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# **got stories?**

**bite-sized tales by  
sixth-grade students of  
berkshire middle school**

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**daniel fisher, editor**

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Title by Chelsey Jackson and Ramius Manière-Spencer.

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# CONTENTS

## Against the Backdrop of History

|  |    |
|--|----|
| HANNAH ALMETER <i>My Story</i> .....                   | 13 |
| CARLY TIFFANY <i>Ramses and the Royal Family</i> ..... | 19 |
| JOE CYPERT <i>Surprise at Sea!</i> .....               | 25 |

## Can You Relate?

|   |    |
|---|----|
| MARIAH VAN ERMEN <i>Always Be Yourself</i> .....        | 31 |
| RAMIUS MANIÉRE-SPENCER <i>Beautiful, yet Bad</i> .....  | 33 |
| RACHEL WEISZ <i>Disappeared</i> .....                   | 37 |
| JULIANE L. VOGL <i>A Family is Waiting for Me</i> ..... | 40 |
| JORDAN REID <i>From Riches to Happiness</i> .....       | 43 |
| MICHELLE SCHWARTZ <i>The Little Black Book</i> .....    | 46 |
| ASHLEY M. LEWIS <i>Maddie's Haircut</i> .....           | 50 |
| LINDSAY SWARTHOUT <i>Up</i> .....                       | 53 |
| MARY CATHERINE LEIER <i>You Shouldn't Care</i> .....    | 55 |

## Consider the Possibilities

|   |    |
|---|----|
| CHRISTOPHER GODIN <i>Idiots in Space</i> .....    | 61 |
| ANDREW ROVINSKI <i>The Long Lost Prince</i> ..... | 68 |

## Darkness Falls

|  |    |
|--|----|
| NEILA LECLAND <i>Bloody Hands</i> .....                    | 77 |
| LOUIS DIVIZIO <i>Once Upon a Not-So-Happy Easter</i> ..... | 80 |

## The Mind's Eye

|                         |   |     |
|-------------------------|---|-----|
| RENEE COLOMBE           | <i>All a Dream</i> .....  | 87  |
| J. B. ROSS              | <i>The Amazing Shoes</i> .....  | 89  |
| MAX GROSSMAN            | <i>Captured</i> .....   | 93  |
| MARGARET ALBRECHT       | <i>A Day in the Life of Flyer</i> .....   | 96  |
| ANDREW SCHELBERG-MILLER | <i>Everything Isn't as It Seems</i> .....   | 100 |
| SALEM A. EZZ            | <i>Friend or Foe?</i> .....   | 104 |
| MARTELL DUCKER          | <i>The Galactic Magician</i> .....  | 112 |
| ARIANA HILLARY BARKIN   | <i>The Girl with Rosebud Hair: A Mystery</i> .....  | 115 |
| JAY WINKLER             | <i>Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Destiny</i> .....  | 119 |
| KRISTYN LEWIS           | <i>Gwen's Gift</i> .....  | 123 |
| REBECCA WURSTER         | <i>The Horrible, Unbearable, Unrealistically Terrible,<br/>Scary, and Not Scrumdiddlyumptious Truth About Middle School ...</i> ..... | 135 |
| PATRICK HEUSER          | <i>The Last Legends</i> .....   | 138 |
| ERIN ELIZABETH BAY      | <i>The Magic of Capseen</i> .....   | 140 |
| LUCIANA DAVIES          | <i>Margaret's Wolf</i> .....  | 142 |
| RJ GIBSON               | <i>A Ninja Named Scorpion</i> .....   | 150 |
| HILARY BISKNER          | <i>Puppy Trouble</i> .....  | 152 |
| JOSHUA THOMAS           | <i>The Quest of a Lifetime</i> .....  | 156 |
| TREVOR LYBECK           | <i>Tatsu</i> .....  | 159 |
| MYLES WILLIAMS          | <i>Time Twisters</i> .....  | 168 |
| STEPHANIE ALEXANDER     | <i>To First Grade and Back</i> .....  | 174 |
| MIMI KARABULUT          | <i>Too Many Monkey Secrets</i> .....  | 180 |

## Nothing but the Truth

|                 |                                |     |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|-----|
| SHAYNA STILLMAN | <i>Dance</i> .....             | 185 |
| GIOVANI NAMOU   | <i>A Dog's Story</i> .....     | 189 |
| CHASEY MILLAR   | <i>My Friend Kat</i> .....     | 190 |
| CLAIRE REID     | <i>The Great Surgery</i> ..... | 192 |

## Team Spirit

|                   |                                   |     |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|
| NOLAN PROCTER     | <i>The Life of Carlos</i> .....   | 195 |
| ZACHARY N. SILVER | <i>Nationals</i> .....            | 199 |
| J.J. BITTKER      | <i>The Slow Motion Shot</i> ..... | 203 |

## The Twelfth Month

|                   |  |     |
|-------------------|--|-----|
| ALEX BROOKS       | <i>The Christmas That Almost Didn't Happen</i> ..... | 209 |
| PETER NAGLE       | <i>The Jewish Santa</i> .....                        | 212 |
| CHELSEY JACKSON   | <i>The Kid Who Sued Santa</i> .....                  | 214 |
| DANIEL DU COMB    | <i>The Leprechauns Who Saved Christmas</i> .....     | 216 |
| SAMANTHA HABOWSKI | <i>My First Real Christmas</i> .....                 | 225 |
| HEATHER SWARTHOUT | <i>You Can't Take Over Christmas</i> .....           | 228 |

## Twists and Turns

|                 |                                       |     |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-----|
| SEAN B. ALPINER | <i>Computer Nerds</i> .....           | 235 |
| SARAH SILVER    | <i>The House of Many Riches</i> ..... | 238 |
| MARIE SANDE     | <i>Keetcha</i> .....                  | 242 |
| CELIA GALLOU    | <i>Mystery Treasure</i> .....         | 246 |
| VERONICA BERGER | <i>A New State of Mind</i> .....      | 248 |
| SEAN M. KING    | <i>Power Loss</i> .....               | 250 |

## Whodunnit?

|                    |                                      |     |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|
| SARA RIVERA        | <i>The Cadberry Tragedy</i> .....    | 255 |
| ALISON HUNTER      | <i>The Hotel Case</i> .....          | 259 |
| MONIQUE J. WHEELER | <i>The Missing Apple Juice</i> ..... | 262 |
| KATE KELLY         | <i>The Principal's Brother</i> ..... | 264 |
| ALICIA COLLEY      | <i>Where Is Shari?</i> .....         | 267 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Index of Authors and Titles</b> ..... | 275 |
|--|-----|





Mr. Fisher would like to express his pride in the efforts of those whose stories appear in this book. He reminds these authors that if writing like this were easy, everybody would be doing it.



AGAINST THE  
BACKDROP OF  
HISTORY



# My Story

*In the days after the heart-stopping attack on Pearl Harbor, a girl tells what she learns about suffering in **MY STORY**, by **Hannah Almeter**.*

January 1, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

I remember way before this war started for anyone, when everything was peaceful. We didn't have to wait in agony for when the paper was delivered. Just this past December 7, 1941, everything changed. The Americans got involved in the war. That day was especially bad for us. It's not been that long, only twenty-six days. Whenever I think about it, it still hurts. You see, on that day I was home with my older brother, Andy, and my younger sister, Lanny. All of a sudden we heard booms, louder than thunder in the worst of storms. We heard them over and over. We all went to the kitchen, wondering if a supposedly extinct volcano had erupted. We heard police sirens all about. All of our neighbors were going outside, wondering, like us, what had happened. My brother left us for a moment to turn on the radio.

“... Japanese bombers. They dropped bombs on the military ships in Pearl Harbor. Coast Guard searching for survivors...”

At that point I stopped listening. United States ships in Pearl Harbor, bombed? Searching for survivors? My brother Kevin

was on a ship in that harbor. I was filled with dread, shaking. I prayed that it wasn't his ship that was hit. I started to listen again.

“... Stay in house. Go into severe storm position.  
Don't panic, this is a message from your Coast  
Guard ...”

Andy got up and went and turned it off. Silently we all went under our kitchen table. Lanny was crying. We all hoped that Kevin hadn't died. Mom and Dad would hopefully be home soon. Maybe they would know if .... no, I told myself, there will be no ifs.

Our parents came home an hour later. They shouted frantically for us. They were running, trying to find us. They didn't know if Kevin had died. The next few days were horrible. The worst in my life. The suspense of not knowing was what really got you. We hated answering the phone or door for the fear that someone was there to confirm our fears. At the same time we hoped it was someone who would tell us he was alive.

Four days after the bombing, we got a phone call from the army. When Mom got off, all she had to do was nod, and we knew that Kevin had died. We all couldn't believe it. We were beyond tears. We went numb with shock. I couldn't think. No one could. A few days later we were going about our normal business, but it was like we were there physically, not really mentally.

One week later, we went to his funeral. That bleak gray-black scene was all too familiar to me. It seemed like I had been to a hundred funerals already. Some of the people I knew, some I didn't know.

At Kevin's funeral, I knew mostly everyone. Some were Papa's friends, though. Kevin's girlfriend, Carrie, was there. Also his best friend Chris was there. Everyone was still getting over the shock. Everyone still is.

January 26, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

Yesterday was Andy's birthday. Today he went in and signed up for the Marines. We all knew he would since today he is turning eighteen. Mom had finally consented. Andy felt that it was his duty to sign up. For the next week, he is going to be in training camp. Then he will go over to Europe.

It's raining a lot.

February 3, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

Today, Andy left for Europe. Before he left he was allowed to come home and say goodbye. Mother made him his favorite dinner. We all tried to look happy, but we didn't quite succeed. After dinner when he had to leave we went with him to the dock, from which a boat would take him to Los Angeles. From there he would take a train to Boston. Then, from Boston, he'd take another ship to Europe. We didn't cry at the dock. We knew we had to be strong. A few other people were there, but it was just mainly us, because people were so used to people leaving. Afterwards, though, the tears came as fast and heavy as the spring rain. I all out hate this war.

