on a bright morning in June, a groom came over to this bride's house. His wedding would take place close by at Lagoon Claire. At her house there were only seven others. The groom, Nick, was going to go change because it was one hour before his wedding.

Lily was about to change into her golden dress for the wedding. Nick was just coming out of the bathroom when he heard Lily scream in her room. After running to her, he saw that someone had ruined her dress. Her golden dress was ripped to shreds. He had to find the culprit so they could pay for the dress, because nobody should do something like that.

"What will we do, Nick?" Lily said.

"I'll find out who did it, Lily. You call the police."

"Be careful."

Nick had to find out who did it before the guests arrived. Nick was a detective and knew what to do in a crisis. First, he had to name the suspects. They are the maid, the chef, Lily's parents—Frank and Beth, Nick's mom—Leyla, and his best man—Jake.

First Nick went to find the maid. The maid was very overtired and jumpy and kind of crazy sometimes.

The maid was in the dining room setting down plates for the after party. Nick questioned her by asking her where she was at 11:35 a.m. (the time Lily's dress was ruined).

She replied, "But I was in the ballroom cleaning up. I didn't do it!"

The ballroom is on the east side of the house, and Lily's room is on the west side of the house, so it could not be her.

"Ok, ok. You are free to go."

Next up was the chef, who was in the kitchen making the dinner for the wedding. Knowing that he must have been making food for the day and the kitchen was on the east side, Nick decided it was not him.

After the chef came Beth and Frank. But why would they ruin their own daughter's dress? It cost a million dollars, and they had paid for it.

The next suspect was Leyla, Nick's mom. Nick asked where she was at 11:35. She said she was in the limo picking up the others in the wedding party. Since the people in the wedding were here, she must have picked them up around that time. The culprit was not her.

Next up was Jake. Nick knew it had to be him. Nick asked him where he was an hour before.

Jake said, "I was getting ready in the room under Lily's room."

Nick knew that there was a trapdoor under Lily's room to the room he was in. "Did you do it?" Nick asked.

"Maybe...no...maybe!" said Jake.

"What? Answer me now," Nick said.

"No."

Nick knew that he was lying. "No, you're lying. I can tell!"

"Fine. I did it. But I'm not paying for it."

"Oh, yes, you are! But why?"

“I wanted to ruin Lily’s wedding because I hate her. In school she was always better than me, more liked, and she always beat me at everything. I’m not paying! I’m going to kill her next!” He started to run. He was trying to get away.

“Why are you letting him go?” asked the maid.

“I’m not!” said Nick. He chased after him. Jake was just about to jump off the cliff when Nick caught his shirt.

“Goodbye, Nick,” said Jake. Then he slid out of his shirt. It was about 300 feet down into a lake. Tears started to form in Nick’s eyes.

“It’s okay, Nick,” said Lily with teardrops in her eyes.

The maid hurried out. “The police are here.”

“Ok. So he ruined the dress, threatened to kill Lily, and then jumped off the cliff?” said the police officer.

“Yes,” said Nick.

“We will check the lake for his body, but there wouldn’t be anything to do for him.”

“Sure thing. Thanks for coming.”

“But what about the wedding?” said Lily.

“We’ll go on without Jake, I guess,” said Nick.

They searched for something else for her to wear. Just then the maid came running down from the attic with a box. Inside was a beautiful, very old wedding gown that was shining silver in the light. After a little sewing, the dress fit just right!

Instead of it being golden, it was shining silver. It must have belonged to the last bride who lived there. She died before her wedding from yellow fever in 1793. Lily even said she liked it better than the original one. Everyone else thought so, too.

They hurried into the car to get to Lagoon Claire in time.

The wedding started a little late, but it was wonderful.

Later That Day

“Did you find his body?” said Nick.

“No, we didn’t,” said the policeman. “Nothing. No body, no trace, nothing. But we will keep looking for him.”

“Ok.”

“I think he was drunk,” said the maid.

A warm hand touched Nick’s shoulder. It was Lily.
“We’ll find him soon, Nick.”

“I know.”

Family Napped

*Mom and Dad should be home, but neither Lisa nor Zac has heard from them. Lisa won't stand for someone messing with her family in **FAMILY NAPPED**, by Liz Bingham.*

It started out as a regular Saturday. I woke up and went and watched television. When it was about 9:00, my dad called, "Lisa, it's time for breakfast." After breakfast I went and got ready for the party. It was my friend Melody's 16th birthday.

When it was about 2:30 my mom and I went to the party. When we got there my mom said, "Call me when you need to be picked up."

"Okay," I said back and ran off.

I was having so much fun until Melody's mom told me my brother was on the phone.

I went over and picked up the phone. Zac is only 14. He was calling because he couldn't find Mom and Dad. I told him to relax. They probably went out to dinner or something.

When the party was over I called my mom's cell phone. She didn't pick up. That's weird. So I tried my dad. He didn't pick up his phone either. Then I called home. Zac picked up, and I asked if Mom or Dad were home yet. He said no. I asked my friend's mom to take me home.

The next day was very weird. The house was a mess. It looked like a tornado went through our living room. I asked Zac, "What did you do to this place?" He said it was like this

when he woke up this morning. Also, Mom and Dad weren't home yet. At about 2:30 both of us were freaking out.

We called the police. They said they would be there right away. It was like two hours by the time they got to our house. Zac told them what had happened. The police looked around the house and found a few fingerprints. Zac and I had to stay at the police station that night, because the police didn't want us to be kidnapped also.

The next day was Monday. The police said to see if we could do anything to help. We found Dad's cell phone signal. We followed it to the old abandoned warehouse about two blocks from our house.

In the warehouse we saw my parents. It looked like they were sitting in a cage. We found a broken door and went in. Zac said we should call someone. I totally rejected that idea. I told him we were going to set a trap.

We looked around for something big like a net or tarp. Zac found some tarp. Then I found a ton of rope. It's a good thing I know how to lasso. I hooked a piece of rope onto one of the ceiling beams, and then tied it to the tarp. I did this about four times. Once that was done we hid behind some boxes in a dark corner.

After about five or ten minutes Dr. Evil came into the room. We were really shocked because we thought he was in jail. When he was standing on the tarp, Zac and I pulled really hard on the rope, and Dr. Evil went flying into the air. When he was all tied up in himself, we went over and opened the cage for my parents.

Once the police came they untied Dr. Evil and put him back in jail. About three days later Zac and I were awarded medals. So, we saved my parents and the city in about three days.

From This Planet?

*Sarah and Sydney start middle school with high hopes—and plenty of questions. One of their new teachers rouses their suspicions in **FROM THIS PLANET?** by Stephanie Timmis.*

Sydney and Sara have been best friends since they met at summer camp. They had gone to different schools all their lives, but this year they would be starting middle school together.

Today when they went to school they stopped at the bright red school doors to smell the fresh scent of the first day of school.

“Don’t you love that smell?” Sydney questioned.

“No! It means the end of our summer vacation,” explained Sarah.

On their way into school they noticed Kasey stop to smell the familiar scent. Once in their first hour class, Language Arts, they were exposed to a new, but not fresh, scent of sweaty gym socks.

“Ew!” Sara squealed. “It smells like sweaty gym socks,” she said, now in a hushed tone as the new teacher walked in.

The teacher, wearing a parka, hat, boots, and gloves, wrote her name on the board in capital letters: MS. TERFISHER.

Sydney passed a note to Sara about Ms. Terfisher’s strange clothing, but mid-pass she was caught and assigned a detention topped with a lecture. The strange thing was that Ms. Terfisher was facing the board the whole time, and the

look of surprise on both their faces was like none ever seen before.

After detention Sydney tripped on a slimy bag covered in green goo.

“Are you okay?” asked Sara, but before Sydney had a chance to answer, Sara asked her, “What did you do during her lecture?” This time she let her answer.

“Well, I noticed that the only part of Ms. T’s body you can see is her face, and a thick, tentacle like, pink strand of hair.”

“So?” asked Sara.

“So, all the other teachers here are wearing shorts and tee shirts, and they exposed their skin and hair that is usually brown or blonde, not pink!” claimed Sydney.

The next day the first-day-of-school-scent was gone, but the smell of sweaty gym socks was not.

Kasey noticed more green goo, like the goo Sydney tripped on the day before. She also spotted boot tracks in the goo and remembered the only person in the school wearing boots was Ms. T. It wasn’t until just before first hour that she remembered to recap what she had seen, but it was not enough time, and she didn’t want to risk being told on by Marilyn, the tattletale.

Then when the teacher reached up to get a book, a small part of her “skin” showed, and there was an alien-like symbol on her wrist. A look of confusion spread across the students’ faces. For the rest of the class no one dared to speak. They were too busy waiting to see if they would see another alien like symbol.

After class Sydney and Sarah discussed what they saw.

“Her wrist had such a weird symbol on it. Maybe it was an alien symbol,” Sara suggested.

“First the smell, then the clothes and the goo, and now the symbol. We should investigate, but we need to get help from some other girls,” said Sydney.

They explained to Kasey and Becca their plan, and they agreed to help.

Remembering the goo, they stole rubber gloves from the office. Ms. T had left her room to go fill out an application of some sort in the office, which was long enough for them to sneak in and out quickly.

They split up because of the lack of time. Sara crawled under Ms. T’s desk and found a black leather strip with spikes on it that could have been used for intergalactic torture. Sydney climbed the shelves and found only a teacher’s guide with a black stain on it. Becca went through her drawers and found a black rose. Kasey had yet to find anything in the closet when “Gross!” Sara exclaimed.

She had goo in her hair. Her hair had been dragging on the floor when she was crawling and passed another plastic, green goo-covered bag.

SMASH! The door burst open and in walked Ms. T. “What are you girls doing here? You four have no business in my room!” She roared, “GET OUT!” The four girls scrambled out of the room as fast as, if not faster than, a track star. Once out of the room sighs of relief were heard from them all.

The next day in class the girls took their seats as if nothing had happened.

“Good morning, class,” Ms. T said coldly.

“Ms. T, it’s very hot. Why are you wearing so many layers?” said Sarah “Take off your hat!” she almost demanded.

“Um, well,” replied Ms. T before she was interrupted by another interrogating question.

“What did you have for lunch today?” asked Kasey.

“Um, um,” replied Ms. T. “Students, let’s get back to class.” And they did.

After school, Ms. T pulled off her hat, and took off her coat, gloves, and boots to expose her total punk outfit, pink hair, and tattooed skin that were all against the dress code and had to be covered. “I wish I had had my two grape jelly sandwiches before the concert. Oh, well,” she said while putting on her black leather spiked necklace and black make-up. She headed out the door to her car.

She arrived at class Friday in the same overdressed attire, and continued her lesson as usual.

How Mary E. Sullivan Disappeared

*In **HOW MARY E. SULLIVAN DISAPPEARED** by Katie Sullivan, Julie Adams tries to uncover the mystery of a missing woman. She learns that nothing is what it seems.*

“Katy! Katy!” yelled Julie. “Look what I got!”

Julie had just bought a purse at a resale shop, and she wanted to show it to her best friend, Katy, because she knew that she would love it.

When she got to Katy’s house she sat down and took a deep breath. When she settled down she told Katy that she bought a really pretty purse and she needed to show it to her.

“I love it!” said Katy.

The very next thing they did was model the purse. When Julie was modeling Katy said that she thought that she heard a rustling noise coming from the purse. Julie sat down and started to search the purse. Finally, she found a piece of paper that was all crumpled up. It had writing on it, but the girls couldn’t figure out what it said. After a few minutes Julie had figured out what the note said.

“I got it! It says ‘help me...darkness all around me... he’s coming...he’s here!’”

“What does that mean?” asked Katy

“Look, there is more on the back!” said Julie.

“It looks like an address,” said Katy.

“It does!” said Julie. “I think this person was trapped somewhere, or still is!” Julie looked at Katy with a weird face (mostly mischievous).

“No. No. I am not solving another mystery with you. The last three were enough!” Katy protested.

“Fine,” said Julie. Then she left.

Julie could not fall asleep that night. She was too busy thinking about the note, the address, and how Katy would cave in and go to solve the mystery with her because she would decide “it was too dangerous for Julie to go alone.”

When Julie woke up that morning she got the most fabulous idea. She and Katy would go on the computer and try to search the address that was on the note (if they could read it).

When Julie and Katy got to the library they went on the computer and searched the part of the address that they could read (Whitehouse Road, Los Angeles). Thirty-five hits came up. They clicked on the first. It said that Mary Sullivan, Brad Tip, and Ricky Adams lived on that street. As Katy was looking at the note she figured the numbers out. They were 36025. She told Julie, and they looked it up. One hit came up. They clicked on it, and the name Mary E. Sullivan came up. That was her house. 36025 Whitehouse Road, Los Angeles was where May Sullivan lived. That is where the note came from.

Later that night Julie called Katy.

“Hi. This is Julie. I was wondering if you wanted to go to Los Angeles with me tomorrow. It’s only a few miles away.”

“Is this for that Mary Sullivan mystery thing?”

“Fine, I will just go by myself.” *Darn it. She won’t cave,* thought Julie.

“Fine, go by yourself. I don’t care!” said Katy.

They both hung up. Julie knew that Katy would call back any second and decide that she would come. Sure enough, Julie was right. It was Katy calling back.

“Fine, I will come with you. I will come to your house and we will leave.”

“Okay. I will see you in the morning.” She hung up and went to bed.

The next morning, bright and early, Katy was at Julie’s house ready to go. Julie got the map to Mary’s house off the printer, and they went to the bus stop. They got on the next bus going to L.A.

They got off and walked around for a little while looking for Whitehouse Road. They finally found it. Julie knocked on the door. A few minutes later an old man opened the door.

“What do you want?” he said.

“Um...we are looking for Mrs. Mary Sullivan,” Julie said.

“Oh, how cute, little fans. Well, she isn’t here,” he said sternly.

“Fans? What do you mean by fans?” asked Katy.

“You do know that this is that famous Mary E. Sullivan’s house. She was an OLD singer,” the old man told them.

“I did not know that she was a singer!” Julie said.

“Then who are you?” asked Katy.

“Um...um,” he hesitated. “I am her husband.”

“Oh, well, then can you tell her someone asked for her?” Julie asked.

“Yeah, I guess so,” said the old man.

Julie and Katy walked away.

“Don’t you think that man was a little suspicious?” asked Julie “We should watch the house for a little while.”

So they did. They waited for two hours until they saw something suspicious. Julie noticed that on the frosted window, there was a shadow. She tapped on Katy’s shoulder

and pointed to it. It waved at them and wrote HELP! on the window pane.

After that they ran to the bus stop and went home.

That night at dinner Julie told her mom about the shadow on the window. And she told her about the suspicious man at Mary's house. Since Julie's mom was a police detective, she could take action.

The next day Julie's mom went to Mary's house and asked the man a few questions. When she got home she told Julie all about it. The man was her husband, but he trapped her. He did not say why. They found Mary. She was exactly where Julie had thought someone was. The shadow in the window was Mary. After her mom told her, Julie called Katy and told her all of the details. And that was that: the end of that mystery. There is no doubt that there will be more!

The Impossible Mystery

*There is no clean answer to what is going on at Long Beach. A contest to solve a messy puzzle brings three boys to the case in **THE IMPOSSIBLE MYSTERY**, by **Luke Almeter**.*

There was a mystery that couldn't be solved. Some said it was impossible, but others thought they could solve it. It was the mystery of the tipped over trash cans.

Jon, Harry, and Fred's parents were sitting at Jon's house watching TV when they saw a breaking news report for the mystery of Long Beach. It said there would be a sign-up in two days. Jon's dad, Mike, said, "Let's go see if the kids can solve it and get the money."

On the day of sign up they drove over and signed up. A few days later they were watching the TV again. A news bulletin popped up: "People can't seem to solve the mystery of the tipped over trash cans at Long Beach."

Then night came, and Jon's mom drove Jon, Harry, and Fred to Bob Dombrowski's Long Beach for a five-night mystery trip. After three hours and one stop at Burger King for lunch they reached the beach.

The first night was rapidly approaching, and the kids were done unpacking. They noticed that the cabin was very small, and that it will be hard to fit in it.

Nightfall was upon them, and there were many people having campfires, walking, and setting off fireworks.

Then Jon remembered that he had a light-up Frisbee. He took it out and they all started to play with it. Later, they went back inside the cottage and prepared for the night.

When everyone was in bed the kids tried to stay up all night and watch the trash can. The first night the kids could not stay up, and in the morning the cans were tipped over. The second, third, and fourth nights brought the same thing. But on the fifth night Jon woke up and went outside to get a drink of water. He saw something moving on the porch.

First, he saw a black and white tail, and then the whole body. "Ahh!" he said. He saw a skunk. He ran back into the cottage, leaving the water bottle behind. He woke up all the others. "Harry! Fred! Get up! I think I know what's tipping over the trash cans and making a mess of this beach!" said Jon.

They all ran over to the door and watched. Then they saw it! But it had a bag on its head. They were laughing so hard after this that all three of them fell over. The skunk was running, dodging, ducking, and dipping through the porch and hit just about everything on the porch. Then it finally got off the porch. As they watched it all happen the skunk ran so fast and so hard he knocked over all of the trash cans as far as they could see. When they saw him again all the way back at the porch he had the bag on his body and not his head anymore.

Jon thought of a way to get the skunk away. He opened the door and closed it so hard that it sounded as loud as a gunshot. That skunk got so scared. It ran all the way into the lake, never to be seen again!

All the people there thanked them so much. They brought in the trucks and loaded them with all the trash. The trucks hauled all of it off. A week later the guys got their check.

The news channel said that the mystery of the tipped over trash cans had been solved. Every morning from then on the trash cans were never tipped over at Long Beach.

They went back home. The next day they were at Jon's house watching TV. Another news bulletin popped up. "No one can seem to solve the mystery of the missing weights at Muscle Beach." Jon said, "Do you want to go?"

All three of them were thinking the same thing. Then they all said it. "Here we go again."

The Last Queen Alive

*When the Queen of England is kidnapped, a group of young detectives goes to work. In **THE LAST QUEEN ALIVE** by **Shelby Clay**, youth is not obstacle to success.*

Hello, my name is Elizabeth. I'm eleven years old, and I live in England. The Queen of England, who has ruled for fifty years, was kidnapped. The royal family is very worried about her disappearance, so they hired my friends and me to solve the case of the missing queen.

The next day my friends and I started our task. We started by looking around the palace for clues. We found five clues. The first clue we found was the queen's crown in the royal makeup room. The crown was missing three diamonds. Next we found the shoe the queen was wearing when she was last seen, and beside it was a white glove. The glove looked too big for her hand, so we suspected that it must have been left by the kidnapper. The last clue we found was a ransom letter. The ransom letter stated, "Pay us five million dollars, or you will never see the queen again."

My team and I decided to question the royal family about the queen's disappearance. We began our round of questions by asking the family when and where the queen was last seen. They all responded with the same answer, stating that she was last seen with the butler in the makeup room preparing for the ball. We also wanted to find out from the family if the queen had any enemies. One by one they all mentioned that the

queen had recently fired the chef, who happens to be the butler's wife.

After all the information we received from the royal family, our next course of action would be to question the butler. The butler was acting very strangely. He was constantly changing his story, denying that he had seen her in the royal makeup room. The butler stuttered, was sweating, and almost fainted when we mentioned that we had found a white glove that was left at the scene. We became suspicious and thought we might be close to closing the case. We decided to let him go, but to stay hot on his trail and see if he led us to the queen.

After questioning, the butler went into a secret room inside the palace. Inside the room was his wife, and they began to argue. The butler was upset because he feared we were closing in on the caper. The chef was upset because she thought they should have asked for more money.

The queen was sitting in a corner in a chair, bound and gagged. The butler and the chef were arguing so much that they didn't see us sneak into the room. We cut the ropes off the queen and quietly escorted her out of the room.

We called the police and informed them that the queen had been rescued and was safe at the royal palace. When the police arrived we took them into the secret room where we found the queen. The butler and his wife were frantically searching the room for the queen when the police arrived. The police arrested the butler and his wife for kidnapping the queen.

The next morning there was a special celebration to honor our little detective agency. All of the townspeople came to celebrate the return of their queen and our quick and clever investigating. When we were interviewed all we could say was, "The butler always does it."

Locker Notes

*Meg is just trying to survive middle school. Then she finds creepy notes in her locker. See where that leads in **LOCKER NOTES**, by *Kristina Satullo*.*

“It is sooo cold outside and the bus is late. If I stayed out there any longer I’d have frostbite,” I told my best friend Jenny as I took a seat next to her on the bus.

“You are lucky you’re one of the last stops. The bus driver just turned the heat on,” said Jenny.

“I am so nervous because today we get our science test back,” I told her. Just then the bus pulled up in front of the school. I pushed my way out of the bus and hurried through the mob of people in the hallway to get to my locker. I met Jenny at her locker, and we went to social studies.

“Meg, why are you so nervous about getting back the science test?” Jenny asked me in class. Just then the bell rang. Mr. L hates it when kids talk out of turn, so I quickly wrote a note to Jenny. Since she sits in front of me, we pass notes a lot. My note said “because I always get bad grades in science and I will probably get a C-.”

After the bell rang I had to run to the dreaded science class, my second hour. Going to science class from social studies feels like running across a football field. But first, I had to stop at my locker.

When I opened my locker, a note fell out. It said:

*You will get an A on your test.
I saw your test because we look
so much alike he got confused
and gave me your test.*

That was a weird note. I don't know anyone who dots their i's with hearts.

I hurried to science class. I didn't worry about the note. The person probably didn't mean to give it to me. Besides, I had a test to worry about.

When the tests got handed out I slowly looked at my paper. My face must have turned pale, or I looked really surprised. Well, at least something like that must have happened, because I noticed that half of the class was staring at me with weird looks. I had just got my first A on a science test! Just then I remembered the note. It was right.

DING went the bell. I nearly jumped out of my seat. Science went by really fast today. Off I went to Spanish with a smile of improvement on my face.

I love Spanish because it is one of the only subjects that I am good at, and we never get homework. Through Spanish, all I thought about was my A.

After Spanish I went to my locker to get my lunch box. I found another note in my locker. This one said:

*There will be a sub teacher in
math this afternoon.*

How did this person know who my math teacher was and what level I'm in? Nobody I know in my math class dots their i's with hearts. I didn't tell my friends about the notes because I didn't know enough about what was happening.

I couldn't wait until math. And I don't even like math because it stresses my brain. Today was different. I wanted to see if there was a sub teacher. Somehow the note was right. Lucky for us our sub teacher let us play math games.

I didn't get any more notes for the rest of the day. Since I only had work in two subjects I was able to look at the notes when I got home. I took out my magnifying glass and looked at them. All the notes were folded in half two times. All the letters were written in pink ink and in cursive. Just by looking at the notes I could tell they were written by a girl.

The next day at school the strange notes continued. When I got to school there was a note taped to my locker. It said:

*My mom told me there will be a
fire drill in third hour.*

I figured this note was just a practical joke. How would someone know when we would have a fire drill?

Sure enough, there was a fire drill in third hour. (This upset me because I missed most of Spanish.) I got another note in my locker after I got back from lunch. This one said there would be a pop quiz in math on dividing and multiplying fractions. This note was written in symbols, so it took me some time to unscramble it. When I finally figured out what it meant, I decided to use this knowledge and study for the math quiz. Thank goodness I studied at noon recreation! The note was right. We had a pop quiz. If I hadn't studied, my head would have been spinning in confusion.

After school I looked at all four of my notes. Then I decided to tell Jenny about the notes. Jenny lives two blocks away from my house and can easily walk over. I called her, and ten minutes later she was in my room looking at my notes.

“Jenny,” I said, “all these notes have the same ink and handwriting.”

Jenny said, “This is weird. Who is she, and how does she know all this stuff? Maybe she can see into the future or she can read people’s minds! But then how does she know you? Maybe she’s been following you around all school year!” Words of excitement kept pouring out of Jenny’s mouth.

One week passed, and every day I got two or three notes in my locker. I still didn’t have any idea who wrote them.

One day after lunch I saw Sarah talking to a girl. She had blond hair that came down to mid-back and blue eyes. Her hair was perfectly straight, and the sides were pulled back. This wasn’t strange at first because I saw her talking to Sarah a lot. Except last week, I only saw her occasionally when she walked past my locker. She hadn’t been talking to Sarah much. Just so you know, Sarah is the girl whose locker is next to mine. She is super smart and gets A’s and A+’s on everything.

That night I realized something really strange. The girl talking to Sarah looks just like her.

I woke up happy that morning because it was Friday. When I got to school I found another note. So far I have 17 notes, so this is my 18th one. This one said:

*Meet me in the library at lunch
rec. to do our s.studies h.w.*

Before I went to social studies I slipped Jenny a note. It said, “Let’s see who wrote the note so meet me in the library at rec.”

I met Jenny in the library and informed her about everything. She was so excited about meeting the person.

Jenny's been reading Nancy Drew books since fourth grade, so she thinks this is a big mystery.

Then I saw her, the one who wrote the notes. All of a sudden it hit me. Sarah's friend wrote the notes! She must have put the notes in my locker by mistake.

I walked towards her, and Jenny followed me over. I was somewhat nervous because I hate talking to people I don't know. I sat down next to her and said, "Hi, I'm Meg. My locker is next to Sarah's, and I think you put these in my locker by accident." I pulled the notes out of my coat pocket.

"I'm Jessica. Yes, those are my notes. I must have put them in your locker by mistake. I was giving them to Sarah. Sorry. I'll try not to put any more in your locker. If I do put any in your locker, you can put them in my locker. My locker number is 1046."

"My locker number is 1222, and Sarah's is 1223, so they are easy to get mixed up." Just then the bell rang. Off I was to my next class.

After fourth hour I got a note. I thought she would stop getting us mixed up. When I read the note I found it was no mistake that it was put in my locker. This one said,

*Sorry for causing you
any trouble or
confusion. I'll try to
remember to put my
name on my notes.
Jessy*

After school Jenny sat with me on the bus and asked me questions about the notes. I didn't see why she wanted to know these things because they didn't matter anymore. But Jenny is always curious.

“How did she know you would get an A on your test?”

“Well, I guess it was just luck. I did study pretty hard.”

“And, um, how did she know there was a fire drill?” I knew this because earlier on I asked Jessy the same question. I didn’t know if Jessy would want me telling people because it sounds kind of embarrassing. See, she gets scared of loud noises. Whenever there is a fire drill the office informs her earlier. I just said I wasn’t sure, and she should ask her yourself.

Jenny kept asking questions the whole way home, and I knew all the answers.

“I think Jessy is pretty cool,” Jenny said. “Well, see you tomorrow.”

The more I thought about it, it was strange how everything Jessy said came true. I had a lot of fun experiencing this mystery, even though it caused me some frustration. I can’t wait until school on Monday. Maybe there will be a new mystery to experience. I kept that in my mind as I walked through the deep layers of snow on my way home from my bus stop.

Lost

*A little girl leaves her house without her family knowing. Love and compassion among family members are important components of **LOST**, by **Emily Rondello**.*

“Lucy, you have to come over and see my new iPod,” my sister Lucinda’s friend Carly Wilson said on the phone. “My iPod has a red cover and has six gigabytes.” Lucinda told Carly that she would come over sometime to see her new iPod.

My little sister is eight years old, and her friend Carly has *everything* you could ever want.

After Lucy hung up the phone, my mom came into her room and said, “Aunt Sara is coming to baby-sit tomorrow because Heather, Chloe, Dad and I are going to a party for big kids and mommies and daddies.” It was then Lucy’s bedtime, so we all went in to say goodnight.

The next morning, all four of us left for the party right when Aunt Sara arrived.

The party went on for hours and didn’t end until 3:00 p.m. The party had started at 10:00 a.m., and it was a fun party for my family and me. Heather stayed there for a slumber party while the rest of us went home.

When we arrived at home, we saw Aunt Sara looking out the window. She looked like she had fainted, knocked out her teeth, stood back up, put the teeth back in, and smiled out the window. I didn’t want to go inside because whenever Aunt

Sara looks like that it means something terrible has happened, and I was afraid it was about Lucinda.

Sure enough, it was about Lucinda. “I’m sorry,” Aunt Sara said, “I didn’t mean to lose her. She just disappeared, and I couldn’t find her anywhere.” I could not understand a word she said because she sobbed in between each syllable. She repeated herself and I finally understood. I ran out of the door right when she finished her sentence, and I yelled at the top of my lungs, “LUCY!” There was no answer.

I ran to the tree house in our backyard where she always goes. She wasn’t there. I went to the house again and said, “Call the police.”

While I went to other places she liked, Mom, Dad and Aunt Sara talked to the police as they arrived.

The next place I stopped was the neighborhood playground where Lucy always played when she was happy. She wasn’t there. I looked at our neighborhood swim club, but she wasn’t there either. I had no idea where to look next. I walked home silently with cold, wet tears running down my cheeks. I couldn’t talk or make crying noises. I just sobbed quietly on the way home.

I walked into the house. The policemen and Aunt Sara were gone.

The next day we went to pick up Heather at the party and didn’t tell her about Lucy until we got home. She wouldn’t leave her bedroom for the rest of the day once we told her about what had happened.

Two days went by, and there was no sign of Lucy. Both days I cried for hours. I couldn’t help it.

And suddenly, on the second day, we received the best news of our lives. I’ll never forget my mom’s words: “Carly’s parents called us to tell us that Lucy is there!”

Carly's house! I ran as fast as I could, skipping over the cracks in the sidewalk. I got there pretty fast, but the policemen beat me there. They were walking out of the house with Lucy in their arms. I ran up and grabbed Lucy out of their arms. I ran her home as fast as I could with the police following right behind me. They were yelling at me. I didn't care. I was so glad that I had Lucy with me.

We talked about what she did wrong when we got home. What had happened is that Lucy went to Carly's house to see her new iPod and slept over for a long time. My parents were upset with her for leaving without permission, but they would talk about that with her later. They were just glad she was home.

The Missing Diamond

*In **THE MISSING DIAMOND** by Megan Van Ermen, four cousins go to their cottage and learn about a family mystery. They become determined to solve it.*

Every year when one of the Van Ermens turns ten, he or she goes to the family cottage. The Van Ermens' cottage is very old. Their great-great-great grandfather built it about one hundred years ago. Now every time one of the Van Ermens turns ten, that child goes to the cottage for one week to spend time with his or her grandma. This year four girls had the chance to go.

Right after unpacking the first night, at dinner their grandma told them about a family secret that everyone learns about at age ten. The secret was that about one hundred years ago when the cottage was first built, their great-great-great grandmother had a special diamond. The diamond was hidden in a special place. She wrote a clue to help people find it. She hid this diamond because she knew that she was going to die, and she didn't trust anyone else with this very special diamond. Though almost the whole family looked, no one could find it. The clue was:

Under the birch tree right next to the river the diamond is hidden to keep it safe from all.

Right after dinner that night the girls went looking. After a while when it was getting dark they stopped looking.

Early in the next morning they went right to work again. The first thing they looked for was a river with a birch tree next to it. After looking for about an hour they found the tree. Then they started digging under it. They dug and they dug, but all they could find were a bunch of rocks.

After about three hours of digging, one of the cousins dropped one of the rocks. All of a sudden a diamond flew out. The girls were so happy.

Before thinking of what to do, they ran home to their grandma to tell them about the diamond. Then each called her family about it.

After a while of thinking of what to do, they decided to hide it again and leave another clue with it. The four girls became family legends after that.

Molly's Malt Shop

*In a desperate attempt to help find her missing parents, a young girl risks a visit to—the malt shop? It's strange, but true, in **MOLLY'S MALT SHOP**, by Tessa Rose Passarelli.*

“Here we are, in beautiful southeast Michigan, where, as some of you know, the detectives Maybel and Horn are missing. In fact...” There wasn't any more, because a 12-year-old girl got out of bed, stretched, and hit the button on her alarm clock.

“Those detectives have been missing for a loooonngg time. I wonder what, or who, took them!” she exclaimed.

This young girl was Sylvia Goldrod, the youngest detective in the U.S.A. She worked on cases that weren't life-threatening, but little did she know in three hours she would go on a journey that would either save the U.S.A., or change it to D.E.F.

Sylvia ran down the steps of her four-story house, and with her bedroom being on the top floor, she had a long way to go. When she stepped into the kitchen, she was expecting to see her mom joyfully baking food, and her dad reading the paper at the table, voicing his opinion on everything from sports to prices on houses. Out in the kitchen she found nothing but the counters, an unusually messy table, and the cold, hard appliances. She frowned; something did not seem right.

She ran across every inch of the house, crying, calling for her parents, but the only thing she could hear was her echo

across the halls. She stepped back into the kitchen, which was the same as before. Her detective instinct finally kicked in, and she noticed something she had not noticed before—a red note stuck to the fridge with a sunshine magnet (which was weird, considering the note attached).

Your parents are in
jail for robbing
banks and stores;
you might see them
again, but maybe
not.

**BUT DO NOT
INVESTIGATE
THIS CASE!**

From your friends
at Molly's

I stared, quietly amazed. What mastermind leaves behind a note saying what they've done? I quickly made two phone calls. One was to the police, telling them what happened, and the other was to my nearest relatives, my Aunt Harshena, my Uncle "Taffy" Todd, and my two baby cousins, Johan and William.

Fifteen minutes later, my aunt and uncle took me to their two-story house. My aunt buzzed around me, making me tell her all the details I knew, which weren't a lot.

"Your parents didn't leave anything, a hint or something?" Uncle Taffy asked.

Once again, I remembered something from that morning. “Why, yes, they did. The table was messy, and mom loves clean tables, so they must have been snatched while they ate.”

My uncle scratched his chin. “This doesn’t make any sense,” he said.

My aunt said, “Todd, perhaps we should call your brother, Murphy.” I nodded. My Uncle Murphy is one of the best police officers, and he could help with the disappearance of my parents. We rang him up, and then we hopped into the car and drove back to my house.

My uncle brought three other policemen with him, and they went from top to bottom of the house three times. I looked around, too. I decided that a clue could be in the bedroom, in case the intruders decided to take something valuable from the room.

I went up to their room. In it, I found nothing but a turned-down bed, two drawn curtains, and a jacket on the...wait! My dad has never left a jacket on the ground in his life, ever.

I ran to it and searched around in it. I found a fifty-dollar bill, his wallet, a receipt for Molly’s Malt Shop, and a purple flower. Wait; did I just say *Molly’s Malt Shop*? I took the receipt out again. It said:

<i>Molly’s Malt Shop</i> 1389 Wood Brook Lane	
Chocolate malt	\$4.50
Vanilla milk shake	\$5.00
2 hot dogs	\$6.75
Tax	\$0.90
Total	\$17.15

I looked it over many times, but still I didn't understand how someone in a nice malt shop, well, could kidnap my parents. I finally decided to go to this malt shop and see what was up. But I'd have to ask my aunt.

I kept asking and pleading with my aunt to take me, but she kept saying, "No. You think I'm letting you go out alone somewhere with a mad person on the loose?" Finally she agreed I could go, but Uncle Taffy had to come with me.

We finally got there, and the place was overflowing with people. It didn't look like an evil place; actually it was quite nice. It was like a cottage. It was a white structure about three stories high and a blue roof.

We entered a place that resembled the mall. It had a sign showing where we should go for specific stores and names. But the names were like "Chicken.com" and "Malt Mania." My uncle and I stood there for two minutes, completely dumbfounded. We then realized we looked like idiots, and rushed upstairs to "Shake land." It looked like a regular diner—nothing special. My uncle and I sat at a booth, where a smiling, black-haired waiter with glassy eyes came over to us.

"Helloooooo, I'm Mary, and I'll be with you today," she said. My uncle ordered a vanilla shake, and I got a chocolate shake. As soon as I took a sip, I felt weird, like I was floating on the moon. At first it was pleasant, but then I felt like there was a voice inside of me, telling me to do something. I then dropped to the floor, and everything went black.

I remembered waking up in a soft, squashy bed. I saw the smiling face of my aunt hovering above me.

"Well, look, Sleeping Beauty has woken up!" she chuckled. I smiled sleepily, and then asked what had happened.

"Well," said my aunt, "you did everything! You came back at 3:45 in the morning, waking everyone up. You and your uncle were laughing like a cow, carrying huge shopping

bags. When I yelled at you two, you both yelled back, and ran off muttering something about a general.”

I stammered, “But, we didn’t, we didn’t, something must have been in that milkshake we had...”

But my aunt cut me off. “I don’t want to hear any of that. Now you and your uncle will have to work the rest of the day for your punishment,” she said sternly.

I flopped back on my pillow. What had I done? What was *in* that malt? I had to find out. But my aunt said after lunch (which was in one minute) that Uncle Taffy and I would have to work cleaning the house as our punishment.

We finished at 6:09. My aunt then gave me another stern talking to at dinner, and an extra half-hour after I cleaned the kitchen.

By the time I finally got to the store, it was starting to get dark. I ran in past the lady at the desk into the malt world. When I got there, all the waitresses looked at me through cold eyes. I slid into a booth. One of them came over with a strawberry shake. I stammered, “Excuse me, madam, I have some”

I didn’t get to finish. They ran to me, held me down, and the shake was forced in my mouth. It was the same feeling as before; floating, burning, and then everything went bl...

I woke up about an hour later. I was in a small cell, like a prison cell, with iron bars all around. I looked wildly around me. I was on a cold, hard bench, with small, tight ropes wrapped around my scarred hands. Before I could even think about anything, a guard came in, took me out, and led me to a huge room. In the middle were four chairs. In one chair there was a tall, black-haired woman with big green eyes. In the other chair was a short man with blue eyes. THE MISSING DETECTIVES! In the other chair was another woman. This one had straight blond hair, and big grey eyes.

She looked terrified. The other chair was vacant, probably waiting for me.

In the middle was another man, with oily brown hair, brown eyes, and an evil look on his face. When he saw me, he smiled.

“Ahh, you must be Sylvia. Yes, I’ve heard all about you. My name is Dr. Elliot Feldspar,” he hissed. As he said this, I was led to a chair and tied into it. He walked around the circle.

“Well, Sylvia, we were just saying why we’re here. These two...”—he pointed at the detectives— ...were way too nosy. They snooped around too much like you. I couldn’t have anyone reveal my secret! Last, well, you’ve never heard of her. This is Tiffany Paraná, a new poet,” he said.

Okay, I thought. This guy is now going to tell us he’s going to do something to us, so he’ll tell us what his plan is.

As if on cue, Feldspar said, “I am going to make you all my minions, so here’s my plan.”

DR. FELDSPAR’S AMAZING PLAN!

By: Dr. Elliot Feldspar

- Step One: Make a malt shop where the drinks and food are enchanted so that I don’t get caught when they steal stuff.
- Step Two: Make a machine that will make the whole U.S.A. my minions.
- Step Three: Change “U.S.A.” to “D.E.F.”

“Why that?” asked Horn Elliot.

“It’s my initials, and don’t interrupt. Haven’t you heard that before?” Then he continued with his plan.

- Step Four: Steal poem from poet before making the world mine. Then get \$500,000,000,000.
- Step Five: I will use the money to make the world my minions with my minion gun. This is a gun that instantly shoots in the air a gas substance like my milkshakes.
- Step Six: Change world name to Dr. Feldsparland.
- Step Seven: Rule world and relax.

He looked very triumphant. “You will now be escorted back to your cells until tomorrow, which is when I will get the money for the poem I’m sending in,” he said. He told his helper, Janet, to lead us back.

As we walked, the three of the detectives talked nervously. Janet waited until we were out of earshot of the doctor, then said, “I’ll help you defeat Dr. Elliot.”

We stared at Janet; she was Dr. Elliot’s assistant. Why did she want to destroy him? As if Janet could read our minds, she answered, “That guy has been pushing me around too long. He said this would help the economy, but it only helps him. So he needs to go down, even if it means taking me down with him,” she said.

We all stared in amazement. Could this girl risk a life in prison, just to bring someone down? We didn’t hesitate, and said yes. Even though we weren’t sure yet, Janet told us the plan, and this is what happened.

Janet led us back to the cells, but then made a detour to the security room. She said to every guard, “The prisoners are ready for brainwashing in room k12. (None of them knew that the room was in the other direction, and it wouldn’t be ready for another nine days.) We snuck into the security room. We then hid behind the door until five guards came in,

and we hit them so hard, they were knocked out for two hours. We stole their uniforms.

Then Janet went to Dr. Elliot's room, yelling, "The prisoners have escaped!" When he yelled at her for not going after them, she explained, "They gave me a black eye, and then ran off." (It was really paint from the guards' uniforms.) She then said, "I saw them running to the map room to try to find an escape door."

Dr. Elliot Feldspar screamed, "Everyone go to the map room, or you're fired!" Then we left from the computer room, where he just was.

We saw the poem was half loaded. Luckily, Detective Horn knew how to hack into computers, so we changed everything so Tiffany would get credit. We then contacted the police, and then got back to the room before Dr. Feldspar got back to the room. Before he got back, the police came and arrested him, and also included the unconscious guards. They arrested Janet, too, but we got them to make it five years instead of ten years.

Finally, that nutty Dr. Elliot was caught! He was sentenced to a life in prison for trying to rule the world and make people do what he wanted.

I explained to an officer at the front what had happened and asked if I could get my parents. They filled out a bunch of papers and said it was okay, as long as an officer came with me. I ran down and found my parents; they were cold, hungry, and confused. When they saw me, they pelted me with questions. And then they were free. They got out and I told them my story.

Apparently, the poem was only worth \$500, but Tiffany was so happy that I saved her poem that she gave me half the money from her winning poem, and she invited us to come to her house any time. My parents also explained the messy table and jacket on the floor. Apparently, the spell of the

milkshake had hit them again while my mom was cleaning the table and my dad was getting ready for the day.

We three, my mom, my dad, and me, happily walked towards Tiffany's house, where we were invited. It was a two-story yellow house with pretty white trim. She was out front, raking leaves. When she saw us, she dropped the rake and ran towards us.

"William, Sanara, and Sylvia, welcome. Do come in, please," she tweeted. We walked into her neat living room with sky blue walls and green curtains.

"I've always loved nature, so I made this room like the outdoors," she explained. She asked if we were thirsty, and we admitted we were. She went and mixed some hot chocolate together. Then, before I could stop myself, as soon as she gave me the mug, I blurted out, "What's the award-winning poem Dr. Elliot Feldspar was talking about?" I asked.

Janet laughed her warm laugh and said, "I'd love to show you all." We all followed her up a narrow passage into a small, floral room overlooking the forest in her backyard. In a gold frame was the poem:

*Fluffy, silver snow falls as the wind blows
Soft golden light shows the way
But the jewel of this crop
Is nothing compared
To the soft laughter of children's play.*

My Lips Are Sealed

*An autistic boy is the only witness in the murder of his mother. It's up to him to overcome his silent condition and tell what truly happened in **MY LIPS ARE SEALED** by Lexi Wehbe.*

Click, clack, click, clack. Ralph awoke to the violent rattling of the doorknob. He was lying next to his mother on the couch in their one-story house. Ralph grabbed his mother's hand and held it tight.

"Ralph, what is it, sweetheart?" his mother asked with her concerned face on.

Ralph stared at his mother blankly. He became stressed, because he was confused and didn't know how to express himself.

"Oh, Ralph, please don't cry, it's okay," she said, hugging him tightly.

There it was again. *Click, clack, click, clack.*

Ralph mimicked the sound. Although he isn't very good at talking, Ralph can repeat almost every sound he hears about the same.

"The trees? Is that what you're afraid of?" his mother said, sounding relieved.

Ralph repeated the sound. His mother let out a quiet laugh.

"Don't worry. It's just the trees and the thunderstorm outside. Everything is okay. Just go back to sleep."

Ralph's mother motioned sleep just to make sure he understood. A minute or two passed; Ralph fell asleep next to his mother.

Click, clack, click, clack. Ralph awoke again. He didn't believe his mother. Ralph knew that the sound was not the trees or the storm. He sat up and faced his mother, but she was fast asleep.

Just then, Ralph heard the door crack open. Ralph turned his head in all directions getting confused and scared. He had no idea what to do. Ralph decided the best thing to do was to go to his favorite place, behind the couch.

When Ralph gets goose bumps, you know he is panicking or confused. And there they were, all along his arms.

Ralph heard steps. Someone or something was coming his way. Ralph knew this because the footsteps caused a squeak. That squeak was something that Ralph always noticed. There was one particular floorboard that was placed incorrectly in the entranceway. Every time someone steps on that floorboard, it makes a squeak.

The footsteps got closer and closer. Ralph peered over the couch and saw a tall man with blond hair, wearing jeans and a black t-shirt. Ralph lowered his eyes just enough so his eyes were level with the top of the couch. Ralph looked at the man's face intently. He couldn't help but stare at the scar that was on the left side of the man's chin.

The man turned towards the couch, and Ralph slammed his head against the couch and slid his head down the side.

Before Ralph had time to do anything came *BANG! BANG! BANG!* Then he heard steps scurrying away.

This sound was new to Ralph, and got him excited. He crawled out from behind the couch to see how his mother reacted to the sound and to find out what happened.

But when Ralph turned to face his mother, he didn't see eyes watching him; he didn't see her sitting up trying to

explain what just happened. What Ralph saw was much worse than that. He saw his mother lying lifelessly on the couch.

Every part of Ralph's body began to heat up. The room started to spin; he took big breaths and screamed. The scream was heard all throughout the neighborhood.

Ralph reached for his mother's hand and felt the coldness that lay inside of it. That is when Ralph realized that he would never see his mother's smile again. He would never hear her telling him his favorite stories over and over again. He now knew that she would never be there to comfort him when things got hard. *He knew.*

The door slammed open, and Ralph crawled behind the couch, confused, sad and not knowing what to do.

"This is the police," Ralph heard with sirens in the background. Ralph did what he did best. He repeated the sounds of the siren.

Ralph stood up and stared at the policeman and began making all the sounds he heard tonight that made an impact on him. "*CLICK, CLACK. BANG! SQUEAK. WEE WOOW! BANG!*" Ralph said.

"Young man...." The policeman's words trailed off as he looked at the couch in astonishment.

The sounds and images of his mother raced through Ralph's head. He plopped down on the floor and began to cry.

"Did you do this? What happened here?" the policeman said, still in shock.

As it turns out, Mrs. Larson, the next-door neighbor, had called the police, reporting that she had heard gunshots coming from Ralph's house.

The night went on with the police calling Ralph's aunt to the house to try and get Ralph to answer questions about what happened. But nothing came out of Ralph's mouth. You

could tell by the look on his face that he was screaming something out on the inside.

Investigators put caution tape all around the house and room. They took away the body for testing.

“Ralph is autistic! He rarely speaks to anyone besides his mother and therapist or people he has been around his whole life,” Ralph’s Aunt Linda explained.

“We would like to set up a meeting with Ralph and his therapist tomorrow to see if she can get anything out of him,” the policeman suggested.

“Okay,” Aunt Linda said, feeling she had no choice.

“Ellie, are you ready to go?” Mr. Jackson yelled up the stairs.

“Be down in a minute, Dad,” she called back.

Ellie’s dad is an investigator on the murder of Ralph’s mother.

Ellie put her shoes on and got in the car.

“So, Dad, is anyone else bringing their child to Bring-Your-Child-to-Work-Day?” Ellie asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied.

“So what is your case on this time?” she asked.

“Yesterday, a woman was found shot dead in her house. Her nine-year-old son Ralph was found alive at the scene. When I arrived the boy was making all sorts of sounds. He is autistic, and today we will go to his therapist’s office with him to see if his therapist can get him to say anything about what happened. But you are not allowed inside, so I am going to have to ask you to just wait outside while we work with him,” he answered.

“How do they know Ralph didn’t do it?” Ellie wondered.

“There was no gun for him to have used,” he said.

They arrived at the therapist’s office, and the sign on the desk said “Mrs. Samuels.”

Mr. Jackson left Ellie in the hallway, and he walked into the room. He saw Ralph sitting in the corner of the room. Mrs. Samuels had a video camera to document the session.

For about an hour they tried to get Ralph to talk and failed. They tried drawing, games, and just talking, but nothing worked.

"I don't understand. He had been making such good progress lately," Mrs. Samuels told Mr. Jackson.

Mr. Jackson and Mrs. Samuels walked to the hallway.

"Ellie, I need to speak with Mrs. Samuels privately. Please go watch Ralph for a moment. AND DON'T LET HIM OUT OF YOUR SIGHT," he ordered.

"Don't worry, Dad, I've got this," Ellie said confidently.

When they left the room, Ralph did the same as he had been doing all hour. He looked out the window.

"Hi," Ellie said.

Ralph quickly turned his head and waved, then looked away.

"I...am...so...sorry...about...your...mom," she said as if Ralph spoke a completely different language.

And here came the sounds.

"*Click. Clack. SQUEAK. BANG! WEE WOO!*" he said.

"Bang? Click clack? What went bang?" Ellie said, confused.

Ralph pointed to his chin and scratched a line across it with his finger.

Just then Mrs. Samuels and Mr. Jackson walked back into the room. Ralph immediately turned toward the window and got quiet.

"Dad! Come here," Ellie said anxiously.

"What is it?" he asked.

"While you were in the hall, I said, 'Sorry about your mom' to Ralph, and then he began to make crazy sounds, like bang, click, clack, squeak, and wee woo!" Ellie began.

“Really?” Mr. Jackson asked.

“Then I said, ‘What went bang?’ And he scratched a line on his chin.”

Mr. Jackson and Ellie then explained it to Mrs. Samuels.

“I want to try something,” Mrs. Samuels said, “Here are coloring paper and games. Do whatever you can to make him talk. He only seems to respond to you,” Mrs. Samuels explained.

“Ellie, if things get out of control, come and get me,” he said.

They left the room, and Ralph and Ellie were alone once again.

Ellie took the drawing paper and colored pencils, kneeled down beside Ralph, and looked him in the eyes, trying to send a friendly message.

“Ralph, would you like to draw me a picture?” Ellie motioned drawing a picture.

“Yes,” he replied.

Ellie was so excited she almost screamed! HE SPOKE. He actually said a word.

“Draw me a picture of what happened yesterday.”

Ralph began drawing a picture of a man with a dot on his chin, blond shaggy hair, blue pants, and a black shirt. Ralph was a very talented artist, much more advanced than your average nine-year-old. Ellie now realized that Ralph had been trying to describe what the man looked like the first time they were alone.

Ellie went into the hall and brought the adults in to explain. Mr. Jackson and Ellie went to the police station to profile the man Ralph drew. Mr. Jackson found one man who was very much like the man Ralph drew: Anthony J. Walker.

Profile of Anthony J. Walker

Gender: Male
Age: 32
Height: 6'0"
Weight: 175 lbs.
Caught: Yesterday with gun at
supermarket on Skyway
Avenue.

“Ellie, I think I found the man,” he said.

“OH! YOU’RE RIGHT! The man did have a gun, so it might be him!” Ellie said, jumping up and down.

Mr. Jackson made some calls. He drove to the jail where the man was being held, and managed to get his hands on the man’s clothes he was originally wearing before he was forced to wear a uniform.

Once a test was done they found out that the blood on the man’s clothes matched Ralph’s mother’s. Walker’s gun used the same bullets as the ones used in the murder. Mr. Jackson was certain that ballistics testing would match the bullets that killed Ralph’s mother with the gun.

The police figured out that the man needs special medication to keep from acting up. He is in jail for life.

Since Ralph’s mother died and his father died when he was two, Ralph was adopted by his aunt, Linda.

Over the next few years Ralph’s progress was incredible. Ralph still missed his mom, but he knows that she will always be with him at heart.

The Mysterious Murder of Mister Fisher

In **THE MYSTERIOUS MURDER OF MISTER FISHER**
by Zach Kalugar, death visits Berkshire Middle School.

One stormy day, buses unloaded students into misty fog in front of Berkshire Middle School. The rain felt like hail hitting their bare skin. A lot of the kids love school, but there is one guy that ruins the whole day for some. Some of the students say he lives in a cave, and some say he lives in a house built of pencils and erasers. Others say he lives in a library with no books but grammar and spelling books. I don't know which one is true, and I don't want to know. Everyone said, "If you don't have a way with spelling words, just use your textbook as a pillow and fall asleep because you won't get anywhere with him." His name is Mr. Fisher (AKA the Language Arts Man).

Before winter break, Mr. Fisher did the undoable and most evil thing ever. Bad spellers all over the school were outraged. He assigned a 100-page essay to be done over break on the letter "A"! A lot of people threatened him.

The bell had just rung and as Mr. Fisher's fifth-period class emptied out of the room on the first day back to school after the winter break, a bolt of lightning jetted down and hit the electrical post. There was a bang and everything went black. The students couldn't even see the person in front of them. Everyone just hustled out of the room.

What they didn't know was that Mr. Fisher would never teach again. He was on the floor, dead, with a trail of blood following out the emergency exit.

The first period class entered the classroom the next day. The room smelled horrible. There in the middle of the room was the pale corpse of the dead Mr. Fisher. There was a series of shrieks, cries, and a lot of running. It was scary! This was a true mystery. How did it all happen? One day he dies, but nobody knows until the next day.

The students were all called to the gym and told not to come to school until further notice. When everyone left, the local and state police were there. They were walking through the building, looking for evidence to give them a clue about who killed Mr. Fisher. There never were any true suspects, or any evidence found. There were too many threats, too many fingerprints, and no eyewitnesses (at least none who were talking). All they found was the bullet that pierced his heart, a knife, and a baseball bat with a name on it that was not legible.

Now it was clear they would never know who killed him, and no one cared. Two weeks later no one acted like they even remembered Mr. Fisher. They just went on with their lives, but from that day forward no teacher assigned more than one page of homework at a time.

The Mystery of the Stolen Basketball

*When a Berkshire student's prized basketball is stolen, the owner calls on supers sleuth Naiz to catch the culprit. Read **THE MYSTERY OF THE STOLEN BASKETBALL** by **Hasnain Mohammad** and follow Naiz as he tracks the clues and cracks the case.*

Once, deep in the heart of winter, Detective Naiz was in his clubhouse, across the school soccer field with his friends Katie, Jessica and Stephan, enjoying a game of Clue. Suddenly, Samantha burst through the door, panting heavily, and screamed out, "My basketball, my basketball! Someone stole my basketball from my locker! It has MJ's and Magic's autograph on it. It was a gift from my parents on my 11th birthday last week and means a lot to me. Can you please find it for me? I heard you are the best detective around."

"Well, thank you, I will work on finding it for you," said Naiz, as he jumped up to grab his jacket. "Will you please show me where you think it was stolen from?" Leaving his friends behind, the young detective walked across the soccer field to the school building with Samantha by his side.

On the way back to school Naiz showered Samantha with questions about her special basketball. After getting the permission of Mrs. Kelmigian, the gym teacher, both Samantha and Detective Naiz entered the locker room from where Samantha's basketball was stolen.

In the locker room, Naiz didn't spare much time and started looking around for evidence. "Hey, look," he said. "Here is a bracelet, but it does not have a name on it. Let's look for more clues, and then we will give the bracelet to Mrs. Kelmigian. Maybe, she will know who it belongs to." As he was pacing the locker room examining the bracelet Detective Naiz spotted a piece of crumpled math homework. He picked it up and signaled Samantha. "Now, we can ask Ms. Yaldo whom this homework belongs to, and that will be our biggest clue," he said.

Detective Naiz had gathered enough clues and was ready to question the teachers. The first person he approached was Mrs. Kelmigian. "Mrs. Kelmigian, does this bracelet look familiar to you? We found this in the locker rooms when we were trying to find clues for Samantha's stolen basketball," said Naiz.

"Yes, I remember a sixth-grader playing with it at gym this morning. He was wearing a red T-shirt. Can you give me a few minutes? I can't think of the boy's name right now," said Mrs. Kelmigian.

The detective and Samantha then headed for Ms. Yaldo's room. A few minutes later they were in Ms. Yaldo's room asking her questions to help them solve the stolen basketball mystery.

"Excuse us, Ms. Yaldo. It is very important. Can you please give us a few minutes of your time?" said Detective Naiz.

"Sure, what is going on?" asked Ms. Yaldo. "Do you want me to review the fractions we did in class today?"

"Ms. Yaldo, it's not fractions. We need your help finding Samantha's basketball. We found this piece of crumpled math homework," said Naiz. "Can you please tell us who did not turn in homework?"

"Yes, I recognize this handwriting. It is Harry Micel's penmanship. He did not turn in his homework today," exclaimed Ms. Yaldo.

Detective Naiz heaved a sigh of relief as he thanked Ms. Yaldo for her timely help and rushed to the gym with Samantha to see Ms. Kelmigian.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Mrs. Kelmigian,” said Detective Naiz. “Did you figure out the bracelet owner’s name?”

“Yes, I remember. It was Harry Micel,” replied Mrs. Kelmigian.

“Thank you, for your help, Mrs. Kelmigian,” said Detective Naiz and Samantha.

“My pleasure. And good luck to both of you,” said Mrs. Kelmigian.

As Detective Naiz and Samantha walked down the hallway, they saw Harry Micel by the cafeteria showing his friends Samantha’s basketball.

Detective Naiz stepped up and said, “Okay, Harry, the game’s up. Can you please return Samantha’s basketball and also apologize to her for giving her a bad time?”

Harry Micel looked sad and ashamed as he walked over to Samantha. He held out her basketball and apologized to her, saying, “Sorry, Samantha, I didn’t mean to give you a bad time. I just adore your basketball and wanted to play with it, and since I was getting late for Engineering Technology I forgot to put your basketball back in the locker or ask your permission if I could play with it.”

“As long as you don’t repeat this again, it’s okay,” said Naiz, and Samantha nodded in agreement as she held onto her basketball.

Samantha was very happy to get her basketball back. She held on to it tightly, and all she said was, “Please do not take any of my things without my permission, or else you will end up in the Principal’s office.”

Undercover Dancer

In UNDERCOVER DANCER by Courtney Furman, the famous dancer Abby Chiller hires a security guard for her dance studio. But the guard has a plan of her own that has nothing to do with keeping Abby safe.

Abby Chiller is a very famous dancer. Abby has been dancing for over 19 years.

One day Abby was walking to her dance studio when she saw police cars parked in front. She became very concerned and began running to the studio. She told the police that she was the owner and asked what was wrong. The police told her that the studio had been broken into. Abby was afraid, and decided to hire a security guard so that she and her students would feel safe. Abby put an ad in the newspaper. It said, "Security guard needed for dance studio. Experience required."

Just the opportunity I've been looking for. This is my chance to get close to Abby Chiller. I have watched Abby dance for many years. She has become the dancer that I have always hoped I would become. Just maybe I can steal her identity. Abby is a well-known dancer that everyone admires. I should have that fame and fortune.

Since Abby is looking for a security guard, I have the perfect idea. I wonder what Abby thinks about a look-alike security guard. All these years of watching Abby dance, I know how to walk and talk like her. I dance as well as Abby also. She won't believe what she will see. All I need to do is gain her trust.

I wonder if Abby will remember me. Abby and I trained at the same dance school when we were ten years old. She always was selected as the lead dancer in all dance recitals. I was never selected as the lead and hated Abby for that reason. I know that I could dance just as well as Abby, but Abby was the most beautiful one. I know she will not recognize me as Angelia Adams, because of all the cosmetic surgeries that I have had. I now look very much like Abby Chiller. My goal is to become Abby Chiller.

Within a week, Abby received over 20 responses to the ad. There was one response that stood out. The response read, "Trained to protect without weapons, uses a variety of techniques and disguises." This interested Abby, so she called the individual for an interview.

When the person arrived for the interview, Abby was very surprised when in walked an Abby look- alike. Abby could not believe her eyes. She had long, black hair and brown eyes just like Abby. She stood the same height and weight as Abby. She even walked like Abby. She also wore the same type of dance outfit as Abby. It was like looking at her reflection in a mirror.

During the interview Angelia introduced herself as Carmen James. She told Abby that she is a dancer and undercover security guard. She dresses as a look-alike for her clients. This is a technique that she uses and it seems to work, confusing the media, photographers and fans. Abby thought, "This makes perfect sense. This could be the perfect disguise for a security guard." Abby liked this idea. It would give her more privacy and help her feel safer. Abby hired Carmen as her look-alike security guard.

Just as I thought: Abby never recognized me as Angelia Adams. Abby wants me to meet her agent Doris so that she knows about the plan. This is working out better than I thought. Abby's agent plans all of Abby's performances. I will just take my time and win Abby's trust. I have waited for over

15 years to be noticed as a great dancer, and if it takes becoming Abby Chiller, then so be it.

“Everything seems to be going well,” Abby thought. “Carmen is working out very well, and my students like her very much. Sometimes they do not know if it is me or Carmen at the dance studio. I must say, Carmen is a really great dancer also.

“I am so excited about the news Doris just told me. I have been asked to be the lead dancer in a dance production in Paris. Maybe Carmen can continue teaching the students at the studio while I’m in Paris. I will ask her tomorrow.”

The next day Carmen and Abby’s agent, Doris, are reviewing Abby’s schedule and appearances. When Abby arrived she was happy that Carmen and Doris were there. She told them about her idea of leaving Carmen in charge of the dance studio and students while she was in Paris.

Later when Doris and Abby were alone, Doris told Abby that she was not sure if she should leave Carmen in charge. “She already thinks and acts like she is Abby Chiller.”

Abby replied, “Only when she needs to act like me. I like Carmen, and I feel that I can trust her.”

“Abby, she is always asking questions about you that I think are not her business. It’s like she needs to know the exact details of your schedule and your plans for Paris.”

I have to get Doris to come to my apartment alone. Abby is planning to leave for Paris on next Saturday. “Oh, hi, Doris. Is everything okay with Abby’s plan to leave me in charge of the dance studio?”

“Well, I think so Carmen. We just need to discuss the dance studio schedule and about security checks with Abby’s house.”

“Sure; why don’t you meet me at my apartment on Tuesday night so that we can go over the details?”

“Ok, Carmen, I will see you then.”

Good. I will get all of the details about Abby's flight, hotel and schedule for Paris. It will be me in Paris and not Abby Chiller.

It's Tuesday night, and Doris arrives at Carmen's apartment. Carmen welcomes Doris in and invites her to have dinner with her. They both tell each other about where they grew up. Of course Carmen does not tell the truth about where she grew up and about attending the same dance school as Abby. She tells Doris that she grew up in New York and attended several dance schools there.

Doris was feeling a little more comfortable with Carmen. They then started talking about Abby's trip to Paris. Doris gave Carmen all the details of the trip. Later Carmen offered Doris a drink. This was her time to work her plan. She planned to put drugs in Doris's drink. This would keep Doris from doing the background check and interfering with her going to Paris.

It wasn't long before Doris was feeling very dizzy and sick. She collapsed, and Carmen dragged her into her bedroom closet. She tied her up and locked the bedroom door. Carmen wasn't worried because the effect of the drugs was powerful, and Doris would not revive for another 24 hours.

Carmen's next step would be to call Abby and pretend to be Doris. Carmen had been listening closely to the way Doris talked, and she could do a good job imitating Doris. She would call Abby on Wednesday morning. She would leave a message at the studio before Abby arrived. The message would say that Doris's mother was ill and that she was on her way to be with her mother.

Now that Doris was out of the way, Carmen thought about her next step. First she would get Doris back to Doris's home and give her more drugs. Next her plan for Abby would be similar to what she did to Doris. She would offer to help Abby pack for Paris. Abby needed to show her how to work the alarm system anyway.

Carmen showed up at Abby's home on Thursday night with dinner. Abby was very happy to see dinner because she had not eaten. They had dinner and afterward begin to arrange Abby's costume and clothes for the trip. Abby talked about how excited she was to be going to Paris. Carmen listened but was thinking that it will be her as the lead dancer in Paris.

They take a break and Carmen offers Abby a drink. Abby accepts because she is suddenly thirsty. An hour later Abby is feeling tired and dizzy. Carmen knows that the drugs are working. Soon Abby will be unconscious and she would tie her up and lock her in the bedroom closet. Carmen would return on Friday night to give Abby another dose of drugs.

Carmen thinks her plan is going well. She thinks to herself that Saturday morning she will be on a private jet headed to Paris. She takes Abby's I.D., passport, and the envelope with information for Paris.

After leaving the studio on Friday, Carmen rushes over to Doris's apartment and finds Doris conscious and confused. She gives her another dose of drugs and leaves. She arrives at Abby's home and hears Abby banging on the closet door. She opens it and Abby motions for help. Carmen tells Abby why she is tied up, and that she was the one that gave her the drugs. Carmen tells Abby that she will be the one going to Paris to perform as Abby Chiller. She then gave Abby more drugs and locked her in the bedroom.

Carmen left and went to her apartment to get ready for her big day. Saturday morning she was on her way to the airport where she would board the private jet. Everyone thought she was Abby Chiller, and she had no problem boarding the jet. Soon she was on her way to Paris.

Meanwhile Doris began to come to in her apartment. She can't really remember how she ended up tied up. She looked at the calendar and she realized it was Saturday. Abby has already left for Paris. She began calling her house phone, but there was

no answer. She thought to call Carmen. Then she remembers the last time she saw Carmen was at her apartment.

Abby remembers Carmen talking about going to Paris. Abby thinks about Doris. She kicks the closet door, and it opens. She rushes to call Doris. Doris answers and is relieved to know it is Abby. They both realize that they had been set up by Carmen. They tell each other about being drugged and locked up.

Abby tells Doris that she is going to call the police and that Doris should check to see if Carmen took the private jet to Paris. Doris began to check her email and found the background check on Carmen. She was surprised at what she read in the report. Carmen also goes by the name Angelia Adams. She was born in Atlanta, Georgia.

Doris called Abby and asks her if Angelia Adams sounds familiar. Abby could not believe her ears. “Yes,” she said, “Angelia and I grow up together. We also went to the same dance school together. She was always jealous of me, and so we never became friends. Angelia was not the prettiest girl growing up and she was teased a lot, but I never thought she would do something like this.

“I must go to the police station so that they can take my statement and get fingerprints.”

They are contacting authorities in Paris. When the jet lands in Paris, Carmen will be greeted by authorities. Doris tells Abby that she will contact the dance production coordinator and let them know what is happening. “We will straighten this out and get the real Abby Chiller to Paris.”

Where's Penny?

*When a puppy goes missing without a trace, the girl who owns her won't give up hope. Eliza is determined to find her dog in **WHERE'S PENNY?**, by Alex Rice.*

There was once a girl named Eliza. She lived in California right on the water. She was tall with dark wavy hair, and she was twelve years old. Her birthday was coming up, and she had really wanted a puppy for the last three years. Her other dog had died of old age. Eliza's parents said that when she was old enough to take care of the dog by herself, she could get one.

The night before, Eliza's parents said that they thought she was really mature. They said, "We talked it over and decided that we are going to let you get a puppy for your thirteenth birthday." Eliza happy danced for about an hour before finally going to bed. Eliza knew exactly where she was going to get her puppy: the pet store on Fourth Street.

Eliza knew the owners of the pet store and the workers there really well. She even had some animal friends that she visited every day. She helped out at the pet store after school for some extra money. There was a boy who she was really good friends with and who she kind of liked. He was four years older than her, though. That was the owner's son. The owners were her mom's friends from high school. Eliza really loved working at the pet store!

Eliza woke up and was getting ready for school. In exactly one week she would be going to the pet store after

school to pick out a puppy. She got so lost in her thoughts that she was startled when her mom shouted up the stairs.

“Hurry up, Eliza! You’re going to miss the bus!”

She dashed down the stairs, grabbed some breakfast, and kissed mom goodbye. Eliza ran out the door just in time to see the bus turning down her street.

It was a hot, sunny day, so she knew the bus was going to be hotter inside. It stopped in front of her driveway, and she hopped on. Eliza went to sit down next to her best friend Annie.

On the way home from school, Eliza sat down next to Annie as usual.

“So, how about that dog?” Annie said at once.

Eliza said, “I’m getting one next week after school, and I can’t wait!”

“A puppy!” shouted Ryan from the back of the bus. “You didn’t tell me!”

Ryan was Eliza and Annie’s friend. He was really nice but sometimes really annoying.

He ran up to sit with them and talk about the dog. When he got up there, Annie said, “Hey Ryan, where’s your backpack?”

“Oh, man!”

When Eliza returned home that day, her mom said that they had to go to the pet store today because it was closing next week.

“Why?” Eliza asked.

Mom said, “Guess they went bankrupt, but don’t ask me. I don’t know the details.”

When they walked in the pet store, it was into the familiar chorus of all her animal friends. There were lizards hissing, parrots squawking, hamster wheels squeaking, cats whining for their milk, dogs barking, and fish tanks bubbling. There were so many sounds that she couldn’t hear everything.

Before she went to look for her dog, Eliza went to the owners' son, Brad. She asked him what was going on and he told her that they were losing money because they were getting so many animals that they could not afford to feed them all. Eliza apologized and then Brad went into the back room.

After about forty-five minutes of looking, a cute little puppy caught her eye. It was copper brown with straight, short fur. And it had the cutest face ever! When she showed her mom, she fell in love with it, too.

They went to buy the puppy. Eliza named her Penny. Penny was a trained dog and would do really well in dog shows. Eliza could still teach her to do tricks, though.

As they were driving home, Eliza saw a flyer for a dog show. If you won, the prize was ten thousand dollars. Eliza thought if she could train Penny for the show, then she could give the money to the pet store. Good thing it was spring break next week.

The next few days Eliza got to know Penny more, and she got her more comfortable with the house.

When spring break came, she taught Penny all sorts of tricks and things to do in a dog show. It was in two weeks, and spring break lasted three weeks, so that should be enough time to train her puppy some new tricks. Penny was a very smart dog and Eliza had confidence in her. Eliza would teach her how to sing, shake, sit, lie down, roll over, fetch the newspaper, and stay.

When Eliza woke up the next morning, Penny wasn't on her bed sleeping like she usually was. *Maybe she got up early,* thought Eliza. She went all over the house and all over the yard looking for Penny. Eliza tried not to get worried. *She's probably hiding from me,* thought Eliza. But she could not find her. She was on the brink of tears.

“Mom, Dad, I can’t find Penny, and I’m really scared! I think she’s lost!”

As the day passed on, Eliza was worried. She had told everyone who knew Penny that she was lost. They were searching for her everywhere. Dad had told Eliza to stay home while they went to look for Penny. Eliza wanted to come, but Dad refused. So all Eliza did was go up to her room and cry all day long.

She had just gotten Penny. Where could she have gone? Could someone have taken her? What if someone else needed that money for the dog show and they couldn’t afford to buy a dog?

Eliza thought some more. She hadn’t heard anyone come in. In fact, she hadn’t heard any noise at all while she was sleeping. And she was a light sleeper. Something seemed suspicious.

She wondered why Ryan had been so excited about the puppy. He usually wasn’t that excited about anything.

Eliza remembered what Ryan had told her two years ago. He said that his family was having problems with money. He always wanted a dog, but he only told Eliza this. Ryan was known for taking other people’s belongings at school. But Ryan wouldn’t take the dog, would he? Eliza thought so much that she got a headache, so she fell asleep.

Later after she woke up, Eliza went over to Ryan’s house. When she knocked on the door, she heard barking noises that sounded too much like Penny’s bark. Besides, she didn’t even remember Ryan ever having a dog. Then it stopped, and Ryan opened the door. He looked scared to see Eliza, but he let her in anyway.

“Hello!” Eliza said cheerfully.

“Hey,” Ryan muttered back.

Eliza was so anxious, but she decided to take it slow and easy. Neither mentioned anything about the dog yet. When

Eliza told Ryan what happened with Penny, he tried to look shocked, but it didn't convince Eliza. After quite a bit of silence, he said, "I found a stray dog wandering in our front yard. Let me bring her down to you so you can see if she's yours."

Eliza could tell that he took her dog and he didn't know what to do. A few minutes later, sure enough, he brought down Penny.

"Penny girl!" Eliza exclaimed, and Penny started licking Eliza's face to death.

She looked up and they stared at each other for a moment. They needed no words, for both of them knew who took the dog.

"If I win," Eliza said, "I'll split the money half." And she turned swiftly on her heel, with Penny in her arms, and walked out.

As soon as she was out the door, Eliza broke into a run. When she got home, she told her parents everything she could. But then there was a knock on the door.

It was Ryan. He said he wanted to talk. He had a great trick that he said would win the dog show. When he told Eliza, she squealed out loud. They were to practice it every day they had left. The dog show was in one week. And then, Penny mastered it.

The day of the dog show, Ryan rode with Eliza there. He was going to help her in the dog show and with the tricks.

When it was their turn, they went up on the platform, and the people applauded. They did all of the usual tricks like sit, fetch, walk, heel, lay down, sing, roll over, and stay. Then the big finale came. Penny would jump through a flaming hoop of fire. So, Penny ran up the ramp, jumped in midair, and did a somersault right through the hoop! The crowd roared. They stood up in their seats and jumped up and down. They loved Penny!

When the show was over, the judges announced the winners. Third place went to a lady with a golden retriever, second place went to a man with a poodle, and first place belonged to Eliza with Penny!

Eliza thanked Ryan so much. She agreed that in one envelope was a letter to the pet store and a check for five thousand dollars. In another was a letter to Ryan and his parents and a check for five thousand dollars. But since Ryan felt guilty, but did not want to admit it, he sent his check to the pet store as well.

Eliza felt good about herself. She had helped her friend and the pet store, and rescued Penny. Now, everyone comes over to play with Penny and see her. Penny loves all the attention!

Who Killed Mr. Smith?

*A man is murdered, leaving behind a wife desperate for answers. Two neighborhood children pitch in to help find the answer to **WHO KILLED MR. SMITH?** in this story by Avery Katzman.*

“Ahhhhhhhh! He’s dead! How could someone kill him?” shrieked Mrs. Smith. She called the police.

“Do you know who could have done it? Did he have any enemies?” asked the police.

“No,” said Mrs. Smith.

“Then we will investigate the place,” said the police. The house is now going to be locked down.

When they looked around they found a secret passage inside his office right behind the desk, but it was empty. They said, “We found something.” All the police rushed over and said, “We will investigate tomorrow.” When the police left, they put crime scene tape in front of the house.

Two children came by and were going to do their job raking the leaves, shoveling, and other yard work. Their names were Ivory and Liz. But they saw the crime scene tape. They asked a neighbor what had happened. The neighbor sadly said, “Mrs. Smith’s husband died today.” The two kids felt like they had to do something about this murder.

The two kids thought that they needed to know who murdered Mr. Smith. The kids rushed to their house and excitedly said, “Who could have done it?” The only people who they could think of were his helpers, like his maids and other people.

“We both have to sneak and find out who killed Mr. Smith, but it will be a secret from Mrs. Smith. Are you in, Liz?” said Ivory.

“Yes, I’m in,” replied Liz.

The next day the police arrived at Mrs. Smith’s house to look for anything else. They did find a bonus: a lock on a door, which means the case is almost over, the police think.

Mrs. Smith called the police to come upstairs because she found dirt all over the floor with red spots on it. The police then followed the dirt, but found nothing. It just leads to the backyard. As for the lock on the door, they did not know a combination to unlock the lock.

The kids were walking on the street when suddenly they found a combination that said 12-38-2. “What does this go to?” Liz questioned.

“Well, this could be a clue to the Smith’s mystery,” excitedly replied Ivory.

It was at night when the two kids snuck in the house. They tried to find something that the combination went to. When they were in the house, they found the secret passageway that was hidden behind the desk. They went in and found a lock, and then pulled out the combination. They were scared that a security alarm would go off, but still they punched in the combination. It opened to an escape route that led to a place where they found a piece of paper with curvy handwriting. In fact, it was so curvy that they couldn’t read it.

Then Ivory heard a noise, and he told Liz to hide. It was Mrs. Smith. She was sobbing. Then she saw a door opened, went in, and saw a hand. She looked and found Ivory and Liz.

“Why did you try to solve this mystery? It is too dangerous for you guys.”

“Well, you see, we wanted just to help,” replied Ivory.

“Fine, you can help,” said Mrs. Smith. Then Mrs. Smith saw the paper Ivory was holding and said, “I recognize that

handwriting. The only people I know who have that handwriting are the butler, gardener, and the maid.”

They went off to talk to the butler about the Smith’s case. The kids and Mrs. Smith got to the butler. The kids said, “What were you doing when Mr. Smith was murdered?”

“I did nothing. I couldn’t have because he is my friend,” replied the butler.

Ivory became suspicious when he saw dry, red blood on his black suit and a small knife with the same color on it.

It was on to the gardener. While they were on their way they found a knife with blood on it in front of the greenhouse, which was very suspicious. They became so scared from this gruesome scene they ran off to talk to the maid instead of the gardener. The maid was out of town visiting her sick mother, so she couldn’t have killed Mr. Smith.

They found some courage and went back to the gardener. They found a piece of paper that had curvy handwriting. They went back inside, and they compared the two handwritings. They matched. Then the kids and Mrs. Smith called the police, and they came right over and arrested the guy for killing Mr. Smith.

But the police suspected he might have an accomplice. One of the detectives remembered that in old movies, it’s always the butler who did it. They went back to where Mr. Smith was killed and checked the place. Then Liz lifted a statue and found a secret passage that led to the butler. When the butler saw the policemen, he tried to run away.

“He made me do it! He made me help him. The gardener said he would kill me if I didn’t help him kill Mr. Smith.”

“Why did the gardener want to kill him?” asked the police.

“Mr. Smith was going to fire him,” replied the butler.

“Well, you’re under arrest, and we are taking you to jail.”

After the case Mrs. Smith was so grateful for the help of Liz and Ivory that she awarded the kids 1000 dollars in cash.

SCIENTIFIC
METHOD

Aliens Attack

*John and Bobby are twin brother caught in the middle an invasion from outer space. They try to survive as they help protect the city in **ALIENS ATTACK**, by **Colin Connelly**.*

John and Bobby were twin brothers that believed in U.F.O's. and aliens. Both had black curly hair and blue eyes and did not look like they were 23 years old. Both young men loved to play practical jokes on their friends that sometimes resulted in black eyes, torn clothes and bloody noses. Once John put a firecracker in his friend's laundry basket and when it blew up claimed aliens had done it.

The boys had a German shepherd that never barked and adored both boys. The dog's name was Spot and sometimes was lost in the messy apartment that the boys had. They lived in New York City in a middle-class neighborhood with friends and relatives all around them. Since both boys loved to play practical jokes on everyone, you could always hear someone yelling at someone else or John and Bobby running away from some joke he had pulled on a friend.

One hot summer it rained and rained for days. No one had seen that much rain in years, and all the dogs in the city barked and barked for no reason. Spot barked and growled all day long. Everyone was cranky because the dogs wouldn't stop barking. And no one could go outdoors for very long because of the rain.

John had gone outside to tell Spot to stop barking and saw all the dogs looking up at the sky and growling and

jumping at something in the air. Then there was a huge screeching noise, and everyone ran outside to see what had happened.

Everyone was outside looking at a dark figure in the sky that at first looked like a cloud, but it wasn't. Some of the people were yelling that they should call someone because whatever this was scared them.

Suddenly little black dots flew out of the sky that looked like huge diamonds from small ships that circled the ground. Then the diamond forms landed, and four legs came out of the objects. The ships landed with ramps coming down from the side. The ships landed and formed a circle of eight ships together with 30 objects coming out of each one.

Now everyone was running for cover. Women were screaming, dogs were barking, children ran with their parents for safety, and John and Bobby knew they needed help.

Green aliens with brown armor and huge plasma gun turrets walked out of the ship. No one could understand what they were saying but knew they needed to defend themselves because the aliens were firing at cars, people, buildings, or anything that was in the way. When the plasma guns were fired, whatever they hit just exploded into a million pieces.

Bobby tried to help his elderly neighbor to safety. But the aliens' plasma gun hit him and the neighbor died.

Everywhere you looked buildings were exploding as the aliens fired at the city. This was only happening in New York, and the news media showed the aliens firing at people and everyone running and screaming, trying to get away. About 30 men had guns and were firing back at the aliens, and others were throwing dishes, tools, or whatever they could at the invading aliens also.

The army was called in and arrived with helicopters and guns ready to defend the city. John and Bobby had grabbed hunting rifles and were outside with their friends shooting at

the aliens, too. The helicopters circled the small ships and fired at them, destroying the aliens' retreat with huge black clouds rising from the destroyed ships.

Everywhere you went there were dead aliens, wounded soldiers, and dozens of people dead. The aliens' blood was yellow and very deadly as it burned a hole in the ground.

Dozens of buildings were completely destroyed, cars were on fire, and smoke filled the air as people continued to defend themselves as best they could. Both boys defended themselves as more tanks and helicopters arrived and soon had the situation under control. The only bug ship remaining tried to contact the president stating that they had attacked New York by mistake and wanted to leave. The president ordered the bug ship destroyed by a bomb, and a huge explosion could be seen in the skies for hundreds of miles.

John, Bobby, and all of New York were happy to be alive and free once again while everyone cheered and celebrated their freedom.

Burger Wars

*A boy plunges into a complicated conflict where every fighting force has a beef of its own. **BURGER WARS**, by Peter Butkovich, chronicles a super-sized fight for supremacy.*

It was normal day. My Mom and I were going to McDonald's. Once I got inside I started watching TV. Suddenly, I saw something on the TV that showed an ad that changed to a video that demanded McDonald's surrender. I was about to ask the lady at the counter what was going on, but I heard rumbling. The Burger King across the street transformed into a giant King robot with the red robes and crown. Then I heard tanks shooting at White Castle, and White Castle was sending little burgers at Taco Bell. The huge amounts of hot grease caused fires everywhere. The Burger King robot attacked McDonald's, but McDonald's workers shot burgers at the robot and made it flee.

After the robot incident I got kicked out of McDonald's. I looked up and saw an Arby's air strike at Wendy's. My Mom and I ran home.

The next day I went to the movies. I figured it might get me calmed down for a while. When I got home I convinced my mom to go to Las Vegas for a week.

Two days later I decided to turn on the news. I waited because I didn't want to be too shocked or something. At first I saw that the news said that McDonald's conquered Europe, Wendy's was destroyed, and Burger King was found in

Iceland. I turned the channel, but they were all the same. I had to get to the bottom of this.

I went outside. I saw that Taco Bell and White Castle had become allies.

I knew a guy at White Castle, and his dad owned a helicopter company. I called him to pick me up in his helicopter and take me to Taco Bell. The helicopter crashed in my living room and made a big mess. I couldn't clean it up, so I went to Taco Bell. The leaders of Taco Bell told me secrets about the war because I was a witness at the first battle. They told me why the war started.

About seven years ago McDonald's and Burger King came up with the same burger. They both had a war in Antarctica and the North Pole for the burger. The war had been a secret—until now....

We knew that McDonald's was heading to London, England on September 15, so that's where we would strike. We got Burger King to help us with the invasion. On TV, I watched the McDonald's army march in to London. Ronald McDonald led their chicken nugget troops through the streets of London.

I flew to London with the Arby's, White Castle, and Taco Bell armies. We got Arby's to drop a roast beef bomb on the army, but the Happy Meal tanks shot the planes down with triple cheeseburgers. Then Taco Bell and White Castle fired taco rays at the McDonald's army. The McDonald's army destroyed White Castle, Taco Bell's ray gun, and Arby's with really sharp French fries.

Taco Bell fought back with Burritos and Nachos Bell Grande land mines until there were only 249 tacos left. Then the Burger King robot armed with Whoppers and nasty Chili attacked and defeated what was left of the McDonald's army. We thought that we had won, but the war was not over yet.

I saw the remaining McDonald's workers run in to the Big Ben clock tower. The Burger King robot knocked over the tower. We thought that we had won (again), but McDonald's had a deadly weapon, the Big Mac.

The Big Mac was a giant burger gun that shot mini burgers. I ran to get Ronald McDonald, and when I finally reached him I got into a giant fight. *Boom! Bang! Smack!* I hit him so hard that he fell into the river and drowned.

All of a sudden the Big Mac blew up, and all the McDonald's workers acted like they were brainwashed. Everyone was somewhat happy, kind of (not really).

Taco Bell and Burger King eventually made a new store called Taco King. There was a big celebration, and I became assistant manager. Nah. But I did get a cool pin.

Dawnlight, the New Mineral

*It isn't every day that the scientific world uncovers a previously unknown mineral. In **DAWNLIGHT, THE NEW MINERAL** by **Julien Ducasse**, one such major discovery has the potential to change the world.*

When I was ten, I was digging with friends while playing a buried treasure game. I thought I saw a flashing light, but it was time for dinner. I went to eat and told myself, "I'll go check it later."

When I came back, the hole was covered. My friends and I went digging for it. We didn't find anything, so we stopped searching.

Today, twenty years later, I came back to Hawaii where I found the rock. I went in the mines to look for minerals and suddenly a flashing light came to my eyes.

I remembered that day when I was ten and I saw this mineral. It was like a flashback in my memory.

I went to look for it, and the more I came closer to it, it flashed more and more. I found it again. I was filled with joy when I found it.

In the lab I was searching for why this mineral was flashing. I discovered that it happened as soon as a little light of the sun went over the mineral. I turn off every laboratory's lights, and the mineral gave enough light.

I had just discovered what to do with this mineral. If I plug it into an electric wire, it will give electricity to the world without consuming any energy, and there will be no more pollution.

I called this “Dawnlight.” It makes a dark room brighter than ever when the mineral is glowing.

I had found a miracle for the world.

That night, I had a dream. Once again I was just a kid. I was going to bring the mineral to the museum for money. I told my mom I would go with my skateboard.

On the way there, the road was pretty bumpy. I tried to slow down, but while braking I hit a rock and tripped. The mineral fell off the sidewalk. That’s when a bully from school stole my rock and ran off.

The next day at school I was mad when I saw him with my rock. He was probably getting ready to bully me, but that’s the day I learned to stand up to a bully. I walked up to him and told him to give me my rock or I would tell Mr. Fisher. “Mr. Fisher, he’s bullying me,” I said to the teacher.

Mr. Fisher knew me well. He told the bully to give back my rock. I told myself I would bring it to the museum after school.

I woke up with an uneasy feeling. I knew it was just a dream, but I hurried to the laboratory anyway. There was the mineral, safe and sound. It was really mine, and soon it would be the whole world’s!

Dehliah's Big Surprise

*Dehliah and Pipelo have been fighting for years. Dehliah has no interest in changing the situation—until she discovers **DEHLIAH'S BIG SURPRISE**, by Elizabeth Hentschel.*

I am sitting at my desk when I hear a high-pitched scream. I was not startled, though. I'd been hearing screams like this almost daily. My father is a scientist, and if you ask me, he's not a very good one. Shortly after that I hear my dad yell, "Dehliah!"

I sigh. When my dad calls my name, it means he needs a glass of xparcarx. Xparcarx is a milky mixture that can cure any wound. He even created xparcarx himself!

I run downstairs to get the xparcarx from the fridge. My dad walks out. His face is as red as an apple and he mutters, "Someday, someday I'll get it, you just watch."

I mend his bright red face. I don't know what he'd do without me. I still have homework to do, and I promised my best friend I'd call her. But I'm too tired for that now, so I go up to my room to sleep.

The next morning I wake up. Ugh! It's a school day! I lazily get up and drag myself out the door to catch the bus. But as soon as I step out the door I slip in a huge glob of green slime! It was a big sticky gob of green slime, which totally ruined the outfit I was wearing! When I get out of the slime I see my bus coming to the stop, and I don't have time to run back in for a change of clothes. Everyone teases me except for my best friend since kindergarten, Petunia. "We both know who did this: Pipelo!" she said.

When you hate someone, you get to know him very well. It's kind of weird, but it's true. The way this enemy thing started was in kindergarten. Pipelo "accidentally" hit me with a plastic sword. It really hurt badly, and from then on it was war! I also know that Pipelo is an orphan. He once had a mom and dad, but now they're history, or at least to him they are.

The next day he really made me furious. I was almost in tears. I was passing notes with Petunia, and on the note I wrote how much I hated my teacher. I accidentally passed it to Pipelo, and he showed it to the teacher. I had lunch detention for a week. Then one day everything changed.

I got home from school, and literally as I walked in the door, my dad called me. "Dehliah!"

There was no more xparcarx in the fridge, so I went into his room and looked for more. I open his drawer and under all his papers I spot a picture. At first I don't recognize anyone in the picture. Then I realize that it's my dad, my mom (who died when I was two), and me ten years ago, when I was only a baby! But there's another baby in the picture, a baby boy. I turn the picture around, and I see a name I'd never have guessed: Pipelo!

I am confused, angry and happy all at the same time. I don't know if I should tell my dad about my finding this photo or just keep it a secret. Then I start screaming. In less than a second my dad is in his room comforting me.

"What happened, Dehliah? What's wrong?"

"Everything! How can you keep a secret so big away from me?"

He looks down and gasps. "I-I-I meant to tell you earlier, but I just couldn't." Then, sitting there in front of me, my dad starts to cry. My idol, my only other living relative that I know about, my beloved dad, is crying. We sit there for what seems like forever but probably is only fifteen minutes crying together. It feels sort of good, letting all of my emotions out.

Then my dad starts talking. “Now that you know about Pipelo, I guess you can ask me whatever you want to.”

I have so many questions to ask him they just won’t come out. I start stuttering, and then bawling again. I guess he takes the hint, and he starts explaining.

“One thing that I never told you was that before your mom died we got divorced. When we got divorced, I decided to take you, and she took your twin brother, Pipelo. After she died, Pipelo had nowhere to go. I was very young and sort of irresponsible. The government was about to take you away, and having another child was out of the picture. Since we have no living relatives, the government decided to put him up for adoption. However, no one has adopted him.”

I just stood there staring at him. I needed somewhere to run and hide. Yet I was relieved that he finally told me the truth. So many emotions were running through my head! I looked around the room, and then ran to my room.

About thirty minutes later my dad knocked on my door. I tried to say something, but I couldn’t. He knocked again, and then came in. He started talking. “I know how you feel about this. If I was a twelve-year-old girl who just found out she has a twin brother, I’d have the same reaction. I’ve been thinking about this, and I’ve come to a conclusion. If it’s all right with you, I’d like to adopt him. He needs a dad and a sister to look after him.”

Then my dad looks straight at me. I probably stare back at him for five minutes and then nod my head. I don’t even know why I did it! I hate Pipelo, but I knew this was just something I had to do.

The next week we took him home.

Having Pipelo as my brother is a lot better than having him as an enemy. Also, knowing that he’s related to me gives me a lot of relief. I’m really happy with our decision, and I bet Pipelo is, too.

The End of the World

Vincent Smith's normal life changes in the blink of an eye in
THE END OF THE WORLD, by *Zack Baker*.

It was a dark Thursday night, and I was playing football, as usual, with my friends Tyler, Zack and Harrison. We were having a ton of fun until it started to rain. We all had to go home and watch TV or something. While I was walking home with Tyler, there was a big *BOOM!* in the distance, and no one noticed it. Then, it started to get closer.

The next thing I knew, I was running past the scared, sometimes crying and praying people. I was running away from the biggest cloud I had ever seen that was shooting red laser beams that vaporized people. One of those people was Tyler.

I kept on running four more blocks to where my house should be, but there was nothing there. I went and found a pay phone, but it was dead. So, I went back to where my house should have been. When I looked down at the hole that was my basement, I saw a gruesome sight.

All of my family had been crushed by the floor above. I started crying.

I yelled, "Why? Why me?" Just then, the alien (I assumed it was alien) ship turned and looked at me, but I didn't care. Everything I ever had was gone: my friends, my family, EVERYTHING!

When the alien ship looked me over, I saw the red mark that vaporized everybody. I screamed, “Hit me with your best shot!”

I saw the beam come down, but I didn’t feel anything. Then I realized something! I was immune to the ray. I can’t explain how this made me feel. I would live, but I would be alone.

After this, one night when I was sleeping, I woke up and turned on my portable radio. I had one in my pocket at the time of the disaster that hadn’t been destroyed and still had batteries. I flipped through the channels and I didn’t even hear static. The loneliness I felt was almost unbearable.

Apparently, I left the radio on, and suddenly I heard something. I heard, “Hello, my name is Harrison Black. I am a survivor living in old Tiger Stadium in Detroit, Michigan along with hundreds of others. I have food and shelter...” I started to run as fast as I could to Tiger Stadium to find this Harrison Black.

When I got to the stadium, the doors were closed. Then, a little, tiny ball on a string dropped down in front of me. It said, “CLEAR. You may now come in.”

Inside, I saw Harrison Black broadcasting on a radio. He pointed to a table with a person and a line of people waiting. When it was my turn, this person at the table asked me my name and age. I replied, “Vincent Smith, 12,” and she pointed to two red doors that said “KIDS.”

In the “KIDS” room there wasn’t a soul. Apparently they had all been killed by the blast or left behind, or were still living outside the stadium.

As the world began to repopulate, more kids became born. I grew up and had a family of my own. Besides this part of my life, it’s been pretty normal.

400 Fighters

*Earth is being attacked, and only one man and his army has a chance at stopping the invasion. Find out if Earth survives in **400 FIGHTERS**, by Ross Williams.*

In 3087 in an unknown galaxy lived evil aliens who planned to attack Earth. Earth wasn't split into hundreds of countries, but was just one nation run by a Texan named Ted Roover. The leader of the Giba clan, Juji, was screaming out with his high-pitched voice, "*Hjing jio wedf koplling!*"

And the followers of Juji were yelling all together, "*Feeeee!*"

Earth Emperor Ted Roover did not know Earth was in for a big attack from the Giba clan. But Ted Roover had trained 400 men in karate, tae kwon do, jujitsu, tai chi, and arts with a weapon because Ted Roover was a master in all things that are martial arts. The Giba clan was equipped with lasers and laser swords for the battle. It was going to be a long war if Earth returned fire.

The Giba clan attacked Earth. They didn't do any damage because Earth had a two-layered shield made of invisible titanium that protected the citizens.

When Ted Roover found out about the attack, he called a press conference and told the press with his Texan voice, "You all know that Earth was attacked on July 11, 2011. We know who attacked us. It was aliens. Me and trained soldiers are going to fight back."

The soldiers were alerted that they were going to go to war with Ted Roover as their leader because Ted Roover was the best fighter in all the land. The 100 soldiers that were best with martial arts weapons were equipped with bows and nunchucks by Ted Roover. The other 300 soldiers were equipped with machine guns, assault rifles, SMG's, nuclear weapons and bombs, rocket launchers, and bulletproof vests. Ted Roover was equipped with extra armor that was black and silver, a bow staff with Japanese writing on the side, and an AK-47 that glistened with brightness. Ted Roover made a speech to the world before the attack. "If the soldiers and I lose the war, the other grand masters of the martial arts will have to train other men in martial arts, and it will have to be done quickly, or the Earth citizens will be captured if the shield doesn't hold."

Juji got his clan members together, looking the 700 clan members right in their green hideous faces and their purple battle suits. Juji screeched "*Hieeeeeeeeeee!*"

The battle was going to start. Ted Roover pulled out the ancient sword that his ancestors' warriors used in battle. The sword had writing on it: "Fight Hard."

The soldiers marched with pride, meeting the Giba clan in the middle of Mars. Ted Roover led them in front. He screamed, "Charge!"

The battle started. One by one, men on both sides died. But Ted Roover was still alive. He was slicing and dicing, killing everybody he saw. He got wounded a lot. But he was still okay. Juji was slicing left and right, too. He wasn't missing any of the fighters. Suddenly Ted Roover was charging with fierce anger at Juji. Juji saw Ted Roover charging, so he quickly pulled out his laser and sliced Ted Roover's sword, knocking him to the ground. Juji thought he killed Ted Roover, but he didn't because Juji's laser missed Ted Roover's heart by inches. Then Ted Roover jumped up,

roundhouse-kicked him in the face, and cut off his head with his sword. Juji's head was gushing out dark red blood. You could even see his pink brain and his lavender guts. But Ted Roover was dripping blood.

Earth was on its way to victory, but Ted Roover realized he was the only man left, and there were still about 50 Giba clan men closing in on him with their laser swords.

Quickly Ted Roover called in the grand masters that were hiding in the spaceships with their weapons. They fought off the remaining Giba clan men while Ted Roover was fixing his deep cut wounds.

They returned to Earth knowing they won the battle, but Ted Roover knew the Giba clan men were going to strike again and try to kill him for killing Juji. But for now, he was safe.

Future Election

*If we can't find the perfect presidential candidate, maybe we should build one. In **FUTURE ELECTION** by **Logan Mendelson**, a man tries to do just that.*

Hello there. Please let me introduce myself. I am Juan Futureman, and this is my story.

Before I begin my epic tale of robots, presidents, and television, let me first tell you a little bit about myself. I am a scientist who lives in California. I love to work in my mechanical laboratory that I built in my home. I was born and raised in Cozumel, Mexico. At the age of four, I moved to the United States with the rest of my family on Cinco de Mayo (May 5th), 2121.

Many moons ago, I was working in my lab on a project for the local university when I heard a familiar voice on the TV. "I will be sure to make the country's safety one of my first priorities."

It was David Longman, the current President of the United States. He was running for re-election, and everyone seemed to like him. He had served several years as governor of California until he won his first presidential election. I liked some of his ideas, but knew he was lying about his recent campaign promises.

As far as I'm concerned, David has a long history of misrepresenting himself when it came to safety issues and concerns. You see, he and I attended the same elementary school together. He once told me at a fire safety assembly,

“Who cares about safety? If I were president, I would make recess and playgrounds my first priority.”

Then in high school, he used real darts and pellet guns at the school fair. When the student council and administration voiced their concern for the children’s safety, David somehow convinced them that the element of danger would bring in more traffic to the booth, thus raising more money for the school. “Let’s face it; it’s all about the money,” he said. “Put your trust in me, and we can rake in the big bucks.”

Coincidentally, we attended the same university. David had a long-running column in the school newspaper regarding the happenings on campus. The Department of Public Safety asked if he would include a few of the unfortunate incidents regarding campus muggings within his column. He refused, saying that bringing attention would only alarm the students, and nothing good would come of it.

Finally, as the governor of California, he took shortcuts in the construction of several habitats in the zoo. David awarded a contract to a local construction company to build the walls and moat significantly lower than the recommendations of the National Zoological Association. This was all done to save money and in total disregard to the safety of the animals and the general public. He figured the walls and moat, at any height, would be sufficient.

Hearing David’s campaign speech reminded me of the previous events. For that reason, I was going to try and expose him and knock him off the ballot. Unfortunately, I was unable to run for the presidency because I was born out of the country, as was everyone else in my family. I decided to attempt to build the first robotic politician.

My dedication and commitment to the project allowed me to finish building the robot in three weeks. I named him Row-bát 149 and nicknamed him Andrew. I programmed

him to know all about politics, and together we studied *Campaign 101*, a book all about running for public office.

There was one major problem with my plan, though. You see, Andrew was a robot. Since robots aren't considered citizens, it would be my new goal to change the constitution, allowing robotic candidates. It is my belief that a robot built by the people and for the people would not waver on its political stance, and would be best suited to implement its plan.

I sent a letter to each and every governor telling them all about my idea. It took more than eight attempts before anyone would even consider my plan. Then one day, I received a call out of the blue from the new governor of California. He agreed that all too often, a candidate changes his views, and that he had heard similar stories about the president. He agreed to write the bill that would be necessary in allowing this crazy idea to become reality.

It was soon sent to the legislative branch, where both houses passed it two to one. At the state level, the majority of the states ratified it to make it an amendment.

Now I really had my work cut out for me. With the approval of a robotic candidate, I had to ensure that people took us seriously. We conducted literally thousands of mini-elections on all of the key issues that would help to form Andrew's platform. Andrew became the ultimate candidate across all political parties. No matter what issue arose, Andrew would know the majority interest and incorporate it in his campaign message and promises.

By the time the president realized what we were up to, his approval rating had already begun to plummet. I received a frantic voicemail from the president's adviser indicating that he wanted to set up a meeting. From the tone of his voice, it seemed they probably feared the citizens would have increased interest in having a robotic president. This would

obviously ruin David's chance at re-election! I decided not to return his call, and continued to train Andrew in the art of politics.

The president eventually contacted an old friend who was a guru in computer technology. Together, they would attempt to hack into Andrew's memory. If they could only get Andrew to waver on a few issues, the president might be able to convince the people that having a robot in office was not a good idea.

At the first debate, Andrew took a commanding lead and answered everything correctly. The president's plan didn't work out at all, as they obviously hadn't manipulated Andrew's memory.

At the second debate, everything went downhill for Andrew. When asked a simple question about his stance on dairy-powered vehicles, he malfunctioned and rambled; "Got milk? Milk Shake. Shake, rattle and roll. Rolls and butter. Butter popcorn. Popcorn kernel..."

This literally went on for 20 minutes, and nobody could get Andrew to stop. We finally had to pull the plug on Andrew. Our plan of creating the first robotic president came to a screeching halt.

I immediately rose to the occasion and began to convey Andrew's message. After all, his message was my message, since I was his creator. When I turned around, I found myself looking right into the eyes of the president.

He immediately recognized me and asked why I was behind this plan. I began to make my point of view very clear to David on that day: The elected president should reflect the best interest of the people.

We spent several days together discussing the matter. Eventually, he agreed that he would be more honest,

trustworthy, and reliable—all of the qualities that would help him in his candidacy.

We equally felt that a robotic president was an absurd idea and would not be the best path for the country to take. Together, we reviewed the results of the many past elections that helped make Andrew the perfect candidate. With this knowledge, David went on to win the election and served the country more than 28 years. In addition, I was hired to head the United States Department of Advanced Technology.

How is it possible, you ask, that David served the country that long? You see, we changed the Constitution after all. A president is no longer limited to only two terms, as long as they are of the people, by the people, and for the people.

The Game of a Lifetime

*In **THE GAME OF A LIFETIME** by Joel Sandler, three boys end up in another universe by way of a strange birthday present. Be careful who you invite to your party!*

Ring! Ring! Kevin picked up the phone. “Hello?”

“Hey, dude! Wassup?” said Omar.

“Nothing. Just trying to STUDY FOR MY MATH QUIZ!”

“Well, you better hurry up! DeShawn’s birthday party is in an hour, and I don’t want to miss the piñata. I heard it’s filled with Snickers! Yummmm!”

“I would hurry up if you’d stop calling me! Jeez, Omar, yesterday you called me at 5:30 A.M. just to say hi, and now you’re interrupting my study process. Did you eat those hard candies again?”

“ONLY ONE!”

Ding Dong! DeShawn’s mom answered the door. “Hey, Omar, Kevin. You’re just in time for presents!” They saw DeShawn standing in front of the kids. Adam Katzman got him a basketball, Rodney Winkler got him a football, Seth Stillman got him a hockey stick, Max Weiss got him a Barbie doll (obviously Max has the worst taste in presents), and Joel Sandler got him a Chauncey Billups jersey. “Thanks, guys!” exclaimed DeShawn.

“Wait! You forgot mine and Kevin’s presents!” shouted Omar.

“I almost forgot you! Sorry!” DeShawn tore open Omar’s present. “A toothbrush. Thanks,” sighed DeShawn. He tore open Kevin’s present. “It’s...it’s...what is it?” asked DeShawn.

“It’s a rocket simulator with power boosters and wheel attachments,” said Kevin, proudly.

“Ooahh! Cool.”

“You forgot my present,” said Dean Trousers, the new kid from Lithuania. DeShawn ripped open Dean’s present.

“What is it?” said DeShawn, still in awe.

“It’s a portal to another universe!” When DeShawn, Kevin, and Omar heard that, they started laughing.

“Yeah, right,” giggled Kevin.

“Fine,” said Dean. “If you don’t believe me, maybe this will change your mind.” He pulled out a red button, pressed it, and the three boys were gone.

“AAAAAAUUUGGGHHHH!” The boys screamed all the way to the place that (they didn’t know) would change their lives.

When they landed, everything was in complete darkness. Then, the lights turned on. The boys were surrounded by whistles and cheers: hoorays and hooraws and such.

“Where are we?” asked Omar. For some strange reason, DeShawn wasn’t freaked out. He was just raising his hands up, trying to pump up the ghouls and goblins in the crowd.

“Welcome to Blow Up Your Planet After U Lose, or BUYPAUL for short,” said a voice.

Kevin said, “Excuse me, uh, Mr. Voice, sir. Um, wh-wh-where exactly are we?”

“You are on a game show, little Earthling.” Then, the person whom the voice belonged to appeared. “Let me introduce myself. I am Regis Philbin II. I’m the host of this marvelous game show.”

“Hey, that’s funny!” exclaimed DeShawn. “There’s a guy from our home planet who runs this show, Regis and Kelly, and his last name is Philbin!”

“And he looks like an alien also!” Omar said. Everyone laughed in agreement.

“Do you people know how to play Glitzgon Ball? Because, if you don’t, we will blow up your planet.”

“We have no idea how to play,” DeShawn said.

“SHUT UP, DUDE!” Kevin whispered. “If he finds out...”

“Finds out what?”

“If he...finds out that we’re no good.”

“Oh. That’s ok. I was just kidding about the whole ‘blow up your planet’ thing.”

“You were?” asked Kevin.

“Hahahahahaha NO!” replied Regis. “I was looking in the Earth Translating book, and it said Glitzgon Ball is the same thing as, how do you say, basketball.”

“Yeah. We love basketball.”

“Good. At BUYPAUL, we have tournaments. Let me explain the bracket to you. There are four teams. You will be playing Galagoor (GAL a GORE), Marxisa (MARX e ZA), and Obamookloosey (OO ba MOOK lose E) in three-on-three basketball. Meanwhile, while you little Earthlings are getting crushed by planet Neptaro, Sharx, Tarx, and Barx from planet Larxon are going to be playing Chauncey, Rip, and Tayshaun from Pistonia. Good luck! You will need it,” said Regis, out of breath. Then DeShawn, Omar, and Kevin left the studio for the b-ball court, very, VERY confused.

*“We interrupt this program to bring you
a special sports update.”*

Duh na na na na na na na NA...n ana...

“Sports Center Space Edition!”

“Let’s skip forward to the highlights of today’s match up, Team Earth and Team Neptaro. Earth is bringing up the ball, then swoosh! It’s stolen by Neptune, leading to a fast break dunk! By the end of the first light-year, it’s 1,326 to 2. The only basket scored by team Earth was when Galagoor accidentally shot the ball into the wrong basket! Now let’s bring you Frank with the second light-year.”

“Thanks, Snorty. It appears that we have a comeback on our hands. Earth has been on fire from the ten-point arch after a pep talk about getting their heads into the game. There are 12.6 seconds left in the second light-year with the score 1,678 to 1,669. It is Earth’s ball.

“They pass it in to the point guard Deshawn. He stops at half court, draining the time away for the last shot. We’re down to 6.7 seconds. Deshawn finally passes to the forward Omar, who drives it in. But wait, he goes behind the back pass right to the center, Kevin, who’s open from the ten-point line. There are 1.1 seconds left! Kevin shoots...”

EEEEEEEEERRR!

“IT’S GOOD! IT’S GOOD! EARTH WINS IN THE MOST TRIUMPHANT UNDERDOG COMEBACK EVER TO HAPPEN ON THIS SHOW! WHAT A THRILLER TONIGHT! BACK TO YOU, SNORTY! WHOOOOOO HOOOOO!

“Thanks, Honkerzingle, or Frank for short. Let’s get back to Regis at the set. Guys?”

Back at the arena, Team Earth and Regis are watching the final seconds of Pistonia and Larxon. *EEEEEEEEERRR!* “Final score: 1,857,837,563,632,344,326 to 6. Pistonia wins.”

Now team Earth is really nervous. So what if they won by a last-second shot? This team won by double Omar’s phone number!

“No, but we want to use that free wish,” said Deshawn.
“We were at my birthday party when some lame kid from
Lithuania came to my house and tricked us into going here!
WE WANT TO SHUT DOWN THIS GAME!”

“YAAAAHHH!” the crowd cheered.

“As you wish.”

Then the building collapsed, and everyone died.

Home Alone

*What could transform a typical suburban home into a habitat for the largest creatures to ever roam the Earth? History intrudes in a gigantic way in **HOME ALONE**, by **Marcus J. Katz**.*

It was 1:00 p.m. on Sunday when my friend came over. My dad was at my brother's football game, and my mom was out grocery shopping. I was home alone. My friend asked me if I could show him some magic tricks, so I did.

After that, we got bored. We spent a full thirty minutes looking for something fun to do. He asked me if I had a soccer ball, and I replied that it would be in the basement.

We went to the basement, and we looked in every single box. Then we found a box in the corner of the basement that read "miscellaneous." We both agreed that it must be in that box. But no, the box was nearly empty! All that was in it was my chemistry set and my dinosaur video game.

My dinosaur video game looked different, as though the chemicals had changed it. I turned it on, and my friend and I played with it for a few minutes. But we decided to play Legos instead, so we brought a Lego box up to my room, leaving the video game on in the basement.

One hour later, we had nearly finished our seven-foot tall Lego Eiffel Tower. Now all we needed was a French flag to put on the top of it.

I ran back down to the basement, and I made it halfway down before realizing that it was not normal. My mouth

nearly fell to the ground. The basement was now a prehistoric forest full of dinosaurs, and the ceiling had grown thirty feet. I knew that because there was a place where I always bumped my head, but now I didn't. There were lots of ferns and tall trees, and it felt damp and humid.