February 6, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

Rain, rain, go away, come again another day (after my lifetime).

February 10, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

It's letting up. Today was Lanny's birthday. She said that the rain letting up was the best birthday present ever. We took her out to a restaurant to eat. She's having her friend Kylie over tomorrow.

February 11, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

School is supposedly starting up again soon. I hope not. It's boring. I hate this war. The only conversational topic with Papa is war. I need to help this war end! More and more people are leaving to fight.

I received an invitation to a party today.

To the Receiver: You are invited to a party on Valentine's Day.

Place: Lulu Crunn's house

Date: Valentine's Day

Time: 12 noon till 4p.m.

That party's going to be so cool. LuLu lives right on the ocean. How can she hold a party, though? I guess it is Valentine's Day.

February 14, 1942 (Valentine's Day)  
Honolulu, Hawaii

I just got back from Lulu's. At Lulu's we went swimming in the ocean. Everyone acted as though they enjoyed the party. At least I did. It was nice, but I was too anxious about the war to really enjoy it. I have to sweep the house now.



March 4, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

I really want to go be a Red Cross nurse, but Papa refuses. I especially want to be one because Andy wrote home that there is a shortage of nurses.

March 10, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

I'm not speaking to Papa.

March 12, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

Still not speaking to him.

April 2, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

Sorry I haven't written in so long, but school did start up. The teachers are loading us up with homework. I wonder where Andy is. I don't know. I've been thinking about the Red Cross. I'm going to go join it. You might say I was running away. I guess I am. I have one hundred dollars saved up. It was for a radio. Now it's for a boat ride to Hawaii Island. One way. I'll have to lie about my age, but only by two years. I'll have to say that I'm eighteen. My boat ride is for the fourteenth, when Papa, Mom, and Lanny are at Lanny's conference. Lanny knows, but she won't tell. When I get to the Island, I'll become a nurse. I'm going to do it.

April 12, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

I've started packing. Just two days. Some clothes, books, and extra money. I'm going to miss everyone, though. I really hope this works. I don't have enough money left for a home trip.

April 14, 1942  
The Voyager, Pacific Ocean

I'm aboard the ship. In a few hours I'll be signing up as a nurse. I'm going to go check my bags. I'm starting to get a little nervous. I'm really excited, though.

Later  
Red Cross, Hawaii

I just finished signing up. The chairman of the volunteer special services, Mrs. Von Holt, was really nice. The Hawaii Red Cross chapter is the only chapter in combat zone. I'm going to volunteer in the hospital. I start tomorrow. I'm also going to board there. No fee, since I'm volunteering.

April 20, 1942  
Honolulu, Hawaii

I just got back from helping today. I received a telegram from Lanny saying that Andy was coming home. He had gotten shot in the leg. I can't wait! I get tomorrow off from volunteering. I hope that Andy's leg isn't in serious condition. All I can do until then is wait. That's all life really is, waiting.

# Ramses and the Royal Family

*Once upon a time in Egypt, trouble comes to the princess, queen, and king. In **RAMSES AND THE ROYAL FAMILY** by **Carly Tiffany**, all of Egypt is affected, and there is only one person who can help.*

Back in the time when the second pharaoh ruled, there was a princess named Nefertiti. When she and the Egyptians were in danger, there was only one person to look to. But would that one person be enough?

Nefertiti was a beautiful girl with long silky brown hair. Also, she had blue eyes and tan skin. Everyone loved her, especially one man who'd do anything to get her.

Nefertiti was in love with Ramses and he was in love with her. When Nefertiti told her parents she wanted to marry Ramses, they told her that that cannot be arranged because he was a commoner. Also, he wasn't suited for her. So, they arranged for her to meet what her parents called "the best suited men" for her! They set up the room and set hot green tea out with flowered china cups.

"Nefertiti! Come here, the men are arriving!" called her mother, wearing her pink silky dress. "And could you at least give these men a chance? I mean Ramses, or whatever his name is, is not even royalty! The men are quite good looking and are fit for royalty, and are better than Ramses!"

"Mother, I told you, I love Ramses and he loves me, and I will turn down all the men in Egypt for him!" fussed Nefertiti, with her hair pulled back and wearing a purple blouse and skirt. "Plus, you don't even know Ramses!"

Her mom just turned and directed Nefertiti to the sitting room. Next, the men were coming and going, being turned down by Nefertiti. Then, there came a man named Ocmed. He was big and bold with broad shoulders and a beard, wearing a blue ruffled shirt with black pants.

“Hello, princess, my name is Ocmed,” he said with his strong voice.

“Hello, Ocmed, you may call me Nefertiti,” Nefertiti said politely.

“Please tell us something about you!” her mother said eagerly.

*Look at mother. She’s practically breathing down his neck. She adores him, but I despise him!* thought Nefertiti as she sat cross-legged on the cushioned chair.

“I do not like to be told I can’t do something when I can, and I will do anything to make a lady happy,” boomed Ocmed.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, Ocmed, but I will have to leave you and Nefertiti alone,” said her mother, giving Nefertiti a look.

*I know what she thinks and its not going to happen!* said Nefertiti to herself, smiling.

Later that evening, Nefertiti walked up to her mother proudly and told her that she turned down Ocmed. Her mother was positively shocked that she revealed the inside of her mouth! Her mother tried to make her reconsider, but she couldn’t. Fortunately Nefertiti had an excuse to escape her mother’s jaws of life. “Mother, I am quite tired and need my beauty sleep. Good night!” Nefertiti pecked her mother on the cheek and then turned away with a grin on her face.

After being turned down by Nefertiti, Ocmed felt that if he couldn’t have her, no one could! Then Ocmed remembered an old friend from high school named Nida. Nida always talked about how she would do anything to rule Egypt and how she’d do anything for him. Ocmed got hold of Nida and told her about her perfect opportunity while they began to devise a plan.

Everyone was sound asleep in the kingdom, except for Nida and some of her men. Nida and her men tiptoed into the

kingdom and began to capture the guards. Tap, tap, tap, and swish! Tap, tap, tap, and swish! All the guards were captured and tossed into the dungeon.

Then Nida, wearing a black dress with a gold dragon in the middle, made her way to the throne. “You two men go into the girl’s room,” sneered Nida. “You two go into the parents’ room,” whispered Nida. Tap, toe, tap, the guards entered Nefertiti’s room and grabbed her long silky hair, and dragged her to Nida. Tap, tap, toe, two guards entered Nefertiti’s parents’ room and grabbed them by their clothes and carried them out to Nida.

“Hmm, what shall I do? I’ve got it!” shouted Nida. “I’ll throw you in the dungeon and let you rot with the others!” Nida said with a grin so big it was from ear to ear. BOOM! They hit the dungeon wall and were locked away as if they were thieves!

When people started wondering where their leaders were, Nida told them they were on a long vacation. Then, she began taking over Egypt bit by bit! The Egyptians didn’t realize what they had gotten into until people were being put in the dungeon for missing their true leaders.

Ramses was in deep thought because Nefertiti never mentioned a vacation. Plus, they can’t go on vacation. But than Ramses remembered overhearing a man and a woman saying something about putting the king and queen and Nefertiti in the dungeon. He needed proof. He thought if someone was able to get out a letter, they might have mentioned something about them being in the dungeon. Ramses went around and asked everyone who had a family member in the dungeon if they had received a letter.

“Yes, I received a letter,” responded a beautiful lady with blonde hair. The lady told Ramses there is a man that receives the letters from a barred window and gives them to the people. “Here’s the letter.” The lady handed the letter to Ramses.

Dear Jasmine,

I have some nerve-wracking news! It seems Nida, our so-called leader, has locked Nefertiti and her parents in the dungeon. Please send some

help and food. We are being starved. I miss you like I miss my bed!

Kisses and Hugs,  
Esmerelda

That's all the proof Ramses needed. He needed a plan. Ramses gathered some close friends and they began to come up with a plan.

"Shhh! They might hear us!"

"Nefertiti, are you in there? It's Ramses?" he whispered.

"Ramses! Oh, how I longed to see your face again. Please help us!" cried Nefertiti.

"Don't worry, we have a plan," explained Ramses. CLUNK! They bars fell off as Ramses melted the bars of the window with a bunch of sticks on fire. Ramses and his friends jumped into the dungeon. "Okay, here's the plan. This is how it will go...."

"Ahh!" came a piercing scream from a girl in the dungeon.

"What's that noise? Whatever it is, you two guards kill them!" shouted Nida.

The guards were holding big sticks, but as they entered, the sticks were hit out of their hands. Ramses and his friends grabbed the sticks.

"So what are you guards going to do?" asked Ramses. BOOM! The guards knocked out a couple of Ramses's friends. Then, the next minute you know, Ramses and the rest of his friends knocked the guards out. "Everyone except the girl leave through the window," said Ramses.

"Wait, I'd like to stay," said Nefertiti.

"We will see you soon," called her parents.

"Ahh!" screamed the girl again.

"What is it this time?" Nida yelled. "All of you guards except Ocmel go and strangle that prisoner!" The guards began to march to the dungeon.

BOOM! Ramses and his friends swung with sticks at the guards but it wasn't enough. WABAM! The guards hit some of Ramses's friends with their fists. BOOM! Ramses and his friends took one more swing and knocked the guards out.

"I think they finally got the prisoner. Well, I'm going to bed. Ocmed, stay guard," said Nida.

Ramses and his friends crept to Nida's room. When Ramses saw Ocmed, he set off sleeping smoke by pushing a button. He got a little gadget from a friend. CLUNK! Ocmed fell on the floor.

"Tie him up," Ramses said as he carefully tied Nida's hands and legs together. Then Ramses trapped Nida and Ocmed with a net.

"What's going on?" shouted Nida.