Then I saw the big red eyes of a gigantic, ferocious *Tyrannosaurus rex* look at me, and he spat out the other dinosaur that he was eating. He had little arms and huge flesh-eating teeth.

I thought that it must have been the video game that caused the dinosaurs to appear in my basement because it was the only dinosaur-related object in the house. Maybe the chemicals in my chemistry set had an effect on the game.

I quickly ran under the *T. rex*'s legs to switch the game off, but it was up in a tree. So I jumped onto a flying dinosaur that brought me up to the game in the tree. The *T. rex* started chasing me. I managed to switch the game off. The *T. rex* could not get up the stairs, so I managed to escape. Turning the game off only stopped the dinosaurs from reproducing and made the ceiling slowly come back to normal size.

I told my friend to call the Birmingham Fire and Police Departments and ask them to bring a very big trailer with them. When they arrived, the police used Tasers to immobilize the dinosaurs, and the firemen used their winch to pull them out of the basement and load them onto the trailer. Then they took them to the Detroit Zoo.

There was bad news and good news. The bad news was that when the ceiling was shrinking the *T. rex* made a hole in it. The good news was that we got 75 percent of the profits that the zoo made because of the dinosaurs. At eleven years of age, we became millionaires, and I was able to fix the ceiling.

Human Weapon

*A child discovers he has extraordinary powers that the government of the United States wishes to channel for purposes of international security in **HUMAN WEAPON**, by **Grant Bail**.*

Many people are at airports everyday. J.F.K Airport is one of the busiest airports in the United States. Many people there have an intention of stealing something before they get on a plane. Today, one of those people would be stopped in an extraordinary way.

A cop rushed down an ugly corridor with fake wood paneling, running after a person dressed in midnight black. The masked individual had almost reached the boarding tunnel when a teenager got out of his seat. He was small for his age, with blond hair and piercing blue eyes. Matt directed his gaze at the thief, and the man fell backwards with such force it looked like he was hit by a hammer.

This teenager's name was Matt Ortega. At an early age strange phenomena happened around him. This started when Matt was playing in his backyard and got bitten by a snake. Suddenly, the family car started levitating in the driveway.

A few weeks went by. Mrs. Ortega didn't know what to do until a knock on the door on a hot day in July. When she opened the door a man was on the front porch. He was dressed entirely in black with dark Armani sunglasses. His name was Richard.

“Mrs. Ortega, I am sorry to inform you that we have to take away your son,” Richard said with no emotion.

“But I don’t know why,” she said, sobbing.

“Well, to tell you why, Matt has some unusual abilities, doesn’t he? Some may call them miracles. Do you know what I’m talking about?”

“Yes,” she said in a whisper.

“Well, we’re going to try to maximize his potential for using them. If you don’t let us, I will take him by force.”

“Fine, but let me say goodbye. Son, I love you so much. I will always be with you no matter what happens,” sobbed Mrs. Ortega.

Matt went with Richard to New Jersey where the CIA has its headquarters. Matt got a room near the top of the headquarters. The government sent its finest scientist to work with Matt and focus his abilities.

“Now, Matt,” the scientist said in a stern voice, “try to move that 200-pound pile of bricks.”

“I’ll try,” Matt said, bored. Imagining the bricks were as light as feathers, Matt put all of his thoughts into lifting the bricks. When they started floating into the air. Matt said, “I’m doing it!” but he couldn’t keep his concentration, and the bricks fell heavily to the ground.

“Very good, Matt. I think in a few months you will finally be able to take on a mission.”

After a few months of hard practice, Matt could push, pull, and lift things with ease. Eventually, the scientist came to the head agent and requested he have an audience with Matt.

The scientist brought Matt to the office. An hour later, Matt went into the agent’s office. It was not the way most people think it looks. It had a fireplace, a plasma screen TV, and a tiger rug that was Siberian. It was more like a person’s study than an office.

“Hello, Matt. I am Mr. Gray. Please sit down.” Matt couldn’t say anything because he was so awestruck. “I can see you are impressed, are you not? The President lets each head decorate this room any way he or she likes. My predecessor was very tacky in his taste.” Matt was still too awed to speak.

“Well, I have just heard that you can successfully lift things. Am I correct?”

“To varying degrees sir,” Matt said in a polite tone.

“Well, then, let me brief you,” Mr. Gray said in a Bostonian accent. “You’re going up against a tough opponent. His name is Abraham Al-Joul. He is a master in biochemistry and used to work in the biochemical warfare division of the CIA. When he left he also took the most dangerous chemical we have, codenamed Blue Water. When mixed with water, the drinker immediately dies. If we don’t get this back, the whole world’s water supply will be poisoned for generations to come,” Mr. Gray said in a grave tone. “But, on the bright side, pack your bags. You’re going to Sweden!”

Matt’s plane ticket was on his bed when he got back to his room. “I’m amazed I haven’t been out of this building since I was four years old.” As Matt packed his bags, he didn’t forget his most prized possession, a very old hunting knife that belonged to his father.

A phone call to his room told him it was time to go. “I may never see you again, room.” Matt used the elevator to take him downstairs. A chauffeur put his bags into the car and took him to the airport. While in the car Matt practiced lifting his Pepsi can.

When they got to the airport the chauffeur asked, “Do you need anything else?”

“I’ll be a fine, thanks.”

Matt took out his duffel bag, put the strap on, and went into the terminal. He checked in with the attendant and didn’t even have to check in with security. He was too important.

He made his way to the lobby where the boarding tunnel was. Matt sat down and pulled out the latest copy of EGM, a gaming magazine. He started reading it, taking occasional glances at the other passengers. When he glanced up, someone was running at the boarding tunnel dressed entirely in black. Matt stood up out of his seat, and, with no one touching him, the person flew backwards into the wall. When the cop caught up, the thief was knocked out. Before anyone could ask any questions Matt boarded the plane.

Matt found his seat and took a very long nap. By the time he woke up they were almost in Sweden. Matt became very bored, but soon he was landing. They landed at Arvidsjaur airport in Sweden.

He left the terminal and took a taxi to a Holiday Inn. He got out of the taxi (which was white instead of yellow) and booked a room.

He woke up very early (because of trans-Atlantic jet lag) and researched the location of the factory that produces the chemical. It was located in a supposed POD factory (Products On Demand) factory.

Matt looked for structural weak points in the facility. He found if he planted four explosives outside of the facility it would explode. He also packed six explosives (C4 actually) to destroy the facility. "I'll do it tonight," Matt thought out loud. Matt spent the rest of the day preparing for assault.

Eventually, Matt set out to the factory. It was not very far away—only ten or twelve blocks.

Finally Matt reached the front gates. He climbed the front gates easily and proceeded to the first place to set the explosives. Very easily he reached the first point and set the explosive there. Then he saw some guards on a walkway. Using his abilities, he propelled himself to the next checkpoint. He set another explosive there, which only took him a bit longer.

One of the guards saw Matt move and was shining a flashlight across the fence line. Matt had to move painstakingly slow to not be seen.

Eventually Matt reached the third area. He had to plant the explosive very fast in order to not be seen. Matt had to make a dash to reach the last spot. With rushing hands, Matt set the last explosive and with inhuman speed ran into the street.

The guards finally saw Matt and started firing crazily at him. While trying to dodge bullets, Matt pulled a small remote out his pocket. His mind had so many thoughts about what was happening. Matt hesitated, but couldn't let the world be destroyed. With conflicting emotions about killing so many people, Matt pushed the button. The factory exploded in a brilliant blue fireball with its chemicals destroyed with it.

Epilogue

Matt was shipped back to America on the USS *Kitty Hawk*. His body was filled with shrapnel and two bullets punctured his right lung. After immediate surgery Matt had a 30 percent chance he would survive. After they landed Matt got full medical attention.

Four surgeries later, Matt was expected to have a full recovery. After five months of recovery and physical therapy Matt was back in the field and ready for his next mission.

Infection

The scientists thought they were creating a cure, but they made monsters instead. Life is a wide-awake nightmare in **INFECTION**, by *Charles Buck*.

The place is a city where everything has gone wrong and only a few humans are left, with danger around every corner. A scientist's lab is where it all begins, where an experiment for a cure for pneumonia has gone terribly wrong.

"Grab the antidote!" shouted the scientist.

"I can't find it!" said the assistant, panicking.

"Oh no, it's too LATE!" screamed the scientist in fear. "Ahhh!" he shouted.

"HELP!" yelled the assistant as the creature went for them both, trapping them in the corner.

When the carrier was finished with them it left the three-story building, sinking its rotten teeth into everybody as it traveled through the building. You could hear the screeches of pain from the outside.

As it wandered the streets at night it turned everybody it saw into carriers by biting them. The more people it bit, the more people turned. As the people were turning, they turned more people as they fed. Everybody was turned except for three people.

Three survivors named Jane, Joe, and Jake are out hunting in the zoo three years after the incident in the lab. Since then they are the only three left, and they don't know the others even exist in Detroit. Life is hard, at night especially, when

the carriers come out of hiding. The army has sealed escape routes with big, metal walls, so the infection wouldn't spread out of the city. No one gets in, and no one gets out. Even if you are not infected by the sick disease, you won't get out.

Jane has red hair, blue eyes, and white skin. Joe has dark black hair, brown skin, and brown eyes. Jake has brown hair, white skin, and blue eyes. They are all about twenty-six years old, and they were all out searching for food at the stores for dinner that night with their guns loaded. Then they found each other and pointed their guns at one another. They were all on their toes and didn't lower their guns.

"What are you doing here?" asked Jake.

"I could ask you the same question, but since it is still daylight, I can see that none of us are carriers," stated Jane.

"So why do we all still have our guns pointed at each other?" said Joe.

They all lowered their weapons and headed back to Joe's place after he invited them over. They each took weapons of their choosing out of his trunk in his moldy room. Joe used to be the owner of the gun shop until the incident.

That night the carriers broke the window and came into the house, triggering the alarm! The three of them wake up to see carriers in the room! *BANG! BANG! BANG!* The three of them snatched out their guns and killed the three carriers, but there were still more of them with their piercing red eyes and the bodies of rotten corpses! The three jumped out of the first-story window.

They all headed to the city parking lot, which was covered in streaks of blood and rust, to find a car for shelter until morning. They broke open the window of a Hummer H2 and hotwired it. The Hummer was dark as night with black leather seats, and it was three-quarters of a tank full of gas, so they drove off in it seeking shelter. They drove for three hours, taking turns driving, and then they ran out of gas! The car

stopped at a school called Dieshard, but the “shard” part was gone.

The three of them are nowhere near a gas station, so they headed inside the rusty, old, and extremely horrific-smelling school in search of something that they could use, such as fuel they used for the buses. They enter the main hall of the school, where the lockers were half off their hinges, and had streaks of blood on them. They turned the corner and saw that the kids were carriers also!

They snatched out their guns as the children came toward them with their tattered school clothes and bloodstains. The three of them shot and headed into a classroom. But behind the door was the teacher, and she was a carrier, too!

“Look out!” cried Joe. *Bang!* went the shot of the gun! The carrier fell with a loud thump.

“Come on, guys. Let’s head into the kitchen,” whispered Jane.

The kitchen was a gourmet kitchen set, but looked no better than the carriers, and there was dog hair everywhere. As they got closer to the rust-covered stove they heard growling, and saw a cage about three feet tall. The gate swung open. “Ahhh!” screamed Jake. A dog that was infected, with patches of bare skin and covered in blood and dirt-covered fur, pounced on him and bit him in the shoulder!

Jane and Joe trained their guns on the dog and shot. The dog whimpered in agony from the excruciating pain of the fire hot bullet embedded in its skin.

“Are you all right, Jake?” asked Jane.

“Ya, I’m fine,” said Jake reassuringly. They all managed to slip out of the school and onto the streets without the children noticing them.

“Is that what I think it is?” asked Joe curiously.

“Yeah, I think it is,” said Jane agreeing. The two of them slowly set Jake down by the wall close by and walked closer to look at a tank!

“Jake! Look!” shouted Joe. But there was no reply, and Jake was standing up. He was walking toward them like a zombie.

As he drew closer they realized he was a carrier now! The two of them hopped in the tank and fired at him. He dropped like a sack of potatoes with a loud thud.

They use the radio in the tank to call the military. “Hello. Hello. Is anyone there?” asked Jane.

“Yes, who is this?” replied the soldier.

“We are stuck in Detroit, and we need you to send us a helicopter so we can escape!” said Jane.

“All right, right away. It will be on top of the old parking lot,” assured the soldier.

They made their way up to the roof level by level, through the carrier-infested levels, shooting the carriers as they went. When they got to the top, there were about one hundred carriers, and Jane and Joe were nearly out of bullets. Luckily for them, the helicopter was in sight.

They got out of the tank, and shot all of their bullets at the carriers until the helicopter landed with a gust of wind from the helicopter blades. When it landed the carriers were getting closer, but not close enough. The two of them just barely got away with their lives.

As they rode out of Detroit, they were examined by the doctors on the helicopters to make sure they weren’t infected. They were given two thousand dollars to start their new life in California.

The two of them had the endurance to survive Detroit. It was extremely dangerous and scary, but the two of them made it.

Orville Redenbacher

Popcorn

*What happens when a good snack goes bad? Adventure is in the bag in **ORVILLE REDENBACHER POPCORN**, by Ian Beal.*

One day O.R. (Orville Redenbacher) was in his lab trying to come up with a new popcorn recipe for his popcorn. He wanted a new kind that would not taste like all the others, and would pop bigger than all the others. He mixed dozens of concoctions that he thought would be great, but none of them tasted great. He tried more butter; he tried less butter, and everything in between.

Then one of his favorite workers gave him an idea. He tried it and it worked perfectly. He started all his workers on this new popcorn.

In the morning they packed up all their boxes, and the two drivers started to drive them to the store. While they were driving they noticed that they were being followed by a black truck. They just decided they were going to hold off to see if they were going to try something.

Then all of a sudden there was a blinding green light. Nobody knew where it was coming from. They thought that the car behind them had shot something at them.

Then those in the truck behind them made their move. They drove up to the van and started shooting. In the van, all

they heard was *BANG BANG BANG*, and they swerved to the left and hit the side of the wall.

All you could hear was the tires scraping against the wall. Metal and sparks were flying everywhere. They tried to fight back, but their van couldn't handle it. Then there was an exit, and they got pushed into it. The black truck didn't get forced into it, and the van got away.

They had enough in their van to make the delivery and get back. They told O.R. what had happened. He just shipped the rest off.

That night all of the popcorn came alive, and by the next day it had enslaved the entire world.

It was up to one person in the world, and that person was O.R. He woke up the next morning and went outside. He looked around and couldn't see anybody. He checked his radar and couldn't see anything. He decided to look into it. He saw that the world was enslaved and he was the only one who could save them.

The popcorn caught him and turned him into popcorn, and the popcorn took over the world.

People of the “Air Kind”

*Sam can't find her family—or anyone else, for that matter. But what is that in the distance, moving toward her? In **PEOPLE OF THE “AIR KIND”** by Samantha Stimac, the world undergoes a dramatic change.*

I was coming out of the store, and there was nothing but silence. Sundays to me are the worst day to come out of a store in the dark. At least I was with my cousin Anna.

I had this weird feeling in the pit of my stomach that something was about to happen. The people were scarce, and it was pitch black at 7:30 at night in July, which is very unusual for that month. That's what made me wonder.

There are just some things that stick in your mind like glue. This was one of those times. I just couldn't understand what was going on. Why was it so dark, and where were all the people?

I finally got home from hanging out and talking with my cousin. I was tired from all the walking and shopping we did. I said hi to Mom and Dad and went straight to bed.

I woke up that night from some weird sound I heard. I got out of bed and went into my parents' room. Where could they be? It was 2:00 in the morning. I searched the house for my siblings. There was no sign of them, either. I was alone.

I was in a panic—me, Sam, of all people. I was in a panic. “What happened to them?” I said. “Where could they have gone?” Something big may have happened, and I was afraid it wasn't good.

I went outside, and it was rather warm, with a mist of rain in the air. It was silent, but peaceful. “Wait, this doesn’t seem like rain to me.” I had no idea what was going on.

Coming my way there were visible figures that looked like people, but they weren’t. I couldn’t exactly make them out. It didn’t seem like they were robots, nor clones. It was air, colorful air. All the people from before were now air. I was the only one left on this so-called Earth. It wasn’t Earth anymore because I was the only one left. I couldn’t find anyone from before. I knew right then I was alone.

I saw all these people I knew that had now turned into colorful air. A couple of other things were a little weird to me, too. Why didn’t the air people talk? These air-like people just gave you this odd glare, the one that would haunt you. The other thing that was weird to me was that I felt like I was the only “real” person left. Why didn’t anyone take me and do some process to me to make me into air?

Where was Anna? Did she turn into air, too? The question here is how I find out what happened, and how it happened. First I needed to find Anna.

I didn’t need to go far before I saw her. She was coming straight at me until I didn’t see her anymore. She had gone right through me. She didn’t even notice that it was me. Were the air people brainwashed, too, or did they not recognize people who weren’t like they were?

I ran after her as I saw her turn into this alley where you could see millions of air people. I tried to grab her, but of course she was air, so I couldn’t. I ran past her and stopped. This time she stopped with me.

“Hi, Anna,” I said to her as she was in a hurry to get back to the air people.

“19250,” she said.

I went to the side of her and saw the number she had just blurted out to me on a tag that said, “Hello, my name is 19250.” It was cool because her tag was made out of air, too.

It turned out that the air people could talk. She told me that the number told her that she was the 19,250th person to turn into air. The reason the air people never talked before was because they normally don’t talk to people who aren’t their kind, which would include me, because I’m real.

A couple of hours ago Anna had gotten an announcement that there was only one person left on the Earth, and her name was Sam KerPatchric. Anna asked me what my name was, and that’s what my name is. Before I could say another word, 19250 disappeared before my eyes. After she disappeared you could see air people one by one disappearing, too.

I ran around and didn’t see any air people left. They were all gone. I guess I should worry about what my life’s going to be like with no one around.

Robot House

*A boy finds it necessary to battle robots in his own house if he is to save his sister from harm in **ROBOT HOUSE**, by Bryce Irwin Anderson.*

BOOM! Oh my gosh, what was that? I heard a bang and sat straight up. My ears were ringing like church bells. I looked around the room and thought to myself, “Of course you can’t see anything; the light isn’t on.”

I turned on the light and saw three robots in the middle of my room. They seemed to be making beeping noises. I think they were talking to each other. Suddenly one of the robots walked out of the room. “This can’t be real!” I thought. I shut my eyes tight then opened them again. “Oh my gosh, this really isn’t a dream.”

“Aaaaaaaahhh!” I would know that scream anywhere. That was my sister’s scream. Then I thought the robot that walked out of the room must have taken my sister. I got out of bed to try and save her, but as soon as I got out of the bed, the two robots lunged at me. I dodged them quite easily because they weren’t very fast robots. But when I looked back I saw the robots had both broken through the wall. I couldn’t believe what was happening, but I kept running to get to my sister’s room.

Of all nights, this was the first night my parents agreed that we could stay home alone without a babysitter. They wouldn’t be home till around midnight.

The two other robots came at me and started chasing me down the hall. When I got to my sister's room, she was in the clutches of the robot; she was thrashing and kicking, trying to get away. I thought that this must be the robot that took off first from my room.

My sister was screaming. "Help! Help! Let me go, you bucket of bolts. Let me go!" she said again, but the robot didn't budge. I decided to keep running past her room because if I stopped they might catch me. I ran to the stairs and almost fell down because I was running so fast.

When I got to the bottom of the stairs, I hooked a left and went for the bathroom. I went there to hide and hopefully get a second to think.

Then suddenly the door was splintered into pieces. It scared me so badly that I dove to get under the sink and accidentally hit the water faucet. It was at full blast like a geyser or something, shooting water all over. The water splashed all over the walls and, most importantly, the robots. The robots started spinning and jerking around; sparks started to fly, and then there were puffs of smoke. "Wow," I thought, "they must be short-circuiting or something. Of course they are, silly," I told myself. "Electricity and water don't mix."

I left the two twirling, popping robots in the bathroom and ran back upstairs to help my sister. I made a mad dash for my room and got my super deluxe water cannon from exactly where I always leave it. It is always under my bed, half full for the "splash your sister when she makes you mad for hogging the bathroom" attacks.

I darted out of my room and went back to my sister's room as fast as I could run. The last robot couldn't exactly charge me because he had my sister to contend with. So I started squirting at it, hitting both sister and robot with all the water left in my water cannon.

I yelled for her to make a jump for it and get away from the robot. When she was out of the way, I pushed the turbo cannon spray button and gave the robot all I had left. Then came the jerking and smoking, and that was that: three fried robots, a wet sister, and a demolished house.

We sat on the bottom steps, speechless. I looked up at the clock that had fallen off of the used-to-be wall to the bathroom. It was 11:55 p.m. I said to my sister, “Boy, are we going to have some explaining to do when Mom and Dad come home.”

Robots Take Over My Room

In **ROBOTS TAKE OVER MY ROOM** *by* **Elijah J. Mims**,
*a boy must save his possessions from metal intruders. Lock
your doors!*

It was a foggy day outside. Everything was quiet—too quiet. I heard some people across the street, but I just ignored it.

I go upstairs to my room and see three robots tearing up my room! One is tearing up my computer, another tearing up my closet, and one is tearing up my Wii! I try to stop them. I can't do everything at once, but I try anyway. A couple of minutes later, they threw my TV out the window.

Now I'm trying to figure out what robots like. Hmm... Then it jumps right out of me: oil. I say to myself, "Robots like oil."

I run downstairs into my garage and start searching for oil. Then I remember my dad puts his oil on the top shelf. I get a stool and get it down. I quickly run upstairs again and say, "Who needs oil?"

Each one of those robots sprint over to me and drink as much oil as they can. But that still didn't stop them. Now they were on a bigger rampage than they were before. But then the oil made them all dry up and freeze, so they couldn't move.

I'm thinking about what should I do. I start cleaning up the mess they made and carry them out to the garbage. Right while I'm doing that, my parents are coming down the street.

I run in the house and close the door right before they pull in. My parents walk in the door and up the stairs. My mom says, "Robert Julian Brooks, what is this mess?"

I say, "Robots did it."

She says, "When are you going to grow up? Go to bed, Robert."

I climb in my bed and go to sleep. My mom's right. I do need to grow up.

Romance, Mystery, Horror and History

*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. But a journey of the type found in **ROMANCE, MYSTERY, HORROR AND HISTORY**, by Taylor Hoffrichter, requires a more complicated plan than that.*

It was a warm summer day, and as the slight breeze blew in his face he had an idea for an invention. An hour later he was writing down something on a piece of parchment paper. They were instructions. They were not just any instructions, but a guide for building a time machine.

The time machine looked like a giant grandfather clock that you step into. After you step into it, the machine takes you instantly to another time and place. The instructions stated that to work the machine you had to multiply mass by velocity and divide by volume.

I whispered in the man's ear and asked, "Do you really think it will work?"

The man did not reply, but instead he asked in broken English, "Do you have a name?"

I replied, "My name is Thomas." I continued my conversation with him even though he appeared to not be listening all that well. "I've seen these instructions before. I even built it, and now I'm here."

I went on to explain that I found the instructions in Boston while fighting the British. "My Minutemen had just

repelled the redcoats, and I discovered a wooden box with instructions in them hidden in the English headquarters. It took me several years and many attempts, but I finally built what appeared to be a large grandfather clock. I enlisted many scholars from Harvard University and figured out the formulas, too.

“I walked into the clock, and all of a sudden I was in an alley. I asked someone in the alley where I was and they sent me here. So where am I?” I asked.

The man said, “You are in my workshop, and I thought you would show up one day. I just didn’t know when.”

I asked him, “What do you mean ‘when?’”

He told me I was in Italy and the year was 1373. He introduced himself as Leonardo.

“What do you mean the 1300’s?”

“Well,” said Leonardo, “I’m telling you, you built my time machine and you used it to travel into the past.”

“But,” I said, “why did the machine choose this time period?”

“Because this is the year I instructed it to come back to,” stated Leonardo. Leonardo went on. “Where is my time machine?” he asked excitedly.

“It’s in the alley over there,” I said.

Both of us raced to the alley across the street. It was a cold and misty alley. Someone was already lurking in the shadows next to the time machine. I was shocked to see one of the Harvard Scholars, Mr. Arnold, standing next to the time machine. “How did you get here?” I asked him.

“I traveled through time with my own machine just to make sure you didn’t come back, Thomas. I built my own machine that allows me to go back and forth in time. Since I knew you would come back here, I followed you in my machine.

“Thomas, I’ve been to the future, and I don’t like what I’ve seen. I had to make sure that Thomas Jefferson never comes back.”

With that, Mr. Arnold stepped into the machine and it disappeared.

Afterwards we found Mr. Arnold’s damaged time machine. Because we had Leonardo’s plans, I knew the machine could be repaired.

It took several weeks to figure out how to make it work again and more time creating new parts for the machine. The tools of the time weren’t quite as good as back in Boston. Metal pieces took weeks to reform in Leonardo’s small workshop.

As time passed I learned to appreciate the true brilliance of Leonardo da Vinci. He would stop and think through every move he was about to make and then very quickly complete the task. Even connecting copper wire gave him reason to pause.

Although it took three months to finish the machine, I was able to view many other fantastic machines Leonardo had thought of. There were sketches everywhere in his workshop. I finally explained to Leonardo that I was needed back in 1773 to help free my country from the English. Leonardo understood my dislike of the English, as he stated that it was a common dislike even in his time period.

Finally the day came to travel back to the future. In the blink of an eye I was back in 1773, and all seemed calm. I walked out of the time machine and I walked into the town square of Cambridge.

Suddenly without warning several townsfolk came running up to me and grabbed my arm. I thought they were there to welcome me.

“We’ve been expecting you, Mr. Jefferson,” said one of the men. “Mr. Arnold has been telling us all year that you

would show up here. We weren't sure about that, and yet here you are."

I was thrown in a jail cell and left for several days with little food or water. I demanded that I be let out, and insisted that I know the charges against me.

Finally one night Mr. Arnold showed up to talk to me. "I just couldn't let you be president one day, Thomas, so I left you in the past while I changed a few things. In fact, from now on call me *Sir* Benedict Arnold. The King and I have a new arrangement."

The Village of the Snufflies

*As if space travel wasn't hazardous enough, intrepid pilot Jacob has to contend with additional challenges once he lands on an unknown planet. So much for a "safe" landing. Andrew Tyndall takes us along to **THE VILLAGE OF THE SNUFFLIES.***

Jacob was now hurtling away from Moon base. He was using every ounce of his might to get his little red spaceship back on its course to Moon base, but that asteroid was too powerful and knocked out his steering and his radio. Luckily his shield was strong enough that the whole ship didn't explode! The only hope he had was if he could land on a nearby planet without killing himself, but that was unlikely to happen. He had traveled so far that he wasn't even sure where he was now. All he could do was brace for impact.

Eventually he had slowed down enough that he might be able to survive the crash landing. The only problem was he couldn't see any planets! He had drifted into an unknown part of the galaxy that no one had dared to venture into, but he had no choice.

Jacob had fallen asleep for a while and had not noticed that he had entered the atmosphere of a planet. If it hadn't been for the bell that had sounded he would have probably destroyed the ship and been killed. Since he had no steering he could not enter the atmosphere at the right angle, so pieces

of his ship were fluttering off. He was lucky that it had not stripped off his landing gear, or he would have been a goner.

Jacob had about three more minutes till he reached the planet at the rate he was going. He thought it would be a good idea if he opened the wings to slow himself down a little. Immediately after he opened the wings, he strapped himself down and deployed the landing gear. It was going to be a rough ride from here on out.

The clouds of this unidentified planet were shooting by him. He could feel himself being pressed into the back of the seat. He felt like a spring ready to explode.

Jacob crashed through a thick layer of trees hitting him straight in the windshield. It was like fingernails scraping across a chalkboard. The sound was deafening, and then Jacob hit hard. It was a hit that rattled his bones all the way to his toes, but Jacob survived, and that was the important thing. Now all he had to do was find out where he was.

Jacob crawled out from underneath the burning wreckage he had come from, and then everything was quiet. Jacob heard a frog in the distance, a flock of birds flying out from a nearby tree and the tiny buzz of the flies.

As soon as he looked around he realized he was in no trouble because there was a large flowing creek right in front of him and lots of fruit trees, even though he didn't know if they were good to eat. This planet was like nothing Jacob had ever seen. It was beautiful. Unlike where he had come from, there were lots and lots of wildlife. Where Jacob had come from, it was so unhealthy that he had to move to a space station. This place's wildlife was so dense that without the machete in the emergency supplies he would have been lost forever. He had to find his way out of here, but first he had to see what shape his ship was in.

Jacob's ship was a mess. He knew he was missing a lot of key parts just by listening to what the ship sounded like.

Without them, he would never leave this planet and get back to Moon base. He had to find help, but he didn't even know if this planet was inhabited by intelligent life. For now he would have to scout around and see if he could find anyone to help him.

Little did Jacob know as he was thinking that he was alone that he was being watched very intently by some strange figures. He traveled about for a few hours searching for anyone that could help. He was hoping that this planet had no large man-eating animals, but he needed help for his ship, so he pressed on.

As Jacob was wandering around, he caught a glimpse of a shadow moving quickly away from him. He thought that it might just have been a trick of the light, but then it happened again. This time he saw a low branch move. He followed it to see what it was, hoping it might be some help. He lost the trace of whatever was watching him, so he decided to head back.

Then he saw a little pink tail poke out of a bush beside him. He darted after this creature until he reached an opening where he saw what the creature really was.

This thing was like a pink bunny that stood straight up on two powerful legs. It had an odd-looking face, sort of like a lion with a mane. It looked like it might be very calm and serene.

Jacob was not afraid because he had encountered many aliens at Moon base. However, none were like this.

He looked at Jacob as if Jacob were supposed to follow it, so he did.

Jacob had been so intrigued by this animal that he forgot to look around. There were little huts built into the trees and rope bridges leading from hut to hut, even though it looked like they would have no problem hopping from branch to branch with those strong legs.

It led Jacob up to a hut that was much bigger than the other huts. Inside was a big chair, which a pink alien was sitting on. To each side were aliens who had spears in their hands.

The alien in the chair spoke up. "We are Snufflies, the mightiest creatures throughout this planet. I am the Chief of my people. What are you doing on our planet?" He had a voice that sounded very headstrong.

Jacob told them about the asteroid, the ship, and the shadows following him, the Snufflie, and ending up here. He finished by saying all he wanted was to get back into space, but he needed some parts.

The Chief said, "By now the Mallica will know you are here. They have enslaved one of my brothers. We would be willing to repair your ship if you rescued him."

Jacob agreed to find this Snufflie, but he would need to know his name. The Chief said, "His name is Netero." He pointed Jacob in the direction where the Mallica were hiding out.

It took Jacob three days to reach where the Mallica were hiding, and he had not seen any Mallica except for a merchant and a local Mallica that was not very mean. He said they were all at a village meeting.

Jacob looked around and found out where Netero was being held. Jacob took the key that was supposed to be guarded and unlocked Netero.

Netero was a very kind Snufflie and was very smart. He helped find Jacob's way back to the village, which was a lot shorter walk with Netero guiding him.

When they entered the Village of the Pink Snufflies, the Snufflies were all gone. The huts were ransacked and robbed. Jacob asked Netero who could have done something like this. He angrily replied, "Mallicas."

Netero knew where all the Snufflies had gone because whenever there was trouble in the village they went there to think about things. Jacob followed him through the forest to another opening where a huge ruin emerged. It was at least twice the size of the village. Netero was right. All the Snufflies were there.

He told Jacob about the huge temple that had been destroyed by the Mallica 100 years ago. He said it is still plenty sacred to the Snufflies. Jacob and Netero found the Chief over by the ruins giving commands to other Snufflies. When he saw Netero he couldn't believe his eyes. He was overjoyed that his brother was safe.

The Chief thanked Jacob and said he was a very kind man and he would keep his promise.

Netero, Jacob, and the Chief were discussing why the Snufflies were here. He said that the Mallicas had forced them to leave or fight, so they retreated, but they were coming back again to force them to leave to the outskirts. This time they would have to fight.

A few hours later, they heard them getting closer and closer. The Chief gave out spears to the men, and the women took the kids to a safe hiding spot.

The Mallica jumped out of the forest and began throwing rocks, but the Snufflies drew out their shields and blocked them. They charged forward with their spears pointing outward ready to kill. They rushed, taking out a whole wave of Mallicas

The Mallicas were thinning in numbers, and the Snufflies just kept on fighting until the king of the Mallicas called, "Retreat back to the forest!" but they were still too fast. They pinned down the Mallicas, and they made them surrender. The Chief banished all the Mallicas to the outskirts of the planet to never be seen again.

The Chief lived up to his promise and got Snufflies to help repair Jacob's ship with the parts he bought from the merchant at the Mallicas' camp.

As he was about to lift off he heard someone calling. It was Netero calling him. Netero wanted to know if he could come and travel with Jacob. Jacob said yes, and they traveled back through space to Moon base.

Netero eventually returned to the planet because the smug city life was not for him, but Jacob was still happy. Jacob also went and visited Netero and the village every once in awhile.

Jacob would tell the story over and over to his family and to everyone he knew.

The Virus

*When evil creatures visit a neighboring planet, their promise of friendship is soon revealed to be a lie. Innocent lives are at stake in **THE VIRUS**, by **Cionne CharMel Jones**.*

On planet Ortero the life forms have three legs and green skin. They are called Orterians. Orterians are very friendly to each other, and no one is ever sick or commits crime. The planet is very peaceful and relaxing. The planet is also filled with plenty of natural resources.

On a distant planet far away called Doierminia, the life forms are part human and part robot. The inhabitants of the planet are called Dorminites. The Dorminites are mean, cruel and evil creatures. The Dorminites trick neighboring planets into thinking they come to visit in peace, when their goal is to conquer their planet.

During the summer of 3010, the Dorminites visit the planet Otero. The king, Bugloo, the ruler of Doierminia, tells the people, “We come in peace and are only here to visit your planet.”

The Orterians believe them and welcome them to Ortero by throwing them a big celebration. “We welcome you to our planet, and you and your people are free to use any of our resources we have available,” said the king, Garoostly, enthusiastically.

King Bugloo called the Dorminites to a secret meeting to discuss how they were going to take over the planet. “King Bugloo, I really like this planet. I can not wait to bring my

family here so they can swim and play in the fresh lakes and rivers flowing through the city,” said one of the king’s advisors.

“I agree this planet is rich in soil and natural resources. Our people will like it here. It is for that reason I have decided that we shall take over this planet,” said King Bugloo. “I have discovered through my research of the planet’s history a virus that almost eliminated the Orterians. The Orterians were able to contain the virus and save their people, but they did not destroy the virus. The book does not mention, however, where the virus was stored,” continued the King.

One of the King’s generals said, “I have heard some of the Orterians talking about the virus, and they said it was locked in King Garoostly’s chamber.”

“That is great news,” said the King. “I have the keys to his chamber, so tonight I will retrieve the virus and set it loose tomorrow night.”

Later that night King Bugloo sets off to retrieve the virus. He finds the virus in a glass beaker. He takes the beaker with the virus and replaces it with a beaker filled with water.

The next night he calls a meeting. “My fellow Dorminites, I have retrieved the virus, and tonight I will pour it in the water supply. Do not drink, touch or smell the water unless you boil it first.”

The next day many of the Orterians become really sick. The doctors of Ortero do not have a clue as to why everyone is getting sick. King Garoostly becomes suspicious of foul play when he notices that none of the Dorminites have become ill. “I believe that the Dorminites have tricked us and have somehow spread a disease that is making only our people very ill,” said King Garoostly to his royal advisors.

“This outbreak is very similar to a disease that occurred on our planet about 500 years ago,” said one of his royal advisors.

“I will investigate at once and check my chambers to make sure the virus is still contained in the beaker it was placed in long ago,” said the King.

The King went directly to his chamber, but on the way he notices King Bugloo boiling water before he places it in a drinking glass. The King finds this to be odd, but he has other things to take care of, so he continues to his chamber.

The King found the beaker exactly where it is supposed to be, but he still takes it to the hospital so the doctors can run tests and make sure no one has tampered with the beaker. “This beaker does not contain the virus,” said the doctor in an anxious voice. “There is only water in this beaker.”

The King immediately thought of King Bugloo boiling his water before pouring it in a drinking glass. “Test the drinking water!” the King yelled. “I think the virus is in the water.”

The doctors test the water, and the water tests positive for the virus. “We must find a cure and force the Dorminites off of our planet,” said the King.

King Bugloo placed a spy on King Garoostly after he placed the virus in the water. King Bugloo's spy overhears what the King said and reports back immediately to King Bugloo. “The Orterian King is on to us, King Bugloo. We must take over this planet now while everyone is sick and before they find a cure,” said the spy.

“We will take over as soon as we get our troops together,” said the King.

Later that morning the Dorminites take over the planet. King Garoostly tries to escape, and he is able to get out of the palace undetected. King Garoostly heads to the woods to try to think of a plan to save his planet. In the woods the King hears a quiet whisper coming out of a cave. “King Garoostly, come in here quickly,” said a strange voice. The King, with nowhere else to go, listens to the voice and enters the cave. Inside the cave is one of the villagers. “King Garoostly, you

must find the diamond that is hidden deep in this mineshaft. There is a legend that was passed on from generation to generation that deep in the mineshaft there is a diamond that contains a cure for the virus killing our people. The legend says that when the diamond is placed in the sun, the sun rays reflected from the diamond will travel all across the planet and heal those who were affected by the virus and destroy those who released it,” whispered the strange voice.

“I will go deep into the mine to find the diamond and cure our people,” said the King.

King Bugloo orders his people to search the entire planet for King Garoostly. King Bugloo becomes nervous because they can not find King Garoostly. King Bugloo searches through all the secret documents of the planet, and finally he finds what he is looking for: the cure for the virus he released. King Bugloo sends for his army and sends them to the woods to search for the mineshaft that contains the diamond.

The soldiers head for the woods. The weather is bad. The wind is blowing about 80 miles per hour. The Dorminite soldiers are having a hard time navigating through the woods. The grounds are hilly, wet and slippery. The Dorminite soldiers are tired and cold. “I think we have been this way before. Everything is starting to look the same,” said the lead soldier.

“I know. Soon it will be dark, and I think we are lost. What are we going to do?” asked the other soldier.

The day turned to night, and strange things began to happen. “Did you hear that?” asked one of the soldiers. Before anyone could answer him he felt a rope tighten around his ankles. Suddenly he was dangling by his ankles from a tree branch high above the ground. The other soldier ran back to camp to get help.

The other soldiers came and rescued the soldier hanging from the tree. “I am glad to see you guys. I have been hearing

strange noises all the while I was hanging from this tree,” said the soldier. The strange noises started again, and all of the soldiers became frightened because it was dark and foggy. The soldiers could barely see in front of them.

All of a sudden the soldiers were under attack. Bombs began to explode, but they could not defend themselves because they could not see. “Go back to your planet and leave us alone,” shouted a strange, whispery voice. Unable to defend themselves, the soldiers run back to the palace to tell their King what happened.

The King is angry and upset. He vows to find the cure himself and sets out for the cave. He finds the cave and slowly approaches the entrance. He sees a small person with a hunched back at the entrance.

Slowly he comes up from behind and grabs the little person. “Where is King Garoostly?” said King Bugloo.

A small whispery voice answers, “You will pay for what you have done. You will pay!” King Bugloo throws the small man aside and runs deep into the mine searching for King Garoostly. King Bugloo sees King Garoostly climbing a ledge to try and reach the diamond hanging from the top of the cave. King Bugloo quietly sneaks up behind King Garoostly, and as King Garoostly reaches for the diamond, King Bugloo pounces on his back.

The diamond falls to the ground. King Bugloo breaks loose from King Garoostly and reaches for the diamond, but before he can reach it, King Garoostly draws from his inner strength. He runs towards the diamond and grabs it, and the two Kings race towards the entrance of the cave.

King Garoostly reaches the outside of the cave first and holds the diamond high in the sky. King Bugloo grabs the diamond from King Garoostly, but it is too late. The reflection of the sun flows through the diamond and covers the entire planet. When the reflection of the sun from the

diamond covers King Bugloo, he disappears in a puff of smoke.

One by one all the Dorminites fall to the ground and disappear in a puff of smoke. Instantly the Orterians that were sick are cured.

King Garoostly returns to his palace to resume his position on the throne. The people of Ortero resume their normal life style, but they are different people now. They still live in peace and harmony, but they will never forget the day the Dorminites of Doierminia came to visit.

When Robots Attack

WHEN ROBOTS ATTACK, by *John Ryan*, is the story of two planets colliding after a freak of nature. It reminds us that something good can come out of something bad.

Far, far in the future, there were two planets. Animals lived on one planet, and robots lived on the other. The animals were happy and peaceful. But the robots were evil, angry and mean.

One day both planets were hit by meteorites, causing the two planets to collide with each other. When this happened, a new planet was formed, which was freezing cold and very snowy. In addition to being cold and snowy, when the meteorites hit it caused some animals' DNA to combine with other animals' DNA, resulting in odd, new animal species. Now the robots and animals lived on different sides of the same planet.

The evil robots decided that they wanted the planet all to themselves and decided to go to war with the animals. Their ruler called all of the robots together, and he announced a plan of attack. He said, "We will use the snow and make thousands of giant snowballs to use against the animals. When the giant snowballs hit the animals, it will knock them out and eventually they will freeze to death. Then the planet will be ours and ours alone." But what the robots didn't know is that their ruler didn't want any other ruler on the planet. He would go to extremes to make sure he was the most powerful ruler of all!

It was going to take a while to make all of the snowballs, so they started right away. Once they finished, the robots' next step was to charge all the way to the border that divided the animals and the robots.

Fortunately for the animals, not all of the robots are evil. The good robots told the animals about the evil robots' plans.

The animals' ruler decided to call a meeting of the minds. All of the animals gathered and he announced, "We need to come up with a plan. Does anyone have any ideas?" Whispering started amongst all of the animals.

One animal in a very quiet voice said, "What about using the creature that lives in the cave?" Everyone turned to the ruler and waited for an answer. The ruler nodded, and the planning began.

The animals were ready for the attack. They came up with a plan of their own. The animals had a secret weapon that would destroy the giant snowballs. Their secret weapon was a fire-breathing dragon mixed with a porcupine.

A blizzard blanketed the planet. It worsened, and more snow than ever fell on the planet. All of the robots were making giant snowballs. Once the robots made over 100,000 giant snowballs, they started their march to the other side of the planet. They were getting closer and closer. Finally, they were within striking distance, and they started chucking the snowballs.

The robots kept throwing and throwing, waiting for the snowballs to hit the animals. Soon, they thought, the planet would belong to only them.

All of a sudden, a burst of fire from the dragon's mouth and the quills off its back hit the giant snowballs, causing them to melt in a quick second. Nothing was left but a prickly puddle that was steaming hot.

The robots were boiling mad. They came to declare war and fight. So they started to charge the animals. But the

robot ruler was an evil mastermind and had decided to battle with the animals' ruler. The robot ruler was a robotic skunk. The animals' ruler was a rabid rat mixed with a bird.

The battle between the rulers raged on. They were the only two who continued to attack. Finally, both rulers stopped fighting and looked around.

They realized that the animals and the robots were getting along. The robot ruler addressed the other robots to find out why they weren't battling the animals. They told him they aren't evil or mean anymore. They were just that way because they were so cold, and now that the dragon has heated the planet they are much happier. The robot ruler also noticed he was much happier, too.

He asked the animal ruler for a truce. The two rulers decided to unite instead of fight, and they combined both of their lands into one giant, happy, and warm planet.

SLICE OF LIFE

The Biography of Matthew Bittker

Author *Susie Bittker* says, “Matthew Bittker, my brother, hero, and best friend, had a challenging life.” **THE BIOGRAPHY OF MATTHEW BITTKER** is one of two entries in this volume that celebrates the life of Matthew.

My best friend, brother, and hero Matthew Bittker was a very charismatic child who everybody enjoyed being around. He had light brown curly hair a few inches above his shoulder. Matthew’s bright blue eyes glistened, and he always had a big, beautiful smile. He was tall, thin, and handsome. Most importantly, he had a cheerful, optimistic personality.

Matthew Daniel Bittker was born on June 8, 2001 along with his twin sister, Elana. He always did certain things very differently. For example, his shoes were too big because they belonged to his older brother and he wanted to be like him. I don’t know anyone else his age with huge, worn shoes. Every time I heard Matthew walking in his shoes, I would visualize him dragging his feet in his over-sized gym shoes and laugh. He was very cute the way he walked in the shoes. I will always have fond memories of that image. Also, Matthew wanted to be like his older siblings. In order to do that, Matthew wore clothes too big and said hysterical phrases like “put a sock in it,” and “gotcha good.”

There were many hobbies Matthew enjoyed, such as basketball, hockey, baseball, baking, Webkinz and Neopets on

the computer, Game Boy DS, and arts and crafts. I looked forward to holidays, birthdays, and special events because Matthew would decorate the house. He involved everybody when he was deciding where to place his decorations.

There was never an end to Matthew's curiosity. He always found fun activities to keep him busy. Matthew, Elana, and I enjoyed playing together. I liked to hide candy and watch them search through our house to find the hidden pieces of candy. My favorite part of the game was when Matthew found a piece of candy that was hidden in a really difficult spot. He was so proud of himself. He would walk away with the candy he found, strutting like a peacock. It was fun for me to spend such quality time with both my brother and sister. It was a treat for me to watch Elana and Matthew play together. They had such a great relationship, and I loved being a part of it.

Another activity Matthew enjoyed was playing dress up. Every day in our house seemed like Halloween. If Matthew wasn't playing doctor, he was baking delicious desserts in the kitchen in his chef's uniform. I often helped Matthew bake. He was always in charge, and I would let him give me direction. I liked cracking the eggs. Once in a while, Matthew would ask me if I could help him with the eggs. I still don't know if he needed the help or he was just being nice.

Matthew knew how to bake. He understood what the measurements were and in what order to add the ingredients. Also, he knew where every item was in the kitchen. Sometimes I would have to ask Matthew where I could find a particular mixing bowl. He always felt very important when I needed him to answer my question. Often, I would ask him questions just to make him feel good. As good as it made Matthew feel, it made me feel better.

Matthew had a habit of carrying around a collection of small toys. Everywhere he went, the toys went with him in some type of container. I would often find a container in the

family room, and immediately I would know it belonged to Matthew. When I opened the container, I would laugh when I saw what was inside. I could not believe the variety of items in the container. No matter what was inside the container, Matthew could tell me exactly which items were there.

Sometimes, Matthew would gather a large amount of candy and put it down his shirt. Then, he would sneakily walk upstairs to his bedroom and hide the candy in random places where no one would look. I could always tell by the expression on his face when he was up to something. I loved when his blue eyes would get really big and he would walk a little faster to make sure no one would catch him. Sometimes I would follow him upstairs just to make sure he didn't get caught. When he came out of his room and saw me, all I noticed was an enormous grin and a deep satisfaction. He was so proud that he had gotten away with his hidings once again. I couldn't bear to tell him that we all knew what he was doing. He would have been so disappointed. Often, he would invite me and my siblings to have some candy when our parents weren't looking. It was always such a great time for me. I really enjoyed sitting around with Matthew, Jason, and Elana and sharing all the candy Matthew hid. It was our time to be together. We shared stories or talked about what we wanted to do together. There were many things about Matthew that made him very special to me.

One day in January, 2006, Matthew experienced horrible pain in his left leg. My parents gave him Tylenol, hoping the pain would go away. However, during the night Matthew woke up screaming from the leg pain. In the morning, my parents called a friend who was an orthopedic surgeon to look at his leg. He arranged to have Matthew seen by a pediatric orthopedic doctor the following morning.

Matthew went to the hospital for x-rays, but there were no fractures or broken bones. Then, the doctor sent my

brother to Beaumont for an ultrasound and blood tests. At midnight, the doctor called and told my parents to immediately bring Matthew back to Beaumont Hospital. When I woke up in the morning and found out Matthew was in the hospital, I was very scared. I didn't understand why he left so suddenly.

After several days of testing, the doctors discovered that Matthew had a rare type of cancer called Neuroblastoma. I was numb when I heard Matthew's diagnosis. It all happened very suddenly, without any warning. As soon as my family found out he had this atrocious disease, we researched different hospitals that specialized in treating his cancer. The best hospital my family found for Matthew was Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. Although I was excited there was a great doctor who could help Matthew, I wasn't sure what would happen to my family. I knew Matthew would be in Chicago, but I didn't know who would stay in Michigan.

Matthew arrived at Children's Memorial Hospital, and the doctors tried many ways to cure his illness. First, he received six rounds of intense chemotherapy. Matthew was brave enough to get through it with a great sense of humor and a smile on his face. He stayed in the hospital for a week during each round of chemotherapy. Then, Matthew was given two weeks to recuperate. If his white blood cell count were high enough, he would start chemotherapy again. After he finished all six rounds of chemotherapy, Matthew had surgery to try to remove his tumor. The surgery was painful, and the doctor predicted Matthew wouldn't be able to walk for a week. In two days, Matthew was playing baseball in our apartment. I was worried that he was too active and would injure himself. I tried to encourage him to watch a movie or just relax, but he clearly wasn't interested. I couldn't change his mind, so I decided to join him. My whole family played baseball with Matthew, and I don't remember having more fun.

Next, Matthew had a stem cell transplant. He was isolated for 21 days because the stem cell transplant greatly reduced the effectiveness of his immune system. After intense chemotherapy, surgery, and stem cell transplant, Matthew transferred hospitals to Northwestern Memorial Hospital. I wasn't as comfortable at a different hospital. I was familiar with the way Children's Memorial Hospital operated. If I was uneasy with the change in hospitals, I could only imagine how Matthew felt.

Matthew received radiation to his pelvis and abdomen while at Northwestern. Soon after radiation was complete, he was placed on a clinical trial and received antibody therapy. I can't believe how strong Matthew remained during his treatment. He was the first patient from Children's Memorial to successfully complete the antibody study. During the study, Matthew was given five rounds of antibody therapy and hospitalized for a week each time. I remember Matthew had many really high fevers. Even though he didn't feel well, when I visited him in the hospital we had a great time together. In the beginning I was shocked at his side effects. After a few minutes, Matthew wanted to play with me, and it seemed like nothing could stop him.

Matthew went through many different types of treatment that left him feeling very sick and uncomfortable. However, I could never tell he was miserable by looking at him. He always had a smile on his face, and cared about my feelings and well-being. He came to cheer for me at my soccer and softball games. He knew all my teammates, and tried to keep up on all the little things that happened. When we played softball, Matthew was the batboy until he could no longer physically handle the job. Matthew always made sure the bats and helmets were perfectly organized. Sometimes he was so eager to get the bat that he would run onto the field before the play was over. When he didn't feel well, he would sit on

his special Taz chair in the dugout and encourage my entire team. When I saw Matthew on his chair, my stomach would drop. I felt bad that Matthew wasn't feeling well. I worried that he was uncomfortable and sat on the chair trying to enjoy the game. I often relied on Matthew as my support system. He was always there for me and made me feel special. He would say something very supportive and kind.

Matthew was very comical when he repeated sayings or facts randomly. He had a way of making me feel like I was the best at every activity. Matthew also thought I was the smartest and nicest person. He made me feel so good about myself. When he looked at me with his adoring eyes and smile, I felt like I was on top of the world. When I was down, Matthew always made me feel better. Matthew would either surprise me or tell a joke to change my mood. He was thankful for what he had, and a very confident boy.

Another special characteristic about Matthew was his determination and his success in many things he tried. An example is his experience with Webkinz. Matthew received a Webkinz stuffed animal as a gift from a friend. A Webkinz is a small stuffed animal with a tag attached to it. The tag contains a numerical code that must be entered on the computer. After the code is entered on the computer, your stuffed animal comes to life. Then, the owner is responsible for his or her stuffed animal's health and happiness. The website has an arcade where you play games and earn money to pay for your stuffed animal's needs or wants. There are also areas to get a job, see the doctor, send gifts to friends, and shop.

Matthew was determined to figure out how to enter the code and play the newly discovered website. Sure enough, Matthew figured out how to enter the code and started playing before any of us could help him.

This was a great way for me to stay close to Matthew when he was in Chicago and I was in Michigan. We would

play games against one another. It was surprising to me that we could interact so much when we were in different states. I would make sure I sent his Webkinz a gift when he had his treatment. I would make sure the gift came with a really sweet note. He would tell me how much he loved the gifts and notes. I thought it was really sweet that he was surprised each time I sent him the gift. He never expected anything from me. I was thrilled we had Webkinz to keep us constantly connected to one another.

When Matthew was about four and a half years old, he became very sick, and was no longer able to attend school. Even though Matthew did not go to school, he learned how to read, write, and add numbers. He spent many hours playing with many different computer programs, educational toys, card games, and boxed games to continue his success in learning. Every time I visited Matthew in Chicago, I noticed that his reading and addition had really improved. It always caught me by surprise because his skills had advanced dramatically, and I knew he wasn't in school. I couldn't believe how determined he was to continue learning on his own.

Matthew adored birthday parties. The only activity he enjoyed more than birthday parties was planning them. Matthew's dream for his sixth birthday was to have an ice cream truck at his party. He decided that an ice cream truck would be a fun thing to have since he enjoyed buying ice cream at Franklin Park after my brother Jason's baseball game. My parents decided to have an ice cream truck come to Matthew and Elana's birthday party.

When the ice cream truck arrived at our house, I saw an extremely wide smile spread across Matthew's face, and his eyes lit up like the stars in the sky. He was so genuinely excited. He looked like he wanted to jump up and scream. I was thrilled that my parents were able to make his wish come

true. It was the first time that week that I saw Matthew excited about anything. He hadn't been feeling well the week of his birthday.

At the time of Matthew's party, he couldn't walk. He asked me if I could carry him into the ice cream truck. I was so happy that I could help Matthew with this small task. It made me feel good that I could do it. He was genuinely excited to serve every person at the party an ice cream. Surprisingly, Matthew found the strength to stand on his own two feet while he was serving ice cream to his friends. He had such a strong will and desire to please people that he overcame the pain in his leg for those few special moments.

I was very fortunate to have Matthew Daniel Bittker as my brother. He endured a lot, and never worried about himself. He was always concerned about everybody else. He loved spending as much time as he could with family and friends. He was definitely a people person. Matthew always had a positive attitude, and was very thankful for everything. He set an incredible example for me to follow.

I learned a lot from my younger brother. Even though he was six years old when he passed away, he taught me more about life than I will probably ever learn. I have a greater appreciation for what's truly important in life. I used to pay attention to all the little details in life, but Matthew taught me to look at the big picture. He also taught me to know who you are and be happy with yourself. I will cherish the time I had with Matthew. My experience with Matthew has helped me become a more kind and thoughtful person.

Getting Judged

*Not everything is about winning. **GETTING JUDGED** is a story about **Madison Broadwell's** challenges and achievements in the sport she loves best.*

I am a sixth-grade student at Berkshire Middle School. One of my interests is karate. Every year there is a tournament at Michigan State University. Last year I participated in this tournament.

When you compete against someone else, you are asked to wear either a white or red belt so the judges can distinguish between you and your opponent. You are assigned a partner who you compete against. This is called a *kata*. (A *kata* is a series of punches and kicks done in a certain order).

My partner was a tough kid with spiky hair. The intimidating look in his eyes made me want to cry.

As I stepped up to do the *kata*, things only got worse. I looked around at all the people in the audience staring at me. This gave me a million butterflies in my stomach. There were at least six judges sitting around me in a circle. They looked strong, and all of their focus and attention was put on me.

I bowed to the judges and then to my partner, and began my *kata*. I knew this *kata* by heart and tried to keep my eyes straight forward. Once I was done I stepped back and watched my partner do his *kata*. He was just as good as I expected, if not better, and I prepared myself for a loss. Two of the judges held up a white flag, and the other four held a red flag. I glanced down at my belt, which was red.

Surprisingly I had won the first round, and was moving on to the second.

A huge weight had just been taken off my shoulders. At least I could tell my friends at home that I made it through the first round.

The second round was a breeze. My partner was a girl my age. She looked like she was good at karate, but she wasn't as scary as my first partner. I tried my hardest through the second round and won again, one to five. I felt like jumping up and down in enjoyment but contained myself.

The next thing I knew it was time for the third round. This time my partner was a boy with a blue belt. While we were waiting in line to compete, the boy leaned over and whispered in my ear, "You could never beat a blue belt."

That hit me hard. I couldn't just stand there and let this boy insult me, so I whispered back, "I have beaten one before." After that nobody said anything.

Once it was time to compete I got really nervous. All of a sudden I felt sick to my stomach. I was about to back out, but knew it was too late now. I took a deep breath and went in.

At the end of the *kata* I waited patiently for the judge's scores. It was two to five. I had lost.

I was disappointed but proud that I had made it so far. I took a seat with my family, and when it was time for them to hand out the trophies for first, second, and third places, I heard my name called for a second-place trophy. I jumped up and ran over to get my trophy.

That day gave me a great sense of accomplishment. Even though I did not win first place, I understand that life's full of disappointments and that's something you have to get over. Throughout my four years in karate, I have won two third-place trophies, two second-place trophies, two fourth-place awards, and I plan on winning a first-place trophy someday. I love karate and will carry it with me all of my life.

I Love My Grandma

*Erin demonstrates a clear grasp of what is truly important in **I LOVE MY GRANDMA**, by Erin Langan.*

A lot of times when grandparents die, you don't realize what you had 'til it's gone. You remember how much you hated having to listen to those boring old stories, but then once they're gone you wish you would have taken the time to listen. When I was a little kid I never took the time to listen or talk to my grandma. It wasn't that I had to listen to a bunch of boring old stories. I just didn't have anything to say. A lot of times little kids just don't want to talk. As I got older I realized grandparents are a lot of fun to talk to.

I'm glad I figured this out when I did because a little while after is when my grandma got breast cancer for the second time. It got so bad that she was going to treatment every Tuesday. One summer she spent the whole summer in the rehab center—that was a few years ago now. However, a year or two after that she got worse.

In early November 2006 she had to be put into a hospice center. That's when people really started to worry. She was in great shape when she was put into the hospice center. No one had any idea what lay ahead. She was talking, laughing, and cracking jokes; all of the employees loved her.

The days went by, and pretty soon it was Thanksgiving. This year Thanksgiving was going to be at my Aunt Cindy's house, and everyone was excited. Grandma's favorite holiday was Christmas, so my aunt had the house all decked out,

Christmas tree and all. Then my grandma visited her real home that was actually attached to my aunt's house; it was kind of like a condo.

The weekend after that I hung out with grandma a lot. My mom, my sister Lauren, and I slept over in her room at the hospice center. First off, I took my bell kit; oh my, did she *love* to play the bells. She just couldn't stop jammin'. She was having a great time!

At the hospice center on different days of the week they had a family snack an hour after dinner. So, when we were done playing the bells we went to get a snack. It was a Friday night, so the snack was ice cream sundaes. After we were done eating the delicious sundaes, we watched the movie *White Christmas*. She just loved that movie. Then we watched some regular TV and went to bed. In the morning we watched some more TV, visited with her, visited with other people that came to visit, sang Christmas carols, said goodbye, and then we were off. We left about 3:00 p.m.

One week later she took a turn for the worse. She would just lie in her bed in pain not talking much to anyone. The last time I saw her before she died was Sunday, December 10, 2006.

The next day, Monday, my parents went to go see her again. When I got home from school I let myself in and called my mom to tell her I was home. On the phone I asked her, "How is grandma doing?"

She said, "She's hanging in there." Then she let me talk to her to say "I love you." So, she handed her the cell phone.

I said, "Hi, Grandma, I love you!" She wasn't responding to anyone all day, so when she tried to say "I love you too, Erin" by moving her lips, everyone was amazed, and when I heard about it I was touched.

A lot of people didn't think she was going to make it through the night, but she did. However, just in case,

everyone sang “Happy Birthday” to her early. Her birthday wasn’t until January 20, but that didn’t matter; she was so excited to be turning 85.

She also made it through Tuesday, but on Wednesday it got bad. My mom and her family put on Christmas songs softly in the background. At 10:20 a.m. “Silent Night” came on. During that song she passed away, and it just so happens that the last line of that song is “...*sleep in heavenly peace.*”

I took an after-school class that day and was really happy. So when my dad came to pick me up he tried to act happy, too. But when we got to the car I asked him, “How is Grandma doing?”

He said, “Let’s wait ‘til we get situated.”

I said, “Okay,” although I thought it was weird. So, when I was in my seat with my seatbelt on I asked him again.

He said, “She passed away this morning.” I started sobbing and wouldn’t let go of him.

Spending that weekend with her was a memory I will never forget and will always cherish. She was a great person to be around. Her family meant everything to her, and she wasn’t going to leave without a fight! She put up a good one, too. It was really sad to see her go, but at least now she is no longer suffering.

Matthew Bittker: A Biography

*“My brother was incredibly brave and courageous during his 18-month battle with cancer. Matthew was a wonderful role model and was truly inspirational,” says author **Jason Bittker**. **MATTHEW BITTKER: A BIOGRAPHY** is one of two entries in this volume that celebrates the life of Matthew.*

My brother Matthew Bittker was born on June 8, 2001. At the age of four, Matthew was diagnosed with a type of cancer called Neuroblastoma.

I remember the day I heard the horrible news. I was scared and worried about my brother. Even at his young age, he showed EXTREME courage and bravery during his battle with cancer. Matthew handled cancer like no one else.

Matthew was an extremely loving and caring brother. He had light brown hair and bright sparkling blue eyes. He was a smart, tall, and skinny young boy. He was always happy and joking with others. One of his favorite sayings was “Gotcha good.” He had a big, beautiful smile from ear to ear that was contagious.

It didn’t bother Matthew that he lost his hair twice as a side effect from the chemotherapy. Matthew wanted to be treated the same as everyone else. He never asked “Why me?” or “Why did I get cancer?” Matthew simply wanted to get better and be like everyone else.

Matthew was the most brave and courageous person in the entire hospital. During the first stage of treatment at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, he received six rounds (18 weeks) of chemotherapy. Each round of chemotherapy required at least one week of hospitalization.

Usually, I arrived in Chicago on Thursday night or Friday and stayed until Sunday night. I always went directly to Matthew's hospital room and sat next to him in bed. By the time I arrived, Matthew would have already received four full days of chemotherapy. The treatments made him feel tired, nauseous, and dizzy, but as soon as Matthew saw me and my sisters enter the room, he would immediately smile from ear to ear and start joking around. He never let the side effects from the drugs interfere with our visits.

Matthew was usually given two weeks off between chemotherapy treatments. He lost his hair within the first couple of weeks of treatment. I remember the evening his hair was noticeably falling out. Matthew saw huge piles of hair on his pillow. I was very concerned about him, but he made a joke about it. I suggested that I would either get a buzz cut or shave my head so we could be twins. He said that I should keep my hair, but I should cut it shorter. He decided that his hair would return in no time.

Despite the side effects, Matthew's leg pain was reduced, and he was able to walk again. Next, Matthew had surgery on his pelvis area. During the surgery, any tumor left in the pelvis area was removed if possible. Then, Matthew received a stem cell transplant. He was isolated in the hospital for twenty-one days because his immunity system was severely compromised. Afterward, Matthew went to radiation every day for approximately three weeks. He also enrolled in a clinical trial using antibody therapy.

Throughout his treatment, Matthew's primary doctor in Chicago was Dr. Susan Cohn. Dr. Cohn has spent many years

researching Neuroblastoma and trying to find a cure. Matthew received excellent care during his battle with cancer.

One of Matthew's favorite activities was to visit the Hershey's store in downtown Chicago. When he entered the store, he received a brown, paper baker's hat. Most of the employees in the store knew Matthew. They made him feel very special and always talked to him. He usually walked to the back of the store where he would wait in line at the bakery.

I loved watching Matthew design his own cupcake. First, he selected a large, chocolate cupcake. He would point to a particular cupcake that caught his eye. Then, he would ask for plenty of blue frosting to totally cover his cupcake. Finally, he would top his creation with Kissables, Hershey Kisses, or Reese's Pieces. We would often eat part of the cupcake in the big red booth, and take the leftovers home to finish later.

Occasionally, Matthew would take a bucket and fill it with different chocolates. You could choose from approximately seven different types of chocolate. For each chocolate, you would turn the knob of a large dispenser and chocolate would pour out.

Outside the Hershey's store, there were many horse carriages. This was the location where the rides would begin and end through downtown Chicago. We often watched the horses, and once took a ride together as a family. Matthew really enjoyed the Hershey's store, and I will always remember our time together.

Matthew loved all different types of sports. His favorite sports were baseball, hockey, wrestling, and basketball. He attended most of my little league baseball games. How Matthew felt physically usually had no bearing on whether he would attend the game. For some games, Matthew would show up with a hot pack on his stomach under a heavy blanket.

Matthew loved talking to the players. He would often have a Little Caesars pizza and a bag of crazy bread on his lap. Matthew always shared his food with the team. Almost every player had a slice of pizza or a piece of crazy bread by the end of the game.

Additionally, when Matthew felt well he loved to be the team bat boy. He took great pride in organizing the bats and baseball helmets. He knew all the players' names, and which bat they preferred. He was the first one to congratulate me every time I made a great play or batted well. I was so excited to come into the dugout after I touched home plate. I knew the first person I would see would be my brother. The look in his eyes showed such deep admiration and love, it made me feel very good. He made me want to play the best baseball I could possibly play. I never wanted to let him down.

After one of my games, Matthew came with me to my friend's house. My friend has a DJ set, and Matthew wanted to be the DJ. He was wearing big headphones while playing the records. Instantly, Matthew's face lit up with a smile across his face. I was very excited because this was the first time Matthew had been active in many weeks. It made me feel good to see Matthew enjoy himself. I have to admit, it was a great night for me because Matthew was there.

We also played basketball, and I made sure the hoops were shorter so it was easier for Matthew to score. When Matthew became tired, he would sit in a hockey net to rest so he couldn't get hit by the basketball. That night, Matthew was given the nickname "Mini Bitty" because my nickname was "Bitty."

At about 11:30 p.m., my mom picked us up. Matthew had had an amazing time. He loved playing sports with the older boys. I loved having Matthew spend time with me and my friends. It was exciting to see my friends discover my brother's great personality and true character.

Other hobbies Matthew enjoyed were baking and arts and crafts. He baked cookies and brownies nearly every week. He would have so much fun dressed in his white chef's costume in the kitchen. I liked coming home and smelling the delicious scent. I always had a great time trying to guess what Matthew created that day. In addition to baking, Matthew loved making paper chains to decorate the house. He enjoyed decorating for both holidays and birthdays. Matthew used a cheerful and fun theme to make each celebration really special. I enjoyed my brother's energy and creativity. He would ask me so many questions to determine if he was decorating the house to my satisfaction. It made me feel good to know how much he valued my opinion. Everything that Matthew did or participated in was more fun because of his enthusiasm.

Matthew absolutely loved using the computer. His favorite website to visit was Webkinz. A Webkinz is actually a small, stuffed animal. It comes with a code that gives you access to your animal on the computer. Your stuffed animal comes to life once you enter the special code. You need to choose a username and password to access your animal.

Matthew's first Webkinz was a frog. He decided to name him Froggy248. He was really excited to see his frog on the computer. Matthew had to take care of Froggy248 and make sure he was healthy and not hungry. He and I could play games in the arcade against one another to earn money to care for Froggy248. Once Matthew earned money, he would use his money to buy food, objects to put in his room, and healthcare for his frog. We had such a good time deciding what to buy together. Matthew eventually collected almost fifteen Webkinz. It always amazed me that Matthew was able to learn new games and features on the website by himself.

Matthew loved spending time with friends and family. Every day, Matthew's first question was whether anyone

would be visiting him. He loved spending time with kids his own age or older. He was smart beyond his years, and could keep up with all my friends.

At Children's Memorial Hospital, the nurses were able to sign up for a particular patient. Many nurses requested Matthew, even though he could only be assigned one nurse every twelve hours. When nurses weren't assigned to Matthew, they would often stop by and apologize to him. Matthew was very friendly, and developed wonderful friendships with many nurses. Often, the child life specialist would stop by Matthew's room and spend an hour playing cards with him.

While we were in Chicago, Matthew spent most of his time with our family and friends. He attended many Chicago Bulls and White Sox games. He was always very happy when he was interacting with people.

Matthew was extremely lucky to have an opportunity to meet two professional wrestlers from the WWE. Our cousin Steven met Rey Mysterio and Chris Benoit in a Detroit hotel. Steven told the wrestlers that Matthew had cancer. He explained that Matthew guided his week by the WWE wrestling programs on television. Then, Steven asked them to sign a piece of paper for Matthew. They were thrilled to write Matthew a note and sign it. Afterwards, the wrestlers told Steven they would be in Chicago for Wrestlemania in two weeks and would love to visit Matthew.

The day after Wrestlemania, the two wrestlers knocked at our apartment door. When Matthew opened the door, Rey Mysterio and Chris Benoit were standing there along with their wives and children. Matthew was shocked and stood there with his mouth wide open.

Rey Mysterio arrived in his wrestling mask that he wears during matches. While Rey was visiting, he asked Matthew to remove his mask. Furthermore, he allowed Matthew to put his

mask on and hold the WWE Heavyweight Champion Belt. It was truly a thrill for everyone.

The wrestlers visited with Matthew for almost five hours. Once they left our apartment, Matthew fell fast asleep. It had been an emotionally exhausting day. After this visit, Matthew had several phone calls and e-mails from the wrestlers discussing various things about wrestling. He really loved his visit with the wrestlers, and cherished his “new friends.”

Matthew died on July 20, 2007. He taught me to be brave and happy no matter what situation I face. Bravery and courage were two very important traits he possessed during his battle with cancer. Matthew was a wonderful role model, and a positive influence on the people around him. I learned that I should never complain. Matthew endured much more than I will in my entire lifetime. I am so thankful that Matthew was my brother, and I miss him very much.

Mostly Fearless

In MOSTLY FEARLESS by Rodney Winkler, a boy is nervous about his first time on skis. The story shows this boy's attempt to conquer his fears.

Fearless: without fear, brave. I've been told that's the definition of me. I've played football, I've swum with sharks, I've been parasailing, I love roller coasters, I trapeze, and I've gone zip-lining. But the first time I went skiing I wasn't so fearless.

When I woke up I was very nervous. I don't normally feel this way when it comes to sports. I didn't want to talk to anyone. I felt like I had a pit in my stomach. I looked out the window and saw the white snow on the mountain. All I could think about was not making a fool of myself on the mountain in front of everybody.

My friend Adam and I drove to Snowmass Mountain. He asked, "Hey, Rodney, you nervous?"

I lied. "No, not really." I looked at the powdery mountain out the window. I was worried that I wouldn't be able to balance. What if I broke my leg?

We arrived at the mountain, got our gear from the car, and carried our skis and helmets to the lounge. Inside the lounge we met our ski instructor, Galen. Sometimes people say they have butterflies in their stomach. I felt like I had hornets in mine.

Galen seemed really nice and experienced. That helped me feel a little better. Galen took us to the ski lift, and we

went to the top of the mountain. I had a bird's eye view of Snowmass. I saw people skiing and snowboarding down the snowy mountain. I wished I was one of them because they looked so good.

The ski lift came to a stop, and we pushed off. It was finally ski time. I got even more anxious, but I knew I could do it. Galen gave us tips on how to break and turn. He then said, "You guys are ready." I was determined to conquer this sport, too.

Adam and I took our ski poles and dug them into the ground. We pushed ourselves off, and we were skiing! I was soaring down the mountain like an eagle soaring through the wind. I realized it wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. I couldn't believe I did it.

I got to the bottom of the mountain and couldn't wait to do it again. I couldn't believe how fun it was. Galen said, "For your first time you did well, but you still need to practice a lot more." I agreed.

The rest of the trip was fun, and I got much better. Now I look back and think I was silly for being nervous. Galen taught me a lot. I hope to get to black diamond, which is the highest level for skiing and snowboarding runs.

I can't wait until next time.

Two Friends

*In **TWO FRIENDS** by Eric J. Scott, a boy's best friend moves away. He relives some of the memorable times the friends has together.*

The house was empty. The moving truck loaded its last load. He and his parents came to my house to say goodbye. General Motors had promoted his father, and that was that. He was moving. It was final. The Joneses had to move. Cleveland, Ohio was the place. Our parents had talked to us and said we could visit. We were just two hours away. But I knew things would change.

I remember all the fun times, like the first day we rode the school bus to Greenfield Elementary School. I was a bit afraid, but he told me it was going to be ok. He was one year older than I was. His birthday is in September.

The first party was on September 11, 2001. At five years old, I had no idea what was going on in the country. It was a great day for us. It ended in my very first sleepover.

His family is from the east coast. And they did not always return home for the holidays. On Thanksgiving my mom invited them to dinner. His mom made some cookies that were out of this world.

Our first vacation together was on winter break. We all went to Florida, lucky us; our dads took us to a Miami Heat game (my favorite basketball team). We got to see Dwayne Wade, and Alonzo Morning play. What a day! Another great memory was when his family took me to Chicago. At the

Science Industry Center I rode the stratosphere ride he was too chicken to get on.

He went to Cleveland with my family. We went to Six Flags. Also we went to an African Safari.

We rode our bikes everywhere. We went to the creek with all our friends. Don't even get me started on sleepovers. We played Power Rangers until we fell fast asleep.

What made all of these ordinary things special was because I was with my best buddy. When we went to Canada, my friend and I went on a roller coaster 17 times! And we had a huge pillow fight in the hotel that lasted three hours.

I will never forget the time we mixed all different types of food together and gave it to his dad. We told him it was peanut butter and jelly, and his Dad actually ate the concoction. We laughed for about one hour.

The thing I will never forget is when I saw the moving trucks. I remember the exact day: November 12, the last day my friend came across Spring River Drive to say goodbye. We shook hands and said goodbye. My friend moved to Cleveland, Ohio. I miss my friend Jayson.

That Was Then

Track to the North

*Despite the official proclamation, emancipation came slowly to the American South. The harrowing experience of one family's attempt to make freedom come true is the subject of **TRACK TO THE NORTH**, by Grant Jackson.*

Every now and then I think about it. What happened that year. We were about to get on a train to go to the joyful and free north. Although slavery was abolished, the south was still mad for losing the harsh and gruesome war. The war ended a couple of years before and it took us so long to leave because the train tickets were at an exorbitantly high price. My dad, Victor, who was a very brave and strong man, had to steal some money, which mother thought was a bad idea because if he got caught, he would for sure be hung or shot.

We had just woken up at about 7:15 A.M. to catch the train. Our train left at 8:00 A.M., and if we were late, we wouldn't get our money back because the owner of the station was white and he was mad enough that we were riding. We were all packed and ready to go to the train station when Mr. Smith, one of our hateful owners, stopped us at the door with a scrunched up face. His eyes stared a deathly and serious look. He wanted some money before we left, but if we gave him money, we wouldn't have enough to go on the train ride. Mr. Smith held up a silver shotgun that glistened with death and pain.

We all stopped dead in our tracks. I heard my heartbeat, which sounded strangely loud. My stomach felt as if it had a

hole through the middle of it as if I was on a runaway horse with thrill and thrust. My dad waited and waited for a move from Mr. Smith, but he stayed right where he was and just moved the gun back and forth threatening us. I knew my dad had perseverance to get that gun out of Mr. Smith's hand. Victor leaped across the dry wooden planks that lay between Mr. Smith and us. I also knew that whatever happened would be a bad reminder to sit and haunt my mind for a lifetime.

He dove and smacked the gun out of Mr. Smith's hands. Just as that happened, Mr. Smith shot the bullet. The gun spun around and around in the air until it hit the ground and shot again, hitting my dad in the back of the head. My dad was dead.

I couldn't believe that in that instant, so many things could happen, like the death of my dad. We stood there for about five seconds until my mom ran out of the house figuring we would follow. I knew my mom was smart, so I followed her, and so did my brother. Dirt flung up from the bottom of my mom's shoes, which made it feel as though it was raining mud and grass. I heard another shot from the mysterious and fearful gun. It nearly hit my shoe, and I knew I was probably going to die, which made me feel extremely unhappy and alarmed.

We managed to escape into the forest and hide behind a tree. There we sat stiff as a pristine book until he left and went back inside his old house, which had paint peeling off the sides and window shutters hanging off their hinges. The door slammed with a thud that shook some windows. My mom gave us the signal, and we sneaked our way out of the trees.

My mom, taking the risk, went into the aged house and saw Mr. Smith crashing and slamming bowls and antiques. She steadily crept over to my dad who lay face first on the floor. Blood made rivers on the ground, which reminded me

of the Red Sea. All of a sudden, a plank of wood creaked. The noise in the kitchen stopped, and Mr. Smith was full of hope on killing the freed slaves. He grabbed his firearm and bent over as if to pick up an object. He bent his knees and started moving.

Right when he got to the corner of the wall and into where he heard the noise, he fired. My mom was gone with my dad and outside hiding with us. The bullet went through Mr. Smith's window. This made him even madder because now he had no slaves and a broken window. When Mr. Smith was done with his fit, we ran, still crying about our dad. My mom dropped to the ground weeping at my dad's side when we reached a spot where we decided to bury Victor. My brother and I knelt down to comfort our mom.

We had no choice but to bury my dad in a small field that we worked in every blazing day in the summer and in every freezing day in the winter. He was buried next to a bunch of roses that stood tall and mighty. I could smell the aroma from the dew, which had a fresh scent. Burying my dad took at least 15 minutes, so we said a quick prayer and left.

We jogged to the train station hoping we wouldn't miss the train. I cried in sadness about my dad. Tears ran off the side of my face as if trying to go back to where they originated. My mom looked at the time and yelled, "Oh my! We must hurry if we are going to catch the train!" Something in my mom's voice said something to me, as if she was trying to say, "Why, why must my husband die?"

When we got to the train station, the clock read 8:00 A.M.! We were all out of breath, but we ran to the train just as it pulled away. We asked a conductor when the next train was scheduled to leave. He said, "The rest of the trains are all..."

He was interrupted by the manager who looked at us with a smirk on his face. He said, "Why are you here?" We stood silent. "Why are you here?" he repeated, now with a more

serious voice. Then he said, "Leave, or I'll kill you! I don't want you riding my trains at all!" he yelled. "Escort these colored animals out," he told the conductor.

The conductor shoved us with hard hands that harmed my bones. He couldn't handle all of us, so he pushed us about half the way to the door, and then gave up. We snuck to a bench that was painted green and was made of stiff wooden boards. My mom, now being the oldest, thought of a great idea. She said, "We will follow the tracks all the way to the north."

My brother and I said, "No way. I'm not walking that far."

"Do you want to stay here after they just killed your father and threatened us, or leave?" my mom replied. We stopped in silence, thinking about our problem. Since it was the only way, we went for it.

The three of us sneaked over to the tracks and hid behind the brick wall which led out of the station and onto the train tracks. We were out of view now and started our journey to the north.

Weeds and yellow-looking grass stuck out of the boards that lay in the middle of the metal tracks. After several hours, we were probably halfway out of Alabama. There were tunnels marked with dull, painted words, trees that had many birds in them and animals. It was warm, but getting crisper because it was getting closer to night. We walked until about 11 P.M. and lay down to go to sleep. I heard the crickets chirping, and in my mind I thought of my dad. He loved nature and especially the crickets. Eventually, I closed my eyes.

It was a warm, sunny morning that started our long journey again. Something in me told me to keep pushing, keep going. I shared that with my family to help encourage them. We walked and walked and walked. My body ached

with perseverance. We finally made it up to Kentucky. Now, we started seeing bears and eagles. When we saw them, we watched and took a break.

One early morning, my brother heard a train very close to us and coming towards us. The tracks had rust from rain and snow that covered the sides of them. The trees started to shake, and the birds started to swarm as the train approached. There were a lot of white people who stared at us and made faces at us as the train passed. So we all jumped in the cornfield and hid. We saw many white men with guns, probably to kill their own slaves with who were running away just like us. Some white kids on the train spotted us and pointed. They laughed and went to tell their fathers.

Now we had caution about other trains coming by. The days went by and we made progress. We ate deer that my brother killed with a rock—he would knock them out so we could roast them.

We were now in Ohio, where we settled. We found an abandoned house on a side of the Ohio River. It was cold and had holes through the walls, which made a slight draft come in. I thought that the hut wasn't good at all, and I complained. But the day after we settled, my brother started placing wood where the holes were, so I was satisfied.

Our family was discriminated throughout the year, but we stayed strong. My name is Sue Smith, and I still miss my dad day after day, and thinking what happened in those gruesome years scares me extremely.

Tu Volo Defungo

TU VOLO DEFUNGO, by *Marie Portes*, is the story of a girl in a perilous adventure to save herself and the kingdom her family rules. By the end of the story, you will understand what the title means.

If you picked up this book thinking you would find a lovely story that starts with a cheesy “Once upon a time...” and ends with “happily ever after,” then you have problems. I suggest that you put this book back on the shelf and find *The Sleeping Beauty* in the kids’ area instead. If you insist on reading it (in which case you are remarkably stubborn), I guaranty when you’re finished with it you’ll stick your head in the toaster, take Latin classes and drink five gallons of water every day till you forget everything in this miserable story. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.

Lyra walked through the castle’s garden. She stopped now and then to take a whiff of a flower. Lyra subconsciously ran her hand through her waist-length silky black hair. It paired up magnificently with her dark brown eyes and her rosy cheeks.

“Princess Lyra! King Robert wishes to speak to you at once!” called Bretta. The plump little woman had been Lyra’s maidservant since the young princess was three. The princess swiftly moved closer to Bretta. “Hurry, my lady, a Scottish princess is never late.”

“Yes, yes, right away. Where is he waiting for me?” asked the young lady in a thick British accent.

“In his chamber,” answered the redheaded maid.

Lyra ran up the steep stairs of the east tower. She stopped in front of a tall wooden door. Catching her breath, Lyra knocked twice, and a gruff voice said, “Come in!”

Lyra entered the room. She sat down in front of King Robert, a fat old man with a short brown beard and a bald head who looked nothing like his daughter.

“There is a slight turbulence in Farway. I have no choice but to go,” said the old king.

Lyra shifted uncomfortably. She hated it when her father had to leave, but she simply sighed and looked away. Her father’s chamber was very familiar: the tapestries of her father as a young man, the large bed, the fireplace that had never been extinguished as far as anyone could remember. She turned her gaze back to her father.

“I’m sorry, but I have to go. I’ll be back in a week,” he said.

As if that mattered, thought Lyra.

“Don’t make things complicated for the servants, please!” continued the king.

“Yes, father,” said the young lady dutifully. “When are you leaving?”

“I leave tomorrow at dawn. You may go,” said the old king.

Lyra walked out of the room quietly. She turned back to see her dad staring back at her. Little did she know that this was the last time she would ever see her father.

Ding, Dong, Ding, Dong...

Lyra woke with a start. It had been two days since her father had left. She yawned and pulled her covers back over her head. Moments later Bretta came rushing in.

“Up, Miss. Something has happened!” said Bretta. Lyra frowned and got up. The panicked look on Bretta’s face alarmed Lyra. Bretta quickly dressed her and took her down to the court.

“Bretta,” said Lyra, struggling to break free, “what is going on?”

“I don’t know! The chapel bells were rung three times, which means something important has happened. The prime minister is waiting for you downstairs!”

Finally they arrived at the court. Bretta released Lyra. She rushed to the Prime Minister, Louis, ignoring all her manners.

“What’s going on?” Lyra said almost instantly.

“As much as it pains me to say it miss, your father, King Robert, was murdered last night,” said Louis. He did not sound sad at all. Lyra’s body began to fill with dread. Then, she passed out.

“Ahh!” Lyra gasped as the cold water that had been gently poured on her face woke her up. For a moment Lyra wondered what was going on. Then, it all came back to her: her father’s tragic death, the minister.

“I’m sorry we had to go to such extreme methods to wake you, but you did not even wake when we had the royal band play!” apologized Bretta.

“What’s going to happen? Who murdered father?” Lyra felt like a three-year-old baby.

“The culprit wasn’t found my lady. I’m very sorry,” answered Bretta.

Lyra walked through the corridor. Her mind was spinning. She had just run out of her father’s funeral in tears. It was all just too much for a 15-year-old. Lyra sat down and wept. Then all of a sudden she quieted as she heard shuffling

footsteps behind her. She turned around, and, seeing nobody, she turned back.

Lyra yelped as she felt the frigid blade touch her throat.

“Follow me. If you try to escape or say a word, it will be a pleasure to slit that pretty little throat of yours,” whispered a gruff voice in Lyra’s ear. Lyra opened her eyes in pure fear but did as she was told.

The man led her through some empty corridors to a small wooden door. He grabbed a little copper key from his pocket and swiftly opened the door, pushing Lyra inside. As soon as she got in he slammed the door shut and locked it.

Lyra, extremely frightened, called for help, but soon gave up, deciding that the walls were way too thick for anyone to hear her. Trying in vain to calm down, Lyra scrutinized her surroundings. It was pitch-black, but by leaning against the wall and walking around the room she decided it was fairly small and completely empty.

Lyra jumped in surprise as she heard somebody whistling loudly. She guessed it was her captor and became agitated again. Lyra then heard shuffling footsteps and guessed a messenger had responded to the person’s call.

“Get Queen Isabelle, now!”

“Yes, Prime Minister!” responded a voice that Lyra recognized instantly. Her throat dried up, but she managed to whisper “Ella; oh, Lord, no!”

Ella was a 15-year-old maid. Since they were three, the two had been best friends. Then Lyra frowned again. What had Ella said again?

“Yes, *Prime Minister!*” Lyra gasped. The criminal that had brought her here was *Louis!* Lyra had never actually liked him, but she never suspected he could betray her and the kingdom!

She was pulled out of her thoughts when the door opened. Louis entered the room with a torch in one hand while pressing a knife against the back of Lyra’s mother,

Queen Isabelle, with the other. Once again the door was closed. Louis put the torch in a torch holder on the wall and swiftly pushed the queen to the ground.

Lyra looked around frantically for any means of escape. Her eyes stopped when she looked at the door. She could swear she saw a flicker of movement near the keyhole.

However, her thoughts were disrupted when Louis grabbed her by the hair and pulled her up. She screamed in agony, but was silenced when a strip of cloth covered her mouth like a gag.

The queen yelped. She said in a quivering voice, "Leave my daughter alone!"

"Oh, I will. *If* you do precisely what I say."

"What is it you want?"

"Just a little something I like to call...let's see... your hand in marriage!"

"I would not wed such a terrible man as you if my life depended on it!"

"How about if your daughter's life depended on it?" He pressed the blade harder on Lyra's throat so a little blood poured out.

The queen let out a piercing scream. "Fine, just leave Lyra alone!"

"Good, good. You will announce our wedding tonight. We shall be wed on Friday, two days from now. I will then become king of Scotland. You are not to speak of this to anyone. One false step and *couic*," said Louis, sliding the knife millimeters from Lyra's throat. "Now go, and do not disappoint me or *tu volo defungo*!"

Lyra frowned as he said that phrase. She knew the last part was Latin, but what did it mean? She had dozed off during most of her Latin classes, much to the teacher's disappointment. What in the world could it mean?

Louis let the Queen leave the room, but when Lyra tried to slip away he tightened his grip on her hair.

“No, no, you’re staying here! While your mother follows me you will be locked up in the dungeons with a guard!”

Lyra was sobbing endlessly in her cell. She knew that soon her mother would be getting married to that creep. She looked around; Louis had said a guard would be arriving shortly.

A few minutes later, she heard footsteps getting nearer. Suddenly they stopped. There was a quick pause and a small scream. Lyra momentarily forgot her fear as she wondered what in the world was going on. A young lady with flowing brown hair ran up to her cell.

“Ella!” the young lady let out a cry of relief as she recognized the maid.

“Lyra! I’m sorry I didn’t get here sooner. I lost my way!”

“It only matters that you’re here now. Thank you, thank you!”

“I’m not going to let my best friend rot in a cell while her mother leads the kingdom to its end!” exclaimed Ella as she fumbled with the keys.

She finally got the door open. Lyra rushed out and grabbed her sweaty palm.

“Come on, we’ve got a wedding to crash!”

Both of them rushed through the castle to the church. They burst through the doors just as the Queen was about to say yes through masked tears.

Lyra ran to her mother’s side, and, in a most unladylike manner, kicked Louis. Ella rushed out behind the culprit and knocked him unconscious. The queen grabbed her daughter, and this time her eyes swelled up with tears of joy.

At the trial:

“So, you admit to not only threatening royalty but also attempting to force the queen to marry you?” asked the judge. Louis nodded, staring at the floor. The judge turned and talked in a whisper with the jury. Finally his eyes settled on Louis again.

“The jury has decided that you are guilty of the crime. You shall be hanged in two days. Till then you will be locked up in the same cell you locked Princess Lyra in. I declare this trial—”

All of a sudden a gust of cold wind extinguished all five torches.

“What in God’s name is going on? Somebody light the torches! Guards, close the doors!” yelled the judge over the screaming voices of the jury.

When somebody finally lit a torch, everyone saw that the guards had been murdered with their own swords that lay soaked with fresh blood on the floor, and Louis had run out, leaving Lyra dead on the floor.

Tu volo defungo. You will die.

War Is a Terrible Word

*In **WAR IS A TERRIBLE WORD** by Rachel Steffes, an orphan girl goes on an exciting adventure during the time of the Revolutionary War.*

March 18, 1773

Dear Diary,

My full maiden name is Amanda Katie Block. On June 8, 1757, I was born in Philadelphia. Nine years later, my parents, William and Samantha, were killed in a wagon collision. I was shipped off to live in North West Virginia with my last remaining relative, step-aunt Margret. I dislike her because she treats innocent children like slaves!

Even at age 14 I feel enslaved. I weave, milk the goat (we don't have a cow), churn the butter, go to market, and cook every day from dawn to dusk. A 14-year-old should not do that much work! While I work, she sits around and eats everything!

April 2, 1776

Dear Diary,

I am so tired of being treated poorly by my step-aunt. I decided to do something really bad to her. It took me a moment to think, but then I knew what to do and how to do it.

It was really dark last night. I silently stepped off my dirty cot and slipped on my petticoat. Since my step-aunt enslaves me, she locks the door when I sleep. Don't ask me why; she's pretty

crazy. I unlocked the door with one of my old quill pens. As I crept downstairs, I thought about how much trouble I'd be in if I were caught. Last time I tried to run away, I got a whipping I would never forget. I quickly shook away the horrid memories out of my head.

When I got to the bottom of the stairs, I grabbed my market basket next to the front door and loaded it with one loaf of bread, eggs, and a jug of dirty water. When I finished packing, I walked out the door, and I felt a tear slip down my cheek. I quickly brushed it away, held my head high and walked.

I walked for miles and miles, not knowing where I was going. Finally, as the sun started to rise, I laid my legs down on a rock in front of a coffee house and set down my basket.

All of a sudden, I heard gunfire and cannon shots. Maybe someone's lost or needs help, I thought, so I ran toward the noise. The noise grew louder and louder until I stopped. A chill went up my spine. I heard about this place from stories the townspeople told. They said it was the devils' sanctuary.

I was standing on the edge of a battlefield. I saw everything! I saw the redcoats firing their fancy, new rifles, and the Americans, who looked like a lot of poor, ragged farmers. Some of their guns were at least 15 years old! It was exciting, but so horrid—blood was everywhere. I may be 17 now, but even so, I was still scared.

Then, some fat, old British man came up to me with a wounded arm and neck and begged, "Kiss me, lass!" I ran like a cheetah to shelter on the other side of the battlefield. I dodged the limp, lifeless bodies on the ground. They all looked so young.

Suddenly, I fell in a heap on the ground, and when I tried to stand up, I heard a crack and collapsed again. I crawled over to a large building that was a dirty white. Luckily, it was only a few feet away. When I got inside I was flabbergasted.

There were more than 250 men in here, either lying on the dirt floor or on homemade cots. I saw men and women in white

uniforms with carts rushing around to patients. The place smelled of vomit and stale bread. A boy about 21 saw me and got off his cot to help me up. He had brown, shaggy hair that hung in his face and deep sea blue eyes. I noticed his arm was wrapped in a sling as he helped me.

“Thanks,” I said shyly.

“No problem, miss. I’m Grover Jacobs,” the boy said.

“I’m Amanda Block. Pleasure to meet you,” I replied dumbly. Grover chuckled. There was an awkward moment of silence.

“Your leg looks broken. Should I get Doctor Kirkland?” the now-worried Grover suggested.

I winced in pain. “Yes, please,” I said gratefully.

He took off. It was a couple of minutes before Grover came back, accompanied by a very tall and very large man.

“I’m Doctor Roger Kirkland, and Grover here says you wounded your left leg.” The other men around me shook their heads.

“No, doctor. See what happened was this young lass came in and hurt herself. Then the boy there tried to make a move on her before I could!” said the man on the right who was laughing hysterically. Grover turned beet red. I smiled and looked away.

Doctor Kirkland smiled as he rubbed some ointment on my leg and wrapped it up with a piece of a soft, old, bed sheet. He ran into a room and came back with something that looked like a pair of deformed sticks. He ordered me to stand up, and he shoved these sticks in my armpits.

“What the heck are these things?” I yelled as pain shot up and down my leg from standing.

“They’re crutches. Instead of walking on that broken leg, you put all of your weight on the sticks,” Grover replied, who seemed to have gotten over his embarrassment.

I tried these “crutches,” and the first time I fell, but Mr. Kirkland and Grover caught me. The second time was easier, and

I was able to move around quicker. I thanked Dr. Kirkland before he left to help other patients. Then I asked Grover when he could leave the hospital.

“Whenever I want. I just stay here because they supply food. I ran away, so I don’t want my ma to find me and love me to death. Ya see, since I’m the only boy of six girls, she thinks I’m special or something. It’s kind of scary.”

It feels good to have a friend.

April 21, 1776

Dear Diary,

“Guess what?” I didn’t wait for an answer. “I’m running away, too!”

“If you want, we could run away together. But first, do you have any food? I have little money.” His eyes sparkled with mischievousness.

I just had to smile. How could you say no to a shaggy-haired boy with big, blue, sparkly eyes? But when he said, “have any food?” I remembered my basket. I grabbed my crutches and hopped out of the building. I heard Grover call after me.

“Come on!” I yelled.

When Grover caught up with me, I told him about my basket. Grover told me to stay put as he ran through the bloodstained grass.

A few hours later, when Grover hadn’t returned yet, I saw a figure approaching. I quickly dived into a bush, and I called out to ask who it was, but I didn’t get any response. After seconds of silence, I saw a very hairy British man (he had on a fancy red coat) slowly making his way to my bush. As he walked by, I stuck one of my crutches out. The man tripped and swore. I jumped out of the bush and clubbed the man on the head many times with my other crutch until he was unconscious and bleeding.

I stood there a moment, thinking. *What have I done? I made a soldier unconscious!* I thought. I ignored the thought and flipped the body over. I took his knife, gun and canteen. It's a battle for survival out here on the war field. I kicked the body into the bush I was hiding in with my unbroken leg, and by that time Grover was back.

May 5, 1776

Dear Diary,

As we trudged across the battlefield, ducking and dodging the bullets flying at us, I spotted a run-down little cabin at the edge of the woods. I alerted Grover, and he took my hand as we crawled to the cabin. I heard a voice yelling and screaming with joy. When we got inside, all the talking stopped. The place smelled faintly of cigarettes and dried blood, but I saw no one around. Plus, the floor was as hard as steel and had bullet holes and blood on it.

Suddenly, a deep voice called out, "Who is there, and are you Americans or those Redcoats?"

Grover told them our full names and which side we were on. "Where are you?" I cried.

"Down here," the deep voice replied.

Grover and I looked down. There was a dirty-red carpet on the floor, and when Grover pushed it to the side, I looked down the hole in the floor. I saw a dim glow, so I grabbed the ladder leading down there and climbed down with Grover following me. When we made it to the bottom, I looked around. There was a wooden table, a stack of heavy-duty wood and a couple of chairs. There were a few tough-looking men with beards who wore rags. They were chugging beer as if there were no tomorrow. They told us they were cheering so maybe some "not-exactly-smart" British man would come over, and then some sniper would shoot. "It hasn't exactly worked yet, for we been

down here about three hours,” the man on the left said. Grover and I looked at each other. Good thing we weren’t shot, I thought.

We said goodbye to the men and climbed back up the ladder. When we got to the top and climbed out, something jumped on top of Grover! I was so stunned that I lost my balance on my crutches and toppled over.

By the time I looked up, a redcoat had Grover in handcuffs and a gun to his stomach!

“Don’t move, lass,” the stranger said in a hoarse whisper. “Gimme all your food and the lad here won’t get hurt.”

Grover shouted out, “Don’t give him your food!” I thought for a second, and I felt at that moment that I had shrunken from my size to about a fourth my size. I stood, shoved the man all of the food and tried to grab Grover away. The greedy man stuffed the food in his pouch and pushed Grover at me. We toppled on the floor, but when we tried to stand up, he pointed the gun at us both directly.

“Goodbye, kiddies,” he said with an evil grin.

Grover and I were awfully close to the hole leading to the basement hide-away. I shoved Grover down the hole and I dived after him. We fell on top of each other again. I heard gunshots firing away at us. Grover stood up and pushed a piece of wood in the hole. The firing stopped and we heard some muttering as the cabin door slammed shut.

May 19, 1776

Dear Diary,

Grover and I snaked our way through the battlefield. It was dark now, so we had to be extra careful. I dragged my crutches along beside me, and when we made it out of the battlefield and on to the cobblestone streets, I almost screamed with joy. Grover then said, “I have to leave and go home to my ma and my sisters.

They are nothing without me since Pa died. I'm sorry, but I'll write to you. Please give me the address." So we found a piece of coal and a scrap of paper, with which I wrote Step-Aunt Margret's address.

"Here. Write me as soon as possible," I said as I gave him a hug and a kiss goodbye. And I trudged toward home.

As I walked, I felt so alone. With Grover, I had felt loved, cared for, and powerful. I am going to miss him awfully much.

May 29, 1776

Dear Diary,

When I got home, it was almost noon, and my step-aunt was waiting in the rocking chair on the front porch. I was in shock. She lost at least 20 pounds.

She looked at me in disbelief and said, "I am disappointed that you ran away, but even though you are an adult in a couple of days, you are still my sweet niece, and so I realized I should treat you with more respect. When my sister, I mean your mother, died, I just could not face it. Your mother never told you this, but our ma married a horrible man. And right before she died she told me she regretted it and to live my life with love. I never followed that and I'm really, truly sorry. You look so much like her, and you will make someone a wonderful wife someday. I have been treating you so hard so that you won't marry an idiot." I smiled and gave Step-Aunt Margret a hug. I think things would be better now that she is going to treat me as family (finally!).

June 11, 1776

Dear Diary,

When I finished the conversation with my step-aunt, I took a bath. While I was scrubbing, she replaced my ratty, old, smelly clothes with fresh, clean ones.

When I had dried off and gotten into my new clothes, I went into the kitchen to find my step-aunt cooking fried eggs, roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, and apple pie. I tried to help her but all she said was, “Sit down and tell me your whole story. I am very surprised you didn’t die with all this war going on. Now, tell me your story while I cook your dinner.” So, I told her my full, truthful story, from the parts that told why I had left, to the hospital, to Grover, to the crazy men in the cabin. She gasped when I told her about the death on the battlefield and the blood. After my story was done, she said she felt so bad about what she did and gave me another hug.

When the chicken was all gone, I asked her about her story. Aunt Margret replied, “It was pretty tough without you. I had to clean and cook and...work.” She shuddered. Then she continued, “It was all my fault that you ran away, and I am very sorry. But it was good for me and taught me a very valuable lesson about people.”

June 8, 1776

Dear Diary,

As I lay to rest on my cot, I think back about these couple of months. From the hospital, to Grover, to the unconscious soldier, to the cabin, to the stranger with the gun, to even seeing Aunt Margret again—it all seems unreal. A year ago, I felt like a child. But after all these experiences, I feel older now, and calmer. Now, on the day of my 18th birthday, I am ready for whatever challenges come my way.

This Is Now

Afraid

*A boy who is the target of a bully has some tough days at school. He finds that having a good friend can make a world of difference in **AFRAID**, by **Kendra N. Polk**.*

In New York there was a huge town called Georgia. In this town the people were joyful. In a huge four-story school, everyone knew each other. The boys knew the girls and girls knew the boys. In this school there were nerds, popular, kids, brains who thought they were cooler than the nerds, cheerleaders, pompons, sport players, tomboys, and the other usual groups that kids divided themselves into.

There was a boy named Aaron who was always getting into trouble and bullying this other kid whose name was Max. Max was the smartest kid in the school. He kept his grades up. Max never started a fight or did anything that's similar to a fight, like calling names or tripping someone. He was the one mostly getting tripped.

Max was shorter than everyone in the grade. He was about four feet three inches tall. He didn't like getting tripped or bullied by Aaron and didn't want to tell a counselor. If he did, he would get even more bullied. All Max worried about was keeping his grades up and trying to do well in gym so he could run faster than the bully.

One day all he could think about was getting bullied. That day Max found a friend named Isaac.

They worked on homework, went to Isaac's, played video games, slept over, ate dinner at each other's houses, and all the normal stuff.

Even though Isaac had moved from India, he still had all the latest stuff, like the Wii, Xbox 360, and stuff like that. Max didn't have any of that stuff because he didn't have time to play games. He had tae kwon do to take to fight back Aaron and the usual homework to do. Even so, he had so much time left because it took only an hour or so to do homework.

Max and Isaac had a huge crush on this girl named Naomi Bourke. She wasn't popular, but she was a sports player. Naomi loved to play sports even if there were only boys playing or just girls. It didn't matter to her. As long as she played, she was happy.

Before this school, Max went to a different school where Naomi had gone also. But in the second grade she wasn't that preppy or as popular as she was now. She would walk past people and she would spit gum or anything else at people to annoy them.

Max and Isaac were sitting down in history listening to Mr. Annoying talking about nothing they were interested in. *Ring, Ring, Ring* went the bell.

Max and Isaac walked down the hall to Max's locker, and standing there waiting was Aaron, the big, strong bully. Max was glad that he took tae kwon do. Isaac said, "You are going to be as flat as a flower getting rolled over by a car. See ya later."

Aaron walked over and said, "So, Max, you got a new friend."

Max said, "Why do you care, jerk? No offense, but do you eat a lot? Because you're fat."

"What's his name then?"

"Why do you want to know his name, and guess what? I'm not going to tell you."

“I’m going to punch you, little loser.”

Max was lucky that a teacher was there to support him so he wouldn’t get hurt.

At lunch that day Max decided to get a grilled cheese sandwich with mustard and ketchup on the side with tomato soup. Yummy. Max sat down and took a sip of his soup. “Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh, this soup is hot!”

Aaron commented, “Isn’t it soup? It’s supposed to be hot, stupid.”

After school, Max and Isaac walked home. They said, “See ya tomorrow,” and walked away.

Battle Scene

*Life is hard during wartime. In **BATTLE SCENE** by Sabrina Fouché, how will a girl survive when her family is in dire straits?*

It was a dark and gloomy day. A little girl about three feet tall stepped out of a small log cabin carrying a tiny boy in her hands. This particular girl was named Angel.

I walked outside to check on Mother who was out working in the tiny fields of corn. I reached out and touched her shivering shoulder. She was walking around the dead stalks of peas and corn searching for at least a little morsel of food so that we could have dinner. Anthony (my little brother) was tugging on my shirt begging to get out of my arms and run free. I didn't let him. Instead I walked inside and set him down on the hard wooden floor to let him bite on anything he saw.

My dad was training to be in the military to fight in the great war. So we never saw him except for a picture that sat on the kitchen table.

I also had an older brother who would come home from his hard work in the factory with only a few bucks in his hands. We had nothing to sell or to trade, such as food, and sooner or later we had to pay off the bills, or someone would come and drag us out just like they did to our next-door neighbor. We all knew one day that everything was going to come to an end: my two brothers and I were going to be

taken to an orphanage, and Mom would go to live with some of our other snotty relatives.

At school we're learning about the Mississippi River and how it is the most important river in the world. We call it "Father of Water." Our family was in need of fresh water. The well that was about 50 yards away from our house had begun to empty just days before, and soon after, all that came in the bucket was mud.

After the few little crumbs we had (which was called dinner) I set off to bed. That night I had a dream about the war. It was horrible. I woke up crying, and my pillow was soaked with sweat.

That morning I woke up to the sound of sirens out of my bedroom window. I also saw a long wooden board and a small wooden board sitting in the grass making large rectangular marks. Someone brought the boards into the house and I could hear a loud thump as they set them down. I uncovered myself feeling the cold October breeze run down my body. I stepped down off my bed and slipped on my house shoes. Then I managed to make it down stair without tripping over the plus-size pajama pants.

Once I got down the steps I couldn't believe my eyes. What I saw I could not describe. Two bodies were lying on the floor covered in blankets.

As soon as they lifted the bodies up I turned away. Everything in my body froze. My toes became cold, my nose started to run, and my eyes started leaking. This time my eyes weren't leaking ordinary water. My eyes were leaking real tears.

Something warm touched my shoulder. I thought it was Mother, but when I turned around it was something I least expected. It was a tall dark-haired man with a clean minty smell. His deep voice said, "Angel, I'm here to tell you that your—"

My arms took control and grabbed him as tightly as I could. A tear rolled down my face and once one slipped out the rest came running down, too. I couldn't stop them. The more I tried, the more came down just like on a rainy day.

I ran upstairs and slammed the door behind me. A heavy knock sounded on my door. I was so angry that I couldn't control myself. I opened the door violently and with a hard shove. My mind was everywhere at once. I told myself stop, stop, STOP. Then everything turned gray.

When I woke up from this so-called nightmare my head was throbbing in pain.

I couldn't move. I saw nurses walking by, but I could not speak. I wanted the room to stop spinning and my head to stop aching.

The same dark-haired man walked by and kneeled at the side of my bed. He said to me some few words that I could not understand because of his strong accent. I tried to guess but it just didn't sound right. I thought that he said, "Your mother has had a heart attack, and she fell with Anthony in her hands."

It sounded weird at first, but as I thought about it all started to make sense, especially the part with the two bodies and the boards and the...

I couldn't stop thinking about it; it all just went too fast.

TWO WEEKS LATER

When I finally thought I had enough power to get up out of the crummy hospital bed, I uncovered myself and walked over to the checkout counter. I was a little wobbly at first when I started to walk, but I got the hang of it. I stepped in front of the counter, and the fragile looking lady said in a squeaky voice, "Little lady, what are you doing out of your

bed?” I replied with a simple shrug. Suddenly the squeaky voice got higher. “Well how cannnn I help you?”

I shyly said, “I want to know what happened to me.”

“Well, darling, I could do that.” She quickly opened a large file cabinet and pulled out a thick folder with paper. She flipped through them very quickly. Her squeaky voice startled me when she said, “Darlin’, you bumped your head on your bedroom door.” I was just about to ask if she knew today’s date but as I was skimming over the junk she had, my eye just happened to pass over a calendar that read November 12. I was so shocked at how time had flown by.

A young woman walked into the hospital with a suit on and an orange purse. She walked over to my bed. My heart was racing through my body so fast it was like I was running in the Olympics. Then she turned to me. I was so scared that I wanted to run and leave my skin behind. But I just stood there stiff as a statue, wondering what was going to happen next. Somehow this lady looked familiar, but I didn’t know where I had seen her before.

TWO DAYS LATER

I walked out of the hospital with the strange lady holding my hand. I still couldn’t accept the fact that she was my new mother and that I never went to the orphanage because I was in that despised, smelly hospital. After we walked about two blocks in the cold, we arrived at a big white and gray house. The windows looked polished. The frozen bushes were trimmed, and the fresh smell of home warmed my body.

Enemies No More

*Through a strange set of events, two girls who absolutely hate each other get stuck together in **ENEMIES NO MORE**, by **Sebastiana Gullo**. See what happens in their forced time together.*

“Attention, attention!” the speakers boomed. “Tomorrow is the sixth-grade field trip to the museum. Bring your lunch, permission slips, and a good attitude!”

“I can’t wait!” squealed Alex.

“I know! This is going to be so cool!” Alex’s friend Maya said with excitement in her voice. “All those ancient artifacts! It’s like paradise!” They both giggled.

On the other hand, some weren’t so happy. “Ugh! I hate field trips!” complained Candace.

“I know! They’re so, so, boring!” her best friend Stephanie agreed. “I can’t believe they make us do this stuff anymore!” she whined.

“Is everybody ready?” the teacher, Ms. Phyllis, asked.

“Yes!” the students all said in a mix of groans and cheers.

“Good! Now everybody onto the buses!” Ms. Phyllis ordered. The students filed onto the buses, and in just minutes they were on their way to the museum.

“We’re here, Candace,” Stephanie warned. “Be prepared for the most boring time of your life!”

They all entered the museum to find themselves in the paradise Alex and Maya had dreamed of.