"You move, you die!" commanded Ramses. WHAM! Ramses swung his fist right at Nida's face. That knocked Nida out. Ramses and his men took Nida and Ocmed by their arms and legs and threw them in the dungeon.

Later that day, everyone got cleaned and went to sleep to be ready for a party the next day. Food, music, laughter, and joy filled the streets of Egypt, for their true leaders were back! The next day the king and queen banished Ocmed, Nida, and her men to a faraway desert.

Next, Nefertiti's parents apologized to Nefertiti and Ramses and told Ramses it would be an honor if he were the prince of Egypt. "Oh, thank you, mother!" cried Nefertiti.

Everyone began to plan for the wedding. And everyone was invited. Nefertiti's gown was gorgeous. It had diamonds and pearls on it! Also, there were flowers everywhere in the kingdom. Ramses wore a crown and a very rare suit. The party was fabulous and the cake was enormous! Everything had gone right that day!

"You complained so much about being a princess, and yet you have so much!" laughed Ramses.

"Well, that's before I married you!" giggled Nefertiti.

A year passed and the kingdom was filled with the sun's happiness. Nefertiti, Ramses, and the king and queen were

especially happy! They found out Nefertiti was going to have a baby!

After nine months Nefertiti finally had a baby girl! “What should I name her?” asked Nefertiti.

“How about Jasmine?” responded the queen.

“No, how about Gem?” questioned the king.

“No, I have it. How about Cleopatra?” said Ramses.

“Yes, it fits her beautifully,” smiled Nefertiti.

The kingdom and the people were never the same again. Who knows what will come their way? But surely they’ll know how to handle it.



# Surprise at Sea!

*Two men start out from England on an exciting cruise across the Atlantic during World War II. But just as the celebration gets under way, the enemy crashes the party in **SURPRISE AT SEA**, by **Joe Cypert**.*

I ran down the hall, the tickets held in my hands. I burst into the hot, humid room, and yelled, “Miles! Miles! Where are you?”

“In here!” he replied from the kitchen of the small apartment that my stepbrother and I shared.

“I got the tickets!” he said.

“You did?”

“Yeah!” Oh, by the way, the tickets we have been talking about are tickets that we ordered for a new ship that is still being built! The *Lady Jane* is the newest ship in the world. Yeah, the tickets were only third class above the boiler room, but who cares? It is a nice ship!

Will O’Brian, our friend, told us about the ship. He also told us he was going to be an officer on board

We would leave a month later, but we started to pack that same day. The year was 1942. We lived in Cromer, England and were headed for the U.S. of A. You know, that big country over the Atlantic that everybody is getting rich in.

On the day we got to the docks, we were met by a crowd of what seemed like one million people. Most were people waving goodbye to friends and family. We saw our long-time friend, Will.

“Well, hello there, Joseph and Miles! What brings ya here?” He was wearing a navy blue uniform and a white cap.

“Did you steal that from an officer, Will?” Miles joked.

“Shows how much you listen. He’s an officer!” I said.

“I forgot.” Miles attempted to save himself from humiliation.

“We’d better be going now,” I said. We were checked for disease. They found none, and let us board.

It was beautiful! Everywhere was oak and electric lights and carpets and brass and I know you will not believe this, but elevators! Electricity and elevators were rare on ships at that time.

We found our room, F23. It had iron bunk beds that were freshly painted ivory white. The wood floor was so shiny I could see my face. It had a brass sink that was freshly hand-polished. I walked across the floor to take a look out of the porthole, and discovered a view of pure navy that extended to the horizon. It reminded me of a crumpled officer’s uniform. Then we went on deck. It was amazing how high we were.

The anchor was raised. There was a quiet roar of the engine as it started. All around I heard voices of people saying goodbye. Some were wishing they could come on the journey to escape their lives on land. Some were waving goodbye to their loved ones for the last time, and we were off, racing over the open ocean!

The Second World War was still going on, so the Nazis had been targeting a lot of ships, military and non-military, but I wasn’t afraid. The reason is at that time all steamships looked like hospital ships.

Everything was wonderful! The food. The accommodations. And the speed!

We left on November 14, 1942, and we’d been at sea for three days and had no problems. I talked to Will. He said there were Nazi subs all over the area where we were headed.

I kept it secret, though. I gave it no mind. If only I knew...

On the fourth day, Miles and I slept in because we had been to a party the night before. In the bridge, an officer said, “Will, get a look through these.” Will took the binoculars and scanned the horizon.

“I don’t see anything. Hold on. What’s this?” he said as he saw a pole sticking straight out of the water. “It’s a...!” He stopped just as the Nazi sub fired two torpedoes at us! One hit a wave and tore into a first class room. The other hit the boiler room! You’re probably wondering why the sub did not show up

on radar. Well, most ships, especially non-warships, did not have radar.

I was sound asleep when suddenly I was jolted awake by the sound of a loud explosion. I knew just what it was. I jumped to the porthole and saw the second torpedo! My body filled with pure terror as the torpedo slammed into the boiler room. I had just left the Navy the year before, so I knew how much time we did not have. I yelled, "Run!" We got on the wood steps just as they exploded. The step under Miles was gone in an instant! He grabbed my leg, pulling me down with him. I grabbed the charred, splintering wood.

I pulled us both up and we ran up four flights of stairs to B deck. A few crewmembers were frantically trying to put out the fires the torpedoes had caused.

We went on deck and I ran to the bridge. Will was not there! I looked toward the lifeboats and saw him getting one lifeboat ready to be filled and launched. We hastily ran to help. We helped with all the lifeboats he did. But that was not much, because the ship was capsizing!

We got in the crew lifeboat and got some people that had jumped into the water, and rowed to the nearest ship, which was the *Olympic*. It took the rest of the day and all night to get there. We were the last lifeboat there, but we left while the ship was still above water.

We were all injured in some way. My hands were bleeding from holding on when the floor blew off. Miles had second-degree burns on his legs. But we didn't know what was wrong with Will.

We got on board the ship by way of nets lowered down to us like they did on the *California* when the *Titanic* sank.

We made it to the U.S. I became a pilot for the Air Force and then worked for NASA and sat in Mission Control for the first manned mission when John Glenn orbited Earth in Mercury. I now have twin daughters and a grandson. My wife, Martha, and I live in Cocoa Beach, Florida.

We found out that Will would be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life because of the major frostbite. He is now retired Admiral from the Navy and lives twenty minutes from my home.

Miles opened a party store in Brooklyn where he enjoys his seven children. His wife passed away a year ago.

We never went on a ship again.

We read later that all the boiler room workers were killed, as well as twenty out of the thirty crewmen, and one hundred out of the 2,258 passengers. Ten of the sixty officers died trying to save the passengers and ship. Eighty-seven children, four dogs and one cat were saved.

The captain went down with his *Lady Jane*.

CAN YOU RELATE?



# Always Be Yourself

*In ALWAYS BE YOURSELF by Mariah Van Ermen, Suzie moves to three different places in a short period of time. She finds it hard to make friends until she finally decides to be herself.*

Suzie Rogers has everything going her way, but all of a sudden her dad gets fired from his job as an auto mechanic. Things go from very happy to down in the dumps.

Her dad got a new job in two weeks flat. Suzie was filled with excitement when she heard the news. Life was good again for about two seconds, until her mom said, very happily, “Your father got hired at an army base in Colorado.” They would move in one week.

The days slowly rolled around. It was the big day, the dreaded day, the day the Rogers would move to Colorado.

When the Rogers got to Colorado, Suzie loved it. On Monday morning she went to school. It was fantastic, until she had to make friends. No matter what, Suzie could not fit in. She was like the ugly duckling. She tried to bribe people with cookies and cake. She told them jokes and even started imitating their habits. All they did was laugh and say, “No way can you hang out with us,” and stuck up their noses and walked away.

The days dragged by like a horse pulling a wagon up a long and steep hill. Thankfully, Suzie’s dad got transferred a little later.

This time the Rogers got transferred to Kansas. The same thing happened in Kansas. Everybody ignored Suzie and they rolled their eyes because it seemed foolish to them to ask them to be friends.

Suzie’s family stayed in Kansas about a year and a half. Mr. Rogers got transferred to Alabama.

This time Suzie felt much different. For some reason, she felt like she belonged. She did not know why she felt this way, but she did. This was her home. It felt like she had lived there all her life.

Suzie was still very nervous. Her knees trembled, but school on Monday was much different. People actually liked her and accepted her for who she was, not the girl she was trying to be.

Suzie learned that while being yourself you can accomplish many dreams. It doesn't matter how big or small they are. Be yourself and you can accomplish all your dreams.



# Beautiful, yet Bad

*Three friends learn the true meaning of “Never judge a book by its cover” in BEAUTIFUL, YET BAD, by Ramius Manière-Spencer.*

*Rrrriinnnggg!*

Joey Calbrog rushed down the hall. The doors leading outside burst open, full of chattering children. Fighting through the crowd, he hurried to the table usually over-stacked with school newspapers, which disappeared every Friday afternoon. He wanted to make sure he got one, because he missed out on important issues, activities and clubs.

“Yes!” Joey yelled, marveling at the fact that he got a newspaper and lived. Catching up to his friends, he smiled a smug smile and waved the newspaper.

“You got one!” yelled Terry Samena.

“Yeah,” Joey replied, “and I can already tell this’ll be the best issue yet!”

“Hope it has more clubs, or one good one,” Chris Mogie said, the tallest of the three. “Last issue had one, but it was-”

“Bad,” Terry yelled. “It was about aliens, but everyone knows they aren’t real, so there was no point to the club.”

Joey flipped to the back. “Hey! Lots of new clubs! How about the career club?”

“No, it’s boring,” said Chris.

“Well, how about the debate club?”

“Too loud. Nobody will listen.”

“Well, how about the cat club?”

“Cat club? What’s it say?”