Just then a man in a suit walked up and said, “Welcome to the National Museum of Science and Technology. I will be your guide for today. So first, let’s go over here to the rocks and minerals exhibit.” The tour guide pointed over to a sign saying “Rocks and Minerals.” The students followed the guide over to the exhibit.

“Here we have some rare minerals.” The tour guide showed the students many kinds of rocks.

“Now I have a little treat for you all,” the guide said. “You can all have one of these minerals to take home with you today!” The tour guide suddenly pulled a blue sheet off of a table to reveal many beautiful minerals.

“I want that red one!” Alex shouted.

“Ooh! I want that greenish-bluish one!” Maya shouted.

“I guess I’ll take one,” Candace said. “Ooh. I love that beautiful diamond-looking gem!”

Just as Candace was about to grab it, the boy she sits next to, Tim Simon, snatched it from her reach!

“Give it! I was going to take that!”

“No, I got it first!” said Tim greedily.

Everyone was starting to move along to the next exhibit when Candace tried to snatch the gem back from Tim. Tim really put up a fight! Candace tugged as hard as she could, but her tug was so strong that she fell backwards, knocking into Alex. They both went crashing into the wall behind them.

Like a thief fleeing the crime scene, Tim ran from the room to catch up with the rest of the group. So nobody saw when, unexpectedly, the wall rotated 180 degrees, and the girls found themselves on the other side.

These two girls from Westly Middle School, Candace Meredith and Alex Peterson, have always hated each other. Why? Well, Alex thinks Candace judges people, including her. But Candace thinks Alex is such a “know-it-all.” They also see themselves as being totally different from each other. Candace

is a cheerleader, and Alex is on the student government. Another thing is that Candace wants to be an actress, and Alex wants to be a lawyer. But they are both about to find out that they aren't so different.

"Candace!" Alex shrieked. "Watch where you're going!" Alex looked around. "Where are we?"

"How am I supposed to know?" Candace said rudely.

As they got up, they looked around. The new room had lots of shelves lined with artifacts that hadn't been put on display in years. It was a dusty little room that you probably wouldn't like to be stuck in.

"Let's get out of here!" Alex cried. They looked around. There were no doors!

"Help!" They started pounding on the wall. Nothing happened.

"It's no use! These walls must be soundproof!" Alex finally gave up.

"Candace! This is all your fault! You always have to have your way. If Tim got the gem before you, then just deal with it," Alex complained.

"Look who's talking, Miss Know-it-all!"

"I am not a 'know-it-all!'" Alex defended herself.

They kept blurting out ugly comments for who knows how long. They finally quit. As the girls sat in silence, Alex checked her watch. "We should be eating lunch now."

"No wonder I'm starving!" Candace realized. She started searching through her purse only to find a little candy bar at the bottom. Candace tore open the wrapper and broke a piece off. She tossed it in her mouth. "Mmm!" Candace sighed. As she swallowed, she looked up to see Alex staring at her, or more at the candy bar. Candace let out a deep breath and said, "Do you want the rest?"

"Um, well, I don't want to take your only food."

"Just take it before I change my mind."

Alex reached out and grabbed the candy. She sheepishly ate it, feeling a little guilty for the things she had said earlier.

“Thanks,” Alex mumbled. The two sat there in awkward silence.

“Ya know, I can’t help but wonder how something like this happened to you!” Alex laughed.

“What do you mean?” Candace asked, confused.

“I mean, everything seems to fall into place for you! Your life seems perfect!”

“It’s not as perfect as you think,” started Candace.

“Oh, sure.” Alex said. “Then how come you’re always bragging about how great your life is?”

“I do not brag! I just state the obvious. But I’ve never said anything about my life being perfect. Because it’s not. I don’t have a regular family.”

Then Alex started to get curious. “I’m still listening.”

Candace started, “Well, my, my dad is...”

“What, what? Is he in jail? Did he rob a bank? Did he—”

“No, no!” Candace shouted. “He’s not bad! He’s fighting in Iraq!” she blurted. “And, people don’t realize that soldiers like my dad are fighting for their freedom. They just take it for granted.”

Then Alex realized what Candace had just said. “Oh my, oh my gosh! I never even thought...”

“Actually, I always thought you were the perfect one,” confessed Candace. “I mean, you are super smart and always know the answer to everything.”

“I’m so not perfect. How could you think I’m perfect?” Alex laughed. “My family has issues, too!”

“Like what?” Candace said in a “beat that” tone.

“Well, two years ago, my little brother...” Alex started.

“Your little brother what?” Candace asked.

“I don’t really want to talk about it,” Alex said suddenly.

“Come on! It can’t be that bad! What happened to your little brother?” Candace asked eagerly.

“He died.” Alex started to tear up. “He had cancer.”

“I’m so sorry for you!” Candace said, tearing up herself.

“But anyway, we need to get out of here. I’m still starving!” Alex said, changing the subject.

They both stood up, not knowing what to do. They practically tore the room apart looking for a way out. They finally gave up and leaned against the wall for a rest. Once again, they felt the wall turning behind them. They were back!

“Where are we?” Candace asked, confused.

“We’re back in the rocks and minerals exhibit!” Alex shouted.

The girls hugged each other. They ran out of the exhibit to see everyone on their way out. “Wait up!” they both called.

“Where have you been?” Stephanie and Maya asked in unison.

“I’ll tell you later,” they both said to their friends.

The next day in class, their language arts teacher, Ms. Phyllis, asked the students to write about their trip to the museum. Alex winked at Candace, and they both smiled (as their friends stared in shock).

And now the war was over. You know, you can learn a lot about a person if you just take the time.

From The Diaries of Dakota Manning

*When a girl learns that her best friend will soon move away, she makes the most of their last week together in **FROM THE DIARIES OF DAKOTA MANNING**, by Lindsay Walker.*

As I lay on the hard, cold ground yelling, “NO, NO!” I thought to myself, why would they take my best friend away from me? My best friend’s name is Sarah, and we have been friends since we were in diapers. I should start at the beginning.

The first day of summer vacation, my best friend in the whole world told me she was leaving the next week. I asked where she was going, and why? She told me that her father got a great job in Los Angeles, California. I told her we should have our last traditional sleepover before she leaves.

So that Saturday, Sarah came over for our last sleepover together. Sarah came over with her pink Cinderella sleeping bag and matching pillow. We went down into my beautiful basement. We sat in our sleeping bags, and started our favorite movie, *Pink Panther*. After the movie, we had a long talk about what we were going to do when Sarah left. I told her I was going to call, write, and e-mail every day. She promised she would come visit me during the summer, and all breaks. I started to cry. Sarah saw me, and said it was okay.

Then I broke out in a crying fest. She hugged me, and then joined in on the fest.

* * *

One morning I sat up in my bed and looked at my calendar. I saw that today was circled, and knew that my best friend was going to leave me today. I jumped out of my bed, ran downstairs, opened the door, and ran outside, across the grass, to Sarah. I hugged her so hard she couldn't breathe.

Sarah jumped in her car. But I didn't want her to go, so I went to front of the car, lay on the hard ground, and started to yell, "NO, NO!" I lay there trying not to think of Sarah, trying not to think about the first day of school, when I would have to walk alone, eat alone, and talk alone.

My step-dad came, picked me up off the ground, threw me over his shoulders like a sack of potatoes, sat me on the porch steps and told me that it would all work out. He told me that Sarah would be back in a year. That helped me a little bit.

A Long Way Home

*In **A LONG WAY HOME** by Ben London, a sad turn of events sends a boy on a journey to look for a new family. With help from his friend Jessica, will Jack find the happy ending he hopes for?*

“Mom,” Jack cried, “please don’t leave me here alone,”

“Your dad and I have important business to do. We have to go to New Jersey.”

“But, Mom, I don’t want to stay home with a babysitter,” said Jack.

“No buts,” said Jack’s mom as she walked right out the door.

Jack sighed.

Later that evening a police officer and a social worker knocked on Jack’s front door. They sadly told Jack that his parents got into a terrible plane crash, and they both died. They said that they did not know the details yet, but they would tell him as soon as they got the news. Jack’s eyes went bloodshot, and he was still. He couldn’t believe what he just heard. His parents were his life. He felt like his life just fell apart.

“I know this is some unexpected news, and I’m sure you are so sad, but let’s take care of what we need to do,” said the social worker.

The social worker told Jack to gather his belongings because they were taking him to an orphanage in the area until everything was settled with his parents’ will. They had to get

going, so Jack sadly ran upstairs to pack all of the memories of himself and his parents. Jack was now ready to go, but was in too much shock to say goodbye to any of his friends that he had known for such a long time.

Upon arriving at the San Francisco Home for Children, Jack felt his stomach drop. Jack started to cry a little. He didn't want to be there. He wanted to go home. The police officer left, and the social worker showed Jack around and talked with him to make sure he was ok. The social worker left Jack so he could get comfortable in his room.

Jack tried to unpack, but he couldn't, so he went down to the community room to watch TV. He heard a voice, and it sounded like a girl's voice. Jack looked up, and there was a girl with long blond hair and blue eyes wearing ripped clothes and a brown hat with a pair of leather shoes. She asked Jack if he was ok. Jack responded, "NO, I don't want to be here at all."

"None of us do," said the girl. "By the way, my name is Jessica."

"How long have you been here?" Jack asked.

"About a year," Jessica responded. "Well, it is almost ten o'clock, and the headmaster will come in here to tell all of us to go to bed soon. I will see you tomorrow."

"See you tomorrow," said Jack.

The next morning Jack woke up, brushed his teeth, and made his bed. Jack walked down to the mess hall for breakfast and saw Jessica and decided to sit next to her since she was the only person Jack had met. Jessica then excused herself to go to the restroom.

On her way back she passed the headmaster's office. Jessica overheard the headmaster talking about Jack. She put her ear to the door to hear what he was saying. The headmaster said that Jack had an uncle named Jerry Collins who lived just outside of town. The headmaster said that he

did not want Jack to know right away because they had not told the uncle about Jack and what happened. They did not even know if the uncle wanted to adopt him. But before the meeting was over Jessica flew back to the mess hall, not hearing the end of the conversation.

Jessica decided to wait until the next morning to tell Jack. She decided to wait because she did not know if he would want to go or even if the uncle would want him. She did not know what to do, so she decided to sleep on it.

The next morning they saw each other at breakfast. Jessica quickly told Jack what she heard the day before. Jack was in shock when he heard the news. Jessica decided she wanted to help Jack find his uncle because she was so sick of being in the orphanage, and she needed to break away. She automatically felt a special bond between them, so she decided to help.

They both ran to the orphanage library to research Jack's uncle and where he lived. They found two Jerry Collinses in the San Francisco area and where they both worked. They decided that morning or around noon would be the best times to sneak out.

The next morning came and they made their plans. They snuck out through an open window during lunchtime. They knew that the first place to look was about 20 minutes away. They started to walk.

After about ten minutes of walking Jessica stopped Jack and voiced her concern. She had second thoughts. She reminded Jack that it might be dangerous to walk by themselves so far. After talking about this for a while, they decided just to go on their way.

The first place they looked was Jerry's Coney Island. Jack and Jessica asked around to see if anyone new a Jerry Collins. A man came out of a door in a suit and said he was Jerry

Collins. Jack asked the man if he was related to his parents, Adam Collins or Lisa Collins.

“I am sorry, but I have never heard of those people before,” said Jerry Collins. Jack sighed. They left the restaurant and went to the next location. The next place was another 30-minute walk. This time Jack stopped and had second thoughts.

“What if we don’t find him and I’m left with no one?” said Jack.

“You will not know if you will find him or not. Please don’t give up,” said Jessica.

The two went back on their way.

Jack and Jessica found the place and asked if anyone knew Jerry Collins. The guy at the cash register told Jack that Jerry Collins was his name. Jack once again asked if he was related to his parents. The man said that Lisa Collins was his sister, and he hadn’t spoken to her in years. Jack told the man that both of his parents died in a plane crash three days ago. The man told Jack that he felt terrible and asked where he was living.

“I am living in an orphanage until they figure out what to do with me,” said Jack. The man asked if he could do anything to help.

“Can you adopt me and my friend Jessica?” said Jack.

“Let’s not jump to anything big just yet. Why don’t you two stay with me for tonight so we can get to know each other, and we will see what will happen?” said Jerry. “I may have friends who are looking to adopt a daughter. Let us just take it one day at a time.”

“OK! That would be great,” said Jack.

“At least you know you have family out there, so I wouldn’t worry too much,” Jerry told Jack calmly.

Memory

*A routine road trip turns into a life-changing event in the blink of an eye for a girl and her family in **MEMORY**, by Grace Lee.*

“Bill, Lucy, time to wake up!” It was 6:30 a.m., and our family was going on a road trip to Canada. My name is Lucy Thomas, and I have an older brother named Bill Thomas.

Our family had a short breakfast, and we hit the road by 7:05 a.m. We all brought things to entertain us during the five-hour drive to Canada.

About 20 minutes into the car drive I was already bored, and I was really car sick. About every seven seconds I asked, “Are we there yet?” We were close to the border of Michigan and Canada.

When the light turned green all of the cars started going. The cars on the other side stopped except for one car... a semi truck driver wasn’t paying attention, and he ran a red light at 70 miles per hour. *BAM!* It hit the side of our beige minivan really hard. It was as loud as someone hitting a gong the hardest they possibly could.

The people in the cars that saw the accident immediately called 911. The ambulance came and took us to the hospital. Our whole family was unconscious. Our whole family was seriously injured, but I suffered from memory loss. I couldn’t remember anything and was really scared. My whole family was really worried about me.

I had been staying at the hospital for a week. My family was still staying at the hospital as well, and they were still in pain, but they somehow managed to visit me at least three times every day. I, not knowing who they were, tried to take in the fact that they were my family.

As I was trying to think about who I was, another girl who was a little older than me was brought to the bed next to mine. When she woke up, I said, “Hi, my name is Lucy. What’s your name?”

“Hey, I’m Mary Jacobs. Nice to meet you!” she responded. She was really encouraging and was a really great friend. Mary was really optimistic, and she always said things like, “Don’t worry. Everything’s going to be okay!” Mary was the reason I didn’t worry so much. She helped me believe that I was going to be okay.

I still couldn’t remember anything, but every now and then I would get these flashes. They came completely without warning. All of a sudden, I would freeze and I would see pictures in my head. Sometimes I would get them when I was talking to Mary. I could see a family eating breakfast, and for some reason I was with them. I saw a giant car crash. I had no idea what these were and got really, really scared.

I kept getting these flashes, and I started piecing them together. First, I found out that the woman was my mom because I was calling her “Mom.” Then I found out that the man was my dad, and I found out that I had an older brother.

My family was so happy and relieved when I asked if I could see them. They were already checked out of the hospital so they rushed to the hospital when the hospital called them. My mom’s eyes were filled with tears of joy. They told me more about the car accident. I kept getting those flashes, and pretty soon I had my whole life pieced back together!

My doctor made sure that I was ready to leave the hospital. He told my mom, “Ms. Thomas, you should bring

Lucy back in about two weeks. Lucy, are you positive that you're ready to go?" he asked me.

"Positive!"

As we were in the car on the way home from the hospital, my mom said, "Next time we should just stay home!" We all laughed and agreed with her.

My Name Lauren

*A girl goes above and beyond to communicate her friendship in **MY NAME LAUREN**, by **Lauren Mendelson**.*

I can't believe that it has been 18 years since I met my closest friend Audrey. It feels like yesterday that I met her at Jonestown Park after the first day of fifth grade.

* * *

My mom was, and still is, a teacher at Jonestown High School. Even though her school gets out earlier than mine did (2:12), she wasn't allowed to leave until 3:45, which is 30 minutes later than when I got out. Nobody could pick me up at the time my school ended, so my mom told me to go to the park one block down from the school, play for a little while, and she would pick me up there.

When school ended, I walked through the crowded halls, down the main streets, and I ended up running to the middle of the subdivision where the park was. I was very excited to get to all the wonderful things at the park. On the way, I always liked looking at the well-kept, old-fashioned houses that I came across on my journey. It is like a step back in time with all white houses, white picket fences, and bright red tulips.

When I got to the park I saw the most amazing things. I went into the park and I found an empty bench to set my bag and books down.

I thought it would be wise to start my homework, but I was distracted by all the fun things Jonestown Park had to offer. I was mesmerized by the yellow slides, the blue monkey bars, the red teeter-totters, and everything else. They even had the water fountains that practically danced when they squirted water high into the sky.

Then I saw a girl who looked like my age sitting alone on the bright-green merry-go-round. She was about my height, and she had blonde hair with blue eyes. I didn't know her, but I thought I could make a new friend, being a fifth-grader and all. As I started walking over to her, it didn't seem like she noticed anyone approaching her.

As I got closer and closer, I decided to grab hold of a silver metal bar and start running in a clockwise direction. The girl seemed to be startled for a moment, but suddenly calmed down as our eyes met, and I hopped on to enjoy the ride. We were focused on each other when everything else was a blur. I smiled at her and she smiled at me. Just by one look, I felt a connection between us. The ride felt like it went on for many minutes before it finally slowed and almost stopped.

Just as I was about to introduce myself to her, she jumped off and began running around the merry-go-round in the same direction as me. The thing is, she didn't jump back on. I quickly stopped the spinning merry-go-round with my foot and looked around. She wasn't there! I thought she must have left.

As I was looking around for the girl, I saw my mom pull up. She rolled down the window and told me to hurry up so I could go home and do my homework before dinner. I packed up my things and got in the car. I didn't bother telling my mom about the girl until I knew her a little bit better.

The next day, I saw her by the purple set of monkey bars, and I waved to her. After I did that, she left. I didn't know what made her leave. I scanned the park and found her walking to a car. I assumed it was her mom. I also saw her signing with her

hands. It looked like sign language! I knew at that moment she was deaf.

Every day after school I would see her at the park, and we would immediately catch each other's eyes while we started to play. I had suddenly developed a great relationship with this girl simply by being together, but not speaking. As fun as it was, it was also a bit frustrating not being able to really get to know this person. I didn't know her name, where she lived, or anything else for that matter. I wanted so badly to be able to communicate with her, and I wanted to become very good friends with her.

Another day went by that we would play together, and we still couldn't talk to each other. This time I was getting really frustrated, and I thought of a great idea. I would take a sign language class. That way, we would be able to somewhat speak to each other.

* * *

The first day of sign language class was incredible. It was a very interesting class. I never knew there were so many signs that could be used. I was learning another language as well as a way to communicate with one of my really close friends. There were only twelve other kids in the class, so we got amazing one-on-one learning. We first learned about finger spelling and the alphabet. We next learned numbers and colors. Then we learned basic signs that can be used at school and at home. I was having so much fun, and I never knew my fingers could twist in so many directions. It was also a bit sad, though, since the classes were held at the same time that I would have been with my friend at the park. I tried going on the weekends to the park, but wouldn't find her there. I was a little disappointed about that. I was still glad, though, that my mom found a class for me.

The class lasted four weeks. I was missing my new friend very much, and I'm sure she was missing me as well. I found out

from my sign language teacher that they had computer software to help learn sign language, and she even mentioned that my school had sign language as an elective. It didn't take me very long to save enough money to get the sign language computer program. I spoke to my Principal about the class at school the very next morning, and he made sure the computer program was involved in the sign language class. I worked so hard at learning this new way of communicating so I could eventually learn about my new friend.

* * *

Finally the day came when I felt I had all the tools necessary to properly introduce myself to my new friend who I had not seen in a month. I was hoping she would still be there on the swings waiting for me. If she wasn't there, I would be very upset. I had practiced all day during school.

On Tuesday, November 7, I began my walk towards the park just as I had done several weeks before to wait for my mom to pick me up after school and after her work.

This was it; I could hardly wait to see my new friend. I really hoped she would be there.

There she was on the swings. She was on the exact swing she and I always went on. We once again both caught each other's eyes and immediately ran towards each other. How was I going to explain where I had been for the past four weeks? What could I say to let her know how hard I had worked to be able to communicate with her at last? I had learned so much. And then it happened: I signed to my new friend, "My name Lauren, your name what?"

P.S: It turns out that waving in sign language means goodbye! That is why Audrey left that one time.

Seeing Double

*Some people learn that the hard way that honesty is the best policy. In **SEEING DOUBLE** by *Natalie Schaefer*, a prank based on a lie causes unnecessary pain.*

It all never could've happened if Melanie Smith hadn't started middle school that year. Or maybe if Brittney Jones wasn't *so* annoying! Melanie would never have found herself having to apologize to Brittney Jones if either of them had just started middle school a year earlier or later.

Melanie was normally a wonderful student and person. She loved to read and hated when someone interrupted her while she read. She dressed formally and was very shy.

Brittney was almost completely the opposite of Melanie. She was also a wonderful person. But she didn't like to read, she dressed comfortably, and she was definitely NOT shy! She didn't mean to be annoying. She was just very talkative.

Brittney and Melanie had only one class together: second-hour math. Melanie was always early, and Brittney was always just making it on time.

One day Melanie sat at her table, filling out her planner. As usual she was three minutes early. Then she pulled out her book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, and started to read. Brittney rushed in and sat down just as the bell rang. She wiped her forehead and cackled like a hyena.

Melanie and Brittney sat at the same table. They were across from each other.

“All right, class! After you’ve filled out your planner, start the bell work!” Mrs. Lawrence instructed the class.

Since Melanie had already finished with her planner she started on the work right away. She worked in peace for about a minute. Then Brittney started to work.

“This work is soooo boring! Why is it even called bell work? We don’t do it when the bell rings. Do you guys ever wonder about that? I know I do! Oooo! This one is super hard! Hey, Melanie, what’s the answer to number four?” Brittney said, so fast that Melanie could barely tell what she was saying.

“I’m not on that one yet,” Melanie lied. She was on number seven. But why should she give her the answers?

They went through all of class with Brittney’s mouth running like a faucet.

At the end of the day Melanie sat on the bus, reading, waiting for it to leave. She heard the engines roar to life, and they inched forward. Then the driver slammed on the brakes and the door opened up. Brittney ran onto the bus, looked around for a seat, and immediately went over to Melanie.

“Can I sit with you?” she asked. Then without waiting for a response she sat down next to her.

About halfway through the ride Melanie’s eyes were as big as dinner plates, staring at her book. She was at a super-suspenseful part.

“What ya’ readin’?” Brittney asked Melanie. Melanie showed her the cover and then went back to reading.

“What’s it about?” she interrupted again. Now if you remember, Melanie hated when people interrupted her while she read, so she simply answered, “A boy.”

“Oh. Wasn’t that thing with the compass that Ben did in math today hilarious?”

To get her to stop talking, Melanie said, “What? I have no idea what you’re talking about!” Then Melanie got a brilliant idea. “Who are you? You sure ask a lot of questions to people you don’t even know!”

“What? Melanie! It’s me, Brittney!” she said, clearly puzzled.

“Ooooh! You thought I was Melanie!” Melanie laughed.

“You aren’t?” Brittney said, tilting her head.

“No! I’m her twin, Angela! She didn’t tell you she had a twin? Well, I’m not surprised! She’s just so quiet! She’s like a mouse!”

“Tell me about it! Anyway, it’s so amazing how much you look alike! You have the same eyes, face, hair! You even have the same freckle on your cheek!” Brittney marveled.

Since Melanie and Angela were the same person, they did look exactly alike. So Melanie’s wavy, dirty-blond hair, sparkling blue eyes, and perfectly white, straight teeth were the EXACT same as Angela’s!

Now that Melanie had said that, she had one chance to back out: right after she had said it. But she didn’t, and there was no backing out now. So as Melanie always gave 110 percent, she decided to do this the right way.

She was very organized. She made a file about Angela that she kept in a drawer in her desk. The file held information on Angela’s likes and dislikes, her personality, and even her class schedule that Melanie had made up. She even practiced Angela’s writing. Normally her writing looked like this: *Melanie Smith*. But when Melanie was Angela she wrote like this: *Angela Smith*. She wanted to practice this, so she wrote a note to Brittney from Angela that she would actually send. It read:

Brittney-

It's ok that you confused me with my sis, it happens all the time! Seriously, it's happened like a gazillion kagillion times! You probably don't see us on the bus together very often because we both have busy schedules. I do sports and she's in the play. So if you don't see us together it's not unusual! It was cool meeting you. Oh, and if you want to learn the way to tell the two of us apart, here it is. I dress way more comfortably than Mel. You'll definitely be able to tell the difference. The only reason I wasn't like that yesterday is because I was doing a bet that I could dress the same as Mel for a week. Yesterday was the last day of the bet. I won \$5!

Angela

Melanie had tried to think of everything in her letter and hoped she had succeeded. Melanie thought of everything she could over the weekend. She called all her friends and told them all about it so they wouldn't ruin it. She also thought about how she would change clothes some days after second hour. She thought she would bring a ponytail with her and put up her hair. She would bring a jacket with her so she could put it on over her other clothes. Some days on the bus she could change into gym shoes.

It all ran smoothly for about two weeks. Melanie found it all very amusing. She was surprised at how easily she could be the complete opposite of herself! She thought she could be an actress. As she thought about how *she* had made the character, she felt as if she would do a better job as the scriptwriter or an author of a book. She would love that!

Anyway, back to “it all ran smoothly for two weeks.” After that it started getting a bit complicated. Melanie found herself lying more and more. She found that the lies got more complicated and hard to keep up with. She confused herself so much that she had to think about it more often. She was even slacking in her classes! Now, this was very unusual, wrong, and terrifying to Melanie. She needed to find a way to stop that!

Melanie was a problem-solver. The first thing you need to be a problem-solver is to be able to recognize a problem. Melanie definitely saw a problem. The next step is to figure out the thing that’s causing the problem. Well, Angela was causing the problem. The final step is to figure out how to get rid of what is causing the problem.

That one made Melanie think. She decided that to end this horrible web of lies she was in, she would have to tell Brittney the truth. It was the only way to untangle herself. After all, the web was only getting stickier.

Also, she knew that what she had done was just plain wrong! It was dishonest, hurtful, and horrible. She had to end it even if she could have kept up the lies.

So the next day on the ride home from school, Melanie/Angela asked Brittney to sit with her. This time she was dressed as herself.

“Brittney, I have to tell you something,” Melanie said.

“Yeah? Wait one sec. Yeah, uh huh. Shush, Kevin! Wait, where’s Angie? Is she at basketball again?” Brittney said in one breath.

“What? Oh, umm, well, you see, this is about Angela. You see, Angela is not here. In fact, she’s never been here. She doesn’t exist”

“What?”

“You see, I fabricated her.” Melanie explained.

“In English, please?”

“Sorry! ‘Fabricated’ means ‘made up’. I made Angela up.”

“But why?” Brittney looked baffled.

Melanie then explained the entire story to her in the nicest way she could.

“B-b-but that can’t be true! I’ve seen Angela! I’ve talked to her! I’ve talked to her!” Brittney stuttered.

“I know, I know. I was really horrible! We were never together, even on the bus! Angela was never there! It was always me! I’m really sorry!” Melanie tried to explain.

“I just figured you both had really busy schedules! And you must have changed after math like, every day!” Brittney raged.

“I didn’t really change. I just... modified my outfit. I pulled up my hair and put on a jacket! I’m terrible, aren’t I?” Melanie explained.

“Pretty much,” Brittney said.

Melanie could tell that Brittney was hurt.

“Look, I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you. It was just a fun thing to do! Nothing against you! Really! I mean it! I know it was a terrible thing to do, but I didn’t think about it much then. I’m really sorry!” That is how Melanie found herself apologizing to Brittney Jones. She would never have thought that in a million years she would be begging for Brittney Jones to forgive her.

As it turned out Brittney did forgive her, but not until one week later. And she didn’t have much to do with Melanie ever again.

Melanie understood why Brittney did this, and understood that what she did was wrong. As she was an over-achiever, she didn't just apologize or write a note. She wrote a two-page apology letter and apologized herself in person.

She never, ever got herself tangled in a web of tangled, sticky lies again.

Sincerely, Molly

*A girl has difficulty thinking beyond the moment, which often gets her into trouble. In **SINCERELY, MOLLY** by Zoie Strebel, a diary provides a record of her conflicts and successes.*

* * *

WARNING: THIS JOURNAL IS WRITTEN ON ACID PAPER, SO IF YOU ARE READING THIS, YOU WILL SOON SHRIVEL UP INTO LITTLE SPECKS OF DUST. THE LAST PERSON WHO READ THIS HASN'T BEEN SEEN FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME!

P.S. I AM NOT JOKING!

* * *

December 12, 2007

Dear Diary,

Another day, another way for my mom to figure out how to wake me up. Today was the blow horn. I fell straight out of bed and hit my face flat on the floor. While I was taking a shower, I must have dropped my soap at least 20 times, so I must have hit my head on the soap holder at least 20 times. I went to school with a big fat honking bruise on the back of my head. I felt like everybody was staring at me. I found a hat in my locker and wore it until Principal Fozzworth told me to take it off. I refused, and just like that I got another after-school

detention. At home my mom and I had another lecture about respect. In retrospect I think I would have done things a lot differently.

Sincerely, Molly

* * *

December 15, 2007

Dear Diary,

Today my brother Gary would not get out of the bathroom! When he did, it smelled like skunk! At school, my teacher wouldn't stop bugging me about my overdue social studies report. He was soooo annoying. He started to get all up in my face. Next thing you know I was in Principal Fozzworth's office. He gave me a long lecture about respect. I received another after-school detention. (I couldn't wait to show this to my mom!).

My ride home on the dreadful bus was no different than any other day: yelling, screaming, swearing. It's like dying again and again every single day.

I opened the door to my house; I saw my mother and father sitting on the couch. My mom said firmly, "Get up to your room, Molly Beatrice Gershwin!" I walked up to my room like it was no big deal. My parents had received a phone call from my school that stated that I had gotten my fifth detention this month.

Thirty minuets later my mom came upstairs and started reminiscing about respect and how I should have it, but don't. But I didn't really pay attention because I was too busy staring at my beautiful poster of Zac Efron hanging on my wall. For dinner, my mom made corned beef casserole. Everybody was dead silent with disgust in there eyes....

"THIS IS DISGUSTING!!" I said trying not to gag.

My mom says, “Young lady, what did I say about respect?”
“I didn’t care to listen because I already know I don’t have any.”

“Then what were you doing for our one hour discussion?”

“Well... since we have already had this talk for the fifth time this month, I didn’t really care to pay attention. For most of the time I was staring at my Zac Efron poster. You know I never get tired of his beautiful face!”

Well, I guess my day was just another typical day.

Sincerely, Molly

* * *

May 17, 2008

Dear Diary,

It’s been so long since I’ve talked to you. I thought you were lost! I just found you while I was cleaning my room. You won’t believe what has happened to me over the months. I haven’t gotten a detention since the last time I talked to you! I’m happy, and so is my mom! I learned not to rebel against my fellow humans. And my mom took down my Zac Efron poster, so I had no other choice but to listen to her lecture.

Last month, I went to the gas station with my dad. While he was filling up his car with gas I snuck in and bought a lottery ticket. (I told the guy that I was buying it from that I was eighteen, and the dope believed me!) I WON! That’s right: mega millions! Okay, maybe not mega millions; I just won \$10, but it felt like mega millions when I won!

Well, the school year is almost over, and I am going to Switzerland for the summer. I’ll probably be too busy to write in you. See you after summer.

Sincerely, Molly

Sophia Is Moving

*The changes ahead seem like the end of the world to a girl who finds out she is moving again in **SOPHIA IS MOVING**, by **Hanna Pfershy**.*

“Now *plié*.”

I am in so much pain! My name is Sophia Elizabeth Adams, and my teacher, Mrs. Ponzer, hates me (I don't know why). Well, I'm in ballet class. I dislike ballet. The only reason I'm doing it is because of Bella, my best friend.

After ballet class I went home to do homework. I am going to a Montessori school in New York. My best friend is Bella. We have been bff's since pre-school. We do everything together, like play games at recess, have sleepovers, and talk about everything. We even do ballet with each other just so we can talk.

As soon as I got home my mom and dad were standing in the doorway waiting for me. “Honey, can you please come into the living room?”

When I went in my little sisters, Avery and Emme, were already there looking scared. When my parents got in the room, they sat down and got straight to the point. “Girls, we are moving.”

“WHAT!” I screamed. I went storming up to my room.

It turns out we're moving to Espoo, Finland. How much worse could it get?

This would be so hard for me the next five days. I had to say bye to everyone I knew in New York. For the first night I was living in denial.

The next day I went to ballet. Mrs. Ponzer actually said she was going to miss me. Bella was throwing a fit. She was saying things like “Nooo!” and “Why is the world so cruel!” (It was really dramatic, and everyone was staring.)

At school I said bye to everyone, even the people I don’t like. Everyone (that was nice) signed a huge card saying “We’re going to miss you!” Later, Bella threw another dramatic fit. All this was so overwhelming I wanted to go in the bathroom and cry. I was going to be leaving everyone I knew and everything I cared about (except my family).

The day we went to the airport was one of the saddest days of my life. My mom wouldn’t let any of my friends come to the airport. (I don’t know why.) It was so hard. My stomach dropped when I saw the plane, knowing that I was about to leave my friends and leave a lot behind.

The plane wasn’t much better. There was a guy in front of me who kept singing along with his music very loudly. The boy behind me was kicking the back of my seat. Then, in the last thirty minutes that boy threw up. The smell was sickening, like a skunk in a dumpster. I wanted to scream.

The first thing we did in Espoo was go to the herring festival. The Finns actually live on this stuff. It’s horrible; it is all slimy and gooey. We had to go because my mom loves it. I’m actually glad I went because I met a really nice guy. His name is Steven. It turns out he goes to my soon-to-be school.

School was a lot better than the festival. Kids there are very nice; they included me in games and class. My friends are Emily, Jane, Amber, and Steven. They are really nice, though they will never replace Bella and all the memories we had.

I finally had a sleepover! Yay! It was with Amber. She is probably my best friend here. The sleepover was really fun.

But her mom was so proper, it freaked me out. She stood up straight, and never used any slang. I didn't know how to react to that.

I thought I wasn't going to fit in, but I do, somewhat. Maybe Espoo won't be so bad. The name will be, but the people in the town won't.

Two Brothers and a Guitar

*Two brothers with a lot in common are also quite competitive. In **TWO BROTHERS AND A GUITAR** by **James Millar**, will Jamie allow jealousy to weaken the bond he has with his brother Justin?*

Justin is an 18-year-old boy. He loves music and likes to play the guitar. He also tries to play the drums. Justin has a younger brother, Jamie. Jamie is 12 years old. Jamie plays the bass guitar and likes to play with Justin. Justin and Jamie have many similar interests like sports and video games, but it seems like music is their strongest bond. Justin and Jamie are good friends, but they also get very jealous of each other.

One day, Justin said he would take Jamie to Guitar Center, a local music store. He had been promising to take Jamie for a few weeks. Both boys like going to try out playing different instruments, but they also liked showing off their playing talents.

When they got to Guitar Center, Justin started playing a guitar, and Jamie started playing the bass. “Hey, Jamie, let’s play ‘I Shot the Sheriff,’” said Justin. They started playing the song together, and before they knew it the whole store was listening to them play.

“Do you guys know ‘Tell Me Baby?’” a bystander shouted. Justin and Jamie began playing this song. After two more songs Justin and Jamie stopped playing.

Several people in the crowd started talking to Justin. Jamie felt a little jealous. “Hey, I was playing, too,” he thought. “Why does Justin always get the attention?”

As they were standing there, a guy introduced himself and said that he had a band that was looking for a guitar player. He asked Justin if he wanted to try out. Justin was quite excited and said he would love to.

On the way home Jamie was quiet. “What’s wrong?” asked Justin.

“Like you really care,” said Jamie. Justin had no idea what was wrong with Jamie, so he decided to leave him alone.

The next day Justin went to his try-out. “Hey, Jamie,” said Justin. “I am going to my try-out. Wish me luck.” Jamie just looked at Justin, but didn’t say a word. Justin felt bad, but he was too excited for the try-out to figure out what was Jamie’s problem.

Once Justin had left, Jamie sat there steaming. “Why does Justin have all the luck? It seems like all of the good things happen to him. It’s not fair.” Jamie picked up his bass and started to play. He didn’t take the time to think that he was only 12 and really too young for a band.

When Justin got home Jamie had cooled down a lot and thought about how he had acted. Jamie told Justin how happy he was for Justin and his being in a band.

At the end of all that Justin told him that he got Jamie a spot in the band as the new bassist.

Worlds *Away*

The Adventures of English Man

*When our hero Jim discovers his favorite teacher is a mutant, it's a race against time to save Springfield from certain destruction in **THE ADVENTURES OF ENGLISH MAN**, by **Spencer Patrick**.*

Warning: Names in this story may cause severe itchiness, but I won't tell who! NEVER!

When Jim was a kid, he wasn't aware he would grow up to fight a horror that still shakes the citizens of Springville.

Jim had a normal life, a normal family, normal friends, and a normal house. His mom was a dentist, and his dad was a construction worker. When he was five, he wanted to become an artist like Leonardo da Vinci. As he grew older, his interests in English began to change rapidly.

When he was twelve, he wanted to take up a teaching career. So he decided to ask his teacher, Mr. Fisher, if he could come by after school to learn more about English.

Once Jim left, Mr. Fisher began to think what was most important to English. While Mr. Fisher ponders, let's look into his past. Mr. Fisher is only new to teaching; he used to work for the government.

His job for the government was to be a plant researcher. He was supposed to find ways to make plants give off more oxygen. But Mr. Fisher wasn't doing the experiment correctly. He was making the plants evil. And he knew it. Mr. Fisher was fired when the plants got out of hand. He was ordered to destroy the plants, but only took them home.

One night not so far from the day he was fired, he was playing with the plants when he got a paper cut on a *Muse* magazine. He thought nothing of it when he scooped out a handful of fertilizer for the plants. His blood got into the fertilizer the plants ate, mutating them.

Mr. Fisher got fertilizer in his bloodstream and became mutated, too. In all of about three and a half minutes, Mr. Fisher had become Poison Oak. (It's just a name; stop scratching, now!)

When Jim heard of this, he rocketed to his grandma's house. After a short explanation of why he needed a superhero costume, his grandma got to work. His costume was a silver jumpsuit with EM on the front.

When English Man reached Poison Oak's lair (Mr. Fisher's house), he found it was guarded by people who'd been turned into fruit and vegetables. He recognized his neighbors and his friends and even his family. NOW IT'S PERSONAL!

As English Man runs up to the house he doesn't see the ground splitting up. Suddenly he falls into a moat! As English Man falls, his life flashes before his eyes. He thinks how he'll never see school or his teachers again. And then he hits the surface of the...Jell-O?

When he finally climbs out of the sticky mess put there by Poison Oak, he sneaks up behind a sweet potato guard. Although the guard has an eggbeater, he is easily knocked out by English Man. He steals the keys and runs into Poison Oak's sunroom. Here he encounters two more guards, this

time Banana Blitzers. Then he goes through two more doors, and there is Poison Oak.

Poison Oak wasn't as ugly as English Man had expected. In fact, he was more like Mr. Fisher than ever. He seemed to be muttering something to himself. Then he turned to see English Man and thought he was a hallucination. Poison Oak began to explain that being evil wasn't very fun, and as he did, he began to change back! In ten minutes everyone was back to normal.

The Blob

*In **THE BLOB** by A. B. Collins, an evil teacher keeps five students after school. That's when his dangerous experiment takes a nasty turn.*

One day a nerdy teacher named Dan Fisher was reaching for his coffee cup for a drink. Instead of grabbing his coffee cup, he accidentally grabbed a cup that contained an evil mind-controlling potion. After one sip, his eyes started to turn pitch black, and his hair turned green.

Once the change took place, Dan would test his evil experiments on students that he kept after school who misbehaved in class.

On a cold snowy Friday in December of 2007, Mr. Fisher kept five students after school: A.J., Aaron , Zack , Jack and Charles. Mr. Fisher told them about Pacific plates and his creation of the blob. Zack said, "All right, Crazy, we totally believe you." Jack and Charles hit Zack in the back of the head with a pencil.

Mr. Fisher started to describe the blob. He said it was green, gruesome, ugly, slimy and gigantic. A.J. said, "Mr. Fisher, stop talking about your girl." Just then the power went off.

There was silence, and then a huge growl. The power never came back on, and there was a huge slime trail leading to the cafeteria that we all stepped in. Aaron said, "O.K. I'm out!"

Zack said, "Chill out."

We called A.J.'s parents, and they called the police.

It was winter time, and all the doors were frozen solid. The parents and the police couldn't travel on the roads because there was two feet of snow outside, and the roads were also filled with ice. We couldn't seem to get out of the school. We were stuck until Monday.

We were starving, and A.J. said, "Hey, guys, don't forget about the new vending machine that was installed in the teachers' lounge."

Charles said, "We should split up and look for something to smash the glass with."

Aaron decided to make the groups. The first group was Charles and A.J., the second group was Zack and Jack, and Aaron was all by himself. Zack was afraid of the dark, and he couldn't find the main power switch. We were really confused and scared.

It was about 2:00 in the morning when we found a hammer in the Engineering Technology room. A.J. found it by tripping on it and hitting his head. We busted open the machine and started to eat like kings.

After we were done eating we heard a very loud bellow. It was Mr. Fisher, yelling and running from the blob. We saw Mr. Fisher running toward the gym. We all followed him and saw something that will forever haunt our minds.

Charles said, "Hi, Mrs. Fisher" when he saw the blob, and Jack told him to knock it off. Zack told everyone to run, and that's what we did. Charles fell on his head while running and was knocked out for a few seconds until we put some of Zack's gym socks under his nose to wake him up. Charles woke right up and said, "What was that smell?"

A.J. had found some old notes in Mr. Fisher's room on how to destroy the blob. We decided to read the notes A.J. found. The notes told us that the only way to destroy the blob was to put chemicals on a sharp dart and aim for the blob's

head. So we devised a plan to kill the blob. The plan was to wait until about 6:00 a.m. and lure the blob with bait.

We were all waiting quietly and patiently, and as soon as the blob entered the room, Zack tried to stab it in the back of the head with a dart but missed by a long shot. The blob knew that the dart had its weakness on it, so the blob knocked the dart out of Zack's hands.

The blob started to eat us one by one. Jack was the only one left, and the blob tried to catch him but missed.

Jack was right near the dart, so he grabbed it and stabbed the blob right in the back of the head. The blob started to expand and expand until—*pop*—gallons and gallons of slime splattered all over the walls. We all came out slimy, but we were in our regular body form.

The next morning the police started busting down the doors. We told them our story, and no one believed us because there was no sign of the blob.

Mr. Fisher was sent to a mental hospital because all he could think and talk about was the blob.

Our story was made into a movie, and there was a saga that followed. Also, we made a multi-million dollar book deal.

No one has seen the blob in years, but there were rumors. As we became parents, we told our children about the blob. My friends and I keep in touch, and we call ourselves the children of the blob.

The blob will always haunt us for the rest of our lives. And poor old Mr. Fisher: He just ate green Jell-O every day for the rest of his life. From time to time I visited him at the hospital, and we talked about the blob.

The Boy Who Saved Christmas

*An ordinary boy takes on his biggest challenge. In **THE BOY WHO SAVED CHRISTMAS** by Gjon Ndrejaj, a boy travels halfway around the world to save one person.*

On a cold, snowy, fall day, I heard Santa was getting kidnapped. I was the one to save him because I knew where he was. I had a dream the night before that Santa got kidnapped and was taken to the South Pole.

I was up for a long ride ahead of me because I had to go to the South Pole all the way from Michigan. The biggest challenge I had to face was my first one: I had to cross the Pacific Ocean. But I was lucky. Most of the ocean was frozen over, so I could walk across.

It wasn't all frozen, though. When I thought it was, my foot fell through, which slowed down my travel. By the time I got my foot out, it was drenched. I waited a while and found somewhere to keep warm until it dried.

When I got back on my feet, I had a lot of energy. I started to go a little faster until I saw a man holding a potato sack that was wiggling around. I thought to myself, *That might be Santa Claus*, so I kept him in sight so I could follow him without him seeing me.

Then it was bad because there was a big blizzard. I lost where the man was, but I kept running until the snow settled. Then I got him back in sight.

I followed him for a bit longer until I came to a big field of glaciers. I saw him go into one of them like a secret layer.

I came in and saw a man duck-taped to a chair. I saw the kidnapper in the other room, so I snuck up on him. I found a fire extinguisher in the office and hit him upside the head with it. He fainted.

Then I got Santa, and we went to the phone and called for help home. They sent a helicopter for us.

That is how I saved Christmas!

Cats and Robbers

*Cats don't have secrets, do they? After reading **CATS AND ROBBERS** by **Judy Wong**, you may never look at sweet little Tabby the same way again.*

It began one morning. A woman named Lily looked in the mirror as she brushed her long blonde hair until it shone like the morning sun and was as soft as silk. She stared at her slim face and complexion that made her look younger than her age of 50. Then she heard a noise outside, so she went downstairs.

She opened the door, and there was a cat on her doorstep. She took the cat inside the house and fed it. But once she actually got close to the cat, its fur reeked of garbage and cigar smoke. She gave it a bath by filling the bathtub just enough and placing the cat in. When she squirted the lime green soap, it gave a squelching sound.

Lily also made posters to say she had found a cat.

Later as she was going to bed, she looked for the cat but couldn't find it. She figured the cat was hiding and went to bed.

The next morning, Lily went out to get the mail. Once again she found the cat outside her door. Lily wondered how the cat had gotten outside.

After a few days no one had responded to her poster, so she figured the cat was a stray. She named her Jesse. But every night Jesse kept disappearing. "Why do you keep disappearing, Jesse?" Lily excitedly asked her.

One night Lily followed Jesse and found out that she could open the back door. She did this by stretching up onto the countertop and pawing at the door handle until the door glided open. Lily then followed Jesse outside into the backyard and into an alley. Jesse led her to a shed.

Jesse went through a space made by a missing board in the wall of the shed behind Lily's house and just squeezed through the open space. Lily couldn't fit through the space but could see through it. Looking inside, she saw jewelry store robbers. She recognized them from the Channel 4 news.

As Jesse walked into the shed, the robbers greeted her, and Lily overheard them talking. One of the robbers talked to Jesse as if the cat were a person. "So, Clea, you're back again," one robber chuckled.

Lily then called 911 on her cell phone, but the robbers overheard her. They brought her inside through the shed door, tied her to a chair, and gagged her.

The next day, a woman found her lying in the alley dead. There was a gun lying next to her with one shot fired. Dried blood was on the ground and the wall of the shed. Jesse was never seen again.

Change of Heart

*When a girl runs away after her parents' death, she finds a place that changes her life forever. In **CHANGE OF HEART** by **Rebecca Starr**, Bella Rose learns the importance of love and acceptance.*

I hated my apartment. It all dark and musty with beer bottles lying everywhere. It had three rooms, when counting the loft, and every appliance seemed to be broken. I would tell my mom that I'm disgusted to step into my own home, but her eyes just filled with tears, and she would murmur, "Sorry."

I knew she couldn't do anything about it. That was because my dad was an alcoholic. I mean, you could barely say "hi" to him when he came home at night. It would be asking to die if you complained to him.

I needed to talk to someone about my (what I assume are) feelings, though. My mom was the only friend I had. That is, if you could call her a friend, or even a mom. What, really, is a person who ran off with her jerk boyfriend after high school, had a child without wanting one, let the nurse in the hospital choose the baby's name, and raised her in an apartment that looks like a dump? Not to mention neglecting to give her an education for ten years, and working at McDonald's for a living. I was just surprised that I'd made it as far as I had in my life with my parents' "fantastic" care.

I sat at home doing my homework. I had progressed pretty far in school already, considering I just began going to

it three years ago, and I'm already 13. My teachers say that with a couple more months of hard work and catch-up, I could soon be ready to be in the eighth grade where I belong.

The only noise was the faint *tick tock* of my wristwatch. I sat in my chair, puzzling over what the ending sentence in my essay should be, when there was a hard knock on the door.

I jumped out of my seat. I had never gotten visitors before, and considering that my parents were gone, it was most likely for me. I tiptoed to the door. I hoped that after looking through the peephole, if I didn't want to see the person, he or she would assume no one was home.

When I looked through the little glass circle, though, to my surprise it was a policeman accompanied by a strangely happy-looking woman. It was as if her job was to make people feel better. Little did I know that that was part of her job.

I opened the door a tiny crack and whispered, "Can I help you, Officer?"

"Are you Bella Rose Jones?"

"Yes." I opened the door a little wider.

"I'm afraid I have some bad news for you," said the policeman. He continued, "Your parents were in an automobile accident, and I'm afraid they did not survive. This is Ms. Sarah Granger from Children's Services." He gestured to the strange lady at his side. "She will be escorting you to the orphanage where you will go until we can find you a proper home."

"I'm going to an orphanage?" I asked in a quivering voice. Although my parents and I weren't very close, I couldn't pretend that this was not an inconvenience. They didn't give me a very good life, but at least I had an apartment that I could call home.

"Only for a year at the most," said Ms. Granger, as if that wasn't a long time.

I replied in a slightly stronger voice, "I don't want to go to an orphanage."

"I'm afraid you'll have to, Miss Jones."

"No, I don't, and I won't." I walked back into the kitchen and pulled out a paper bag from the cupboard. I began putting in two big bottles of water, two bananas, a little container of peanut butter, a couple of energy bars, and a spoon.

"Miss Jones, you will be going to the orphanage. You have no choice." I cast a dirty look at the police officer who had just talked to me. Acting as if he didn't notice, he continued, "Don't worry about packing any food. You will get three meals every day at the orphanage." I continued giving the two adults the silent treatment for a minute as I went up to my loft. In a slightly larger bag I put my food and a blanket. Then I went back downstairs.

I turned around to face Ms. Granger and the officer. "I told you, I'm not going to go to your orphanage," and at that, I swiveled on my heels, and I broke into a run.

I didn't dare stop and look back. I ran through the hallway door that entered the main building. The officer and Ms. Granger had been at my front door, so I figured this was the best bet. I flew down the hallway and went down the stairs three at a time. Out the building door I went. I didn't know where I was going to go, but through the city streets I ran. In the distance, I could hear the officer shouting, "Get in your car and go after her. I'm going to call for back-up."

Ten minutes later, no one had found me. I assume I had run at least a mile, but I had no idea where I was. I had gotten out of the crowded city safely, but I didn't know how much farther I could run. I took a deep breath. The air smelled of sweet flowers the farther I ran. I was glad that the smoke-filled city was behind me. When I had been running

through it, so much smoke filled the air I could barely see, let alone breathe.

In the distance, I saw a thick forest. If I only ran a few more minutes, I would be able to be safe in there. I stopped a minute to look back at the city. It seemed miles and miles away, but that didn't mean the cops had stopped chasing me.

I resumed running at full speed. The wind was whipping across my face. For the first time in thirteen years, I felt free. My long brown hair was floating behind me. My eyes were watering and my legs felt sore as though I had just run a marathon. That didn't stop me, though. It felt like I was flying.

Suddenly, as I reached the forest, a cool feeling and a scent of fresh pine filled the air. I slowed down, not sure if I should go in. I knew I had to, though. I walked back a few feet, and then I took off, and went full speed into the forest.

It was like a magnetic force had pulled me in. The moment I went in, it felt like I had just broken through a glass wall. I stumbled and fell onto the hard, dirt-covered forest floor. An icy feeling rushed through me, but I didn't feel scared. I felt safe, very safe. Then, everything went black.

When I woke up an hour later, my legs and back were achy. I stood up, though, and looked around. My bag lay next to me, but I wasn't anywhere near where I had been when I fell. Around me was a clearing, and rather than standing on a hard, dirt ground, I was standing on cool, soft green grass.

I kicked off my shoes. It felt good to dig my toes deep into the grass. The air was crisp and refreshing. The sky above was a beautiful pale blue, although I was sure it would be nighttime by now.

Slowly, I picked up my bag and began to walk around, towards the forest. How I had gotten to the clearing was a

complete mystery to me, but I decided that I would just push it out of my mind. As I made my way into the dense trees, I heard a high-pitched, squeaky voice say, “She’s up, she’s up. The little girl is up.”

I froze in my tracks. First of all, I was not a little girl. I was a young adult. That was the least of my worries, though. I could feel fear prickle up my neck, as it normally did when I was too afraid to move.

I looked around. I was sure that I could hear movement. I jumped. Was that a twig cracking? Then, emerging from the forest came lots of animals, both big and small.

They all looked so strange. One particularly odd one was a little cat that had ears like a bunny, the coloring of a snake, hooves of a horse, and the hopping movement of a jackrabbit. Its skin looked scaly and rough as if it had been through many fights.

All the creatures slowly began to encircle me. This was not the way I wanted to die. I desperately wanted to cry out, “Leave me alone,” but my throat had a lump in it. The next thing I knew, I had collapsed on the forest floor again and was shaking uncontrollably.

“Do something,” said one of those strange cats.

Slowly, a larger animal that resembled a bear and a dog mixed together approached me. I tried to yell at it to go away, but that lump was still there. My mind was rushing. What was I supposed to do in a situation like this?

The bear dog came closer and closer until it was practically on top of me. I stared at it. It had thick brown hair that smelled of flowers. His face was kind looking, and its eyes were a watery, deep brown. “Don’t be afraid,” it whispered in a soft, comforting voice. “We are here to help you. Trust me.”

I’m imagining this, I told myself. Animals can’t talk. As though it had read my mind, the bear dog said, “You’re not

imagining this. We are real. Only to the ones who need us, though, and you, Bella Rose, you do.”

“How do you know my name?” I demanded, completely forgetting that I was scared out of my wits.

“We have our ways,” replied the bear dog, chuckling slightly. I could almost see a smile appear on his warm, welcoming face. I suddenly felt calm again. “Now come with me. You need to tell us your story.”

Too worn out to disagree, I simply said, “Okay, and what is your name?”

“Charlie, but we will have time for names later.” At this, Charlie hoisted me and my bag on his back and off we went, into the thick, green forest.

An hour later, I sat in a cave on my blanket. I was full of the wonderful, warm food I had just eaten. Charlie had taken me back to a large cave that was full of paths that led to each of the animal’s sleeping quarters. We had all eaten a fabulous feast consisting of lemon chicken (because none of the animals were chickens), fresh berries, a salad, and apple pie. It was all prepared by Jennifer, who was, I’m not quite sure what animal. She resembled a ground hog slightly, but on the sides of her body there were wings. The wings were as white as snow, but they had golden flecks sprinkled across them. Her face had that same texture as the first strange animal I saw, but it still had warmth to it. Her fur was a strange purple color that when seen in the sun looked blue.

Then I told everyone my story from the first moment I could remember to stumbling into the forest. They all listened intently, not interrupting me once, which was quite enjoyable to me since at home I had hardly ever been able to finish a sentence. Then, when I was done, they simply sat there without making a noise.