“It says we get to learn about cats, their behavior, when, why, and how they do certain things, etc. It also says we get a free journal to record our findings in.”

“Cool!” Terry said. “My mom bought a kitten, so I can study him.”

“Mine has, too!” Chris and Joey said simultaneously.

“Looks like we’re going to the cat club,” Chris said. “Meet at my house tomorrow at 7:00 A.M.”

Everyone said ‘bye’ and left.

Everyone met at the same time, but it was still dark outside, and they were still sleepy and cold.

“Well, let’s go,” Terry said slowly. “Joey, where is it?”

“It says it’s on Maple and Pinewood, in the back.”

“In the back? What’s that mean?”

“In the backyard, I suppose.”

“Outside? It’s too cold!”

“It might be in the back of the house.”

“So they expect us to just walk in and find the back of the house?”

“It’s probably in the back of your brains,” Chris said fiercely.

“Can we go already? I’m freezing. We’ll probably find out when we get there!”

They started on their journey, but if it weren’t for the cars, traffic lights and post lamps, they would’ve gotten lost many times. When they finally arrived, they were wide awake.

“I see a light in the backyard,” Terry said. “So you were right, Joey.”

“Yeah, yeah, let’s just go.”

They went in the backyard to find the light beaming from a tree house.

“Pretty lame, don’t you think?” Chris asked.

“Considering it has electricity, I’d say it’s pretty good,” Terry said in a matter-of-fact tone. They climbed in to find many people excited there.

“Welcome to the cat club!” a woman started. “I am Mrs. Fragnart, the instructor for this club. This is a brief meeting explaining what to do, and to get your journals.”

She looked around at everyone.

“The point of this is to help you understand how cats interact with the same thoughts, plans and things in mind as us. This will help you understand why they act differently.” Everyone started talking. “Other than the fact that they’re cats, not humans.” The room became silent. “Once you get your journals, you may leave.”

Everyone grabbed a journal and left. When they got outside, they all started bragging about how many good (and funny) things they would have. However, none of them knew the problems that could occur.

The next Saturday, everyone was in good spirits--except Joey, Terry and Chris.

“Now, I hope everyone has good news to share,” Mrs. Fragnart said. Hands shot up.

“Now...Joey, why don’t you share your findings with us?” He didn’t know how he was picked among all the others, but he shared it anyway.

“Well, I found out that if you play with them, they might take it too seriously and attack.” Everyone looked confused.

“Anything else?”

“Other than the fact that they can hurt you, no.”

“Interesting. Terry, share your findings.”

“Same story.”

“What?”

“Same story.” Everyone else laughed.

“Chris, give us something positive, please.”

“I don’t have anything positive to share.”

“Give us the least negative one you have, then!”

There was a long pause. “My kitten learned how to steal.”

Everyone else howled.

Mrs. Fragnart looked at a clock. "Time's up! I'll see you all next Saturday!" She looked at Joey, Terry and Chris. "And bring something positive."

That Wednesday, Joey and Chris confronted Mrs. Fragnart in the school.

"Mrs. Fragnart, please tell me something," Joey said. "I decided that my kitten's behavior is unexplainably negative. Some actions might be slightly like that of a stray. Can you please tell me what's going on?"

"Well, Joey, you might have gotten a kitten from a 'bad batch.'"

"But it's so beautiful! How could it be so bad?"

"Appearance is not everything." Moreover, she left them with that.

The next Saturday, neither Joey, Chris, nor Terry ever arrived.

"Kids, three people aren't here because of their cats," Mrs. Fragnart said. There were many questions.

"It's as simple as this: They got kittens from a 'bad batch.' It's like this: They got the beautiful yet snobby ones, whereas they could have gotten regular breeds with normal attitudes."

She looked around at everyone.

"I'm sure we all learned a lesson: Never judge a book by its cover."

# Disappeared

*When one girl is the target of selfish and spiteful behavior by fellow classmates, she chooses to take the high road. In **DISAPPEARED** by **Rachel Weisz**, optimism proves stronger than cruelty.*

Sometimes I wish I could just disappear. I wish I could start all over and feel free to live life the way I want to, not the way others want me to.

Being ostracized from the sixth grade changed my outlook on life. Although I still try to live my life with one of my father's favorite phrases in my mind--"Is the cup half empty or half full?"--choosing that the cup is half full isn't always simple. Depression and anger are emotions I try not to experience, but I do get depressed and angry sometimes when I look upon my past and present. However, I know my future will be bright.

I know that you must be wondering why I'm babbling on and on like this (it's a tendency of mine; it runs in the family), so before I bore you any longer I present you my story of my sixth-grade life!

It started out on a Monday morning in late August at 8:15 A.M. It was the first day of school. Wait, let me see; nothing exciting happened that day, so let's move to November, right before Thanksgiving Break. I had just been moved up to a seventh-grade French class and I was ecstatic! French class was interesting but a little too easy, and I was ready for a challenge! Seventh-grade French class would be just the right thing for me. I had already met the seventh-grade French teacher, Madame Kratt. I thought she was very nice and I looked forward to being one of her students. While walking down to the cafeteria for lunch, I heard someone yell out my name and say, "Rose, we want to talk you."

I turned, and it was none other than the infamous pop posse. The pop posse was made up of the three most popular girls in the sixth grade. They were Maria, Austin and Sydney. Let's just say they weren't the nicest people around. They might have been stylish, but nice? I don't think so. I had learned that one of the ways to combat these people was to act like them, but sarcastically. So I said "OK, what do you want to talk to me about? Clothes, boys, the latest issue of *Instyle*? Or do you want to talk about Kate Hudson's or Reese Witherspoon's new chick flick?"

"Actually, we wanted to talk to you about that seventh-grade French class you're in," Sydney said with a bit of dry wit in her tone.

"Yeah, what about it?" I asked.

"If you didn't already know, French is my turf. For some reason the stupid French teachers didn't think I was ready for seventh-grade French and they thought you were, so if I were you, I'd watch it. You'd be surprised to see what three girls with a goal can do," Maria snapped at me. Then the pop posse turned away, flipped their hair and walked into the bathroom to most likely touch-up their make-up.

At the time of that incident I didn't think much of the pop posse, besides the fact that they were airheads and were completely oblivious to the fact that it's common courtesy to be nice to other people. When Maria said that I should watch it, she meant it. In the next few months I was going to experience life and mental pain as never before.

Instead of going into long detail about what happened between me, and Maria, Austin and Sydney, I'll give you a condensed version. In the next few days I heard people at school spreading rumors about me. It didn't bother me because I knew that I didn't have a crush on what's-his-name and I knew that I didn't have dyed auburn hair. But, the rumors intensified and people said things about me that are too awful to write. After that, the pop posse turned almost the whole grade against me, and I was left with virtually no friends. Even though every night I went home and cried because of the pain and loneliness I felt, I still tried to be kind to everyone. As my mother says, "You can

get more bees with honey than vinegar." Since I mention my mother, I might as well tell you that my parents were a big support system for me. I told them everything and they really helped me when there was no one else.

Although it seems like what I went through at school wasn't much, if you experience it you get a much different view of what's going on. I had never wanted to change schools because that would have meant I was giving up, but I have to say that when my father was transferred to France for his job, I was quite relieved. I mean, switching to any school would have been fine, but going to another school on the other side of the Atlantic--well, that was just great! And better yet, I was quite good at French, the whole reason I got into this problem!

It may seem like I've disappeared to some people, but I know I haven't. I'm here in France living a happy life. If I wouldn't have changed schools (more like changed countries!) I still would have kept on trying to be kind and live a normal life at my school. I'm happy I kept a happy outlook for my future, because now I'm not bitter and angry about my problems. I just accept them. And I didn't disappear. My problems disappeared.

# A Family Is Waiting For Me

*A new life with an adopted family in the United States brings a world of changes to a girl from China. Her story is told in **A FAMILY IS WAITING FOR ME**, by **Juliane L. Vogl**.*

I lived in an orphanage in China. My name is Li and I am nine years old. I had been living there since I was three years old. I was told that my parents died in a car accident, and they both had very few relatives. The people in the orphanage are very nice. I made friends with some of the girls my age.

One day Mrs. Chang called me into her office. I was afraid I did something wrong. I was nervous but Mrs. Chang smiled at me and asked me to sit down. She had important news to tell me. A family living in North Carolina wanted to adopt an older child. They had one son who was an only child. The Edwards wanted a daughter and decided to adopt. Mrs. Chang thought we would be a perfect match.

I waited for six weeks for the day to arrive. I was sad to leave my friends but excited to have a family. I worried about a lot of things, too. Would they like me? Would I like them? What would my room look like? I couldn't even picture going to school in the United States. Luckily English was one of the subjects they taught in my school in China.

One thing I wouldn't miss in the orphanage is that every night I didn't get to sleep until midnight because the babies kept crying and crying. Being there really made me want to have a family even more than ever. I hoped I would get a family without squalling babies. During the day it was awful, too, because all the kids that are five and under get 98 percent of the attention. That means



that the nine-year-old group (I'm in that group) gets two percent of the attention.

The day arrived when Mrs. Chang came towards my room. She was there to tell me that the Edwards had arrived and were waiting for me in the reception area. I was so excited and nervous. I ran down the hall and opened the door to the reception room and there was my new family. Mrs. Edwards was crying and hugged me very tightly. Mr. Edwards gave me a big hug, too. Their son Max did not look very happy to meet me. He just looked down at the floor. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards got mad at him, but he continued to ignore me.

Leaving the orphanage was very sad. I had to say goodbye to my friends. They were like sisters to me. Mrs. Chang arranged a big party in the cafeteria for me. The Edwardses were there, too. My friends and the Edwardses got along great, but as usual Max seemed to hate everything, including me.

Time seemed to be going by so quickly, and before I knew it I was on the plane going to North Carolina. It was the first time I was on an airplane and it was exciting. The bad part of the trip was sitting next to Max. His manners were terrible. He kicked the chair in front of him so many times the person in front of him turned around and told him to stop. He took his bag of potato chips and popped the bag open with his hands, causing the chips to fly all over the place. I even had chips in my hair.

Luckily, Mrs. Edwards switched seats with Max. The rest of the trip was much nicer. She taught me how to play American games like hangman and checkers.

When we were driving home from the airport, I started noticing how different the United States was from China. For one thing, there weren't as many bicycles on the street. Everyone looked much taller than the people in China, too. I couldn't believe my eyes. There were so many fast food restaurants: McDonalds, Wendy's, Taco Bell, Burger King, White Castle and Little Caesars.

The Edwardses had a beautiful house with lots of pretty flowers and trees. I had the tour of their home and finally saw my new room. It was so awesome, filled with all kinds of stuffed

animals, and the closet was full of pretty clothes. I thought I must be the luckiest kid on earth. I couldn't stop smiling. My one worry was Max. Would he ever accept me? I decided to ask Mrs. Edwards if she knew why Max did not like me.

She explained to me that Max would be having some problems adjusting to this new situation. He was very happy being the only child and he was a little spoiled. He begged his parents for a brother, but the Edwardses always wanted to have a daughter.

The Edwardses had a big dinner on Sunday, the day after my arrival. Mr. Edwards was funny and told me he would help me become a football star one day. Mr. Edwards is a football coach and coaches Max on the weekends. Mrs. Edwards teaches art at the high school and she is very creative. The dinner was a unique experience. Mrs. Edwards made steak, mashed potatoes, and a few oriental dishes to make me feel at home.

Mr. Edwards was telling a lot of jokes. I was laughing so hard my stomach started to hurt. Every once in a while I looked at Max and he looked very unhappy. I think he was feeling jealous. I looked over at Max again and this time he had a smug look on his face. He loaded his spoon with mashed potatoes and then flung it at my face. I was so shocked, but I found myself fighting back. I put both hands in the bowl of mashed potatoes and threw a big clump of potatoes in his face. He looked so funny. He wiped the potatoes from his eyes so he could see.

Mrs. Edwards sternly sent us to our rooms. I thought, this is great, I am in trouble on my first day. I was sitting on my bed listening to music, and to my surprise Max walked in.

He said, "My mom made me apologize to you. I was surprised you fought back. For a girl, you are pretty cool. I guess having a sister won't be that bad after all." That made me feel really good because I knew that Max and I were going to have more fights in the future. But, I also believe that Max and I are going to become good friends in the future, too.

# From Riches to Happiness

*In FROM RICHES TO HAPPINESS by Jordan Reid, a young girl is puzzled by the changes in her family's circumstances. What secret is her father hiding?*

"Wow, isn't this a charming view?" I said to my brother. I never imagined we would have our own lake! It feels like we are rich living here. I am very confused how we can afford this delightful house. I have been trying to get Daddy to answer, but he always changes the subject. Dad is only a construction worker who makes \$19,000 per year. I am only thirteen and have my own big screen TV and a walk-in closet the size of my old house.

Our old house was in a rough neighborhood, with the house all messy, things out of order, and everything cluttered. There was trash rolling in the streets and speeding cars flying by. There was little food in the fridge, but just enough. Everyone seemed to be doing just fine when we lived there. I know why we moved, but I wonder how we were able to do it.

"Tracy, it's time to go out to dinner," my mom yelled from the bottom of the stairs. As I walked down the winding staircase, I spotted the pool outside. The pool in our backyard caught my attention. I am still not used to having a pool in my yard. I slipped on my leather coat with the fur trim and walked outside. I saw a shiny, black convertible sitting in the driveway.

My dad hopped out and said, "How do you like it?"

"Like it? I love it! It's wonderful. Can we take a ride before dinner?"

"Only if Mom says yes. She is still upstairs trying to get Jimmy to come. You know how five-year-olds are!"

As Mom walked outside, Dad said, "I will meet you there. I have to make a quick stop."

"But Daddy, what about going for a ...?"

"Honey, I have to go."

"OK, dear," my mother yelled. "Just make it quick!"

"Can I go with you, Dad?" I said.

"No. I will see you at dinner," he replied.

As Mom, Jimmy and I walked into the van, I wondered why Dad did not let me go with him. What was he doing?

On the way to the restaurant, Jimmy brought up that Dad had been acting differently. I said to myself, "Jimmy is right. Dad has been acting odd."

"We are here," Mom said. The restaurant was extremely creative! I had never seen such a place. The paintings on the walls said something to me, such as being in the forest, or sitting in the sand on the beach. Each one had its own special message, like the pictures were telling me something that I needed to know.

As we went to take our seats, all of the silverware and fancy glasses caught my eyes. Each had a tint of shine under the lighting. In not more than five minutes the waitress came to take our orders. My brother and mom went first. Then the waitress asked me what I would like.

I said, "I will have the small chef salad."

The waitress said, "Okay then. I will be back with your meals in about twenty minutes."

"Why did you only get a salad, honey?" my mom said to me in a soft voice.

"I, uh, I am not that hungry."

"OK, sweetie."

Dad never showed up or even called. Later as we curved along our delightful driveway, Mom finally called dad on his cell phone. There was no answer.

Several hours later, he swooped toward the house. My mom went rushing out, asking him where he had been. He gave her the same answer he gave her every night. "It's business. You wouldn't understand."

The following morning we woke up and there was an eviction notice on our house. Plus, Daddy's car was gone!

"John, why is your car gone and there is an eviction notice on our door?"

Dad paused, as if he didn't know what to say. He looked sick. Finally, he drew a deep breath and said, "The bank came to get my car because I have not paid them back the money I owed them for it. I did not know things would happen this quickly. I have to tell you something, Sherry. You might want to sit down. For the past few months I have been gambling at night. I've been winning. I've won a lot, but not lately. I have lost almost everything we had. I am very sorry, honey. But it has been a huge problem for me."

Now it was my Mom's turn to search for words, but she accepted the situation quickly. "I am very disappointed in you. But I am willing to help you find help and figure out your problems." She wiped a tear off her cheek.

"Thank you, Sherry. Thank you very much. I appreciate this."

I had been listening in on their conversation. "Daddy, don't cry," I said. "Let's just go back to our old lifestyle. It doesn't seem like anyone is happy here anyway. I mean, our old lifestyle was not that bad. At least everyone was happy. What do you say?"

"Sounds great to me, honey."

# The Little Black Book

*Two girls stumble upon a handwritten journal that tells a startling tale. In **THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK** by **Michelle Schwartz**, a secret is exposed that once seemed hidden forever.*

Nikki and I found this black journal when we were cleaning the attic. It was in this little box called “Stuff.” We are going to look at it as soon as we finish cleaning out the attic. Who knows? Maybe we’ll find another journal after.

We’re finally done cleaning out the closet. Unfortunately we didn’t find another journal, but at least now we can read this one.

*July 10, 1937*

The psychologist told my mom to get me a journal to write my thoughts down. I have blond hair and blue eyes and my brother had the same. I go to Undercove Middle School, and am in seventh grade. My brother was the same. My brother Adam and I always played baseball with the kids in our neighborhood. One time when we were playing--I don’t feel like writing. Maybe I will tomorrow, but I doubt it.

*July 11, 1937*

Okay, where was I? So we were playing a really close game. By the top of the ninth the score was 2-2. My team was up. My brother and

I are always on different teams because we are the two best players and since we are twins everyone says it wouldn't be fair to double up. My team was batting. There were two outs, it was the bottom of the ninth, the bases were loaded, and I was up. I smacked the ball into the street (that is an automatic home run in the rules we play). When I was running, Ben yelled out, "Sam, your brother just got hit by a car!" He told me that a car was going about 70 miles an hour and Adam fell to the ground gushing blood. Alex ran and yelled, "Mrs. Deeps, Adam was just hit by a car! Get help!"

"Oh, my God," she replied. When the ambulance came, they took my mom and Adam, and told my dad to drive me to the hospital. We met them there. The nurse told me to wait in the waiting room, but my dad told her that I should go and see my brother. When I saw my brother he was alive, but I couldn't say anything because I was too sad. All I said was, "I love you."

I waited in the waiting room for about one hour until my parents came out so the doctors could check my brother. Two hours after that the doctor came over and told me he needed to talk to my parents for a little bit and told me to go over and play with the toys. When the doctor was done talking to my parents, my mom and dad came over to talk to me. They told me my brother was dead. I started crying even though it is embarrassing for a 13-year-old to cry. I didn't care, though. All I could say was, "Why did he die? What did he ever do that was so bad?"

"He did nothing. Some things just happen for no reason," my mom told me.

This is going to be the shortest diary/journal every. I'm going to hide it and never look at it

again. I'll put it in this little box in the attic and never look at it again, and if someone finds it then good for them. I don't really care because I never want to see it again.

"I want to find out who Adam really is, because we have the same last name," Lyla said.

"Let's look it up on the Internet," Nikki replied.

"Good idea."

Nikki had no luck. "I don't think you are related because it doesn't say there was anyone named Adam Deeps in your family. But we could always go ask your mom or dad."

"No, that wouldn't be a good idea. My mom will get too emotional and my dad will act all weird if Adam is related to me."

"Well, then, we'll ask your grandpa. His name is Sam and a kid named Sam wrote the journal."

"Good thinking. Let's go."

We went to go ask Grandpa Sam and he said with a whimper, "Oh, Adam was my brother." He started to cry, remembering his brother.

"Are you telling me that you're the person who wrote that journal that you never wanted to look at again?" Nikki asked.

"Yes, I was."

"Can you tell us what it was like when it happened?" Nikki and Lyla asked together.

"No, I promised myself I would never tell anyone about my twin. That day was so painful. I can't. I can barely look at the name Ada... oh, I can't even say it. I'm so sorry."