After a minute or two, Charlie began to speak. “I see you have been through a lot in your life, Bella.” The animals

nodded. “You have experienced anger, sorrow, and being abandoned. Although those were not at all your fault, I have to tell you that you have much to learn also.”

I looked at him, trying to understand. He saw that this was not making sense to me. Why was he saying I had to learn? It was all my parents’ fault that I had been through so much. I had nothing to do with it. I didn’t need to learn anything.

“For all the things that have happened in your life, you have chosen someone to blame, and you just keep dwelling on them. You need to learn that everything happens for a reason, and once it’s done, it’s done. After it ends, it’s out of your control. You can’t change it. You need to learn to accept life the way it is.” Charlie stopped a moment, as if letting this soak in. Then he continued, “Also, you began to think that your whole life is bad. Slowly, because of your mindset, you have begun to shut your heart to love the last couple of years. You’re beginning to look at everyone in the world with hatred. You want to blame people for what has happened to you, even if it is the first time they show up in the scene.” He looked at me, and I could see tears sparkling in his eyes.

I just sat there, though. All my life, I had been sure I was causing none of the unhappiness in my life. Now that Charlie was trying to tell me that some of it was my fault, I was not happy at all. I felt like I just had to blame someone. Charlie continued, noticing I wasn’t taking a word he had said to heart. “But it is late. Come, and I will show you where you should sleep.”

I picked up my bag and blanket and bid goodnight to all the other animals. Then, I accompanied Charlie down a long path in the cave. I know that it was rude, but I didn’t talk to him the whole time. He had just made me so mad saying that my unhappiness was partly my fault.

Halfway down the dirt path, we took a right turn and pushed open a wooden door. I was amazed what the animals had done with just a cave to turn it into a surprisingly pleasant house. In my room there was a small bed that looked pretty comfortable. It had a wooden frame and blankets that looked quite welcoming. There was also a table, dresser, and pot that I assumed was to go to the bathroom in. I decided that it would be best to only use it for emergencies. Then, I turned around and saw a cute little window and a tall rectangle cut in the wall with a raised short wall in the front. There was also a hole in the floor inside the walls. In the back was a wood piece at the top. "This is for when you would like a shower," said Charlie. "Simply pull back the wood piece, and water will rush through. There is a waterfall on the other side. Towels are in the dresser."

"Wow!" I exclaimed, completely forgetting that I was mad at him. This was nicer than my old apartment.

"You will be staying here until your lesson is learned," said Charlie. I wasn't quite sure what that meant, but I simply nodded as if I understood, and plopped down on the bed. "Sweet dreams," whispered Charlie.

"Sweet dreams," I mumbled. Then, off to dreamland I went.

I awoke early, but felt reasonably well rested. The sun was shining through my window, and it felt warm on my face. Momentarily, I forgot where I was. Then, I remembered the events of the day before. My parents had died, I had run away, and now I was living in a magical forest. I never really believed in magic until now. Now, it seemed quite possible.

I got out of my bed and walked stiffly over to the dresser, pulling out some towels. Since my apartment had been so cheap, the water only worked three times a week. The last time I had taken a shower was three days ago. It was going to

feel great bathing in the cool, fresh water. I walked over to the shower, and pulled off my clothes. They felt dirty from all that they had been through the day before. Then, I yanked the wood on top back and let water pour over me.

It was much warmer than I thought that it would be. The water felt like it had been heated in a pot over a fire. I stayed in there for a long time, but when I looked at my fingertips and they were all shriveled up, I decided to get out. I dried off, pulled my clothes back on, and went out of my room.

I walked back towards the entrance of the cave on the same path I had taken to my room the night before. I was quite happy that it consisted of very few turns so that I actually knew where I was going.

As I got closer, I could smell a wonderful scent that wafted through the hallways. When I reached the source of the aroma, I saw that Jennifer was cooking. The food looked wonderful, and I could feel my stomach rumble. "Good morning," I said to Jennifer. Her face was full of cheerfulness.

"Oh, good morning, child," Jennifer replied in her singsong voice. "Sit down, sit down. Have some food." I sat down and devoured my food in five minutes. Jennifer simply laughed and said, "Don't worry, lunch will be up soon enough." I thanked Jennifer for breakfast during which she talked to me. Then I went off to explore.

On my way out of the cave, I thought about what Jennifer had just said to me. She was telling me about not blaming people for anything that went wrong. You needed to accept it. I brushed the thought out of my head, though. I still didn't want to think about anything that had to do with what Charlie had said to me last night.

I ran into all sorts of animals who talked to me about what Charlie had said the night before. It was a little annoying, but I tried to listen. They explained all about how

hatred is never the key, and even in the toughest of situations, it's always the right thing to keep your heart open to love.

Over the next few days, I went through this routine each day. The animals were teaching me all about how everything I went through was going to help me. They said that all I need to do was think about it, and not point fingers. They also said to know that that was the way it was, and everything happens for a reason. I learned that when you care for others, they were going to care for you back.

Then, slowly, I began understanding more about life, and in my heart, I was sure that I was feeling a new kind of warmth that had to be love.

A week and a half after I had first stumbled into that magical forest, one night I went to bed thinking about everything the animals here had taught me. Then suddenly, it all seemed to fall into place. I was going to simply need to accept what has happened in my life, and learn to love what I do have. I would need to do the right thing and go to Children's Services and turn myself in. They only want the best for me. And strangely enough, this thought was comforting to me. After that, I drifted off into a peaceful sleep.

"Bella, Bella Rose," whispered a voice I recognized at once as Charlie's.

"Morning," I said, barely opening my mouth. I sat up, my eyes a little blurry.

"How are you today?" asked Charlie. I could detect a slight bit of sadness in his voice, but I didn't know why.

"Fine," I replied, although I would have rather not been woken up. "Can I help you with something?" I asked, trying my best not to sound rude.

"I'll tell you when you are fully awake," said Charlie. "How about you meet me out at the front of the cave when

you are ready? Bring your bag with you when you come.” At this, Charlie left and closed the door quietly.

I took a good ten minutes to pull my clothes on and gather up my bag. I was feeling slightly annoyed that Charlie wasn’t telling me what was going on, even though he did wake me up from a deep sleep. Nevertheless, I did as he told because he was providing me with a place to stay. For that I was quite thankful.

As I made my way down the cave hall, I could hear a frenzy of activity in the main gathering room. When I got there, I saw that just about every animal was crammed in there, enjoying a huge buffet made by Jennifer. This surprised me because usually every animal was out doing its own thing in the morning. Today, for some reason, was different.

When Charlie saw that I had arrived, he gave a mighty cough to get everyone’s attention. Then, he beckoned me over to him. I sat down, nuzzling into his warm fur. After that, he began to talk. “It is with great pleasure that I announce that Miss Bella Rose Jones here has come to an understanding, and learned the lesson that she had to learn to escape this forest.” There was a slight applause, but I did not know why. What on earth was Charlie talking about? Before I could ask though, he continued. “Now, although with great sadness, for I and all the other animals loved having her with us, I will be releasing her to go out into the world that she must now face. So, I would love for you all to join me in saying, ‘Goodbye and good luck, Bella Rose.’”

All the animals clapped and cheered. I, on the other hand, was simply dumbstruck. What lesson had I learned? Why did I have to leave?

The next thing I knew, though, I was being ushered out of the cave, out of the clearing, and out of the forest. Charlie waved goodbye and said, “Bella, don’t be afraid. You know what you need to do. You told yourself last night.” And with

that, I found myself standing in the middle of a field, and where the forest used to be, was a beautiful, sparkling pond.

As I slowly made my way back to the city, I kept looking at the forest that I used to live in, but was now gone. My first thought was that I must have been dreaming. I probably fell down and became unconscious as I was running away. That couldn't have been it, though. More than a week had passed since my parents had died, and I knew that all those animals had been real. Then, it hit me. When I had first arrived at the forest, Charlie had told me that he and the other animals were only real to the ones who needed them. That must have been the same for the forest itself, too.

When I finally arrived at the Children's Services office, more than an hour had passed. The whole time, though, I just kept thinking about what had happened to me in the past nearly two weeks. I finally seemed to understand it all. Everything began to make sense.

I knocked on the door hard and strong. I suddenly felt full of confidence. When a young woman answered, I recognized her at once as Ms. Granger. "Hello, Ms. Granger," I said in a voice just as nice as hers had been two weeks ago. "My name is Bella Rose Jones. You may remember me as an orphan who you tried to send to an orphanage nearly two weeks ago."

Ms. Granger seemed flustered at first, but then replied, "Oh, oh yes, well, come on in, young lady." I followed her into the building, not feeling even the tiniest bit of fear. Then, she took me into her office and closed the door. "Would you like something to eat or drink?" she asked as if I was just a normal visitor.

"I'm fine, thank you," I replied, trying to be as polite as possible.

Over the next five minutes, Ms. Granger went through lots of papers and searched for files on the computer. Finally, she said, “Okay, Miss Jones. Going off of what was expressed two weeks ago, I can tell that going to an orphanage will not really work for you. So, after a little bit of researching, I found an opening in a foster home that you can go to until we find you a family that, with your approval, will adopt you. How does that sound?”

I rolled the thought over in my head a bit, and then decided that the best thing to do would be to say yes to the offer. I replied with lots of confidence in my voice, “That sounds like a wonderful idea.”

“I’ll make the arrangements. In the meantime, we have rooms upstairs for the children who are about to go to a home and will just need to stay for a few days. Go ahead and make your way upstairs and talk to the secretary at the desk. She will find you a room.”

“Okay. Thank you, Ms. Granger.”

“Thank you, Miss Jones, for doing what needed to be done.” And with that, I went out of her office and left.

As I walked towards the stairs, the same warm feeling of love and happiness that I had felt in the forest began to fill me. I was going to get to start over.

Escaping Pants

*A boy trying to become a wizard zaps his pants without knowing it. In **ESCAPING PANTS** by **John Polakowski**, the boy must undo his mistake before things get completely out of hand.*

One day I woke up and said, “Yes! This is my first day of magic school!” I was so excited to finally start my first magic.

In the brochure it said that we had to have a trick ready before we came to class, like a show and tell. Now in the brochure there were many tricks. You could choose from ten of them. There was make a dead person come alive, make yourself fly, and a couple more, but the one I chose was make your dog fly.

The night before, I tried it. It was not the easiest trick in the world, but I finally got it, and it worked. It also said, “Try the trick the morning before class to make sure you are ready.” So I did it before class, but as I was saying all of the words, I felt my stick start to shake. I started to panic, and when I was doing the trick on my dog, the wand flew out of my hands. It hit something else, but I did not know what it hit. I was looking for something weird around my room or to see if something had happened in my room. When I was eating breakfast I was scared that something had happened in my room.

I was thinking the same thing until it came to trick time. I was very scared I was going to mess up, and if I did, it would rewind my whole grade.

As I was saying the spell, the same thing happened: My wand started shaking, and as I was done, it flew and hit my friend's pants. So my teacher let me have another try the next week.

When I went home, I checked my whole room and heard a thump. I looked everywhere until the one place I hadn't looked was my closet. I looked in my closet, and there were my clothes, alive in my closet! At least, the pants were alive.

When I opened the door, they all ran out and headed for downtown. Also, my friend called me and said, "You hit my pants, and they ran downtown when I got home!"

I tried to figure out what spell I really did, and if it was to make pants come alive. There was one word I had said by accident.

I biked downtown. Not only my pants were alive, but others came alive from mine. So there were more than 100 million pairs of pants. I had to find a spell to kill all of the pants.

I went into a local store and went on the Internet on the computer inside. The spell was "go away." I did it to all of them and—*boom*—they were all gone.

But when I got home, I was grounded for life.

Eyes for Vengeance

*In **EYES FOR VENGEANCE** by Joshua Vance, a young boy loses his parents to a vicious murderer. The boy grows to manhood with one goal: vengeance on the man who killed his parents.*

It was just a normal day in Tokyo, Japan. Shin and his wife, Taik Hirokeu, were walking down the street to cash a check. Suddenly, an assassin ninja popped out of nowhere and stabbed both Shin and Taik in the back. They both bled to death within minutes, leaving their son, Kenant (Ken) Hirokeu, with no parents.

He was only three years old, and he had to feed himself. By the time he turned six, people were disrespecting the fact that he was so determined to turn out the best and he wanted to be the best. He was a very misunderstood child.

Ken always believed in himself because no one else did. He was very self-determined and started going to ninja school like other kids. At age ten, Ken found out about his parents and was determined to find the killer. He now has a special skill that he can use. "I promise, that I will find the killer and I will kill him to get revenge for my parents. I HAVE NO PARENTS THANKS TO HIM, AND I WILL TAKE HIM OUT! I SWEAR IT!" Tears jerk out of his light brown eyes. They turn red as his black hair begins glowing silver. His black jumpsuit turns blue as his muscles grow bigger, and a special blue power barrier flares up as he EXPLODES! Veins in his skin grew huge, long lines. He is in dramatic pain, but

can only think about the horrifying, tragic death of the only people that had ever loved him.

It seemed as though he was going to go on a vicious rampage because of the people lying to him about his past. He was told that his parents went on a trip and that they forgot about him, which made him kind of mad at his parents, but never that they were killed at the hands of a ninja.

His trainer, Master Shoden, calmed Ken down. Ever since then, Ken has discovered he has “The Eyes for Vengeance.” That skill is very rare and special. A person gets this skill from a lot of energy awakening inside of one’s body when a person snaps from anger and longs for vengeance. He or she can explode on an opponent with unbelievable and very oppressive force. However, the fighter that wields the fighting-style jutra must not take it for granted, or the jutra will take over mind and body. The ninja’s soul will become evil. This jutra is hardest to control. It is very deadly in its state.

Unfortunately, special powers didn’t always come with respect. Most people in his town did not like Ken’s attitude and were jealous of his powers.

In ninja school, Ken was also disrespected. That gave him even more to prove, however. He had to gain everybody’s trust and create himself a new image. In their ninja school, they get taught how to wield their jutra properly and how to keep their special powers under control. Ken eventually learned how to keep his jutra under control.

Ken grew older and got wiser, stronger, and more respected. He still had a lot more people he didn’t get along with. He even learned a new jutra. It was called the shadow-speed jutra. He learned it in a great battle with his master when he was in need of speed. Fortunately, there are such things called miracles. It makes him faster in all ways.

In school one day, Ken was partnered up with two other people. One was Raney—one of the best girl ninja fighters in the village. Another was Casey—a “cool” quiet guy, and a ninja fighter ranked number one in the village. Both teased Ken but were forced to try not to argue with him. They used excellent teamwork in battles, but most of the time when not battling, they argued. The only thing that kept Ken away from quitting is when he swore revenge for his parents, and this was the only way he could get strong enough.

Ken wanted to be the strongest of the village and had a lot of heart. Raney and Casey were both critical to Ken’s training. They all trained against each other to get better, which really helped Ken out. He was out day and night training and thinking about his parents.

He was 18 when he had to take the ninja final exam. He passed with flying colors. Most others thought of Ken as a hard worker because he got his ninja license while most of the other people failed. He was so proud that he gained a new image, but he felt he wasn’t ready to search for the assassin. He trained more and tried to get info on the killer

He found out his enemy’s name—Doron Katami—and a lot more information. It turns out he is a leader for the most dangerous gang ever.

Ken did four years of training until the age of 22 before he thought he was ready to take on the challenge. Finally, he thought he was prepared to take on that challenge to avenge his parents. He knew that the place he was looking for was about five villages over from where he was. He took a train that was a couple of hours over from his place, and sat there staring at his sword for the whole ride there.

He went to their hideout, the basement of a basement in a building called X-Goods. Once he arrived, he threw a smoke bomb through the window of the basement and killed all of the guys except Doron, who was too strong to be destroyed

by a bomb. Once all of the smoke began to clear up, Ken said, "Do you know who I am?" Ken began powering up, and finally as his eyes turned red (this time) and his hair turned silver, he knew that he was finally about to avenge his parents. "The Eyes for Vengeance" was unleashed. All-out destruction was caused just by powering up to help the jucra build up in his body. As the clouds turned black, tornadoes began to form, and thunderstorms began to form. It was such an awe-inspiring thing to see.

The building exploded, and blue flame glows flared around his body. He shouted, "YOU KILLED MY PARENTS, AND NOW I SHALL KILL YOU! DIE!"

Doron began powering up while laughing and saying, "I have killed your parents, and now I shall kill you!"

They both finished powering up. Doron charged at Ken. Ken used shadow-speed jucra. He dodged Doron's punch and retaliated quickly and with a clean slice from his sword. Doron laughed and cut Ken horizontally with his sword. Ken took it and charged back. Doron reversed Ken's kick and kicked Ken through three hard buildings.

They both finally got tired and stopped for the moment. Suddenly, Doron seemed less calm than before and a little more tense. A hard gust of wind blew that somehow told you that it was the final clash between evil and justice. Either way, one of them had to die in this battle.

Doron charged at Ken and kicked him in the face. Blood went flying from Ken's nose. He was kicked 100 yards away from where he originally was. Ken lay down as if he were done for. Doron charged up ready to shoot an energy gun at Ken to end his life. Right at that moment, Ken remembered the promise that he made to get revenge for his parents. He got back up and charged at Doron waiting to shoot the electrical gun in his hand at him.

Then suddenly, an unexpected twist occurred. Instead of two energy blasts canceling out each other like energy blasts usually do, they both clashed, and one was still going to shoot the other and end his life. Now it came down to who could shoot the gun the strongest.

The blast eased over to Ken, and was eventually in his face. With all of Ken's last strength, he gives his blast a boost: a boost good enough to beat Doron's blast. Somehow he pulled it off. Ken won, and Doron was caught in a huge explosion as he screamed in aching pain. Doron slowly fell to the ground and said silently, "He did it; he killed me."

Ken responded, "That was for my PARENTS!" He left Doron to die slowly and painfully.

Ken went home proud and feeling relieved when he said, "My parents are finally avenged."

Ken was worn out during the fight. He then proudly passed out and died.

Freed at Last

*A surprise can come from anywhere. In **FREED AT LAST** by **Alexis M. Zerafa**, a girl gets a huge surprise from a little dog.*

Molly Murdock was staring out of her living room window into the bright autumn day like she had done for the past few days. It was about the fifth day in a row that the strange Dalmatian had shown up in her yard. He had on a dog tag, but he was always too far away for her to read the tag.

The dog got up from where he was sitting in the neatly kept yard and headed towards the dense woods. Molly decided that it was time to see what the dog tag said so she could return him to his owner. She quietly crept outside and followed the dog from a distance. It was hard to see the dog through the thick trees. The dog didn't seem to notice her except for a quick twitch of his nose (unnoticed by Molly).

Suddenly, the dog broke out in a run. Molly ran as fast as she could without him seeing her. Tree branches whipped at her face as she sprinted. Then, just as suddenly as he had started running, he stopped. She darted behind a thick bush to avoid being seen. The dog shifted into a sitting position. This was her chance.

She leapt from her hiding place in the bushes and clung to the dog's furry, spotted back, holding his mouth shut with her hand. Surprisingly, he didn't struggle. She took her hand off of his mouth and read his tag. It was blank with one star in the middle of it. "That's odd," Molly said aloud. "Well...I

guess you are a stray then? How about I take you home with me?”

The dog didn't resist her when she put on the leash that she had brought with her. For the whole walk back to the house he acted like Molly was just taking him on a stroll as if she had done this every day. It was very odd behavior for a stray.

When they got back she unleashed the dog and led him into the house. “You'll have a great time with Kodiak,” Molly said. And right on cue, Kodiak came bounding in. *Who is this mysterious dog?* the large husky thought.

Molly got out some dog food for the dogs and placed it on the floor. The stray came over to the bowl and picked it up in his mouth. He carried it over to the open dog food bag and dumped it back in. “Wow,” said Molly. “I must be seeing things. I think I need more sleep.”

Molly went to the fridge to get herself a snack, and the dog came rushing over. He stuck his nose in the fridge and pulled out last night's leftover pizza. He finished it off within seconds. “Bad dog,” said Molly sternly.

How come the newbie gets people food? thought Kodiak enviously.

“Just because you don't like dog food, doesn't mean that you get to eat *my* food,” Molly scolded him.

In the middle of the night, Molly heard the sound of the front door rattling. She got up and saw the stray dog trying to get out through the doggie door. She followed him, not wanting to scare him into a run.

He led her to the highway and sat under a billboard for eHarmony.com. It read, “eHarmony, you'll never be lonely again.” The dog started howling miserably.

Molly slowly approached him and patted his head. "Are you lonely?" Molly asked. "Do you need a date?" Molly giggled.

Suddenly there was a flash of blue light and a twinkling of stars, and the dog slowly started changing form. Within seconds, there was a young man standing where the dog should have been. He was wearing a pointed wizard's hat and blue robe with stars all over them. It looked like he was pulled out of a fairy tale.

Molly stared, mouth agape, for a long time. Finally she spoke. "Wh-what hap-happened t-to my dog?" she stuttered.

"Well, I was a dog, but you freed me," the man said in an odd accent.

"I'm positive I'm delusional," said Molly.

"You said the word 'date.' This is a term only used with humans, so by speaking to me as if I were a human you freed me from being trapped in animal form," the wizard replied. "I've been watching you for the past five days to see if you were the right human to break the spell. You seem to be kind and caring, so I let you catch me. I ran away to see if you cared enough about me to follow me."

Molly wasn't completely listening to his explanation. She was over in the corner sitting on a rock. "I'm losing my mind. This isn't real," she sighed.

"My brother accidentally trapped me in animal form. We were just playing around with potions, and he got carried away. He couldn't release me, and for some reason only I knew the thing that could free me, but I couldn't talk," he said. "Anyway, I must be off! But, first, I'd like to thank you for your troubles."

Suddenly, another flash of blue light and stars came raining down all over and lit up the air. Sitting there was a Dalmatian puppy with a gold collar. Molly just stood there with her eyes bugging out. "It was my pleasure," replied

Molly. With another blue flash of light, all that was left of him were a few falling stars.

“Now that I’ve come to accept that I’m crazy,” Molly said, “I realize that the wizard disappeared without introducing himself. Who am I talking to? I am crazy,” Molly said. She gathered the puppy in her arms and looked at his golden collar. Printed on it was one single star. Molly smiled.

Molly opened the door to the house and walked in. Kodiak came up to the puppy and sniffed him curiously. *I could have sworn you were older last time that I saw you,* Kodiak thought.

“Meet the new addition to our little family of two,” Molly said. “His name is Starlight.”

Gone

*In **GONE** by Alex Lurz, eight secret guardians must recover what is stolen and discover what is unknown.*

It was a warm summer night. I walked out the front door trailed by my friend Manning and patiently waited in the driveway. In three or so minutes Mike drove up in his yellow four-door Lamborghini with Layla. They greeted us, and we hopped into the back. We set out and were on our way to the Fisher Theatre where we would be getting the secret *Book of Durbell* from the other set of guardians. The trade was to be at the theatre because it is said that for the book to change owners the trade has to be done in a sacred place. In the world there are only six sacred places, one on each continent not counting Antarctica.

The *Book of Durbell* is one of the most powerful objects in the world. It contains the ability to destroy any object and give you control over any person. There are two sets of guardians that protect the book for the safety of the human race. Guardians are chosen by the previous set of guardians every ten years. First the current guardians choose from the best of the Navy SEALs. The Navy SEALs are not informed by the government but by the guardians themselves. They are told that they are training to be the guardians of something important but not what. Next the cuts are made and the SEALs who are still standing go through a process of mental and physical tests. If they are fit for the job they get it, but if not the process starts all over. The guardians trade the book

off every six months in order to halt any plans to steal the book.

The drive to the theatre was a quick twenty minutes. We jumped out of the car and walked into the theatre. I took the lead and headed us into the main theatre. In a few minutes I had found the other four guardians sitting on the side balcony. The guardians in this group were Ivan and Bob, who were the tough ones, and Peter and Joe, who were the witty ones.

I took the stairs by twos, made my way to the balcony, and sat in one of the four empty seats.

We said our hellos and then got down to business. The passing of the book was going to take place during the first intermission. It was scheduled to be at this time because the guardians did not want to cause any attention to themselves when they said the prayers that allow the book to rightfully change owners. Peter was going to secretly pass me the book, and I was going to put it in the extra large pocket that had been specially made for the transfer.

The show started, and the first intermission quickly came. It was the big moment. Peter secretly took the book out of his jacket and, right as he was about to pass the book to me, pulled it back and jumped off the balcony. He landed with a thump, and then ran out of the door. The seven guardians sat shocked until Ivan said, "I'll chase him. You can come with, but I might know where he's going."

"Okay, where?" I asked.

"To Cairo. That is where the book is most powerful. But there's not enough time to explain now. I'll go direct. You guys go and get some weapons just in case."

"Okay, we'll get there as soon as possible."

The six guardians and I left the theatre in a flash. We sped home, and I went inside and grabbed a throwing star and six undetectable knives. I ran back out of the house and jumped into the Lamborghini. We drove to the Million Air Airport

and boarded our 20-seat mini jet. The ride was overnight, and in about twenty minutes I was out cold and didn't wake up until we landed in Cairo.

I got off the plane. It was early morning in Cairo. Immediately after we landed I called Ivan, and he said he was somewhere on Main Street. He also said that he had not seen Peter, but that he had talked to people who had. We quickly told the cab driver to take us to Main Street. He did as he was told, and within no time we were getting out of the cab on Main Street.

There must have been a million people on that street alone. It was so crowded you could hardly move. It was going to be impossible to find either Ivan or Peter.

After about an hour the chase was getting kind of hopeless until I spotted a hooded figure out of the corner of my eye. The figure was about the height of Peter and seemed to be trying to stay out of sight. The guardians and I ran over to him and stopped him before he could step into a small store selling souvenirs. We took the figure's hood off and saw the face of Peter as if it had been punched quite a few times.

I asked the traitor what happened to him and the book. He said, "Ivan caught me as I was trying to sneak into a small hotel. He then beat me up, stole the book and headed off towards the pyramids of Giza."

"Do you know why he went there?"

"He said that he was looking for a grave to rob with the help of the book."

"Well, then, I guess we'll go and find him there," I said.

Peter suddenly spoke up and said, "You guys, I'm really sorry for stealing the book. Ivan said that if I didn't take the book and run to Egypt he'd make me wish I was never born."

"In that case, your apology will be accepted on one condition," I said.

"What?" he asked.

“You help us find Ivan. You could have just told us what he said. We could have dealt with him.”

“Done deal.”

The now seven guardians and I called over a cab and hopped in. We told the driver to take us to the pyramids of Giza as quickly as possible. He sped off, and we were at the pyramids in no time. We jumped out of the cab and gave the driver an extra tip for the speedy delivery.

Manning luckily had a picture of Ivan in his wallet. He pulled it out and started asking around to see if anyone had seen this man. The owner of a small perfume shop said he had seen the man no less than ten minutes ago riding a camel out towards the great pyramid of Giza. I knew it would be no use to chase him on foot, so we went to a camel renting shop and rented seven camels.

We set out towards the Great Pyramid on our sprinting camels. After about fifteen minutes of travel we could see a figure in the distance. We sped up our camels and could see the figure of Ivan sitting on his camel just slowly moving along. I shouted at him, and he turned around. He saw it was the guardians, so he put his camel into full gear and tried to make an escape. Lucky for us we were only about fifteen yards away from him when I yelled. His camel was a little faster than mine, but when he started to gain a little on us I remembered that I had brought six knives from my house. I reached for my backpack only to discover that it wasn't on my back. I must have left it in the taxi, I thought.

Just as I thought it was hopeless, I remembered I had the throwing star in my pocket. I quickly pulled it out. I had one chance to hit him, and this was it. I started aiming, and on the count of three, with the smooth flick of my wrist, I threw the throwing star. It sailed through the air like a bullet and pierced Ivan right in the back. With a loud yell, he fell off his camel and landed hard on the sand.

We rode our camels over to him and saw that he was alive, but barely. I asked where the book was, and Ivan pointed to the camel. Right there on the camel was the *Book of Durbell*, sitting in a pocket hanging off the side.

I pulled the book out of the pocket and put it in the special compartment of my coat. The seven guardians and I helped Ivan back onto his camel, and then we set off for Cairo. Ivan seemed really sick, so as soon as we got back to the city we took him to the hospital. The doctors at the hospital said that Ivan had lost too much blood and was going to die.

“That’s too bad. One bad decision, and it cost his life. On the upside, we got the book back and will never make the mistake of losing it again.”

Hector and the Evil Marshmallow Gnomes

*Is it okay to talk with your mouth full if your food talks first? Maybe that question will make sense after you read **HECTOR AND THE EVIL MARSHMALLOW GNOMES**, by Adonis Marshall.*

There is a young fellow that attends Berkshire Middle School who loves to eat. His name is Hector Eatemup. He is a lot overweight, with red hair and big ears. Although he eats many different kinds of foods and snacks, his favorite snack is marshmallows.

One day Hector was looking at TV, and there was an advertisement on the new fruit-flavored marshmallows shaped like gnomes. Hector said, "I have got to get those."

The next day he couldn't wait to get out of school. When school finally let out, he went to the candy store on the corner near his house to buy the new fruit-flavored marshmallows.

As soon as he got home he jumped on the sofa. He opened the bag to taste only one of them. Hector said, "Whoo hoo! Those taste excellent." They tasted so good that he ate the whole bag except three. Hector wanted to save the ones he didn't eat for lunch the next day. He put them in the high cabinet over the fridge. After eating the marshmallows, Hector fell asleep for the night.

Around three o'clock in the morning, he woke up because he had a dream that someone or something was trying to eat

the rest of his marshmallows. Before he could get downstairs, he heard what sounded like little people talking coming for the kitchen.

He walked slowly and quietly towards the kitchen. He stood in the middle of the room to see where the little voices were coming from. The talking was coming from the cabinet over the fridge. Now he was scared because he thought there were some rodents in the cabinet eating his marshmallows.

He slowly opened the cabinet and screamed, "Holy smokes!" He fell backwards over the chair. Hector couldn't believe his eyes. The gnomes were now little funny-looking people. They were as small as the Barbie doll's baby sister Kelly, but with long gray beards and slanted eyebrows.

He got up and his heart was pounding. He wanted to eat the rest of his marshmallows, so he went back to the cabinet. At this time, the gnomes looked like they were mad. They were very mean. The gnomes looked at Hector, started talking, and threw sprinkles in his eyes.

Hector washed the sprinkles out of his eyes with water. By that time, the gnomes were sabotaging the kitchen. He caught them and put each one in the blender one by one. He threw ice in the blender to make them melt faster.

After he blended the gnomes, he put them in the garbage disposal. Once the gnomes were gone, Hector went to look in the cabinet and found they had opened all the food and snacks. That's when he noticed there was a hole in the marshmallow bag. Hector said, "That explains how they got out."

After the ordeal, whenever Hector bought marshmallows he ate all of them so that the leftovers would not turn into little evil marshmallows gnomes again.

Jessie's Worst Nightmare

*Beware the doll army! In **JESSIE'S WORST NIGHTMARE** by **Claudia Fuderer**, one girl's dolls band together with evil intentions.*

One night little eight-year-old, blond haired Jessie Star put her brunette, short, nice dolls to bed (she thought) in their dollhouse. When she was in bed that night at 2:00 a.m. she heard one of the doors creak and what sounded like footsteps walking down the stairs in the dollhouse. She wondered what it was, and then went back to sleep.

That morning Jessie woke up and went to get her dolls out of the dollhouse. One of her favorite dolls was gone, but none of the rest.

She went downstairs to tell her mom, who was in the kitchen. Out of the corner of her eye Jessie saw her favorite doll running in the busy, crowded, loud street. At that moment she ran out of the kitchen and into the street. The doll was gone. A bunch of cars were in a huddle, and Jessie knew why. Her doll was in the cold, dark, brick alley across from their house and laughing as hard as a hyena because she had escaped Jessie.

That night Jessie went to bed, and at 12:00 a.m. she heard the door creak again with whispering and footsteps. She sat up in her small twin bed and saw little spots moving. At that moment Jessie got a chill down her spine. She checked her dollhouse. All the dolls were GONE!

She immediately tried to wake up her mom. That didn't work!

She thought about it. Now there was a doll army out on the streets of her town.

The next day was a Saturday, so Jessie went looking for the doll army. Jessie knew it was unsafe to go out without her mom's permission, but she went anyway. She saw her dolls in an alley and heard what they were talking about: destroying the town!

The dolls saw Jessie and held her hostage in the alley. The dolls would only let her go if she didn't tell a single soul. She said she would not tell anyone. They thought that they couldn't trust her, but then again they were her dolls, and let her go.

Jessie ran home, weaving in and out of the traffic. Jessie was thinking of a plan to destroy her favorite dolls. She came up with a great plan. She was going to bring something they absolutely loved: the hairbrush she used to brush their beautiful, long, brunette hair.

Once the dolls saw Jessie with the hairbrush they all gathered around in excitement. Once all the dolls were there she threw a big net down to capture them. Just at that moment Jessie saw a garbage truck coming down the alley. Jessie stopped the garbage men and asked them for help. The garbage men took the captured dolls, threw them in the back of the garbage truck, and compacted them with the garbage.

Jessie got that off of her shoulders and felt so bad. Jessie walked home with tears in her eyes waiting to come out. They were never seen again...but there was always a chance they would return from the dead!

Judgment Drink

*Just another drink at the beach? Not if it's the one the pirates from space are after. **JUDGMENT DRINK** by Clark M. Lindsay explains all.*

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, there was a small green-, blue-, and white-colored planet. But in a different galaxy, farther away, covered with the solid blue of raging storms, the occasional sprinkle of islands, and the chocolate obsessed space pirates, lived Moby Galaxy. It was an enormous whale, the size of three blue whales, with talking dolphins, space sharks, and the inability to travel through space. That is, until Captain Swirly came along.

Captain Swirly is the smartest space pirate and the most highly regarded chocolate hunter on the planet. He has left the planet on his newly rocket-propelled space pirate ship.

Now, back to Earth, in the year 2007. Tim, an 11-year-old boy living in California. He and his brother Earic and his dog Daisy go down to the beach every day to get genuine Hershey's dark chocolate milkshakes. One day they were drinking their milkshakes when an enormous classical pirate ship (besides the rocket boosters) covered in cannons and crew arrived. There were 100 pirates at least, diving off the side of the ship into the sandy, shallow water with ease, and these aren't those big, overweight, stripe-wearing swashbucklers. These guys looked like they could have been in a *Star Wars* movie, with black robes and shining blasters and what looked like light sabers holstered on their belts. The ship

landed around ten meters out in the water and glided into the beach, docking directly on the sand.

Daisy began barking insanely at the ship as a leather-coated pirate with a peg leg that seemed to be a spoon stepped off the enormous ship. He was adorned with many patches with the names of chocolate products on them. He wore a pilgrim hat with a golden buckle, of all things. There was an enormous whale in the distance that nearly blocked out the sun surrounded by shining, dolphins that could reflect the breaking waves on their skin, singing, “Chocolate is nearby! Chocolate is nearby!” over and, over. This seemed too weird to be true.

The pirate bellowed, “I, captain Swirly, asks you minor humans where the chocolate is!”

Eric responded, rather creeped out, “They have chocolate in the shack.”

“Well, what’s taking you so long to fetch it, fool? I swear I’d—” But Swirly couldn’t finish his sentence. A large screech from one of the dolphins forced him to look around only to see a singing dolphin drop from the sky, covered in crimson blood, as a flying shark, black as the night sky, ripped through the dolphin orb in the sky. Swirly began to mutter curses under his breath as he revealed his laser cannon, instead of a pirate hook.

“Holy—” Tim began, just as Captain Swirly deftly aimed and launched a long glowing beam of sapphire light at the shark. The shark shortly after dropped out of the sky. It made a loud pop as it smacked against the water’s surface.

“Where there’s one shark, there’s more,” said Captain Swirly. Eric and Tim both let out a shudder, accompanied by a sigh of confusion at this horrific event.

“Men! Board the ship. We have to get out of here before more arrive!” The pirates loaded the chocolate onto their ship and shot off the beach into the air, its captain screaming out

orders to his men as they fired more laser weaponry out at the sharks. They warded them off of their ship as they warped into hyperspace speeds again. They left the planet with the horrible space sharks close at hand.

The next day, Tim and Eric drank their milkshakes with air-soft guns beneath their armchairs on the beach. They were ready for the next inevitable visit of Captain Swirly.

The Kiwi Juice Dilemma

*Who knew kiwi juice could cause so much trouble? In **THE KIWJ JUICE DILEMMA** by **Jaime Gaulzetti**, one boy discovers what one little lie can turn into with the help of some spoiled kiwi juice.*

“That’s the year my mom won a silver medal at the Olympics!” said Chaz.

“Your mom?” said Joey. “Your mom was in the Olympics? No offense, Chaz, your mom seems pretty strong and everything, but I don’t believe she was in the Olympics.”

“She was, and I can prove it,” Chaz said.

“Prove it how?” asked Joey.

“I can show you her medal. We keep it in a frame in our family room.”

“Dude, it’s true!” said Chaz’s friend Troy. “I’ve seen it about a thousand times. It’s awesome!”

“Uh, okay, if you say so,” said Joey. “Hey! There’s my mom. I gotta go now.”

Chaz and Troy tried hard not to look at each other until Joey was far away. Once he was in his mom’s car, they both burst out laughing.

“Chaz, I don’t think he believed you about the medal,” Troy said.

“Why not? I thought it sounded good.”

“Well, sometimes people think your stories are made up.”

“Really? I think people like my stories.”

Chaz can sometimes be a troublemaker. He had always been that way. For example, when he was little and going to preschool, he would refuse to get dressed in the morning. There were many days he went to preschool in his pajamas with his clothes for the day in a backpack.

Now, he is a sixth-grader at a new school. During his first couple of days at the strange new middle school, he lies to try and impress his new classmates. He tells people that his mom was in the Olympics, that he has someone do his homework for him, and that his dad is the President of the United States and he lives in the White House!

One day on the way to Troy's house after school, Troy tells Chaz, "You know, I've been to your house. I know it's not the White House because it's not really big, but I don't care what kind of house you live in. I like you, not your house. Why do you tell people all those lies?"

Chaz admits to Troy that he makes things up because he wants to look cool.

That afternoon Chaz and Troy are hanging out in Troy's kitchen. Troy's mom is a fitness trainer, so she has a lot of special health and energy juices in her refrigerator. Troy dares Chaz to drink some of his mom's kiwi juice because he thinks, "It's the grossest drink ever!" Troy thinks that the juice might be spoiled, but he doesn't tell Chaz because that would ruin the fun. Chaz thinks the juice smells weird, but he drinks it anyway because he doesn't want to look like a wimp.

Later that night, at exactly midnight, Chaz felt a sudden shake that rattled his insides and woke him up. Everything seemed all right, so he went back to sleep. But the next morning when he woke up he realized that, first, his dog Ringo wasn't in the bed with him like he always was, and second, he was in a completely different bedroom!

"Where the heck am I?" he thought.

Once Chaz got up and opened his door he was even more shocked because he was in a totally different house! He started to search the house for his parents. He finally found them downstairs sitting at a huge table, eating a very fancy breakfast on fancy dishes with lots of glasses and lots of silverware. He ran up to them and quickly started asking them questions like “Where are we?” “Where’s Ringo?” “Whose house is this?” and “How did we get here?”

His parents had no idea what Chaz was talking about. They asked him to slow down and start over, but Chaz was too impatient. Couldn’t they see they were all in a strange house—a big, fancy, expensive-looking house—with lots of people walking around in business suits and talking on cell phones? It didn’t make any sense!

Chaz didn’t understand why his parents were acting so strangely, so he went to look for Ringo because he knew his dog would never change. While he looked for Ringo he passed by more than 100 doors, many portraits of people he didn’t know, and lots of security officers standing as straight as statues. Then, he finally realized where he was and burst out, “I’m in the White House!”

After all those times he told people that he lived in the White House, here he was, *living in the White House!* How could this be? He needed to find his dog to prove that he wasn’t going crazy or having a strange dream, so he started to look for Ringo again.

Even after hours of wandering around the many halls and rooms of the White House, he still couldn’t find Ringo. So he went back to his parents to see if they had seen any sign of him. They replied, “Who is Ringo?”

“OUR DOG!” cried out Chaz.

“We don’t have a dog, honey,” his mom said very calmly. Chaz was so shocked that he almost passed out. He thought

to himself, “Who are you, and what have you done with my parents?”

He went to his room thinking, “How could this be?” He tried to figure out what happened, and finally realized it must have been “that dang kiwi juice I drank last night! I knew there was something wrong with it.” It made his stomach hurt and somehow had changed his life by making one of the stories he had told come true!

Chaz was upset, so he went to find his parents again, but someone in a business suit told him that they were flying on the private jet to a meeting in Philadelphia. So he gave up on that plan, and decided to go play fetch with Ringo. But then, unfortunately, he remembered that his dog was gone too!

After a week of living in the White House, his life wasn't looking so good. He had no privacy. The security guys followed him everywhere. He had to eat big fancy meals and couldn't just make himself a taco or grilled cheese sandwich after school. His parents were always gone or too busy to talk to him. He missed his friend Troy and his dog Ringo. Worst of all, he had to go to a private school and wear a uniform!

He realized he shouldn't have told all those lies, and he shouldn't have drunk the spoiled kiwi juice. He missed his old life where he was able to spend time with his parents and play with Ringo. But he wasn't sure how to get his old life back again. He thought of ways to reverse the effect of the kiwi juice. He got the White House limo driver, Norm, to take him to Market Triangle to buy some fresh, normal kiwi juice. He hoped that if he drank some normal kiwi juice his life would go back to the way it was before because he realized that he actually liked it that way.

Once he got back to the White House he opened the kiwi juice and poured it into a big glass. He drank the whole glass as fast as he could to make sure it worked. Chaz thought that the faster he went to sleep, the faster he would get his old

REAL life back. And he really wanted it back. In just a few minutes, he was sound asleep.

He was so sound asleep that he didn't feel his body shake at exactly midnight. The shaking rattled his insides, but he didn't feel it, and he didn't wake up.

In the morning Chaz is lying in his bed half asleep with his eyes closed. He doesn't remember feeling a shake during the night, so he thinks that nothing has changed. He feels stupid for telling all those lies, and hates how horrible his life is now. Just then, Ringo jumps up on the bed, and starts slobbering all over Chaz! He cannot believe that Ringo is there, just like he used to be!

Chaz is ecstatic that his life is back to normal! He's happy to be home with his own dumb parents (maybe they aren't so bad after all) in his own little house and with plenty of privacy. His room was just how he liked it, and he was living with the best dog in the world! He promised himself that he would never tell a lie again—or ever accept a stupid dare! And that would be the *last time* he would ever drink kiwi juice!

Leave Me Alone

*Oliver needs to get back to his tree, and soon. In **LEAVE ME ALONE** by **Max Gross**, a little leaf named Oliver finds out what it is like to live on human ground.*

Crunch, crunch.

I could hear the voices of all those poor leaves whimpering to their sad deaths. I imagined in my mind what that would feel like: getting stepped on by humans, or getting blown away by the wind, but worst of all, getting raked. I felt the burn in my heart.

“Stop daydreaming, Oliver,” my friend Lenny whispered to me.

“What...huh? I’m awake, I’m awake! I said that too loud, didn’t I?”

“Yup,” Lenny explained.

“Oliver Crunchnick!” my teacher screamed. “Stop talking this instant!”

“Yes, Mrs. Leaveitch,” I said quietly.

I was in class listening to my boring teacher, Mrs. Leaveitch, talk about dirt. I stared at her disgusting, wrinkly, brown, yellow body. I examined her old, twisted stem. She was one ugly leaf.

It was a fall evening, the month of the dead leaves. No leaves were around during fall. They all would be on the ground, dead, or trying to find shelter for themselves. All the leaves are ripped off from their trees and carried down to the ground. Big giants would rake you and put you into a leaf pile:

“the death pile” as we call it. Because of this, you have to watch out for giants and the long pointy rakes. But I wasn’t scared. It was an unlikely chance for me to get raked to death and put into the death pile. Besides, I lived on a safe tree.

Ring, ring, ring-a-ding!

“Finally, school’s over,” I said in relief.

“See yah later, Oliver,” yelled Lenny.

“Bye-bye,” I replied.

I felt wind brush against my face, and I knew the 3:30 wind was coming my way. *Fushhh*. The wind dragged me to my tree.

That’s my stop, I said to myself. “Hey, Mom.”

“Hi, honey,” my mom said to me.

“Come on, Mom, don’t call me that. I’m not honey. I’m a leaf for the last time!”

“All right, then, hi, leaf,” my mom corrected herself.

“Hey, Mom, can I go to Lenny’s tree?”

“Yes, but be home before dinner. We’re having roasted twigs and CO₂!”

“All right, Mom. See you at dinner.”

I was just in time for the 4:06 wind. I saw the gust of wind in the distance coming towards my way. I jumped up, and I was caught by the wind. “Weeeeeeeee!” I hollered.

I was there in a jiff. I jerked out of the wind and onto Lenny’s cozy tree. “Hey, Lenny.”

“Sup, Oliver.” Lenny was sitting on his rough, bark table doing his treework.

“You have treework,” I announced.

“Yep,” Lenny said.

“Hey, Lenny, want to go play some hide and go tree?”

“I love that game...NOT IT!” Lenny shouted.

“Oh, tree stump, I’ve got to be it.”

“Yes, you are,” Lenny proclaimed.

“Count to 20 tree seconds,” said Lenny.

“Ok,” I yelled. “One tree, two tree, three tree, four tree, oh whatever, twenty tree! Ready or not, here I come!”

I searched around for Lenny for minutes, and I finally gave up. “Lenny, I’m done seeking. You’re too good. Now you seek and I hide!”

I waited for another minute and lost my patience. “All right Lenny, come out here right now!” I angrily yelled.

Nobody replied to me. I started to get worried and nervous. Plus, the wind was starting to blow. The wind doesn’t blow until later, I thought. The *Daily Leaf News* said that the wind blows only later, not at this time.

“Lenny,” I said softly.

“Ahhhhhhh!”

I heard a scream in the sky. I looked around, but no one was there. My heart was pounding at the speed of light, and I didn’t know what to do. *I’ve got to get to my tree*, I said to myself in the speeding wind...*but how?* I looked down at the ground, and I couldn’t believe what I saw. “Lenny!”

He had fallen off his tree and onto the cold, hard ground. I didn’t know what to do. I looked back up because I didn’t want to see the horrible sight. Something was falling down at me, but I couldn’t see what. The wind was blowing in my eyes. It started to get closer to me, and I could see it better now. It was speeding above me.

“Oh my g-d!” I yelled.

I tumbled onto the ground, and my stem felt twisted and cracked. I slowly closed my eyes, and everything went blank.

“Oh...” My eyes slightly opened, and all I could see was the beautiful morning sky. “Where am I?”

“You’re down here, with us,” said a nearby weed.

“But how?” I questioned.

“You were hit by a branch that broke down in the storm, and fell down here...with us,” replied the weed.

“How do I get back up on my tree?” I asked.

“You can’t. It’s impossible,” said the weed.

I was stuck down here forever, as the weed said. I couldn’t get back to my tree. I hope my parents are ok. A tear formed in my eye and slowly dripped down my red body. I looked at my cracked stem, and I started to cry hysterically.

“I can’t even get up,” I cried.

“It’s ok,” said the weed.

“But...what happened to Lenny? Anything could have happened to him. Crushed by humans, ripped by a rake, or maybe the fall really hit him hard,” I declared.

“Breathe in, breathe out, take deep breaths. Don’t worry, it’s going to be all right,” said the weed.

The weed made me feel a lot better. With him around I didn’t feel alone anymore.

“Hey, I never got to know your name,” I said.

“It’s Jack Weedy, what’s yours?”

“Oliver, Oliver Crunchnick.”

This Weedy guy was really nice, and he seemed like he knew a lot about life on the ground. He taught me how to protect myself from getting stepped on or raked by humans. He taught me tree-fu and how to find some food on the ground. He also taught me how to use stealth. Jack was an excellent weed, and a great friend.

A thought popped in my mind. I worried about Lenny, and I wanted to find him. “Jack...you know about Lenny,” I said.

“Ahh, Lenny. He would always wave to me and talk to me from up in his tree to down to the ground. We were very close friends. What do you want to know about him?” asked Jack.

“He fell off of his tree during the storm last night, and I want to find him,” I replied.

“Oh my,” said Jack, his mouth dropping straight down to the ground.

“I might go through many obstacles, and I might run into a giant with a rake, but I am determined to save him,” I exclaimed.

“I will come with you,” said Jack.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yup, you’ll be more protected with me around,” affirmed Jack.

“Oh, my stem,” I complained.

“Yes, but Oliver, we should stay where we are until your stem is healed. You’re not fully recovered,” Jack announced.

“You’re right,” I agreed. “Hey, Jack, how can you walk if you’re just a weed?” I asked.

“I rip my stem out from the ground and hop to wherever I want to go.”

I got really tired and I had to be ready for my journey, if my stem healed. *Yawn*. I fell asleep right away.

I dreamt of Lenny and me, sitting down eating twigs in a bowl, laughing over and over again. But then Lenny and I were getting pulled apart, and I was getting scared. My dream popped when I opened my eyes in the morning and saw Jack standing right in front of me with a weird expression on his face.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“You were talking in your sleep, saying, ‘I’m ok, I’m ok, I’m ok’ over and over again,” explained Jack.

“Oh, I always have those. They’re called tree terrors, so get used to them. Anyway, I think my stem has healed,” I told Jack.

“Are you sure it’s all right?” asked Jack.

“It’s fine, Jack. With you around, I will be safe.”

“Thanks. You should eat a big breakfast because if we want to find Lenny today, we have to have a full tummy,” said Jack.

“I will.”

I grabbed some CO₂ and set it on the ground, I took some twigs from our twig pile. I spiced them up and heated them in the sun. I sprinkled some CO₂ on them just for some tang in my recipe.

“My mom taught me this recipe. I call it Fried Spice Twig! Want some?” I asked.

“Looks yummy. Yeah I’ll have some,” replied Jack.

I made another batch and we gobbled the twigs up in a second. The good part about being away from your parents is that you don’t have to use your manners.

I took all of the stuff I needed on our trip, like some twigs, and I even threw in some CO₂.

“Got all the stuff that you want to bring?” asked Jack.

“Yup,” I replied.

“We should head north because the wind was blowing north on the night you fell to the ground,” exclaimed Jack.

“You are one smart weed,” I said.

We were walking for so long and hadn’t spoken in a while, so I decided to say something.

“Hey, Jack, got a GF?” I asked.

“What?” replied Jack.

“Yah know, a girlfriend,” I told him.

“Ohhhhhhhhh,” said Jack. “Actually, yes, I have,” exclaimed Jack. “She was beautiful. She had a smooth yellow body with a perfect straight stem, and she always had a smile on her face. Her name was Alexandra Twigler,” exclaimed Jack.

“The model?” I asked.

“Yes, the model,” replied Jack.

“She modeled for *Tree Tops!*” I screamed. “But she’s not in the magazines anymore. Do you know why?” I asked.

“I do know why. She was ripped by a rake.”

“Oh, wow, I’m sorry,” I replied.

“Yeah,” said Jack.

I caught a giant figure in the corner of my eye and wondered what it could be. Then it moved, and I looked up and saw a human.

“Oliver, hide!” Jack whispered. I jumped to the left and hid in the grass. This is what I feared. I knew that this would happen.

Jack whispered next to me, “Oliver, she’s got a rake, so watch out. This is very dangerous.”

“It’s not like I can’t spot a rake,” I said.

“We have to get past her quick, because she’s raking those leaves fast, and soon she’ll get to us,” exclaimed Jack. I got really nervous, but I knew that Jack would think of a plan. “All right, this is what we do: I go left and you go right. She won’t be able to catch both of us...but one of us might get ripped. All we do is sprint as fast as you can and don’t stop,” said Jack. “On three. One, two, three!”

I ran like the wind. The ear-piercing screams filled my bleak surroundings. As the wind whistled in and out of my ear the exchange between the rake and leaves was on.

I could hear the voices of dying leaves. I glanced at the ripped up leaves on the ground, but I kept running, for I knew it could be my fate. I inspected both left and right to see where Jack was. I couldn’t find him anywhere. I was almost past the battle when I looked behind me and saw Jack being chased by the rake. The rake pierced his body and his stem cracked. He was crying in pain. When he was getting pulled back into the dead leaf pile, it looked like it was sucking him in.

Jack had taught me so many things, and now it was my turn. I needed to save him. I turned and started to run back faster than I had before. I jumped in front of the cruel human and distracted her. She picked up the rake and Jack slipped off. Now she was chasing me.

“RUN, JACK!” I yelled.

The human ran a lot faster than me, but I did what Jack taught me to do: use stealth. I ran behind a tree and fell onto the ground, acting as if I was dead. *Leave me alone*, I thought. She walked right past me. When she was further away I got up and ran. She caught a glimpse of me running.

I saw Jack ahead on the other side of the road. She was chasing after me so fast. She must have multiplied because there were two of them now, one with yellow hair, and one with black hair. I was on the road and almost made it when the black-haired girl slammed the rake down at me.

The rake cut part of my stem off, but I kept running. I ran slower now and I got weaker as they damaged my body. I looked at my red skin, holes going right through it and my stem half cut off. This was the day. It's over.

I took a peek ahead of me and saw a big monster with huge silver circle things and two bright eyes, and it was moving really fast. It had blue sides and the silver front of the monster was flashing light in every direction. The monster was blocking out the whole sun, and its shadow was lying over me.

I stopped running, and the girls hit me one more time. The monster went right over me and the girls ran back onto their grass.

Jack was running towards me, hurt, too. He pulled me to the other side. When the monster passed by we were gone, and the girls couldn't find us.

I felt bad that I left all of the leaves in the dead leaf pile to die. I could hear all the leaves scream in terror. One said, "Help me!" Another said, "Please save me!" My heart was in two, broken apart.

"Jack...if you ever find Lenny, tell him that he was a great friend," I said.

"No, you don't die without me...bro," said Jack. Jack pulled out grass and set it on my wounds. They would

eventually heal. “You’re not dying. Your stem is still on,” said Jack.

I sighed in relief. My heart was hurting badly, though, and I thought that I would never be able to fulfill my task.

“Yes, but I don’t think that you can complete the journey. I will find him myself,” replied Jack.

“No, I always finish things once I’ve started them,” I exclaimed.

“You looking for me?” said someone.

“Who?” I asked.

“Lenny,” he replied

“Lenny, it’s really you?” I asked.

“Yes...it’s really me,” said Lenny.