"Okay," the girls said in unison. Lyla said, "We understand that it must be painful, but maybe you'll want to look at the journal. We will go and get it for you." They ran to go get it, but when they got to Lyla's room, it was gone.

"Where could it be?" Nikki asked.

"I bet Sidney took it. She's always sneaking around and taking things that aren't hers. That seven-year-old twerp."

"Probably. Let's go get it from her."



They were right. They found Sidney looking at the journal, trying to read it. “No, I won’t give it to you. Why should I? You never do stuff for me,” Sidney said.

“Oh, yes we do,” Lyla said.

“What?”

“Ummmmmm, I’ll just go get Grandpa Sam.”

“Fine, I’ll give it to you on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“Tell me who wrote this,” she said, holding the journal.

“Deal. The person who wrote this is Grandpa Sam.”

“Ha, ha. I’m not gonna give it to you. You fell for the trap.”

“Grandpa Sam!” I yelled at the top of my lungs. “Sidney won’t give me that journal.”

“Fine, take the stupid journal. I don’t care about it.”

We went to go give the journal to Grandpa Sam, but when we took it to him he just started crying.

When Sidney walked into the room she asked, “Why is Grandpa Sam crying? Did he get a boo-boo?”

“No. Do you remember when I said Grandpa wrote that journal?” Lyla answered?

“Yeah.”

“Well, he wrote the journal after his brother died, and when he looks at it he remembers his brother, which makes him very sad.”

“Okay, but I want to hear the story.”

“I’ll read it out of the journal. I want to remember what I wrote,” Grandpa Sam said.

“Well, okay, then. Lyla, why don’t you come back to my house?” Nikki offered.

On the way home Nikki asked, “Lyla, do you think there is anything in my attic?”

“Well, let’s go look,” Lyla replied.

# Maddie's Hair Cut

*A new look brings new problems in MADDIE'S HAIR CUT, by Ashley M. Lewis.*

On September 3, I had a basketball game against the Sharp Tigers. My team was the Lightning Blue Jays from Blue Jay Elementary. I was the best player on my team. Once I even scored 15 points in one game! I'm Maddie, and here's a short story of my life.

It was the championship, but my hair was way too long to see. So when my friend Jordan threw me the ball, I missed, and also tripped, knocking over my coach. That same night my mom told me that the following day I was due to get a haircut.

The next day at school my two best friends, Jordan and June, were waiting for me on the rusted, steel stoop. I sat on the cold hard stoop when Prince walked by. Prince was one of those guys that takes looks for granted. Even though that was how he was, he was still so fine! As he walked by I said hi, but he silently walked pass without so much as a wave.

When I got home I changed into play clothes and began to play basketball in the driveway. My mom was there waiting for me to come out, as if she knew I would be home. Ten minutes later we were at Lady Lucy's Beauty Salon. My mom said, "Special," and I was scared. When I was finished, people said I looked different. Lady Lucy gave me a mirror to look at myself. This is what I saw: bright blue eyes, and pink rosy lips and cheeks.

Get this: The next day, Prince asked me to the Halloween dance. Even though I wanted to say yes, I soon figured out that he was taking advantage of my new look, the JERK!

Dorothy Ann was the snottiest girl on earth. She had hazel blue eyes, a bad sunburn, and white moon crescent, shiny lips. She thinks that she is a total guy magnet but she is wrong. The day when Prince asked me to the dance and I said no, she went from snob to boiling snob.

Anyway, every day Prince asked me to the dance and every day I said no. One day, Dorothy Ann was really trying to get his attention. When she asked him to the dance, he looked at me with big eyes but I shook my head in dismay. So he said yes, not knowing what he had started.

As Dorothy Ann passed by I yelled, “He doesn’t like you. He is either desperate or blind!” Then Dorothy Ann started to cry, harder and harder. She ran out of the building, away from the laughter. I didn’t see her until the next day just before the dance.

As we were getting ready for the dance, I followed Dorothy Ann into the locker room. When I put my hand on her shoulders she jerked away, and before I could say anything she ran out of the locker room. I stood there in a dim sort of twilight, my ankle bracelet shimmering in the dark. I silently got into my costume as a beautiful witch. I looked like the woman in the Addams family. Before long, I stood in a bathroom stall, weeping my heart out; you know, the way you feel when you’re new at school. I finally put on my black lipstick, slowly. I was a witch in need of her cat, in need of a comforting eye of newt.

In the gymnasium, I hardly recognized anyone. Even the gym was disguised. The walls were painted black with fake blood oozing out of cracks. Thick fog surrounded my feet and the dance floor was sparkling with glitter. The DJ played “Thriller” by Michael Jackson while a group of girls did a routine. They were dressed in straight black like the drama club. Jordan and June were in the group. I smiled and started to tap my feet. Before I knew it I was dancing, too. Later we did the Cha Cha Slide dance.

I saw neither Dorothy Ann nor Prince at the dance. My heart dropped once again thinking about her. As I walked to the locker room to change out of my costume, I could hear the DJ. The noise echoed as if it were bouncing off of springs on the wall.

I was confused about the way I felt. I felt mixed emotions. Next I heard the music get soft. I could envision what the gym looked like.

That night I had a dream about the people at school. My parents were rich and nice and I was happy. I looked out of my top bunk later that night and saw the familiar woods standing there. The branches of the tree scratched the roof when the wind howled and air leaked warmly through the cracks. I had always looked at them before and never wondered about the trees. But when nothing else is on your mind, all you can think about is the last thing on your mind.

I slowly got up and walked barefoot across the creaky, cold wood floor. I put on a heavy coat and snowshoes and started off to the woods. I heard owls going “Woo, Woo” and the rustling by the moonlit bay up the hill. I followed the sound of frogs and the river until I was at the top of the ice hill. It was cold, windy, and starting to rain.

I hurried home to get to shelter, afraid to catch cold. As I undressed, I listened to the crickets and prayed that one day I could be as cheerful. As I fell asleep, I realized that my life is too good to pass up. Tomorrow, I will be happy, and I will walk proudly past everyone. “I will not feel sorry for Dorothy Ann, anymore!” I said proudly and aloud.

So the next morning I did just that. I smiled as I walked with my head up. Proud.

# Up

*A dream of flight takes lyrical form in UP, by Lindsay Swarthout.*

The one place Lysa loved the most was the sky. That's where she was now, back and forth, back and forth on the bright red plastic playground swing. Flying free among the clouds. Free. No worries. Not worrying about taking out the garbage or next Friday's math test. Sky-high thoughts, limitless boundaries.

When she grew up, Lysa wanted to be an airplane pilot, to fly free among the clouds. Not touching the ground every seven seconds, such as now, but staying up, staying high. Staying free. Getting paid to make her dreams come true.

Now she was happy, up and down, up and down, the swing creaking for joy for beginning a dream, beginning a goal, a life ambition. Loving the idea of a start for one little girl. Her favorite pastime. The start of her future, the happiness of her present and the memories of her past. Opening a door in Lysa's life.

The plane over her head was more than happy to fly in circles over her head, to fly low over her head. With no reward. No reward but the giggles of a happy child, blowing in the breeze. No reward but her smiles as she tried to figure out where it was headed. Maybe Australia, maybe the Amazon, maybe Arizona. No reward but the sight of joy. Pure joy.

Tiny wildflowers were content, swaying round and round, round and round under her feet, pulsing with the joy that had a rhythm all its own, unique. So quiet and happy, so beautiful and joyful. A symphony you had to be a part of to hear.

Spring breezes added fragrance to the symphony, blowing the flowers' smell in teeny circles. Blowing color into her face, moving her light orange ponytail. All together uniting the

symphony as one. The wind enjoying the moment, then pressing forward, making room for more.

Lysa wanted to pilot a plane more than anything in the world. But for now she was happy on the swing. Back and forth. An opening porthole. A window of opportunity. Ultimate freedom. Flying. Up.

# You Shouldn't Care

*In YOU SHOULDN'T CARE by Mary Catherine Leier, a girl finds out that hair and clothes don't make the person, and you shouldn't worry about what people think of such surface details.*

Jessie was nice--well, to her friends, at least. She really had everything. Her family was great, and her friends were nice, and she got good grades. Most important (to her anyway), she was popular at school. To her, that was the life. Then everything went wrong, or so she thought. If you want to know what happened it's easy to explain, but we have to start from the beginning.

She lived in New York City with her mom, dad, little brother Mark, and little sister Jamie. One day like any other, she went to school. Everyone knew who she was. More than everyone knowing her name, the kids there just knew who she was. She was the popular girl. Either you liked her, wanted to be her, or didn't like her. Whenever something happened in her life, she would tell a friend, then the whole school would know. It was a chain. She'd tell one good friend, then that person would tell someone else. Everyone knew what was happening in Jessie's life. It was weird.

"So is it true? I mean that your parents are getting a divorce?" one of Jessie's good friends asked her.

"I doubt it. Wait, how do you know? I didn't tell you," Jessie said.

"Please. It's my job to know," her friend said.

"Well, even if it's going to happen, I'm staying here," Jessie said confidently to her friends.

"I hope so. We'd miss you."

Jessie looked at her friends, smiled, and said, "I'm not going anywhere." Then Jessie smirked and struck up another conversation.

As they were walking to class, there was this girl who looked at Jessie and smiled just to be nice, though Jessie was never nice to her. The girl's name was Marie. She dyed her hair a purplish-pinkish color. She wore baggy black pants and a short sleeve shirt with a Volcom sign on it. She had Hurley shoes, two spiked bracelets on one wrist, three spiked bracelets on the other, and a New York Yankees hat on backwards. Jessie rolled her eyes, smiled back, then started laughing with her friends. They laughed because, to them, Marie was a loner, a freak, a loser, because she wasn't popular.

During lunch, Jessie's mom got her from school early and then picked up her brother and sister from their school. When they got home, Jessie's mom looked at the floor, then at Jessie. Jessie's mom said, "Honey, I know this is going to be hard on you guys. But your father and I are now officially divorced."