Lenny and I reunited and hugged each other. I was so pleased to see Lenny all better, remembering when I saw him on the ground all twisted and hurt. We three were safe together, but we needed to travel back to our trees. Jack left alone.

We hiked for a very long way, and I felt a pinch of wind on my body. I knew that the wind would blow me to my tree. We jumped out in the air. The wind carried us a far way. When the wind stopped I looked down, and realized that I was on a tree. It was my very own tree. I was safe.

Some days the weed would see me up in my tree and wave to me. Lenny would still go out to my tree and play. Jack, Lenny, and I always check the *Daily Leaf News* and make sure they’re right. Our eyes are wide open now for any dangers that creep around the world, now that we know the risks.

Magical Makeup

*Can what you put on your face affect what goes on in someone else's head? Christiana considers the possibility in **MAGICAL MAKEUP**, by **Antonia Barthlow**.*

There's a girl named Christiana. She's a sweet girl who doesn't have a lot of friends. Her favorite thing was putting on makeup.

She goes to school every day and is always bullied by a girl named Katie. Katie is a popular girl who is the queen of their school. Her favorite thing is to pick on Christiana! She knows one little secret about Christiana that no one knows: her favorite thing is to put on makeup.

Now you're probably thinking that's not a big deal. Well, at their school it is. Why? They're in their last year of middle school, and everybody wears makeup—well, at least all the girls do.

Christiana goes home and puts on her makeup. And she receives a phone call from Katie's friends saying they're sorry they always pick on her. She's going along with it, but she's not sure if they're up to something. They ask her, "Do you want to hang out?" Christiana said she would think about it.

The next day she decides to put on her makeup. She walks into her school and everybody's looking at her. And one boy says, "Wow! You look good!"

"Really? Oh, thanks," Christiana said. After all those surprises, she knew it had to be Katie's plan to mock her.

She had to beat her to the punch. But how? Hmmmmmm? “Let me think. Ahhhhhhhh! I can’t think of anything. Why is this so hard? Well, there’s the bell. Got to go!”

As the day went on, the girls were still nice to her. She was so confused. “Maybe I should head home and get something to eat.”

The next day she received a phone call from Katie’s friends. They wanted to know if she wanted to go to the mall. She told them once again she would think about it.

When she went to school, it was the “same old same old.” The only thing different was that she had forgotten to put on her makeup. Oh well.

Maurice the Famous Baker

*If Maurice wants to save the people in his town, he has a long journey ahead of him. But a pleasant trip with his friend Lenard becomes something much different in **MAURICE THE FAMOUS BAKER**, by Maya Dagher.*

One day in a little town in Arizona it seemed like a regular day. The streets were quiet and the people were out and about. But little did they know trouble was near....

It all started down at a little muffin shop named Maurice's Marvelous Muffins, which provides muffins that were the only source of food for the people in this town. Once you taste Maurice's muffins, no other food could compare. Also they provided the vitamins and minerals needed for the townspeople.

One early morning when Maurice was making his famous muffins for the day to feed all the people, the muffin machine suddenly stopped working. Quickly, Maurice checked the machine to see what the problem was. He soon realized that a part in his machine had broken. He tried to join the two pieces of the part together, but no force known to mankind could join the two pieces once again.

Maurice went to his thinking place, which was at the top of a cliff, overlooking the whole town. When he got there, he knew that the machine part was useless and he had to get a

new one, which meant that he had to travel halfway across the world to Hong Kong to get a new part. (Hong Kong was the muffin making capital of the world and the center of arts.) That made him furious! His face turned as red as a juicy, plump tomato. He punched the ground with his fist so hard that it created a crater.

While Maurice was walking to Hong Kong, occupied with his thoughts and not noticing his surroundings, he accidentally smacked heads with his best friend, Lenard. Lenard and Maurice's friendship was really old. Lenard was a few inches taller than Maurice, and he was a very fast runner. He could leap and run at a very fast pace for over three hours.

"Oh, sorry, I didn't see you there," said Maurice.

"That's fine," replied Lenard. "What's wrong? You seem a little down."

"Well, I'm on my way to Hong Kong because the machine part in my muffin machine is broken and I need to get a new one."

"Do you need any help? I've been to Hong Kong millions of times!"

"Why?"

"My uncle and I go there all the time to buy fine art for his gallery."

"Sure, I can always use an extra foot," said Maurice. They both laughed and started their long journey to Hong Kong.

Since Lenard was such a fast runner, he would carry Maurice on his back while running. If there were anything blocking their path, Maurice would jump in front of Lenard, pick it up, and throw it.

When they got to the Atlantic Ocean with Maurice on Lenard's back, Lenard, being strong and possessing monstrous amounts of speed, ran on the water to Asia to pull it to the edge of North America with his strong muscles.

Once the borders of the two continents touched, they climbed onto Asia.

When they arrived at Hong Kong, Lenard asked a man where the nearest muffin machine parts store was. The man told them that it was right down the block. Lenard and Maurice thanked the man and headed along their desired path.

When they arrived at the shop, they were stunned and overwhelmed. Piles upon piles of machinery were stacked on top of each other; they had no idea where to even begin to look for the mysterious muffin machine part.

A little man in a blue silk robe, large eyeglasses, and stringy, white hair came up to them with a warm look on his face. "How may I help you gentlemen?" Maurice took a deep breath and launched into his epic tale of the mysterious muffin machine part. By the end he was out of breath. "Ah, that's no problem we can't fix; follow me!"

The stout little man let them into the back room of the store. Inside the back room were odd machines, stainless steel and eye-catching. Rays, heaters, lasers, and everything mind-boggling and amazing were glinting in the bright lighting of the back room. "Here you go. Use it well," the man replied in a small, pleased voice. He handed them a small, red, velvet box with a key balanced on top of it.

They grabbed the box without hesitation. They knew that the velvet box would protect the machine part. Then, the man bowed and left the room.

Lenard and Maurice never got the chance to thank him, but they were certainly pleased and left the mysterious little shop with smiles on their faces.

They ran all the way home. While they were running, Lenard suddenly tripped over a rock and went soaring into the air. He found himself lying on the hard, concrete ground with a large scrape down the side of the leg. Fortunately, he was ok.

Maurice and Lenard stopped and sat on the edge of the continent. They put their legs into the cold salt water. All of a sudden, they saw a giant gray figure.

“Lenard, there’s something under there; I think we should take our feet out! It could be dangerous!” Maurice said cautiously.

“Hah! Nothing is too dangerous for the great and powerful Lenard! I laugh in the face of danger!” Lenard said confidently, still swishing his feet back and forth in the ocean.

Lenard peered into the intimidating water assessing the coming object. Maurice quickly pulled his legs out of the water, but Lenard didn’t think anything was going to happen; he just sat there in a trance.

Then, out of nowhere, a humongous great white shark thrust itself at Lenard’s leg. The shark missed, going back under. Lenard took deep breaths, unsure of what had just happened.

Quickly, once again, the shark came back up and went at his leg again. This time, the shark grabbed his leg with its razor sharp teeth, increasing its grip and ready to kill.

Maurice was frightened, stunned, and frozen in his spot, unsure of what to do. He watched as Lenard plunged deep into the dark, dark water.

Maurice popped his head in the water and looked around, but he couldn’t see a thing. His heart pounded in his chest and his mind raced with worry.

Maurice was not giving up. He dove into the icy water, flailing his arms around, looking this way and that. Maurice carried on like this in the ocean for about five hours, going deeper and deeper. Finally, Maurice gave up and knew there was absolutely nothing he could do. Lenard was gone.

As Maurice continued on his journey, he could not raise his soul from the depression darkening his spirit. He would curse himself for bringing Lenard into such a life-threatening

situation and tried to convince himself he was not the cause of Lenard's death. Lenard loved helping Maurice feed thousands, and Maurice knew he would want him to continue his journey and set out on what he sought to do. So Maurice walked on, conscience cleared.

When Maurice arrived in North America, he pushed Asia back to where it had been before. He shortly arrived at Arizona, with all of the people in town waiting hungrily for Maurice. He unlocked the door to the shop and let the people in so they could enjoy his famous muffins. The people were so delighted to eat his muffins again.

Later that week, Maurice decided to change his shop's name to Lenard's Lovely Muffins in dedication to Lenard. Maurice did miss Lenard, but he knew that he would always be with him in his heart.

Mermaid Melody

*In **MERMAID MELODY** by Dominique Wynns, a mermaid princess heads to the human world. It isn't long before adventure finds her there.*

One day, a little girl was in the ocean. Her name was Luchia. Luchia is a mermaid princess from the Pacific Ocean.

She went up to the surface and saw beautiful fireworks in the sky. "Wow, pretty fireworks," said Luchia. Then she saw a cargo ship. A boy the same age as her came to the balcony of the cargo ship and saw Luchia.

"Hey, what are you doing in the water?" said the boy.

"Umm..." Luchia was too nervous to tell him, so she put up her tail.

"Whoa, you're a mermaid!" said the boy.

"What is your name?" said Luchia.

"Katio," said the boy. "What's yours?"

"My name is..."

Then a big wave came by and smashed the cargo ship, knocking Katio off the ship and into the water. Quickly Luchia went to save him.

At sunset, Luchia pulled Katio out of the water. She took off her necklace, and Luchia popped open her pink pearl. She put it on Katio's chest, and he woke up. Luchia's cheeks turned red, and she ran off to the ocean.

A few years later, Luchia arrived with her penguin friend, Hippo, at the beach in California. "Why are you looking so glum, Luchia?" asked Hippo.

“I want to be a human,” said Luchia.

“Why?” said Hippo.

“Because I don’t want to live my life in the ocean all the time. I want to live in the human world,” said Luchia.

“How on earth can you do that? It’s impossible to do that!” said Hippo.

“I’ll try,” said Luchia. She tried with all her might, and then a wishing star came. Her pink pearl started to shine, and it changed her into a human!

“Wow, I’m human!” said Luchia.

“I can’t believe it,” said Hippo.

“It’s hot out here, and I’m tired. I wonder if we can get a room,” said Luchia.

“Oh, I saw a big poster that said there are rooms open for rent,” said Hippo.

“Cool, let’s go!” said Luchia.

They rented the room and decorated it. “Wow, cool room,” said Hippo.

“Thank you,” said Luchia.

The next day, they went to the beach and saw a big wave come by with surfers about to ride it, and then they walked down to the beach and saw the competition. At the end of the surf contest, Luchia saw Katio, the boy that she saved when he was knocked over by the wave in the cargo ship. “I didn’t know he was a surfer. Maybe he entered the contest,” said Luchia.

“Tell me about it. Uh-oh, he’s coming. Bye!” said Hippo.

“Wait, Hippo!” said Luchia.

“Hi, what’s your name?” said Katio.

Luchia’s cheeks became red. “Umm, Luchia.”

“I’m Katio. Do you go to John Grace Academy?” said Katio.

“Yes, I do,” said Luchia nervously.

“You want to hang out sometimes?” said Katio.

Luchia's cheeks became redder. "Yeah, sure," she said, really nervously.

"See you at school," said Katio.

"Ok," said Luchia.

While Luchia was walking to her room, she ran into someone. "Ow!" they both said.

"I'm sorry. Let me help you," said the girl.

"What is your name?" said another girl with her.

"I'm Luchia," she said.

"I'm Hanon, and this is Lina," said Hanon.

"Cute necklace. You must be a mermaid princess," said Lina.

"How did you know?" said Luchia.

"Because we're wearing the same thing, too," said Hanon.

"Hey, you want to come with us to get snacks?" asked Lina.

"Sure," said Luchia. "And one more thing: Why did you guys come to the human world?" said Luchia.

"Because our kingdom was being destroyed by water demons," said Lina.

"Oh, ok. Let's get some snacks!" said Luchia.

But in the deep ocean of California, in a dark, mysterious castle, a ruler name Gatio had a mission for one of his helpers named Starlight. "Starlight, bring the diamond to me. It is located in a house right in front of us. Also, bring the person who took it. He must pay the consequences," said Gatio.

"What is the person's name, sir?" said Starlight.

"His name is Katio."

A few months later, Lina, Luchia, and Hanon were looking at the sunset on the beach, until the sky turned black. "Starlight is coming," said Lina.

"Who's that?" said Luchia.

“An evil water demon. She is coming to take back the Blue Diamond. This diamond is so powerful that it can take over the world. The mermaid goddess hid the diamond so no water demons can find it, but we know where it is,” said Hanon.

“But where is the Blue Diamond?” said Luchia.

“In that house over there,” said Lina.

“Oh, no, that’s where Katio lives,” said Luchia.

“Come on,” said Hanon.

They went to Katio’s house and saw Starlight taking the Blue Diamond and Katio.

“What are you doing to Katio?” said Luchia.

“He is going to pay the consequences for taking the Blue Diamond,” said Starlight. The girls knew they needed to change into mermaid singers.

“Pink Pearl Voice,” said Luchia.

“Aqua Pearl Voice,” said Hanon.

“Green Pearl Voice,” said Lina.

Their Pearls were shining brightly, changing them into mermaid singers.

Meanwhile, Katio was waking up. He saw Luchia. “I remember that necklace. Luchia has one just like it. Is she a mermaid?”

“What are we going to do?” said Hanon.

“I’ve got it! We’ll use the Blue Diamond and sing at the same time to get more power!” said Luchia.

“Ok, let’s do it!” said Luchia, Lina, and Hanon.

They started to sing, and Starlight was getting a headache. “Stop. I’m through with you. I’m out of here. Ta, Ta, ladies,” said Starlight. She faded away into the sky.

Luchia, Lina and Hanon turned back to humans, and Luchia went to Katio and gave him a big hug. Katio gave her a hug, too. “Are you ok?” said Luchia.

“I had the weirdest dream,” said Katio.

“I’m still glad you’re ok,” said Luchia.

Miranda the Brave

*As the big sister, Miranda looks out for her brother. But can she overcome the challenges of a mysterious adversary in order to rescue him? The adventure unfolds in **MIRANDA THE BRAVE**, by Jenna M. Atchu.*

It was a cold winter morning. Miranda and her brother Dils were walking to school. They saw a very shiny, sparkly button on the ground. Dils wanted to pick it up, but they saw the bus coming, and Miranda just wanted to go to school and come back in peace. She was the calm one and Dils was the risk taker. Dils couldn't stand it! He had to pick it up.

As soon as he picked it up, he pushed the button. Then a hole started burning in the ground, and before you knew it, Dils was in that hole and gone! Miranda was astonished!

"Dils? Dils!" Miranda screamed. But there was no answer.

Then Miranda found a note on the ground. The note read:

Hello,

Your brother has been taken to a very dangerous place. Will you risk your life to save your own flesh and blood? If you wish to proceed, jump into the hole in front of you.

She was even more scared than before to know that her brother's life was in her hands. Miranda knew she had to help her brother. She jumped in the hole.

All around her she saw pictures of needles, highways, and lions. She didn't know what that meant. Finally she was out of the hole and found herself in a safari, with many lions in cages. There was another note on the ground.

Hello Again,

*You did a good thing by helping your brother.
But the hard part starts now. When you are done
reading this note you will see two big buttons.
One of the buttons is to turn invisible. The other
is to fly. You have to push one of the buttons
before you find out your next challenge.*

Miranda saw the two buttons. She chose to be invisible because she thought the challenge had something to do with lions, since there were lions all over the place.

Her first challenge was to cross through the lions to the other side of the safari. She was nervous, but pressed the button, turned invisible, and walked through the lions. She could tell the lions could smell her because they sprang up like they were about to attack. When she was done with that she ended up in a desert and was still invisible.

The second challenge was to slide through a stack of pins and needles. They were all so pointy and looked like they could hurt a lot! "I wish I would have chosen the flying button," complained Miranda.

As she started to walk through the pins and needles she just wanted to cry because it hurt so badly. But since it was for her brother, she had to do it.

When she fulfilled that challenge she had to cross a highway. But there was another note.

Miranda,

You have been very brave throughout this journey, but you have to make another big choice. You can cross the highway and not turn visible until you touch Dils, but get to have your school think you went to school and have nobody find out about this journey. Or, you can just see Dils across the highway and turn visible.

Miranda chose the first choice. As she looked upon the highway she realized how much traffic there was and how many big trucks were driving along. She crossed the highway with no trouble since she was invisible. Then she saw Dils in the distance! She ran and ran and finally got close enough to Dils to touch him. She was visible again, and Dils was saved! They hugged like they hadn't seen each other in years!

They saw another note on the ground. It read:

Miranda and Dils,

You will not find out who this is until another time. Prepare yourselves for that day. It could be a long time from now or a short time from now. But the whole purpose of this is to teach you life skills. It will help you in the future. It was a test for just you and Dils, and no one else. You should feel very special!

Thanks,

ANONYMOUS

Miranda and Dils didn't care. They just were happy to be together!

“What did you have to do the whole time that I was going through obstacles?” asked Miranda.

“Nothing really, I just suddenly appeared in the highway. People thought I was a hitchhiker! Ha ha!”

“Funny, Dils,” said Miranda.

Miranda and Dils realized that the highway was the one by their house. And they knew they would have to explain to their parents why they didn’t go to school. But Miranda remembered the note said no one would find out about their journey. They were still a bit scared because they didn’t know when the next mission was going to come. But they were just so tired that it didn’t bother them too much. Plus, they knew it was for their own good.

So without any doubt Miranda and Dils walked home. They were very exhausted and just wanted to go home and sleep like a bear during hibernation.

Molly the Mirror

MOLLY THE MIRROR, by *Jessica Mooney*, is a story of girl whose life suddenly spirals downhill. With the support of her aunt and an unusual friend, she tries to pull through a very dark time.

Ring. Ring.

Kathleen ran to the phone.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hi, this is Lieutenant Smith,” said a man with a deep voice.

Kathleen had been waiting for her parents to come home from their date. They were two hours late, and she knew that if a policeman was calling it wasn’t good news.

“Are you the daughter of John and Lisa McDonald?” the man asked as he continued with his conversation.

“Yes, I am,” said Kathleen.

“Do you have an adult I could speak to?”

“Yes,” said Kathleen. Her babysitter, Julie, got on the phone to talk to the policeman.

“I am sorry to tell you that Kathleen’s parents have been in a car accident,” he said.

Julie tried not to act too upset and thanked Lieutenant Smith for calling. Julie proceeded to tell Kathleen what the phone call was about. “Kathleen, your parents have been in a car accident.”

Kathleen’s eyes began to water. She was very close to her parents and was devastated to hear this news.

Kathleen and Julie went outside and whistled at the first cab they saw. The cab stopped at once. They hopped in and drove to the hospital. They walked into the hospital and went straight to the main desk, pushing all the people in front of them to the side.

“I am looking for my parents, John and Lisa McDonald,” exclaimed Kathleen.

The nurse took out her clipboard and told Kathleen her parents were in room 216. The nurse insisted on taking Kathleen to her parents’ room. Julie decided it would be best if she went to the waiting room so Kathleen could have some private time with her parents.

When Kathleen got to the room she opened the door slowly because she was afraid of what she might see. She stepped in and saw her mother and father with deep cuts all over their bodies. Her father had his leg in a cast and elevated.

“Kathleen!” her mother yelled. “Oh, I was so worried about you.”

Kathleen ran over to her mother and father to give them a big hug. The doctor happened to be in the room when Kathleen walked in.

“Are you all right?” Kathleen asked her parents.

“We will be fine,” said her mother.

“Your father has broken his leg, and both of your parents have pretty deep cuts from the glass of their car window,” said the doctor.

“But they’re going to be okay, right?” asked Kathleen.

“We hope so,” continued the doctor.

Kathleen sat in the waiting room with Julie while the doctors ran tests on her parents. It turned out that both of her parents had to have surgery because there was a lot of glass inside of them. The operations were very serious, especially for her father, because there was a piece of glass

very close to his heart. The surgeries were scheduled for the morning. Julie thought it would be best for Kathleen to get a cab and go home to get some rest and return in the morning before the surgeries.

The next morning Kathleen woke up bright and early, got dressed, and had Julie drive her down to the hospital so she could wish her parents good luck. Little did Kathleen know that this would be the last time she would see her parents.

She walked into her parents' room just before the doctors took them into surgery.

"Bye, Mom and Dad," said Kathleen. "Good luck with the surgery. I will be here when you get out."

"All right. We love you," said Kathleen's parents.

In her father's surgery room, it was a nightmare. The piece of glass in him was bigger than the doctors thought and actually was touching his heart. The doctors tried to remove the piece of glass, but it had already cut her father's heart, and it was just too late to repair the damage. Kathleen's father died.

Over in the next surgery room was Kathleen's mother facing her own nightmare. Her mother had many pieces of glass throughout her entire body. These pieces of glass had caused internal bleeding, and the doctors couldn't stop the bleeding. Her mother bled to death.

Kathleen sat in the waiting room for a couple of hours waiting for her parents to get out of surgery. Finally Dr. Smith came and sat down next to her.

"Hi," he said.

"Hello," said Kathleen. "How are my parents?"

"Well, we tried to help them, but unfortunately both of your parents didn't make it," said Dr. Smith.

Kathleen was so devastated she couldn't speak. So many things were racing through her head. *Why? How? No! What*

am I going to do? What will I do without my mother and father?

Kathleen cried herself to sleep that night. The next day after her parents died she got a call from Child Services saying that there was only one other relative left in her family that could take care of her. It was her great aunt that lived in Minnesota. Kathleen had never met this lady, and her parents hadn't mentioned her before. To Kathleen, she was going to be living with a total stranger.

The following day, Julie took Kathleen to the airport where she was to get on a plane to fly to Minnesota where her aunt lived. Kathleen and Julie said their goodbyes, and Kathleen walked onto the plane.

During the flight Kathleen could only think about her parents and how much she missed them. She did not know how she would cope through life without them and wondered to herself how she was going to live with a complete stranger.

When the plane landed, Kathleen walked off with the flight attendant. When she got out of the plane she started to look around even though Kathleen had no idea who she was looking for. Kathleen's aunt had brought a sign that said "Kathleen McDonald" on it. Kathleen spotted it at once and walked over to the woman who held the sign. Her aunt was very skinny and had short brown hair. Her aunt was the first one to speak.

"Hello, you must be Kathleen. I am your Aunt Mary."

"Hello," Kathleen said.

They walked through the airport and all the way home without a word spoken.

They walked into Aunt Mary's house. There wasn't anything special about it. It was kind of old and dusty. Aunt Mary walked upstairs to Kathleen's new room. Inside the room were an old dusty dresser, a lumpy bed, and an ugly yellow-looking mirror.

“Make yourself at home,” Aunt Mary said.

“Thanks. It looks nice,” said Kathleen, even though it was a lie.

Aunt Mary left Kathleen alone so that she could unpack her things.

The next day Aunt Mary helped Kathleen get ready for school. Kathleen had never gone to a real school before because her mother home-schooled her. Kathleen was pretty terrified of going to school. She never really got along with other kids very well. All the kids that she had ever met thought that she was weird and ignored her or made fun of her.

Aunt Mary walked Kathleen into her classroom. When she opened the door all the kids stopped what they were doing and stared at Kathleen and Mary. It was very unusual to have a new kid join school in the middle of the year. Her teacher immediately introduced her to the class.

“Class, this is Kathleen. She is a new student. Let’s all welcome her.”

The teacher gave her a seat next to a little girl with bright red hair. The assignment was to get with a partner and talk about what you did on your weekend. Kathleen looked all around the room for a partner, but didn’t see anyone. So she finally said to the redhead, “Hi, do you want to be my partner?”

“No way,” said the girl.

By now everyone had a partner except for Kathleen. The teacher didn’t notice that she didn’t have a partner, so she went on with what she was doing. Kathleen waited another five minutes, and that part of the class time was over.

They moved on to math. Kathleen thought that she was pretty good at math. That is what her mom had always told her. When the teacher started writing the questions on the board, all the other kids wrote the answers in their notebooks.

Kathleen, however, had absolutely no idea what the answers to the problems were. Her mom had never shown her how to do those kinds of math problems. Kathleen just sat there and pretended that she knew the answers so the teacher and other students wouldn't know that she hadn't learned this yet.

The rest of the day went on the same way. Kathleen didn't know anything that the other kids knew. When it came time for partners or groups, Kathleen was totally left out. You could say that her first day of real school was a disaster. She could only hope that the next day wouldn't be as bad.

The next day was even worse. She was always left out and felt like she wasn't smart compared to the other kids. At recess she sat on the swings all by herself while the other kids had their own games of kickball and tag.

She finally got so lonely that she started talking to herself. She would talk about everything that she could think of. She was truly her own best friend. Since her aunt and she didn't talk much, Kathleen would talk to herself at home, too.

One day she was talking to herself in her room about the science test when she heard a voice beside her answer back. She jumped at once. There was no one in her room beside herself. It sounded like the voice came from the yellow mirror. Kathleen looked over, and there was a female head floating in the mirror.

"AH!" Kathleen screamed.

"Hi," said the face in the mirror. "My name is Molly. What is your name?"

"Why are you talking? Are you a ghost?" asked Kathleen.

"All mirrors can talk, and no, I am not a ghost," said Molly.

Kathleen was very frightened and thought she was losing her mind. She stood frozen in her room, not sure if she should run downstairs to get Mary or if she should pretend she did not see Molly in the mirror, hoping she would go

away. Instead she decided to ask the question she was thinking about. “How do you know how to talk?”

“Well, everything on the planet can talk. You just need to know how to hear it. People who are open to new and exciting things have no problem hearing things from everywhere. I think that after your parents died you were open to everything coming your way, hoping it would make your life better.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” Kathleen said nervously. She still was extremely scared, but decided to introduce herself. “My name is Kathleen. Nice to meet you.”

The mirror and Kathleen slowly became more and more acquainted, and as time went on Kathleen and the mirror became really good friends. Things at school got better because Molly was very smart and taught Kathleen lots of things. Molly also showed Kathleen how to become friends with other kids.

Kathleen became good friends with a girl named Nora. Kathleen sat next to Nora in science class and got to know her very well.

One day Kathleen had Nora over to her house after school. Kathleen had no idea what to do with her friend, so she decided to carry Molly around with her the entire time Nora was over. Nora thought it was odd that Kathleen carried a mirror around all of the time. She questioned Kathleen about it. Kathleen decided to tell Nora about Molly.

Nora did not believe Kathleen at first and told her she thought she was crazy! When Molly heard Nora say this she decided to talk to Nora. Molly asked her what she was afraid of. Nora said she was afraid of ghosts, and that she must be one! Molly told her she was not a ghost, and that she would not harm her, and there was nothing to be afraid of.

Kathleen chimed in as well and tried to calm Nora down. “Nora, Molly is really a wonderful friend, and when you get used to the idea of a talking mirror, you will think so, too.”

Nora went home that night very confused, but decided to keep an open mind about the whole thing.

The next day at school, Nora talked to Kathleen about Molly. Kathleen seemed to have eased Nora’s mind about the talking mirror and asked her not to tell anyone about it. It would be their secret. Nora agreed, and after spending more time with Kathleen and Molly, she decided that the talking mirror was pretty cool! Nora and Kathleen and Molly became best friends.

One day when Kathleen got home from school Molly started talking to her. “Hey, Kathleen do you want me to tell you and Nora about another power I have?”

“Yes, please,” said the girls.

“Okay,” said the mirror. “But you can’t tell anyone.”

“We promise,” said Kathleen and Nora.

“Did you know that mirrors can show you the past?” asked Molly.

“Really?” asked Kathleen.

“Yes,” said the mirror. “Do you want me to show you something that happened in the past?” asked Molly.

“Could you show us how my parents died?” asked Kathleen.

“Sure,” said the mirror.

Kathleen and Nora saw how both of Kathleen’s parents died. Kathleen was upset to see they both died in pain. She got so mad that she started throwing things around. She picked up a book and threw it, but instead of the book hitting the bed, it hit the mirror. The mirror shattered into a million pieces. Kathleen and Nora tried to pick up the pieces, but it was impossible. Molly was gone forever.

Kathleen was very upset that she could no longer talk to Molly the Mirror. She really had become dependent on her. With Molly gone, Nora and Kathleen became even closer friends. Even though Molly was gone, Kathleen realized that Molly had taught her a lot about life and was so thankful that she had been a part of her life. Kathleen learned quickly that life is too short and decided to make the best of her situation.

Kathleen decided to work on her relationship with her Aunt Mary. She never did tell her Aunt about Molly. Kathleen thought it was best to keep that secret between her and Nora. Kathleen did find out over time that her aunt was a very kind and caring person. Aunt Mary told Kathleen that she was very grateful she had Kathleen living with her because she had never gotten married or had children of her own. She felt that Kathleen was the daughter she never had. Kathleen felt that her Aunt Mary was like a mother to her. She would never be able to replace her real mom or dad, but she had grown very close to her aunt and realized how lucky she was to have a person like her in her life.

The Mystery of Room 115

*The meanest teacher alive will never pass anybody. One girl is determined to break the spell that teacher holds over his pupils in **THE MYSTERY OF ROOM 115**, by **Bethany Rivera**.*

If you have ever gone to Berkshire Middle School, you know not to go into room 115. Mr. Fisher is the hardest teacher in all of Michigan. Not one student could pass his class. Not even a little genius could pass. He was so scary that when kids got their class schedule and they saw that they had Mr. Fisher, they would want to transfer to a different class.

When Mr. Fisher was just five years old he got his teaching degree. He was the smartest kid in the world. But then little Joe Kajawa became a teacher at age four. Mr. Fisher got so mad that he made his class harder and harder until nobody could pass his class.

My best friend Tessa went into his room to get a box of pencils and never came out. I wanted to go in, too, but my friends stopped me before I could even get close to his room. They said that if I went to the room, I wouldn't come out. I went and stood at the door watching. I was scared that she would not ever come out.

When I looked into the classroom, I saw an old man. He looked like he was 36 years old. Mr. Fisher called him John.

I thought very hard but could not think of any way to get Tessa out of that classroom. All my friends thought, too, and finally we came up with something.

We set up a camera outside the window, and we started to watch the screen that we had set up. For the first ten hours we could see why nobody could pass his class. All he did was talk and talk and talk. About half of the class was fast asleep.

When we got the tape back we looked at it again and again. I finally saw that when Mr. Fisher leaves the room, he does not lock the room. So I could sneak in the room and get Tessa and all the other students.

My friends would not let me go in to the room, so they sent in Sara. She had volunteered and was one of my best friends, so it was hard to see her do that for Tessa. Mr. Fisher turned around, and Sara went in. But she did not see the pulley system that allowed Mr. Fisher to operate the door from his desk, so the door closed and locked. She was also stuck in the room.

I was so sad that I would not talk about it even if my life depended on it. I saw Mr. Fisher throw a book at Tessa or Sara. They were right next to each other, so it was hard to tell.

The only way to get everyone out was to send me in. I had everything ready. I had five notebooks, 200 pencils, and a laptop because you never know when you might need to use a computer. I went in and found the class was very easy!

When I passed the first test, Mr. Fisher made the next test harder, and this test was five days long. Everything just seemed to come very easily to me. Of course, that might have something to do with my being a slight genius. When I passed this test all of the students would ask me for help. When the other students started to pass the class, too, Mr. Fisher got really mad and broke five rulers at one time. He made the class a lot harder. It did not make a difference. Everyone

passed every test after that. He had no choice but to pass all his students.

On the last day of class, Mr. Fisher started to cry. I asked him, “Why are you crying?”

He said he did not want to have all of his students leave all at once. I told him that he would see us around school, and I promised that I could visit him every week.

This was the most fun I had had all year. Mr. Fisher was a great teacher and one of my favorites.

The Non-Real Story

*This is, indeed, a disturbing universe. Warring factions of creatures of all kinds rule the action in **THE NON-REAL STORY**, by **Ronald Johnston**.*

Two years have passed since the founding of Durator. Although there is an armistice between The Noble Alliance and the mighty Horde, the Horde are evil people. The Horde is an evil group that includes trolls, blood elves, taruen, orc, and the undead. The Noble Alliance is people who are good. That includes Gnomes, dwarfs, elves, humans, and dranei. Tensions between the two factions continue to mount as worldwide conflicts draw the two sides closer to all-out war. Fighting has erupted in battlegrounds of Atrac Valley, War Tate, and Athurle Bane.

There was one night when every Alliance and Horde member was born in separate places. The Alliance was born in the United Kingdom. The Horde was born in the Clashnite. The people in United Kingdom had Children that were named Nathen, Mike, Acalethie, Peyton and Jessica all on the same day. The people in Clashnite were also born on the same day. The Horde Children are taruen, orc, troll, undead, and bloodelves.

The Alliance Children went to East Coast Academy where they learned their power. The Children got along. When they went in the Academy a guy was there and he said, "Hello. Welcome to East Coast Academy. You five are going to do

your first mission to determine your powers. The mission you guys are going to do is save your ancestors.”

The gnome said, “Ancestors?”

The guy said, “Yes, your ancestor is part of your family.”

The dranei said, “Ooooooooooooh. But what happens if we fail?”

The guy said, “There is no such thing as failure.”

The Children left and went to West Fall; they saw a big castle where their ancestors were. They read the mission slip, and it said, “Only one at a time goes in.” So the elf went in and they heard a big *BOOM BANG PLOP*. The human said, “What happened?”

The dwarf said, “I think he fell in a ditch.”

All of them said, “OMG.”

So they all ran in and saw their ancestor’s ghost trapped in a big white bubble. Nathen popped the bubble, and they fell into a secret ditch.

They all see black and white when they die. When they looked, they saw a graveyard and screamed. They saw through themselves and saw a woman. She said, “Hello, I am the Wisp Healer. I am the one who gives you afterlife. I am the one who can make you come back to life in five seconds if you want to.”

Peyton said, “Yes, please.”

The Wisp Healer said, “You were on an elite mission that is only for adults. But you guys got close to your ancestors, so I will tell you your power. First, Peyton is a druid.”

Peyton asked, “What is a Druid?”

The Wisp Healer said, “A Druid is a nature lover. Your powers are you can turn into animals and have nature powers.

“Mike, you are Rogue. Nathen, you are a Priest.”

The human said, “WHAT! Why am I a stinky old priest?”

The Wisp Healer said, “You aren’t a regular priest. You can do spells and cures and heal other people.”

Nathen said, "Cool."

"Acalethie, you are a Hunter. Jessica, you are a Shaman."

"What is a Shaman?" said Dranei.

"A Shaman is just like a Druid, but a Shaman is great with Elemental stuff," the Wisp Healer said. "Here is your traveling uniform." The kids got them and they loved them.

The Wisp Healer said, "You all have signature moves. Priest, you have Poseidon's fury."

Nathen asked, "What's Poseidon's fury?"

"Poseidon's fury is a big water wave that can kill anyone if they're not moving. Jessica can do Curse Mark Seal on people, so they won't move.

"Before you guys go, The Horde is your mortal enemy. They have the same powers as you do. There are also pets that only the hunters can tame. Flying pets are free to use, but you have to go to a vendor," said the Wisp Healer.

The Horde went through the same treatment as the Alliance. Tank is a warrior, Grusome is a mage, Tranka is a paladin, Lansing is a warlock, and Killer Eye is a Warrior.

The Children Horde had a plan to attack United Kingdom. The attack occurred at 9:00. The bell went off, and all the Alliance kids woke up and ran outside and saw the Horde. They couldn't go through the Alliance guards.

The Horde guards attacked the Alliance guards. Then the kids jumped into the fight. The elf went in bear form and attacked Killer Eye. Killer Eye shot Peyton, and Peyton died. Lansing put a spell on Jessica, but Jessica put Fire Shock on Lansing. Lansing was burning to death. The Horde retreated back to their home base. The Alliance Children went back to sleep.

At 12:00, the Horde came back and brought more guards. The Alliance Children were asleep. The Warlock put a portal on the Alliance Children to teleport them to Iron Forge. Iron Forge is a place where Children should not be.

The Children woke up and started to get worried. They saw a big yellow light spinning around them. The light took them into the air and transformed them into adults. They got traveling pets to ride. They rode them to a close village. They went to a place called Stromwind and bought food. They went traveling to a place called Sunshine, where they got weapons.

They were in search of a mission. They searched and searched and found nothing. They went to a rock. The rock said, "Use the ancient gods to defeat the Horde. The Horde has United Kingdom. You guys have to stop them, or they will kill a lot of people. Here is a portal to go to United Kingdom."

All of the Alliance went to United Kingdom. A person yelled, "People of United Kingdom, our heroes, the Alliance, are here to save us from the Horde. Here they are known."

The Horde saw them through a window. Killer Eye came out and told his pet to attack, and it bit Jessica. Jessica put Earth Shock on the pet. The pet dodged it. Peyton turned into a cat and fought the pet. Lansing came up, summoned a fire imp, and made it attack Mike. Mike went in stealth and backstabbed Tranka. Tranka died. Peyton ran away into the forest. Acalethie said, "Where are you going? The fight isn't over y—" Acalethie got shot in the head by Mystery.

Peyton came back and yelled, "Hey, Horde, TAKE THIS." All the animals from the forest came and attacked the Horde.

Nathen said, "That's it: Poseidon's Fury Spell!"

Jessica said, "Cures Mark Seal!"

A big wave is coming. *SPLASH*. All Horde could not move because of the Curse Mark Seal. The horde people died. The Alliance won and got their city back.

But the Horde has a Wisp Healer.

The Pencil

*Dealing with strange numbers can be confusing and difficult to a toddler. In **THE PENCIL**, **Bridget Gibbons** shows how difficult it can be.*

10-12-2007

As Liam bit into his half-sized grilled cheese at the house of his friend Nate, he wondered aloud, “Do you think that there are numbers more than ten?”

Nate shrugged his shoulders and said, “I don’t know, is there, Alice?”

“That’s ‘Teacher’ to you!” snapped Alice, in a playful way. “Write out numbers one through ten, NOW!”

What Liam meant to say was, “I’m tired of doing the same thing every day!” but what he really said was, “Okay, fine with me!” He picked up the pencil in grief, and wrote:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10-14-2007

“Hey now, guys! I didn’t say that you were fat. I said that you have a lot of muscle!” squeaked a voice out of nowhere.

No TV’s or radios were on. Things like this had been going on for the past two days. Liam looked at his clock. It

said 2:37. There was also an empire of his dirty socks and shirts. The details of it looked like it was straight out of a textbook. It was crafted so well, it made his dirty laundry look good.

“Mom... there’s someone in my room,” Liam practically whispered.

“Oh, darling! You’re just imagining these things! Just get to bed, and you’ll feel much better!”

No one was listening to him! Not his dog, not his dad, not his mom, not even Alice and Nate! What could he do! And that’s when he had an idea....

“Hello, whoever you are. My name’s Liam Tinge. I’m five, and I welcome you to my room. I would like to make a deal. I’ve been hearing you’ve been having a hard time with a bully, and I’ve got a propos—I’ve got a deal.”

“What?” said the squeaky voice he had heard before.

10-28-2007

It had been almost two weeks. The number nine (which actually turned out to be the squeaky voice) and nine other of his friends were being picked on by number ten. Liam and the number nine had thought of a plan, which is what they were considering now.

“Okay, Nine,” said Liam, “have you got the plan down?”

“Yes, let’s go!”

The Showdown

“Ten, we need to chat,” said Nine “Sometimes you’re really mean to me, and I don’t like it. Stop, or I’ll have to fight back.”

“Oh yeah? You and what army?” asked Ten.

“The army of me, myself, I, and our creator, Liam.”

“Yeah, like you can beat me all by yourself, Punk...ha ha!” As Ten pushed Nine down, Liam picked up the pencil, turned it around, and suddenly, Ten was gone!

Epilogue

10-1-2037

“So, Mr. Tinge, what do you plan to do with the one billion dollars you won in the lottery?”

“Well, I’m not going to quit teaching, but I will make a bedroom for my two-day-old son, Nate, and buy something nice for my family and friends, and my wife, Alice.”

“Well, that’s certainly nice. Back to you, Carrie.”

10-1-2042

“Well, son, I hope you like the pencil. Just promise me one thing.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Never, ever use it.”

“WHAT!” screamed Nate.

Romance on a Spaceship in the Pacific

*Two people fall in love in outer space, but the story doesn't end there. Romance meets science fiction, fantasy, and horror in **ROMANCE ON A SPACESHIP IN THE PACIFIC**, by Andrew Helton.*

One early morning at 8 a.m., Franchesto walks out of his large 70-acre home. He jumps in his orange Porsche and starts speeding along the roads to work. Being the coach of the 2008 New England Patriots, he is very wealthy. Being this wealthy makes him careless, and being careless, he takes a wrong turn and starts driving into nowhere. Before long he realizes he's going the wrong way, so he screeches the car to a stop and accidentally sends it over the edge!

His last hope is miraculously a success! Franchesto flips up the top of his convertible, jumps, and grabs the only branch on the 200-foot straight down cliff. He looks down as his car lands safely without a scratch or any impact. He curses so loud the Chinese could hear it!

He suddenly saw a bunch of flying chickens. When he reaches out to touch one, its head explodes! Then he sees a cloud that looks like a head with horns. Even while hanging on the cliff he can't keep his eyes open and falls asleep.

When he wakes up, he is on a spaceship and lying across a lady who is wide awake. He finds out her name is Angelica, and they both fall in love. After they kiss, they try to find a

way off the spaceship. Franchesto finds a light saber in sword version, Angelica finds a blaster, and they run into three-eyed aliens. Franchesto pulls out his sword saber, but the alien pulls out a whip saber! Instantly the alien explodes from one blast of Angelica's blaster.

Two more come from around the corner. Both Franchesto and the aliens have their swords up. The world seems to slow as the two aliens collide with Franchesto. The first alien's sword connects with his. He can feel his sweat flying off his face and falling to the ground. When the second alien comes around on the other side he knows he was toast. The first alien has both his hands occupied, leaving his heart wide open for a kill. Angelica comes out of nowhere and conks the second alien on the head, brings the blaster around, and kills the first alien as well.

Suddenly they hear laughing. The king of aliens is the devil! They find out that the devil owns Angelica's soul, so they propose a trade: Franchesto's soul for Angelica's soul. The devil's pet was a chicken, and whenever it touched something its head exploded. Suddenly it all comes together for Franchesto: the exploding chicken heads, the devil's cloud...he was the devil's servant!

The devil wanted him to work for him in 30 years for 300 nights. Suddenly the devil explodes with one blast from Angelica's blaster. Little does she know Franchesto would be taken away from her in 30 years on that exact day at that exact time. Everyone knows that is the longest amount of time that the world can survive without a devil. If you don't know that I'm surprised you know how to read!

As for the second alien, Franchesto stabs it. After he stabs it he says, "Die, you alien! I love you, Angelica!" and they kiss. They continue their search for the escape pods. They find the main escape route and they jump in the pod. They fire straight down into the Pacific. Franchesto kills five

sea creatures in a row after the crash. Then Angelica blasts 15, and they're all dead.

In 20 years they have triplets, but ten years after that Franchesto disappears. Their kids find land, get married, and have kids. But every 30 years a new devil is taken to serve for 300 days. It is always one of the descendents of Angelica Loppershninkle, murderer of the devil.

The Story of a Sixth-grade Witch

THE STORY OF A SIXTH-GRADE WITCH, by *Brooke A. Billings*, takes you through a day in the life of a not-so-typical sixth-grade girl. In the end, she discovers things are not always as they appear.

My name is Marissa, and I'm a sixth-grade witch. Now I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I am some evil witch that's green, has an oversized nose, and has warts all over my face. Well, I am nothing like that. In movies, they're just totally stereotyping witches. The funny part is I look like any normal kid! But I can not say I have a normal life. For example, I was recently grounded for a reason no other normal kid would be grounded for. It was a long string of events that led up to my being grounded, but I will start at the beginning anyway.

* * *

I go to an all girls' school called Pinkinston College Preparatory. It's a junior high school in Honolulu, Hawaii. School is where most of my "drama" takes place. Today started out as a pretty normal day. For breakfast I had French toast and a cup of orange juice. I arrived at school on time at exactly 8:00 a.m. I stopped at my locker and grabbed my

books. After I stopped at my locker I headed to my first hour class, which was Science with Ms. Ross.

Ms. Ross is the sweetest teacher in the world. She rarely gives her students large assignments for homework. Her tests aren't too long, and to top it off in class we do a lot of fun "hands on" science experiments. Today my class watched a movie about volcanoes and Pompeii, and we had to write 20 facts about what we learned. I enjoyed the movie so much I forgot to take notes. Therefore, I had difficulty coming up with 20 facts. Now my parents don't allow me to use magic in school, but I really couldn't afford to take a chance on having my science grade lowered. So I turned back time one hour and watched the movie again. Then I wrote down 20 facts about the movie.

After science I headed off to Math. I have Mrs. Live as my teacher. Mrs. Live gives very long tests and detailed homework. Despite all of that, most students do very well in her class because she explains things thoroughly. Mrs. Live is a great teacher, and you can tell she really loves her job. As a matter of fact she loves it so much she refuses to retire, and it's common knowledge that she can be forgetful. Students have tried to figure out her age, and we think she is about 80 years old. We think that because she taught some of our parents and grandparents!

I felt like I wanted to do something nice for her. I figured using a little more magic today wouldn't hurt. Therefore, I cast a spell on Mrs. Live's tests. The tests graded themselves and logged their grades in the computer. This helped me, too, because I really wanted to know my grade, and quite frankly Ms. Live is a slow grader! When Mrs. Live looked at her tests and saw that they were graded, I heard her say in a cheery tone, "I'm getting so forgetful I can't remember grading my test." Then she said, "Well, I guess I can take a full hour for lunch today." It felt good helping Mrs. Live because she

deserved it. The bell rang at exactly 10:11 a.m., and I was off to my next class.

My next class was gym with Miss Gilmore. There are only two words that describe Miss Gilmore: “HARD CORE.” If someone ever got hurt and started to cry, she would say “suck it up.” She would add, “I’ve pulled just about all of my muscles and you don’t see me crying!” Today we played one of our roughest games, which is “freeze tag to the extreme.” The rules are pretty much the same as for regular freeze tag. The person who’s it chases the other players and gives them a normal touch to freeze them. But with Miss Gilmore’s version the person who’s it gives the other players a hard shove so they fall to the ground. If this game wasn’t already scary enough, she chose Molly as the tagger.

Molly is the biggest kid in the sixth grade. She is about five feet six inches tall and has a thin build. She has long black hair and big, dark mysterious eyes. She never laughs, and she always has a mean and intimidating look on her face. She has a bad temper, and everyone is afraid of her. Last, she doesn’t have any friends. I think Molly intimidates others with her attitude and unfriendly expression. Therefore, other kids are afraid to approach her, and that’s probably why she doesn’t have any friends.

Things have progressed to the point that Molly is unkind to everyone. However, for some reason she really likes to pick on me. Now that Molly had a chance to do something bad to me, she was going to take it.

Before I could chicken out of the game, Miss Gilmore shouted, “Let the games begin!” I started to run around screaming frantically, because I knew Molly would come after me first. Molly could run faster than me, so eventually she would catch me. As I was running, I tripped over someone’s shoe. I tripped and stumbled but did not fall. However, that gave me a great idea. If I fall by myself Molly can’t shove me.

So I pretended to fall slowly and gracefully. As I was going down Molly came up behind me, and she gave me the hardest shove ever. I not only fell, but I think I was flying. I flew across the gym floor and slammed into the bleachers. Everyone laughed hysterically including Miss Gilmore! I just knew I was going to die. Now, again, my parents don't approve of my using magic at school. However, drastic times call for drastic measures.

* * *

After gym I went to lunch. I sat with my three best friends Isabella, Ashlee, and Jennifer. While we were eating our lunch, I updated them about what happened with Molly in gym class. After I finished telling them, we all agreed we needed to teach Molly a lesson. We all knew Molly was afraid of two things: worms and being embarrassed in front of a class. All of my best friends knew that I was a witch, so I could use my magic freely around them. My friends and I were giggling hysterically, knowing that what we were about to do would make history.

Making sure no one saw me, I cast a spell on Molly's sandwich. Molly took a huge bite of her sandwich and screamed. The fattest and longest worms that you ever saw were in her sandwich, and she even got one in her mouth. She spit everything out of her mouth and ran out of the lunchroom crying. My friends and I were laughing so hard that we were falling on the floor.

After lunch we headed to noon recreation. My friends and I were still talking about what happened. That was a great prank, but we all agreed that the job was still incomplete.

We headed to the gym for an assembly after recreation. The teacher in charge of the assembly was Ms. Barbarian. Ms. Barbarian's name describes her appearance. Her teeth are as

yellow as corn, and she smells like she lives in a barn. You can tell she never brushes her hair, and her clothes have permanent stains on them.

The topic of the assembly was respect. This gave me another opportunity to finish what I started with Molly. I cast a spell on her so whenever someone said the name of a song she would stand up and start singing that song.

Ms. Barbarian said, "The topic of this assembly is respect." Sure enough, Molly stood up and began singing "Respect" by Aretha Franklin. Ms. Barbarian shouted, "Sit down!" Ms. Barbarian continued and said, "As I was saying nobody's perfect." Molly stood up again and started singing "Nobody's Perfect" by Hanna Montana. Ms. Barbarian shouted, "Stop right now!" Molly began singing "Stop Right Now" by the Spice Girls.

Next, one of the students across the room shouted, "Hey, Mickey, look at Molly." Then Molly started singing "Hey Mickey" by Toni Basil. My friends and I were laughing so hard we were crying, and this time we weren't alone; everyone in the gym was laughing. After that, Ms. Barbarian sent Molly to the principal's office.

* * *

When I got home I talked with Isabella, Ashlee and Jennifer on the phone. We were still talking about Molly, and my mom overheard the conversation. Because I used magic at school, she put me on punishment for a month. I couldn't watch TV or talk on the phone. If that wasn't horrible enough, I couldn't go to the Spice Girls concert that I was so excited about!

You see, I am quite frankly the Spice Girls' biggest fan. In my bedroom my pink sparkly painted walls are filled with posters of them. My dark pink comforter and pillows have

enlarged pictures of the Spice Girls on them. I have a pink disco ball in the middle of my room that plays music by them. To top it off, my alarm clock plays their songs every morning to wake me up.

The absolute last straw was my mother calling Molly's mother. They discussed a way for Molly and me to make peace. Molly's mother invited my entire family to their house for dinner. Now I was already mad enough, and I had to walk in Molly's house and meet her entire family. I felt like I was going to throw up.

* * *

As I walked in Molly's house I was shocked to see how nice it was. I figured she lived in a dungeon, and that was why she was so mean. Also, her mom was really cheery and her dad had a great sense of humor, just like my dad. As it turned out, my parents and her parents really hit it off. Now as for Molly and me, when Molly took me to see her room I was shocked. It looked like my room! She also had Spice Girls everything! After I started to talk to her I realized we had a lot more in common!

After that day Molly and I began to spend a lot of time together. Eventually, we became friends, and now she's one of my best buds. As you've probably guessed, the moral of the story is "Don't judge a book by its cover." Eventually, I even told Molly about my secret about being a witch, and she gave me the greatest idea. She suggested that I use my magic to give Ms. Barbarian a makeover. Needless to say, Ms. Barbarian's appearance now reflects her true personality, and not her name.

Sweet Dreams

*In **SWEET DREAMS** by Allison Kelley, a girl finds that things are not always what they seem. A world of fairy tales makes her realize that dreams can come true.*

There once lived a girl with hair like spun gold, and eyes as blue as the sea. She was head of her class, and as beautiful as a princess. She had four siblings, and she was the oldest. The teenage girl did some babysitting since her parents went out occasionally. Ella was very responsible, and her brothers and sisters were well behaved.

One night, Ella's parents were going out to dinner and needed her to baby-sit. After a few hours, it was time for them to go to bed. Her siblings insisted on her reading them a bedtime story. Sarah, who was the youngest child, chose a book of fairy tales to read.

Ella read a few fairy tales, and then told them it was time for bed. After a couple of hours, she fell asleep.

In her dream, Ella was like Cinderella. She had two evil stepsisters and an evil stepmother. She did all the chores around the house: Laundry, sweeping, vacuuming, dusting, carrying her stepmother's things, and any other chores they could think of.

One day, Ella was scrubbing the floor, and she couldn't take it anymore. She packed up her things and ran away. She ran far into the forest. She had never been this far from the castle unless she was running an errand. In Ella's opinion, it was magical. She loved hearing the birds and other little animals. There were so many trees! She scurried along, listening to the wonderful sounds.

As she was walking, Ella spotted a little round lump in the grass. She almost tripped over it since it blended in with the ground. It surprised her when it made a croaking sound and leaped into the air. "Oh look, it's just a frog!" Ella picked it up, and the frog talked to her! He told her that he was lost, and belonged in a fairy tale, but he didn't know which one. Ella agreed to help him find his way back to his lost story.

They strolled along in the forest together. Ella easily got distracted by the scenery around her.

It startled her when she came across a small cottage made of candy. The tiny home had walls made from gingerbread, and they were glued together with vanilla frosting. The roof was coated in colorful gumdrops. The walkway was made of Oreos, and the doorknob was a mint. The chimney was a peppermint stick. The rest of the house was covered with rainbow candies.

Ella forgot to pack food, and she was very hungry. She went over to it, and started eating.

To her surprise, seven dwarfs came marching out of the cottage. Ella felt very bad about this, because she realized she was eating their home. "Oh goodness! I'm so sorry. I was so hungry. You see, I haven't eaten in hours," Ella explained.

"It's okay. I would eat it, too, if I were you. Are you all right? You look lost," said one of the dwarfs. She assumed his name was Happy, because that's what it said on his shoes.

"I'm fine. I'm running away from my stepmother and stepsisters. I don't mean to impose, but I am so tired. Do you mind if I take a nap?"

"Of course you can!" Happy said. Ella and the frog scurried inside.

"What a mess! I'll just have to tidy up a bit." She looked out the window. A deer, eight blue jays, three chipmunks, two rabbits, and a raccoon were standing outside. Ella called them inside. They helped her clean the house, and everything was spotless. "Perfect."

The dwarfs let her stay overnight, so they took her upstairs to her temporary bedroom. They made a little house outside for the frog. Ella's room was a tower with a spiraling staircase and a lovely pointed ceiling. She stuck her head out the window, and her golden blonde hair grew so long that it fell to the ground. The frog hopped up from his small house, and Ella kissed him. That moment, the frog grew legs, then hair. Its arms stretched out like a human's. Finally, he became a prince.

"Prince Charming!" Ella said. "I know what fairy tale you belong in!"

"What is it?" asked the frog-prince.

"It's my fairy tale!" Ella told him.

After that, Prince Charming and Ella lived happily ever after. Well, not really.

They felt the ground shake, the wind blow, and Ella heard a familiar voice calling to her. She grabbed some scissors and chopped off her long hair. They ran outside, and there was an earthquake! The voice got closer and louder. Then a horrible buzzing noise was yelling in her ear.