"What!" Jessie screamed out at the top of her lungs. Her cheeks turned red and she started to cry after she heard those horrible words. She sat down and blocked out everything else her mother said after she realized this was real. Her sister cried and her mom hugged Jamie and Mark, telling them everything would be fine.

"Wait, who are we going to live with?" Jessie asked.

"With me," her mother replied. Her mother went on. "And we're going to live..."

Jessie interrupted and said, "Here, right? Here where we always have?"

"No, Jessie, In Orange County, California," her mom said.

The next day they finished packing. Jessie, Mark, and Jamie said goodbye to their friends, got on their plane, and left.

The next day when Jessie's mom dropped Jessie off at the new school, she said, "Come on, try to see this is a new adventure. Don't be so down. Okay?" Jessie's mom asked. Jessie just nodded.



The girls there were just like her friends: popular and stuck-up. She tried to make friends with them, but they didn't like her and she didn't like them. Jessie was now like Marie, but instead of dyed hair, she had a lip ring. The girls at her school considered Jessie a loner, a freak, and a loser. When she got home that day, she called Marie and said she was sorry for all the things she did to her. Marie said that it was okay, and that people make mistakes.

One year later these girls walked up to Jessie. "Hey, why are you like that, not caring about what people think of you?" the first girl asked. Then the other said, "Yeah, because you, like, don't care about your hair!"

"I think it's stupid that people judge you on that. It shouldn't matter," Jessie answered.

Then the first girl said, "Ok, like, whatever!" They turned, flipped their hair, and walked away with their high heel shoes clicking on the floor.

Jessie went home. Her mom asked, "Now do you think it was that horrible moving?"

"No, not that bad," Jessie said. Jessie went to her room. From then on she was still made fun of, but it paid off. After high school Jessie got a band together, and then became famous. She traveled all over the world, and went on millions of TV shows. Jessie never regretted moving.



CONSIDER THE  
POSSIBILITIES



# Idiots in Space

*When three clueless NASA personnel find out the Earth is going to be taken over, they take it upon themselves to save the planet. In the action movie spoof **IDIOTS IN SPACE** by **Christopher Godin**, see if these, well, idiots can save the earth from the evil Zorakians.*

## *Forward*

I don't have much to say, so I'll keep this short. It is my belief that this story should have been a radio show. Unfortunately, the stupid people at the radio station were too stupid to realize that this writing was pure genius. And so were the TV people. And the book publisher. And the Internet site. And the cartoon syndicate. And the newspaper....



It all started when the Zorakians found out that their planet was not solid but instead more like a balloon, and just as breakable, too. This didn't bother them much until they found out that a meteorite was headed directly toward their planet. Then they started getting serious. They knew that unless they found a new planet to live on, their race would be entirely wiped out. The place they chose was Earth.

## *Back on Earth*

“NEVER!”

“Why not, Michael?” Jerry asked.

“I AM NOT GOING TO APOLOGIZE TO A NICKEL!” screeched Michael.

“But it’s a nice nickel and it has feelings, too!”

“Just say sorry for stepping on the nickel,” remarked Bob.

“AM I THE ONLY SANE ONE HERE? NO!”

“How about both of you quiet down! We are getting a transmission,” said Bob.

Then both of them (Michael and Jerry) shouted, “What does it say?”

“Here it is,” said Bob. Suddenly a creepy looking creature popped up on the screen and stared talking.

“Hello, I am Ufendimer of the Zorakian race and I have been told to inform you that...

*Two hours later*

“...In short, our planet is about to be destroyed and we have chosen to incinerate your entire race that we may inhabit your planet instead.”

“That sure took a lot longer than was needed,” said Michael.

“Yeah,” remarked Jerry.

“Well, um... don’t you think we should go out there and blow them out of the sky?” asked Bob.

“No way! Let’s do what they do in action movies!” shouted Jerry.

“What’s that?” asked Michael.

“Stay here and take way too long developing an over-elaborate plan, then at the last minute the plan will fall apart, but we will still find some way to defeat the bad guys! Then at the end we learn some stupid moral that no one cares about!”

“Cool!” shouted Michael and Bob.

*Three weeks later*

After three weeks of careful planning, the three men made a plan that fit all of the requirements of the plan in an action movie

“Remember,” said Jerry, “there are four steps. Step one: over-elaborate plan. Step two: We mess up the plan. Step three: We solve the problem anyway. And step four: stupid moral.”

“Hey,” said Bob, “do ya think Jerry’s nickel will come into play later in the story?”

“I dunno,” said Mike. “Let’s ask the narrator. WELL?”

And suddenly the skies opened and out from the clouds came.... Oh wait.... That’s me...

Wait a sec... What the... How did you know I exist? And furthermore, how did you know this was a story?

“Stop changing the subject,” said Mike. “We know that you know whether the nickel will play a part in the story or not, so tell us!”

I can’t...

“Tell us.”

No.

“Yes.”

NO!

“Then we won’t continue the story!”

This is crazy.... Fine. You know what? I’ll tell you, the nickel has NOTHING to do with the rest of the story.

“Thank you. Also,” said Mike, “stop interrupting all of our statements, ok?”

Sorry, I have to. It’s a union thing.

“Well, ok.”

Geez.... Anyway, to CONTINUE with the story....

“Ok,” said Jerry, “so we have gotten the first step down but OH MY GOD THERE’S THE SPACESHIP. AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

All three of them ran behind the bush that Jerry planted two weeks before and saw the most horrendous sight they had ever seen: two aliens stepping out of a pod that looked just big enough for three people.

“Hey, look,” said Mike, “that guy is holding some kind of gun. What is it?”

Jerry, using his super powered binoculars, read aloud: “The Organism Incinerator 2000.”

Then Bob said, “It’s time to initiate the plan!”

“All right,” said Mike, “I’ll call all the nutcases that have ever had a ‘close encounter’ and have them come over right away!”

And then Mike whipped out his cell phone, dialed some huge long combination of numbers that no one but he could memorize, and shouted, “INITIATE OPERATION SAUERKRAUT. THIS IS NOT A DRILL, I REPEAT, THIS IS NOT A DRILL!” Then he hung up. “Okay, they should be here in three, two, one...”

Then suddenly out of nowhere, a huge mob of about 200 people appeared, took the gun, gave it to Mike, and stormed off with the two aliens.

“Wow... that was pretty efficient considering they were just a bunch of crazy people,” commented Bob.

“So are we going to shoot the space station or what?” asked Mike.

“Nope,” said Jerry. “Remember, we have to do this like they do it in the action movies. Break the gun.”

“Ok.”

BOOOOM!

Suddenly huge explosions went off, blowing them into the pod, which immediately lifted off and shot toward the mothership. When they got there they were greeted by a large amount of aliens.

“Umm, hi,” said all three.

“We have been waiting for you,” Ufendimer said.

“Hey, Xoloxular, show these guys what you’ve made for them.”

And suddenly two huge doors swung open, revealing a surprisingly small room.

“AHHHHH! A GIANT POOL OF ACID!”

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Depending on the weather, various taxes may or may not apply, including—but not limited to—the Fund to Save the Lithuanian Pelican tax, the beaver-spleen tax, banana tax, banana peel tax, a tax having nothing to do with bananas, strawberries, or fruit of any kind, sliced banana peel tax, sliced banana tax, banana-sliced-by-a-cat-named-Jimmy tax, service tax, sale tax, carpet tacks, tea tax, and look-at-me-I-own-a-goat tax. If these taxes do NOT apply to your purchase, please send a mangled monkey tail segment painted green with a wombat-hair brush with your payment. These may be purchased at “Joe’s Diner” for the price of a glass of cheap ale, an old snail, a rusty pail, and a rock.

Must have a shoe size of  $\pi$  or larger to order.

We now return to our scheduled programming.

“So,” said Mike, “are you going to throw us in?”

“Nope, I’m going to tie you to a platform and shut the big metal doors and hope everything goes all right and you die.”

“Nice,” said Jerry.

“Hey, you’re not the only ones who watch action movies.”

So the aliens tied up Bob, Jerry, and Mike and it seemed like all was lost.

“BEGIN THE UNNECESSARILY SLOW-MOVING DIPPING MECHANISM,” shouted the general. Then with a loud boom the gates closed.

“Great! What do we do now?” asked Bob.

“I don’t know. This wasn’t in the plan, which means...THE PLAN HAS BEEN RUINED!”

“Now,” said Jerry “to cut us all loose.” Suddenly Jerry pulled a knife out of his pocket and cut them loose.

“Yea! We’re free!”

“Okay, now what?” asked Bob

Mike looked around, wondering what they could do, and suddenly he got an idea.

“THAT’S IT!” shouted Mike. “The gears are showing. If you throw your nickel in them, the ship will blow up! Do it!”

“No.”

Bob and Michael looked at Jerry in awe.

“Why not?”

“Its not just a nickel, it’s my friend, and you still didn’t say sorry for stepping on it.”

“NEVER!”

“Say it or I won’t throw him in.”

“NO.”

“Yes.”

“NO.”

“YES!”

“FINE, OKAY. I’LL DO IT! I’m sorry for stepping on you.”

“Who did you say that to?” asked Jerry.

“To Chippy the nickel.”

“Okay.”

And Jerry threw the nickel into the gears, causing them to jam.  
NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO, CHIPPY, WHY? WHY  
DID HE HAVE TO GO? NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Not only did this make the acid drain out, but it also made the ship blow up. But don't worry; our friends weren't harmed. Since they were in a titanium chamber, they were simply catapulted back to earth.

And don't worry about Chippy. Thanks to advanced cloning sciences (and the U.S. Mint), Chippy was cloned and made king of Earth (in fact, some people feel that they would rather have been incinerated than have a nickel rule the earth).

### *Epilogue*

Hey guys. It's me again.