"No! No!" Ella screamed.

"It's time for school," the voice said.

Ella woke up. It was all a dream. Her mom was waking her up, and the alarm clock was going off. She walked out of her room, and over to the book of fairy tales. She flipped to the last page, and found her fairy tale in it. "What a dream." Ella thought to herself. "I must have read too many fairy tales. I wonder if my dream was trying to tell me something..." Ella left the book on the table. She went back to her room, and got ready for school.

The next day, as she was taking a walk, Ella spotted a frog lying in the grass. "Good morning, Mister Frog," Ella said with a smile.

"Hello, Ella!" the frog croaked. Ella was too frightened to speak, so she turned toward the sidewalk and ran away.

Ten Years Later

*Natasha is understandably floored when she is whisked a decade into the future. In **TEN YEARS LATER** by Madasyn S. Tyldesley, it turns out that time isn't the only complication.*

Natasha zoomed through her house. “Backpack, books, lunch...,” she said to herself. Then she saw across the room what she needed. “Wand...DUH!” She zipped to her wand, her long raven black hair whipping around her beach-tanned skin. Almost there, she ran into her mother.

“It’s the first day of middle school, and you are already breaking the rules,” said her mom.

Natasha’s light blue eyes sparkled at the thought of middle school. Melissa and she had been dreaming about it since graduation. Melissa was her best friend, a garden fairy. Talk about a green thumb! Natasha was an animal fairy. Yet, she looks like a water fairy. Her favorite color is blue, she wears blue, and even her eyes are blue!

Beep, beep!

“Well, gotta go!” said Natasha. She grabbed her wand and ran to catch the caterpillar.

“Love you!” yelled her mom.

“Hello, Natasha!” said the caterpillar named Artie.

“Hey, Artie!” said Natasha. “OH MY GOSH!” Natasha quietly said. Melissa was talking to Derrick Evans! He was one of the coolest, cutest, most talented boys in school!

“Natasha!” yelled Melissa. She said something to Derrick and then flew over. “He just asked me to be his girlfriend! AH!!”

“AHH!” Natasha said sarcastically.

“Oh, let’s just finds seats.” Melissa said, smiling weakly.

“LET’S GO!” yelled Artie. Melissa and Natasha found seats in the back. They talked all the way to the third bus stop when Cody got on.

“YO, my ladies!” he said.

“Hi.... What are you wearing?” Melissa said. Cody was wearing baggy pants, a baggy shirt, sweat jacket with the zipper open, and a gold medallion.

“It my new thang, ya know,” he replied, talking like a rapper.

The three talked all the way to school, which was only ten minutes.

Natasha and Cody had one class together. First hour for Natasha was a nightmare! She met an evil snake! Its name was Stacy McGuire. Natasha sat next to her and Cody. Stacy was a water fairy. The first thing she did was splash the aquarium water on Natasha! The worst part was that Stacy was in all of her classes!

Third hour seemed to last forever. It was her last class until lunch.

“Melissa, it was awful!” Natasha said. But Melissa wasn’t listening. She was staring dreamily at Derrick. “Hello!” said Natasha, getting annoyed. Melissa had been like this since the beginning of lunch.

“Isn’t he the dreamiest?” Melissa said, sighing.

“I can’t believe you! You care about Derrick more than me!”

“So not true,” Melissa said, standing. “I can’t believe you’d even think that!” Melissa left the table.

“Wow, you really did it this time, Natasha,” Cody said. After he said that he left, too.

Natasha walked home that day. “I hate this!” she said. “I hate Jameson Middle School, and I hate Melissa!” Then something caught her eye. A dark alley was there. She had noticed it before, but was too chicken to go down it. “Oh, a shortcut!” she said a little excitedly.

Natasha went down the alley. Then she saw a shimmer. “A wishing well!” Natasha ran to it. “You know what?” she said with a dangerous glimmer in her eye. “I wish it was ten years from now. That way I wouldn’t have school or Melissa or Stacy to deal with!” As her coin hit the water, Natasha said, “It’s not like that’s ever going to happen...” Everything melted away. All she heard was a sprite crying.

“Huh... what’s that noise?” Natasha said sleepily. Then she realized she was surrounded by silk sheets. She was in a golden room with satin curtains and an Oriental rug, and she was in really soft pajamas!

“WHAAA!” yelled the sprite.

“Okay, okay,” said Natasha.

She went to the sprite and saw their resemblance: the same raven black hair, aqua blue eyes, and tan skin. She picked up the little sprite, and she immediately stopped crying. Instead she started laughing. “What are you staring at?” Natasha said, giggling at the little sprite squirming around.

“Guess who?” said a girl’s voice.

“Who are...?” Natasha said turning around. “STACY!”

“Uh... yeah, I am your roommate,” Stacy said. “Oh... poor little Cherry,” Stacy said.

“Cherry?” Natasha said, puzzled.

“You had her a year ago and you don’t even know your own baby’s name!”

“Stacy, say what?” Natasha said. *Wow*, Natasha thought. *My own child? Me?* “Where’s her father?” Natasha asked.

“Well, remember? Ryan left you a year ago after Cherry,” Stacy replied.

“Jerk,” Natasha mumbled. “Stacy, can you explain why I’m 20 YEARS OLD?”

“Oh, that’s easy,” she replied. Then Stacy explained Natasha’s whole life to her. They had stopped being enemies at 15 years old. Next she explained Ryan and her elopement at 18. When she had

Cherry, he left. Natasha was a lawyer and made MILLIONS! That's why she has a big house and expensive stuff. "Why are you asking me all of this...?" Stacy started.

But Natasha interrupted. "Awesome!" Natasha yelled. "I've got to see my closet!"

When Natasha got there she opened the gold doors and stepped into a walk-in closet! "OMG!" she yelled. She changed and put on a silky red dress with a cashmere over-vest, and then she put on pearl earrings with a matching necklace, red leather sandals, and the final touch: a solid gold headband.

"Snazzy," said Stacy when she saw.

"I want a Coke." Natasha said. Suddenly it appeared in front of her. "I am so loving this!" she said, opening her Coke. Next for breakfast she asked for a Double Dutch Chocolate cake with chocolate frosting in the middle. After she was done she flew outside to enjoy the summer day.

"I'm rich, I'm rich!" she sang giving her wings a break by walking. Then she tripped over something. "Hey, watch it, will ya!" she said sternly. Next to her was a boy fairy in tattered clothes and a woman holding a sprite. "Let me tell you who I... Cody, Melissa?" Natasha said. Even in his tattered clothing and five o'clock shadow, Natasha always recognized her Cody's sparkling green eyes. He could be in complete disguise except for his eyes and Natasha would always know.

"You're looking happy," Melissa snapped.

"Of course she is; she has heat!" said Cody.

"What happened to you guys?" Natasha said.

Melissa had always had a good brain and was definitely smarter than Natasha. "You happened!" said Melissa. She explained how they used to live in the mansion with Natasha. Then she kicked them out when their sprite came along.

"He's too much' is exactly what you said," yelled Cody. Since they didn't have a back-up they became poor. "Now leave," Melissa said after they were done.

“Hey, you can come back if you want...” Natasha started.

Then Stacy came out and yelled, “Natasha! YOU HAVE TO GO TO WORK!”

Work? As a LAWYER! “Be right there!” Natasha yelled back. She said goodbye to Melissa and Cody, and then went home to change into “lawyer” clothes. She put on a gray skirt, white blouse, and a gray jacket. She tied her hair into a bun and put gray high heels on. Then for a finishing touch: “Wand... DUH!” Then she flew out the door.

“Wait a sec... where is this place?” she said. So she flew home, and asked Stacy.

“Left, right, right, left, got it? Oh, and I’ll be gone at...”

Natasha flew there ignoring Stacy. It was a tall blue flower with a lot of leaves. She flew in the stem.

“Good morning, Ms. Andrews,” a pretty lady said.

“Yeah, what’s up? Who are you, exactly?” Natasha said.

“Secretary Jenny, Ma’am. Now, Mr. Clover called about his case. He’s in your office,” the lady said. “This way please.” Mrs. Jenny took Natasha to a leaf-o-vator and set it to the tenth floor. When they got there they flew to the last door on the right side.

Inside a man with black and gray hair waited. His name was Jimmy Clover. In the past he was in Natasha’s fifth hour. “Hello, sir,” Natasha said smiling brightly. “What do you want?”

“I want to get a settlement, Ms. Bonehead! These numbers make no sense, you imbecile!” he said rudely.

“Excuse me!” Natasha said, very insulted. “You are talking to one of the best lawyers in the state, country, and probably the world! And you talk to me like that! I’m out of here!” Natasha sped out of the room, flying so fast Mrs. Jenny’s papers flew across the room.

“Hi, Stacy!” Natasha said. But Stacy wasn’t there. There was a note on the refrigerator. It said:

Dear Natasha,

I left with Jeremy, my boyfriend. We're getting married over the blue sea. I'm also going to adopt a sprite. Cherry is in her crib sleeping. I'll call you in a couple of months.

*Good luck,
Love, Stacy*

“Stacy, write what?” Natasha said, surprised. Then she heard Cherry’s unbearable cry. Natasha ran over. This time when Cherry was picked up she didn’t stop crying. Natasha changed her diaper, but she was still crying. Natasha fed her, and she was still crying. No matter what Natasha did, Cherry was still crying.

Natasha’s perfect life went down from there. Melissa and Cody went away forever, Cherry STILL wouldn’t stop crying, the house caught fire, and she got fired. After a while Natasha decided to go back to the wishing well. She did, and wished to go back.

Natasha did go back. When she did it was the same place and time. The next day she went to first hour. “Oh, look, who let that thing into school!” was the first thing Stacy said.

“Stacy,” Natasha said. “I’m not going to fight with you. I’ll stop if you will,”

“Really? Sure!” Stacy said. She actually seemed kind of happy.

Next, she apologized to Melissa. Then in fourth hour something happened. “Hi,” said a boy. “I’m Ryan Andrews.”

“Huh, who? What? Bye!” Natasha said. She went to her seat and ignored Ryan.

All was right, and they lived happily ever after. And when Natasha went back to the alley one day after school to see the wishing well, it was gone.

Toys Alive

*Welcome to the family! In **TOYS ALIVE** by **Lauren Mali**, a girl brings home a doll that becomes like a sister to her.*

Ding, ding, ding. It was the end of school on a cold winter day in the middle of December. Almost every kid went home except for Lela. Lela was a seven-year-old girl who was very curious. What does this have to do with the rest of the story? Well, let's just say that she found out something that no one had ever known before.

Lela had short blond, wavy hair with chestnut red natural highlights. She was the quiet type of girl in school. You could say she was one of the smaller girls in school.

Instead of going home or to a friend's house like other kids, she went to an old store that has lots of little toys that she loves to tinker with. The store was rusty and old. How Lela found out about the store was that her mother and father went there when they were kids. The name of the man of the store was Rick Sr. He retired years ago when Lela was wearing extra small diapers. Now the owner of the store is Rick Jr.

Today was different because she usually didn't get a smile from Rick Jr., the store cashier. Rick Jr. was the tall handsome type of guy.

Today when she walked in, Rick Jr. smiled so big that even the worst town in the state just had to smile or give a cry of joy. He looked at her and then looked back at the window. Lela looked back and saw that his store was the best in the

whole town (now that was serious because the town was...well, it had seen better days).

“What’s that poster have on it, Mr. Rick Jr.?” Lela asked. She didn’t understand the poster, due to a lack of reading skills.

“That is a good question. You see, my store is the cleanest in the town,” Rick said kindly. “With that honor, I get money to spend and money for new toys.”

She still didn’t understand, but she didn’t want to waste his time. “Got anything new in?” she quickly chimed up. Rick nodded and smiled the kind of smile that says, “I was waiting for you to ask that.”

“Come and follow me,” Rick said, like there was something exciting going to happen. Of course she followed. As she followed, Rick went through a humongous red, white, and blue door. On the door it said in green paint “NEW ROOM.” Rick had added a new room with two new aisles filled with toys and whatnot. While she was walking down the aisle she thought she saw a doll wink at her.

This doll was not like any of the other dolls. It was a queen doll that was wearing all blue. They were different shades of blue, like baby blue, sky blue, and light blue. Her tiara was light blue with dark blue sapphires lined across the top. She was holding a light blue stick with a dark blue crystal ball at the top.

Lela said, “I want that one,” and pointed to the queen. “She’s perfect.”

“Are you sure you want that one?” Rick asked, confirming with her.

“It’s perfect!” Lela said in a big cheery voice.

Rick wrapped it in a bag and sent her off. Lela was very happy with her decision.

When she got home, she put it on her bed and somebody said, “Next time ask to carry me. Didn’t you read the label? I’m fragile.”

“It’s the closet monster!” Lela said, running under her bed.

Lela didn’t know who had spoken. A crazy thought gave her the idea that it wasn’t the closet monster, but it was the doll she bought.

“Take me out of this bag. I’m dying—I wish,” the queen said with a snotty little attitude. When she heard that, Lela quickly took the doll out of the bag.

They sat there for what seemed like hours, but it was only minutes.

Lela finally broke the ice. “So, you’re real?”

“Of course, why wouldn’t I be?” the queen said, trying to get some sense into her head.

“I’m going to tell all my friends at school that I have a talking doll!” Lela said, all excited.

“A talking doll? Is that all the credit I get? You know I am not just a talking doll. I am a work of art carved by goddesses. All I get is that I am a talking...stupid...doll. Is that what you think of me? Is that what you think of me? Me? I am more than just a *talking* doll. I am alive. Oh, and you don’t have to call me a doll. Just call me by my name, Queen Justine,” the queen said angrily.

“Well, of course you’re not living. You’re a *doll*,” Lela said, not getting it through her head.

“If that’s the kind of respect I get, I will just sit here, like a *doll*,” the queen said, being sarcastic.

“Fine, you can just sit there. Let me go get my other dolls that just sit there like a lump.” Now Lela wasn’t being sarcastic. She meant it, and that’s just what Lela did. Now just sitting there seemed boring, so she and Lela talked to get things straight.

After about a week Lela's mother and father found out about Justine. Boy, were they freaked when they found out about her. That's not how Justine was about it. She just sat down with Lela and Lela's mother and father, and they had a discussion about adopting Justine.

So now Justine is Lela's sister. When Justine first became part of Lela's family, it was just before Christmas. That the best Christmas ever! Lela finally got somebody to share it with.

The queen didn't just sit there any more, unless she was sleeping in her Barbie house that was addressed to her from Santa Claus, or swimming in the Jacuzzi at the top of her Barbie beach house, or watching TV on the Barbie beach house (for some reason they couldn't find out why the plastic Barbie TV wasn't working).

Queen Justine wasn't just a secret any more; she was part of Lela's family.

Trickster Nuii and the Road to the Emerald Temple

*You have a weird journey ahead of you. Tag along on a fantasy adventure with “demented” attitudes, “spazzing,” and strange creatures in **TRICKSTER NUII AND THE ROAD TO THE EMERALD TEMPLE**, by Erin Grabowski.*

1. Getting Ready for a Big Drag

“Ehhhh...I don’t want to get up, Mom,” Nuii whined.

Nuii was a Trickster girl that had a hard time getting up in the morning. “Ehhhh,” was Nuii’s oh-so-annoying whine. She didn’t want to get up. She always didn’t want to get up, no matter what her parents said.

“Nuii, you get up this instant, or you’ll lose computer privileges for the day. Get up now, put your clothes on and eat breakfast,” Nuii’s mom commanded.

“Fine, I’ll do it. Whatever.”

She got up groggily, put her clothes on and went out of her bedroom door, but forgot to make her bed. But she did as she was told and was out in the kitchen in five minutes flat. She sat down at the kitchen table.

“What do you want to eat?” Nuii’s mom asked.

“I’m not hungry, Mom,” said Nuii.

“Well, you gotta eat breakfast, or remember: no computer privileges,” said Nuii’s mom.

Nuii always tried to get away without eating breakfast, because she thought it would make her fat. She agreed to eat anyway.

“Fine, I’ll have a stinkin’ Pop Tart. A chocolate one, please.”

Nuii’s mom got her a chocolate Pop Tart, but Nuii didn’t like the way it was toasted, so she ate it discerningly, peeling off the brown crust. The chocolate made her feel less crabby, anyway, and ready to take on the day.

Then she grabbed her backpack, brushed her teeth and used mouthwash.

“OK, I’m going to go to the Kuttle bus stop now, Mom.”

“All right, dear. Be careful,” said her mom. “Bye!”

“Bye, Mom.”

Nuii ran to the Kuttle bus which shuttled Trickster kids to school and back home. Her stop was located on her best friend Loii’s front lawn. Loii was a boy who had been friends with Nuii since preschool.

“Hiii, Loii. What’s up, dude?” said Nuii.

“Hi, Nuii. Nothing much is up, but I hate getting ready for academy. It’s such a drag.”

“Yeah, it sure is.”

The Kuttle bus pulled up.

Just like human kids, Trickster kids got bored with schoolwork, too. Nuii and Loii stepped up into the Kuttle bus and sat in the front seat like they do every day.

“Hey, remember, isn’t there a big assembly in the Grand Room today about some weird mission?” Loii asked.

At schools for human kids, students had to conquer their books for grades. Academies for Trickster kids sometimes sent their students out on missions on their own to test their skills in the world and to build up the honor of their Academy.

Nuii acted bored, too, saying, “Yeah, isn’t it like about they pick a random team to go on some hard mission, and then they don’t have to do any more schoolwork or anything, and they just get an A +++ for the year?”

“(Sigh) Yeah, something like that... I hope we don’t get picked. It would be a BIG drag.”

They both thought it would be un-cool to act too excited about getting picked to go on the adventure, even if they had a chance to get A+++ for the entire year.

“Man, Loii, you say ‘drag’ waaay too much, but I agree. Even if we did get picked, Borii’s pyromaniac ways would get in the way.” Borii was their other teammate.

“Heh, heh! Yeah, Borii’s such a spazz about his fire stuff.”

Nuii just laughed and looked out the window of the bus, secretly hoping that they *would* get picked.

The Kuttle bus pulled into the parking lot of Trickullus Academy. They got off the bus and started walking toward the school. Just then their friend Borii came flying up to them talking way too fast, with a crazy look on his face.

In a very excited voice Borii said, “OMG! Did you guys see that show last night about how people eat fire on a stick sometimes? Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh!”

Nuii’s eye twitched, and she looked at Borii and said, “Dude, did you have sugar or something?”

Borii didn’t mind being teased. He was very self-confident. “Maybe, but that’s not the point. Did you see it or not?”

“Nope,” Nuii said.

“Nope, it would have been a drag to watch a whole hour of people eating fire on a stick for no apparent reason,” said Loii.

Borii said, “Aww, you guys should have watched it. You’re both boring.”

Nuii and her team (Borii, Loii and herself) walked to the Grand Room and had a seat at a large table. The Grand Room

was a huge room with long tables and straight-backed wooden chairs. The floor was polished smooth by years of students shuffling across it. It was colorfully lit by huge stained glass windows depicting historical Tricksters that had accomplished many honorable feats. Only one window was clear glass: the one stolen by Trickudo Academy when they split off from Trickullus in a huge disagreement over who taught the most powerful magic.

It took a great while for all the students at Trickullus Academy to get seated and settled down before Principal Hoiï stared speaking about the mission.

“Welcome, students of Trickullus Academy. The bravery of one of our Trickster teams is about to be tested with traveling, fighting and the pressure of competition while retrieving a magic artifact.”

The room fell quiet, although most of the Tricksters tried to look bored so no one would think they were not cool.

Whenever Trickster kids were sent out on a mission, they were sent in a team of three for safety, and to increase their chances of success. Unlike humans, Tricksters also had an extra tricky ability to outsmart evil. They were also taught magic and other useful skills. Success on missions was important for the honor of their Academy.

“As you know, I will be picking a team randomly for this mission. The reason you’re going to retrieve this artifact rather than archeologists is because those scientists already tried, but some evil things drove each of them away, and they never returned. Of course, they didn’t have the skills and spells that we teach at this school, so they could not overcome evil on their own.

“I will be picking a team’s name out of my hat so that no one will think that I’m fixing the drawing.”

Some of the Tricksters began teasing each other, but still kept one ear on the speaker.

Principal Hoii was very confident that his Tricksters could take care of themselves, but he wanted to give them extra help to be successful.

“Also on this mission the team I pick will be given a special animal, which happens to be this little guy named Doki. He is a heat fox. He will help get you through your challenges. Something I’m sure you’re all wondering is ‘What is this thing we’re supposed to be retrieving?’ The answer to that is something called *The Nivini*, the mysterious ancient machine. Before the archeologists were driven away, they were sending us emails and pictures of it. They also sent us this map of the wilderness. You will travel on foot because there are only narrow paths and many steep climbs.”

This mission was very important to the honor of Trickullus Academy because they knew that their nemesis Trickudo Academy also knew that the archeologists had failed, and they wanted to retrieve the Nivini for themselves.

“You will also be competing, actually, against our rival academy, Trickudo Academy. Trickudo has been our nemesis ever since they split off from Trickullus, and we must reclaim our glory. Therefore, I will give an A+++ to our team members if they are successful.”

The student audience fell silent for a moment, and then realizing how difficult the trip would be, felt kind of fearful of being picked.

“Now for the moment you’ve all been waiting for, I’m going to pick the team...”

Tension rose.

“...and the team is: Team Nuii!”

A huge sigh of relief went through the crowd. “Pheew!” was the sound.

But Nuii’s team’s faces were saying, “What? Oh man, oh man, oh man, oh no.”

“Everybody please leave and go to your regular classes now, except for Nuii’s team.”

It took a while for everyone to leave, but finally everyone did. Principal Hoiu walked over to Nuii’s team carrying Doki.

He said, “Well, all I have to say is you had better go home and start packing. The Kuttle bus is waiting outside to take you home. I’ll call your parents to inform them about your mission.”

He gave Doki to Borii.

“You can take care of Doki for now.”

Breathlessly, Borii rattled out, “Yeah! Isn’t this a heat fox? Don’t they breathe fire? He, he, he, Oh my god oh my god.”

2. *Starting the Big Drag*

Nuii’s team was expected to meet at Kanjin Gate, which led to the wilderness outside of town. That was where their adventure would begin.

“Agh. Borii’s late. He’s probably playing with that fox,” said Loi. “This is a drag.”

“Yeah, he better well be here within five minutes, or uh, he’ll uh...well, he just better be here,” said Nuii.

Just then, they saw a big tower of fire. It seemed like it was creeping towards them. After the fire tower got over the hill, they realized that it was just Borii with Doki sitting on his head, breathing fire up toward the sky.

“Oh my gosh, I’ve been playing with this little guy all night, so I didn’t get any sleep, but anyway this guy’s awesome!” said Borii.

“What? You didn’t get any sleep? You’re supposed to be prepared, as in *prepared before you come here*,” said Nuii.

“I dunno, this guy was just, ‘eye candy.’”

“Yeah, well, we’d better start going up this path known as, uh (let me look at the map), Kanjin Path,” said Nuii.

They nodded to each other and started walking up the hill. About a half mile up the hill, a big swarm of bugs came whizzing toward the team.

“What? What the heck are those?” said Loii.

“Well, to me they look like a big swarm of bugs. Oh darn, this can’t be good,” said Nuii.

“*GZZZZZZZZ!*” The swarm was getting closer.

“Hey! Bugs don’t like fire, do they?” said Borii. “Maybe Doki can burn them up.”

“Yeah. That’s a good idea, Borii,” said Nuii.

“Yeah. All right. Hey, Doki! Can you burn up those bugs with your flame breath?”

Doki nodded and ran up to the swarm, jumped in the air and let go with a flame that seemed to dissolve them in thin air.

“All right, Doki! Your first accomplishment since you joined our team! We’re glad you’re here to help.”

Doki made a small, happy, squeak sound.

“Well, let’s keep walking. This Nivini thing isn’t going to find itself,” said Loii.

“Borii, what are you eating?” Nuii asked.

With his mouth full, Borii said, “Um, um, I’m eatin’ some burnt chocolate.”

“OK. I can understand anyone wanting to eat chocolate, but *burnt* chocolate? That, my friend, is just messed up,” Nuii said with disgust.

“Come on, Nuii, you can understand why he’s eating burnt chocolate. He’s obsessed with fire. He had chocolate, and he’s obsessed with fire, so he burned it and ate it. He thinks everything tastes good burnt—and I have to agree, burnt marshmallows are pretty good.”

“Hey, wait a minute. How can chocolate be burnt? Wouldn’t it just melt?” asked Nuii.

Nuii’s eye twitched.

Loii’s eye twitched.

Borii's eye twitched.

"I have no idea. That's just plain creepy. I don't even know how that happened. I just had Doki burn it with his flame thrower and it got *burnt*—that is just kind of creepy."

Nuii interrupted, "Ahh. So Doki burnt it with his fire. Maybe it's his fire that is different instead of the chocolate, because..."

[THREE HOURS OF BURNT CHOCOLATE
DISCUSSION LATER]

"...and that's why the chocolate was burnt instead of melted."

"Nuii, you're such an egghead. Does chocolate always get you going? Anyway, it's getting dark. We spent way too much time talking about burnt chocolate that Borii was eating, and we've nearly walked five miles while you were blabbering on," complained Loii.

"OoOOH! What's that? It's a pond with steam coming up from it. Is that a hot tub?" Borii asked.

"Borii, let me just say this," said Loii sternly. "We're nearly at the top of a mountain with all types of bugs and wild animals, and you think that there is a hot tub, man-made out of plastic. So no, that is not a hot tub."

"How is it a hot tub? HOOOOOW? Seriously, how?" added Nuii. "It doesn't even look like a hot tub. Boy, Borii you're such a spazz, but you do give me a laugh once in a while. It's a hot spring, or in your words, a *hot tub* in the wilderness," said Nuii.

"Whatever, same difference," replied Borii. He never let his friends' picking slow him down. "Anyway, wouldn't this be a great spot to set up camp and recover from that chocolate speech of yours?" said Borii.

“Fantastic. Another good idea from Borii,” said Nuii. “Let’s set up camp here.”

So they did set up camp, got their pajamas on and went to bed. But Doki was awakened by a sound during the night. Doki awoke to the sound of running footsteps. The footsteps faded and weren’t heard again, so Doki fell back asleep.

3. *Going Through the Forest*

It was the morning. First Loii got up, then Loii got Borii up, then Borii attempted to get Nuii up, but she just went, “Ehhhh. Five more stinkin’ minutes.”

“Nuii, get up now, or no breakfast,” Loii said.

“You sound like my mom, but yeah! No breakfast for once!”

“I take that back. You have to have breakfast, or you’ll get dehydrated and...look, just get up and be quick about it.”

“Oh, all right.”

Nuii got dressed and went out and sat by the fire where the rest of her team was, but forgot to make her bed.

“What’s on the menu, Borii?”

Borii was the cook for the mission. He likes to cook things with fire. “Well, I have some cooked sausages, and no, they’re *not burnt*. I just thought I’d be extra nice today and not burn them for you.”

“Yeah! Something not burnt and made by Borii! Well, hit me with two sausages,” Nuii said.

Borii picked up a sausage and hit Nuii with it.

“Ow! That’s not what I meant, you demented dumbbell. ‘Hit me with two sausages’ means *give* me two sausages—not hit me on the head with them.”

Loii laughed and said, “Yeah, heh heh, you two finish with the conflict while I go get ready.”

Loii went to get ready, and Nuii and Borii finished breakfast and got ready, too.

“All right guys, let’s get goin’,” Nuii said. “Whoa, I never noticed this forest that’s really close to where we camped. I’ll bet that’s where we’re supposed to go through next. Loii, check your map.”

Borii guessed. “Yeah, I think you’re right, we have to go through Tricku forest.”

“Dang, the map says that we do have to go through a whole stinkin’ forest. What is this, a video game?” Loii said. “Ha, ha, ha, I made a good joke, but yeah, we do have to go through the whole ding dang, stinkin’, evil, annoying, crud of a forest.”

Nuii’s team entered the forest cautiously. Borii hummed and looked over his shoulder to see if there were any rabid, wild animals behind them. He didn’t see any wild animals, but what he did see was the other team of three Tricksters from Trickudo Academy and their special animal. There was one girl, one tall boy and one tubby boy. Following them was an ice rabbit: their special animal.

The three new tricksters ran toward them and jumped right over them, spinning backwards and glaring back at Nuii’s team.

“Hey. You guys must be the tricksters from Trickullus Academy. I’m Torii, and I’m way better than demented dumbos like you. Smell ya’ later!” said the girl who was the leader of Team Torii from Trickudo Academy.

They jumped off, but the chubby team member had trouble keeping up with them.

“Well, that was demented. I guess our opposing team is one smart aleck, one giraffe of a trickster, and a rather tubby one, too. This is going to be easy beating the crud out of them in getting the Nivini,” said Nuii.

“Yeah, I can’t believe our opponents look like that!” Loii said.

Borii nodded and Doki made a giggly, squeaky sort of sound.

After leaving the other team, they started to talk about Borii's weird obsession with fire.

"Borii, what is your thing about fire? Why are you so dang obsessed with it?" Nuii asked.

"Yeah, why?" Loii asked also.

"Well, once when I was little when it was Christmas and we were sitting by the fire that my daddy had just made in the fireplace, I looked at, no, I *stared* at it. I plopped off my mom's lap and glared at it with glee like a llama, and that's how it started."

"Like a llama? Do llamas even have facial expressions? Oh, never mind. That's the whole reason you're completely obsessed with fire?" Nuii asked.

"Guys, stop talking about fire, and look ahead. I think we've reached the end of the forest."

"Yeah, look!" said Borii, and they ran out into a beautiful meadow filled with flowers that were all different colors of the rainbow. They were beautiful. The flowers almost looked and smelled tasty, they had so many colors.

"Wow. This is amazing. Let me check my map. It says this is called Sai Meadow, and it says that nearby is a lake called Sai Lake. Hey, if you look out there you can see it," Loii said.

"Yeah! I love this place! The flowers are so tasty smelling and cool looking. I'd come back here on vacation! This would be a great place to set up camp," said Nuii.

"Definitely, dude," Loii said.

They set up camp, but it took a great while for them to get situated because their tents would not go up and kept falling over. Finally they got them to stay up. Then they cast their sleeping bags and went right to sleep, inhaling the sweet scent of the flowers.

Nuii was exhausted, but she woke up in the middle of the night and thought to herself, "I smell chocolate... where is that smell coming from?"

She got up and looked about in the meadow to see where the smell was coming from.

“OMG, is that a chocolate flower? OMG, cool! Tee-heel!”

Nuii ate the flower.

“Holy cow, this flower is made completely out of chocolate!” Nuii ended her excitement, went back to her tent, and slept soundly.

It seemed like it had been a dream, but she was more ready than ever to face the next day.

4. *Coconut Trouble*

The sun came up.

Borii got up first and got Loii up and then tried to get Nuii up, but she just said, “Ehhh. Ten more minutes.”

“Nuii, don’t make me act like your mother again.”

“Fine, I’ll get up.”

Nuii got up, got dressed and left her tent, but forgot to make her bed.

Nuii went out and sat at the fire where breakfast was being held. “Hey, Borii, hit me with three sausages, but don’t you dare *hit* me with them.”

Borii took out three sausages, cooked them and gave them to Nuii.

“Thanks, Borii, and thanks for not hitting me with the dang things this time. Yeeeah, I’ll eat these now. But did you do anything to them?” Nuii asked because Borii was smirking.

“No, I didn’t do anything to them.”

Loii said, “Ok, those were good sausages. Nice and warm. I’m going to get ready for our hike today.”

Loii went and got all of his stuff together, and then Nuii and Borii finished eating and got all of their stuff together as well.

“All right, guys, let’s head to Sai Lake.”

Nuii and her team walked about a mile or two till they got to the shore of beautiful crystal blue Sai Lake. The shore was rimmed with white sand that was hard to walk through. The forest beyond the sand was thick with tangled branches and picker bushes. Only a narrow pathway ran into the forest and disappeared into the darkness.

They walked only a few steps into the deep sand when two little strange Coconut Men jumped out of the brush in between them and the shoreline and said in a Jamaican accent, “Welcome to Sai Lake, mahn! We say don’ go round’ da’ lake, go *unda’ da’* lake, mahn.”

The Coconut Men looked exactly like big coconuts with small arms, stubby legs with big feet and large eyes that seemed like holes in a bowling ball.

“Under the lake? What do you mean?” asked Looi.

Doki looked too confused for words and went to the water’s edge and started digging in the sand.

“What we mean, mahn, is dat’ if you press dis’ litti’ post, a tunnel will open up, mahn, and then you go unda’ da’ lake and come out da’ otha’ side, safe and sound, mahn.”

The post looked like a long stump of a tree sticking up out of the sand. The top had been beaten flat by years of pushing hands.

“Uh, OK. Doki, can you jump on that post over there and make it go down?” asked Nuii.

Doki made a confirming squeak, ran over to the post, jumped high into the air and slammed the post with his big paw. Doki was only about two feet tall, but he had big paws for his size.

The post sank slowly into the sand.

The ground near them began to shake. A big slab of sand fell down and stairs appeared, leading down into a bleak tunnel. They could see only a few feet into the dark, wet passage. Wet

sand fell in clumps down the stairs, and seaweed roots hung like a curtain on the walls.

The team wondered if it would be safe to enter, but knew that they would save much time and probably get way ahead of team Torii by taking the shortcut.

“Well, there ya’ go, mahn, safe travels, mahn. Jus’ keep walkin’ till ya’ pop up oud’ da’ udda side, mahn.”

The two Coconutters skipped away gleefully.

“Heh, heh, we neva’ fail to get dos’ travelers in trouble, mahn.”

“You said it, mahn.”

The Coconutters had tricked Team Nuii!

“Ooookay, then, that was demented. Anyway, let’s go!” Nuii said.

The team walked into the dark tunnel. The tunnel air tasted like rocks and smelled like dust.

“Um... did I mention my love of dark places and tunnels to you, Nuii?” Loii only said this to Nuii because they had been best friends since they were babies, unlike Borii who they had just met at the beginning of the Academy year.

“No... no, you didn’t. Not you with an obsession, too! Aww, man,” Nuii said.

“Yeah... hee, hee, hee, hee, *the darkness*,” Loii said while he madly twiddled his fingers.

The team walked deeper and deeper into the tunnel, so far into it that you couldn’t see the entrance anymore.

Just then two different savage-looking Coconutters came running in and said, “What? More intruders in here, mahn?” The Coconutters sported spears.

“Why do you ask?” Nuii replied sternly, hiding her nervousness. “The Coconutters on the shore told us to go down here. What’s your problem?”

“This is our litta’ hideout here, mahn! You Tricksta’ kids keep cuttin’ through here. Yoo-a supposed to walk ‘round the lake, mahn! Not unda, mahn!”

These Coconutters were angry.

“Whoa, whoa. We mean no harm. But what do you mean by ‘more intruders’? Were some other Tricksters here before us?”

“Ya-ya one girl, one tall guy and a tubby one.”

Immediately team Nuii knew that Torii’s team must be just ahead of them, and they didn’t know what to be more worried about: angry Coconutters or getting behind team Torii.

But Nuii spoke up quickly again, saying, “Well, we want to get out of here as much as you want us gone, so, now if you just let us, we’ll walk right through.”

“Fine, mahn, but neva’ come back here.”

Relieved, the team hurried up out of the tunnel only to see three sets of footprints on the other side, leading into the jungle path.

5. *The Emerald Temple*

Team Nuii fell down out of breath on the hot, dry sand on the shore of Lake Sai.

“Aagh! Team Torii is in front of us, but at least we’re finally out of that ding dang tunnel,” said Loii. “Now we should be heading to...uh, let’s see here: the Emerald Jungle Path.”

“Hey, ‘Emerald’? We must be getting near the Emerald Temple,” Borii said.

Loii looked at the map again and said, “Yeah, and after the path we are supposed to go to the Emerald Temple.”

There was also an inset diagram on the map of the Emerald temple showing the chambers that they would have to go through.

“Yes. We better hurry,” said Nuii, “but we need some energy so we don’t have to stop again. Let’s just have a quick snack here before we move on.”

They all agreed. Borii quickly took out some nacho chips, and Doki melted a cup of cheese in no time flat.

“Oooh! Nachos and cheese. My favorite snack,” said Nuii.

Borii pulled out the bowl, and Doki poured the cup of cheese over it that he had melted. Then, Borii added the chips so they could all grab the chips with their fingers.

They barely finished licking the cheese from their fingers as they continued down the trail. Then suddenly, Torii’s team came out of the jungle.

“We’ve come here to finish you off, Team Nuii!”

“So, you’re looking for a fight, Torii, am I right?” Nuii asked.

“Yeah, we are. But first let me introduce us. As you know, I’m Torii.”

“I’m Ploiï,” said the tall one.

“I’m Korii,” said the tubby one.

Nuii shot back bravely, “Let’s get this thing done, Torii! But, we always do this when we fight: Torii, you stand against that ledge. Don’t fall. Ploiï, stand in front of Torii,” Nuii ordered. (She was plotting a trick.)

“Why the HECK are we doing this weirdo thing of yours?” Torii asked. “Well, I hate to agree with the opponent, but, what the heck. We’ll beat you on your own terms.”

“LOLZ,” said Nuii. “LOLZ” was Nuii’s way of laughing.

“Huh?” said Korii.

“What?” asked Ploiï, confused.

Torii tried to peek around her teammates, but it was too late. Nuii poked Korii hard in the belly and he started to tip over! “AHHHHH, IM FALLING!”

Korii tipped over, which created the domino effect, and then Ploiï tipped over, and then Torii fell off the cliff along with her team!

Down at the bottom Torii's team brushed the dirt from their clothes, yelling back to the top, "CURSE YOU, STINKIN' TEAM NUII!"

Nuii smiled.

"Nuii, you tricked them!" Loii said.

"Well, isn't that what Tricksters do?" said Nuii.

"Well, now, let's get to the Emerald Temple," said Loii with a confident smile. "All we're doin' here is wasting time!"

"All right, yo! We're gonna' go!" said Nuii.

The team ran as fast as they could down the trail to the Emerald Temple.

"Well, they don't call it the Emerald Temple for nothin'. It's SOLID EMERALD!" said Loii.

"Well, what did you think it was going to be? The Ruby Temple?" Nuii scolded.

"Yeah, I know it sounds obvious, but I didn't think it would actually be made of ancient emeralds. I just thought it would be green or something."

"Yeah, well, anyway, we better go in there...but wait. Isn't it getting a little late? Won't it be too spooky inside?" asked Loii. "It would be a drag to get scared out of our minds by ghosts."

"Yeah, but that's the whole point," said Nuii. "To show our bravery."

"Yeah, I like scary stuff," said Borii.

They entered the temple, but it was just a room—one room.

"What the heck? This ain't no temple. It's just a room!" Nuii said.

Doki looked furious and was stomping about until he stepped on one of the emerald bricks, and the whole floor fell in!

"AAAGH! We're falling! We're falling! What the HECK did you do, Doki?" they all shouted.

They landed on another chamber floor made of emerald and were lucky that they did not get hurt.

"Are you OK, guys?" asked Nuii.

“We’re OK, but look at all of the doors! Which way do we go?” asked Borii.

“Let’s check the map,” said Loii.

Loii’s face went blank. “Uh, it, it doesn’t say. Oh, man, I can’t believe we have to go through this.”

“There are always so many choices,” complained Nuii.

Nuii took the lead and said, “Let’s go to that one.” It looked just like all the others, but when they opened it, there was a scary dragon in there.

“EEkk!” said Nuii as she closed the door and said, “Um, maybe not that one.”

“How about this other one?” They opened the door and out came the music:

Peanut butter jelly time.

Peanut butter jelly time.

“Ooookay then, I don’t think this door is very Nivini’ish,” said Nuii.

Doki, Borii and Loii were all on the ground rolling around laughing at the top of their lungs. Nuii knew that Loii could not resist laughing whenever he heard the song “Peanut Butter Jelly Time.”

Nuii now knew that Doki and Borii could not resist laughing about it, either. “Ha, ha, ha. Oh, gosh, that was so random,” said Loii.

“You got that right. I mean, ‘Peanut Butter Jelly Time’ in an old temple. That is so weird and random, and I like it even though it has nothing to do with fire,” said Borii.

“Nuii, you seem bad at picking doors, so why don’t you let me try once,” said Loii.

“Fine, fine.”

Loii went and picked another door. The only thing that was in the room was a turtle.

“Aww, it’s a turtle!” said Borii. “He’s gonna be my new pet. I love turtles!”

Doki went in, picked up the turtle and gave it to Borii.

“Oh, never mind,” Borii said looking at Doki. He looked at his friend Doki and said, “Oh, I don’t really want this old turtle. Does anyone else want it?”

“I do! I do! I do!” said Loii. “I really do like turtles.” Loii picked up the turtle and put it gently in his pack. “That pack’s pretty damp, so you’ll be safe in there,” said Loii.

The turtle pulled in his head and legs and went to sleep.

As they were watching Loii put his new pet in the pack, Doki went to a door, pointed to it and jumped up and down. They all looked up to see what Doki was excited about.

“I think Doki wants to tell us that we should open that door,” Borii said.

So they did. Nuii walked over and opened the door.

6. *It Flies!*

“That thing over there! I think it’s the Nivini!” Nuii said.

The team entered the room. Nuii walked over and touched the Nivini. As soon as she touched it, a large shadow was over the team.

The team whirled around to see a GIANT stone man.

“Who... who the heck are you?” Nuii asked.

In a grumbly, grinding, hard-to-understand voice, the stone man said, “Ggggguuuuuaarrrrddiiiiiaann.”

“Guardian? Is that what you said? Guardian of...oh! The Nivini? This is not going to be pretty,” Nuii said.

Doki jumped up in the air and hit the Guardian’s stone head, and the head went flying off, and hit the wall.

“Well, that was fast. I can’t believe he didn’t even put any effort into that.”

“Doki probably got fed up with his grumbly talking and hit him in the head a little too hard,” Nuui said.

“Yeeeeeah, I think that went by a little too fast,” Loii said.

“This is too easy,” Borii said, grinning.

“Quick! Grab the Nivini,” said Borii, “before another Guardian shows up!”

“Yeah,” Nuui and Loii said.

The team ran toward the Nivini and looked at it. It looked like some kind of mini airplane-ish thing.

Suddenly the canopy opened and sucked the Tricksters and Doki in.

“What the heck? What is this? Some kind of cramped airplane? And why did it suck us in?” Nuui said.

“Borii, you know how to fly airplanes, right? Can you fly this thing?” Loii asked.

“Sure can. This looks like a regular airplane, but old-ish. So if I push this—”

BOOP! The canopy closed, a shaft above the Nivini opened, and the Nivini shot up through the chute.

“WHAA! What is this thing on, some kind of auto pilot?” Borii said.

The Nivini shot up into a big room, and then it started to fall.

“Aah! I don’t think it’s on autopilot anymore. I better start trying to steer this thing,” Borii said.

Borii steered it, but then an exploding mine fell from the ceiling.

“Yee! What is this, a land mine? Don’t tell me there are booby traps in here, too!”

“Fraid so. We’ll have to evade these booby traps until we can get out of the top of the shaft up there,” Loii directed.

“Good call, Loii. I better do this thing!”

Borii steered all around going up, down, left and right, evading booby traps of all kinds: mines, arrows, nets, rocks,

falling emerald bricks and a whole slew of other bad things. Nuii had her face buried in the wall, Doki was all curled up next to Nuii shivering, and Loii pulled his hat over his eyes. Even Borii was a little worried, but he had to focus.

“We’re almost out! Oh, OH! Look out for that net!” Borii said. He swerved out of the way just in time to miss the net and flew out of the opening—and they were safe at last.

“Aww, you guys can stop cowering now. We’re safe,” said Borii.

“Hm?” Nuii looked up.

“Hm?” Loii looked up.

“Squeak?” Doki looked up and stopped shivering.

Looking all around, they saw pink skies with purple clouds and a beautiful orange and yellow sun sinking on the horizon. The sky was beautiful. Everybody smiled.

Nuii looked out the window and could see Trickullus Academy approaching below. The rest of the Tricksters were leaning out of the windows waving hats, tossing little magic fireballs and shouting various happy and weird things.

Principal Hoii ran out of the front door on the lawn waving them down for a landing.

Borii gently pushed the control stick to lower the Nivini as he petted Doki.

Nuii smiled to herself and thought, “Wow. We finally accomplished this big drag of a mission. We’re all going to get A+++’s and no more classes for the year. Heh, heh. Even Borii, that goofball!”

And with that, the Big Drag became a *Big Brag!*

What Time Is It?

*A boy experiences what it is like for time to stand still. No, it's not another interminable language arts class, but a temporal phenomenon in **WHAT TIME IS IT?** by Sam Yost.*

Five more minutes until freedom. Five more minutes until I can plan the ultimate water balloon fight. Five more minutes until I can plan the best Airsoft gun fight. Five more minutes until I can leave this junk joint, school, and have freedom. There I was, looking through my boring science book. “Page 236,” my teacher said. I went ahead and started reading the blurry print.

We were starting gravity projects. My group made me the timer, so I needed a stopwatch. Great, more homework! I read the print in the textbook. Blah, blah, blah. I swept through the page, memorizing my part. I said the word “timer” from the top of the page, not knowing that that one word would change my life.

Then I heard the sweet, crisp *ting* of the bell. That is easily my favorite sound on a Friday afternoon. I shot out the door. Weekend, here I come!

When I got home, I told my mom I needed a stopwatch. She went upstairs and quickly came back. “This was your grandfather’s,” she said as I threw it in my backpack. “It might not work perfectly,” she said.

“Whatever,” I shot back.

Monday came too fast, and I loafed back to school. Luckily for me, school went by quickly also. Just one more period to go. My teacher reviewed what we had to do, but I

had nothing to do for a while, so I grabbed the stopwatch and walked over to my group.

“When I drop the balloon,” this kid in my group said, “press start and then stop when the balloon hits the ground.” He reached out his hand and slowly opened his fingers, and I slowly pushed the button. That was the life-changing move I made on May 5, 2008.

Out of the stopwatch came a green glow, and then a starry flash of indigo sparks. Everything stopped.

I turned to my group and knocked on their heads a couple of times as I barely realized what was happening. I ran around the room a couple of times and out the door. No one was moving. Did I actually stop time? I looked at the other kids and my teacher. They weren’t breathing. “I did it! I really stopped time!” Everyone was frozen in space. “Cool!” I thought, “I can do whatever I want!” Then I thought again. “Maybe this would be better to do at the end of the day. That way I’ll have no distractions.”

I ran back to my room and got back into the position I was in. I slowly clicked the start/stop button on the stopwatch. This time I saw a quick blast of scarlet, and the shock hurt my hand. Then I heard the racket of my class. I looked at the stopwatch, and it was timing. In my head I thought, “What will I do when I have to stop the timer? Maybe I have to press a different button.”

Suddenly the balloon hit the ground. I quickly looked at the stopwatch but couldn’t read the tape that said what the button was, so I randomly chose one and clicked it. Luckily it was the right button. I smiled and waited through the rest of science.

I looked out the window as the buses rapidly sped away. I ran to the main hall of the school. Nobody was in sight. I looked at the watch and clicked the magic button. Suddenly it happened again: I saw the stopwatch glow green, and then the

starry flashes of indigo sparks. Just like that, time was stopped again. “Now to have some fun,” I thought.

I walked around with a big grin on my face. What should I do first? Right then, right that second, I was thirsty, so I ran around the corner to the nearest drinking fountain. I slammed on the button and waited for the refreshing liquid. No water. “It must be broken,” I thought.

I tried the next one, and again, no water. “I’m having horrible luck at this,” I said angrily.

So I went to the next closest drinking fountain, and still no water. “I don’t think it is me. I think it is the way time is stopped. Dang it!” This is a bust. What good is a time stopper if you can’t do anything when time is stopped?

I grabbed my backpack and ran downstairs. My backpack felt unbelievably heavy. But I suddenly stopped at the bottom of the stairs and thought, “Hey! Why does my backpack move if nothing else will?” I turned and heard the zipper jingle. What did I do special with my backpack? I remembered that I stopped time while holding it. “If things are able to move if I stop time when I’m touching them, then that means I have to start time, touch the thing I want, and then stop time if I want something.”

This was very confusing. It also meant I had to hit the button quickly before anything else happened. I thought it through and then thought what to do. Next I opened my eyes widely. I had the perfect plan, and here it is: *Skateboard + pool = awesome!*

First, I needed some supplies. I knew there was a skateboard in the Lost and Found. There are wood boards in the engineering tech room (for the ramp) and the pool is wide open. Most importantly, I needed bungee cords. I also worried about the watch. It would have to work, or I was toast!

I wanted the skateboard first, so I went to the office. The Lost and Found is outside the office door, so I grabbed the

skateboard. Now to test my idea. I held the stopwatch in one hand and the skateboard in the other. I closed my eyes and let my finger go.

I heard the explosions. I opened my eyes to find the skateboard in my hand. "YES," I screamed. Now for the rest of the stuff.

A while later everything was ready. I made the ramp at a 90-degree angle with two nails sticking out the side, which I wrapped the bungee cords around. I hooked the cords to my skateboard. "It is go time for the jump. Later, I'm going to come back and jump it the long way. But for now, I'll go easy."

I pulled back on the bungee cord as I looked up at the ramp. I smiled and said, "This is going to be sweet!"

The bungee cord looked like it was going to snap when I let go. I shot up the ramp and looked down at the water. But when I looked up again, my smile faded. I was only halfway! When I was six inches off the surface, I closed my eyes. This was not going to end well.

Then I heard a big clank and opened my eyes. I was skating on water! "Water surfing, awesome!" I screamed. Then I finally slowed to a stop. When time is stopped, nothing can move, so I would not have fallen into water. That was lucky.

I grabbed the skateboard and skated around some more. When I came to the main hallway, I saw many pencils on the ground and felt a light breeze. "Ahhh...that feels good." Then I froze in space, looking out with eyes bigger than baseballs. My lower lip trembled and my hands felt more wet than they would be in water. Time had stopped, so how could things be moving? I shrugged it off and kept skateboarding.

Then I saw a flash of grumbling black and thought, "That is not just me. That really happened." And quicker than you could say "hi" I was out of there. In front of me was quite an obstacle course of about one million erasers and two million

pencils! I tried moving left and right, dodging them, but it was not good enough. As quickly as I started, I ended. I was going down quick.

I saw my life flash before me, and knew I would be eaten alive by this U.W.O. (Unidentified Walking Object). I came down in a big lurching smack and felt about three pencils under my back. I closed my eyes hoping everything would be over in a snappy second. That's when I heard a deep breathing sound and knew that I should keep running.

I got up with a jump and bolted down the hall, but the breathing sound only got louder. I knew I needed a plan to confront the U.W.O. and quick. Then I looked up when I got to a dead end. At the end, I turned to find...nothing. "What?" I yelled, when suddenly it jumped out!

Looking down at me was a ten-foot tall, black and purple dust cloud! It had fat, angry yellow eyes with purple in the middle. My eyes opened wide, my mouth open wide enough to fit an orange in it, and my lower lip began to vibrate. My hair stood straight up. I could not speak, not even for one million bucks. I reached into my pocket and pressed start/stop on the watch, not knowing what would happen next.

I tried to figure it all out in my head. Maybe the monster can't see me, but it couldn't be as simple as that. So I moved to a different part of the school, pulled out the watch, and hit the start/stop button. Again I saw a green glow and a starry flash of indigo sparks. I also found myself looking into the big beating eyes of the dust devil! Not understanding what happened, I hit the start/stop button once more. I saw a quick blast of scarlet and time started again.

I scratched my head, sat down with my legs crossed, and thought, "Maybe the monster is here when time is started, but it can't do anything. How can I defeat it so I can still have fun? This is a life form made of magic. So how do you defeat magic?" My eyes lit up as the answer came to me. "With

magic. You defeat magic by using magic. Brilliant! Now, how do I do this with the stopwatch?”

I looked down at the watch and saw the button that I forgot about. “That’s it! I stop time and press the new button and put an end to the monster! I hope this works.” I held out the watch, closed my eyes, and pressed the start/stop button.

I imagined the green glow and the starry flash of indigo. In my head, I saw the monster and I pressed the button, hearing a loud screech and crackling sound. Then I opened my eyes to see that time had stopped. “YES!” I screamed, “It worked!”

I walked over and got my backpack. I was getting hungry and tired now, and I wanted to go home.

I walked to the front door and grabbed the knob. I took the watch in my left hand and swiftly pressed the button twice. Again I saw the exploding colors of indigo and scarlet. Time started and stopped instantly. I turned the doorknob, but it didn’t budge.

“Shoot, shoot, shoot,” I thought as I grabbed the stopwatch from my pocket. I felt my hand burn to a crisp as I grabbed the stopwatch. I must have burned it up. “Darn it! A malfunction! I hate technology! It always messes up when you need it the most.”

Suddenly I remembered something. The science textbook had a stopwatch repair part.

I bolted to the science room and looked in. Nobody was there. I tiptoed to the book that was in the corner and pulled out the stopwatch. The stopwatch wasn’t as hot any more, so without thinking, I pressed the start/stop button twice. Yet again I saw the blasts of indigo and scarlet as I grabbed the book. Time was stopped again.

I turned to the “Repair” section when my head shot up as I realized something. I stopped time to get the textbook when I could have used that stop/start on the door to open it! I realized that I needed to wait for the watch to cool down again.

That's got to be easier than fixing it. So I waited for a minute to pass and I touched the stopwatch again. It was still burning, so I set it on a table for repairs.

I read the text and did everything it said to do, but it was still burning. "I'm in trouble now," I said to myself. There was one part left to read. "Changing the Battery," it said at the top of the page. That's it! I needed to change the battery! The book said that there are two lives to a battery, and to get it on its second life, you have to turn it over. However, it said, it might screw up the stopwatch if you turn it over, but I did not care. I turned it over anyway.

I walked back to the spot where this whole mess first started in the main hallway right next to the science room and hit the start/stop button. This time, the flash was an emerald green and it sent seven rings of light outward. I looked around. Everything was moving again! I did it!

Suddenly, there was a hand on my back. I nearly shot halfway to the moon. "Did you miss the bus?" my assistant principal said. I quickly nodded my head up and down. He led me to the office and I called my dad. He came in a jiffy to pick me up. I looked out the window on the way home. Boy, was that an adventure!

The next day in science, I did not want to press the button to stop time. I finished my worksheet and was turning it in when I saw a flash come out of my pocket. Looking up, I noticed that time had not stopped. This time, everything was moving backwards! "Oh no," I thought, "here we go again!"

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