“What is it now?” said Mike.

“STOP THAT!”

Geez ,okay. Anyway, you forgot step four, the stupid moral.

“Oh yeah... umm... umm... okay, so sue me. We didn't learn anything.”

Oh, umm, okay.

THE END

# The Long Lost Prince

*Jake is the best pilot that the Inner Sphere has, and his position in society seems secure. But a revelation concerning his hidden origins changes everything in **THE LONG LOST PRINCE**, by **Andrew Rovinski**.*

## Prologue

Jake Campbell was the newborn prince of the Inner Sphere. Just after birth, Jake was thought to have been killed in a battle against the Clans. But actually, he was kidnapped to be ransomed. The Clans never got around to using him for ransom because they wanted to see what kind of a ‘mech pilot he was, and decided to let Jake grow up as a regular Clanner.

As Jake grew up, he thought he was a Clanner. He went to school, and graduated from the military academy. He was trained to kill. Jake participated in the army of the Clan, and had a very high rank. He grew to be 20 years old before the Inner Sphere took him back to be a soldier. They found him stranded and passed out in the middle of a desert after a battle. The I.S. (Inner Sphere) decided to take Jake as a hostage. The Inner Sphere has no idea that Jake is a prince, and neither does Jake...

\* \* \*

It was quiet. Too quiet. Jake Maxwell was piloting a giant 30-foot robot called a Battlemech. This style of ‘mech happened to be a templar, a sort of a human-shaped robot.

*Enemy detected*, beeped the radar. Jake hesitated. He knew that he had to kill the Clanners, but they raised him as a child! Could he kill his own thought-to-be people? Jake realized that the

Clanners had abandoned him. They were not his family anymore. Plus, if General Kabrinski was told that Jake would not kill Clanners, he would kill Jake!

Jake thrust out of his hiding spot in a crevice of moon rock, and fired two light gauss rifles. Light gauss rifle bullets are electrified bullets the size of garbage cans, only one of the many weapons used in the raging war that was going on. He only hoped it was the right thing to do.

The opposing 'mech, a Longbow 'mech with giant missile pods for arms, had a missile lock on Jake, and fired. The missiles were coming in fast: 950 meters ... 800 ... 750 ... 600 ... 300 ... 10 ... BOOM! At the last second the missiles were thrown off-course by a machine gun.

Jake's lancemate, Katherine Zandor, was in a 'mech called a Masakari. She had fired the machine guns.

Katherine fired her ERPPCs, which are like lightning bolts. Again, Jake hesitated, and waited. Was he supposed to be hurting the Clanners, the ones who raised him? While Jake was thinking, Katherine was blasting away. He snapped back to reality, and thought that if the Longbow was firing at him, then he is the enemy. Jake took another shot with his dual-light gauss rifles, and the Longbow exploded with a brilliant light.

"Well, that's the last of the Clan 'mechs for now," said Jake. "Let's return to base."

All over the galaxy a war raged on between the Clans and the Inner Sphere. The Clans and the Inner Sphere are two separate groups of people with different ideas. Everyone used to be part of the Inner Sphere, but the Clans didn't like the way it was run, so they broke off to gain their freedom. They are kind of re-enacting the Revolutionary War. Jake Maxwell thought he belonged to the Clans. The Clans hid from Jake that they kidnapped him as a child. But now, the Inner Sphere has taken Jake back, and forced him to fight as a mech pilot. Now Jake's life is a fight for survival....

Unknown to Jake, people in high places were taking interest in him. They wanted to see if Jake could really be the thought-to-be prince of the Inner Sphere.

“Queen Sarah, we believe we have found your son,” chimed the transmission. On Solaris VII, Queen Sarah Campbell and King Theodore Campbell, rulers of the Inner Sphere and parents of the unsuspecting Jake, had lost their son in a battle. At least that’s what they thought. “In a recent transmission we have found that Eaton, one of the other Inner Sphere planets, claimed to have captured a soldier who has a very close resemblance to you and your family. Plus, he is wearing the family symbol: a necklace with a green emerald shaped like an ‘S.’ We suspect that he could possibly be your son.”

“Bring him to me,” said the Queen. “We’ll find if he really is my son. Although, after all these years, there’s not a very good chance that he’ll still be alive. The clans may have been brutal to him! How would he have ever survived?”

“We don’t know,” said the puzzled face. “What we do know is it’s our job to report anyone who might look like your son. Over and out.”

“What were you thinking?” snapped General Jack Kabrinski. Jake was in the General’s office for running away from everyone else to fend off enemy ‘mechs. “I would have you thrown out of the academy if you weren’t one of my best pilots!”

“But sir, there was a danger of being...” Jake started.

“SILENCE, YOU INSOLENT LITTLE FOOL! I don’t care about what danger there was! The spaceships were equipped with ERPPCs! Those would’ve taken care of it!” Jake could tell that Jack Kabrinski was fuming. His face was blood red, and his eyes were popping out of his head. “Maybe I should take away that necklace of yours...it might be worth something,” said the general. Jake reached for the “S” shaped emerald necklace he wore.

“Please, no, sir! My mother gave me this as a child! It’s the only thing I have left,” Jake pleaded.

“Well...”

“Sorry, sir. I’ll never do it again,” Jake said sheepishly.

“You’d better not! Dismissed!” screamed the General.

Jake walked outside the office to find Katherine and another one of his lancemates, Lewis, waiting for him.

“So, how’d it go?” asked Lewis

“How d’ya think?” asked Jake.

“That bad, huh? We heard the yelling out here,” said Katherine.

All of a sudden, a voice came over the P.A. saying, “Jake Maxwell and his lancemates, please report to the main deck.” Jake, Lewis, and Katherine were shocked. They had never been to the main deck before.

“C’mon! Let’s go,” said Jake. They rushed down to the main deck, and were stunned. It looked beautiful. There was grass, a small stream, trees, everything you would imagine a paradise to look like. Surrounding it was a glass dome. When you looked up, you could see something that would take your breath away. Vast clusters and stars glistened like polished pieces of metal.

“Ah! Jake! Just the person I wanted to see,” said Karl Zandor. “I just received word that the Queen has chosen to see you. You will pack your things, and meet me here tomorrow morning a 0600 sharp. As for you two, you will be accompanying Jake as his bodyguards.

“Aw, why do we have to be Jake’s bodyguards? Why can’t Jake be my bodyguard?” said Lewis.

“Because you have problems,” said Katherine. “You’re too stupid to be lance commander.”

“Hey! That’s not funny!” said Lewis.

“That’s all. Start packing! Dismissed!” said Karl.

The next day, Jake, Katherine, and Lewis were on the main deck at 0600 waiting for Karl. Finally, after five minutes, Karl showed up. He was holding a lance commander outfit, and two lancemate outfits, the kind professionals use.

“Put these on,” said Karl. The trio put them on without a complaint. “Now, we just got a new shipment of ‘mechs, and each of you will be keeping one. Jake gets a Kodiak, Lewis gets a Nova Cat, and Katherine gets an Atlas. Each of you will set out for the spaceship at the intergalactic spaceport in exactly one hour.

It will take you to Solaris VII, where you will meet the queen. Good luck!”

Jake and his lancemates walked into the ‘mech bay where they saw their new ‘mechs. They were breathtaking. The Kodiak looked like a bear that was reared up, with lots of missiles; the Nova Cat looked like a human with beefed up legs, arms and chest, with humungous guns as hands; and the Atlas looked like a human with closed fists. They plopped into the new machines and set off.

After an hour, they saw the General in his Mad Cat and his lancemates with Bushwhackers come up on radar.

“And just where do you think you’re going?” asked the General. “I just got a call on my radio from Karl Zandor that I’m supposed to let you through because Queen Sarah and King Theodore want to see you. But Karl Zandor is not my commanding officer, which means I don’t have to listen to him! You’re not going anywhere, no matter if you’re the prince or not!”

Just then, the General unleashed a barrage of missiles with the dual missile pods on the shoulders of his ‘mech, while the Bushwhackers attacked with their giant machine guns. The bushwhackers looked like squatting midgets with backwards legs. These Bushwhackers also each had a giant missile pod on its shoulder. Jake let loose all of his missiles, too. Compared to Jake’s, the General’s amount of missiles was nothing. Then Jake fired his two giant bombshell cannons, and hit a Bushwhacker right in the cockpit. The Bushwhacker exploded, and tiny specs of blood covered Jake’s cockpit.

Meanwhile, the other two pilots had shot ERPPCs, ERLarge lasers, and light gauss rifles like there was no tomorrow. The other Bushwhacker was limping on one leg, and Lewis shot the other leg with an ERPPC, and the bushwhacker fell to the ground, unable to move. All that was left was General Jack Kabrinski.

“Well, this is goodbye General. It’s been HORRIBLE KNOWING YOU!” said Jake as he shot the general with all of his weapons. The general ejected at the last second before the ‘mech exploded, and landed safely on the ground. But before he could get away, Jake stepped on him with his giant steel foot.



The battle being won and the general dead, all that Jake could do was continue on his way to the spaceship. A few minutes later, the ship's pilot greeted him as he welcomed them aboard. In a couple of days, Jake was standing before the King and Queen of the Inner Sphere on their demand.

"Oh my goodness..." the Queen exclaimed. "My son has been found! After all these years of searching! I thought I'd never find you again. But here I am, right here, with you standing right in front of me. I could tell because of the necklace you're wearing."

Jake took out the "S" shaped necklace, and the Queen took out an "I" shaped one. When they put the necklaces together, they formed "IS" for the Inner Sphere.

"Call the chef, and tell him to make a grand feast in Jake's honor," shouted the King.

Soon after, all of the royal family, subjects, and friends were seated at a large satin covered table, swarmed with all kinds of luscious food just waiting to be eaten. King Theodore stood up. "Your attention please! Thank you all for coming. As you know, this banquet is in the honor of my long lost son, Jake Campbell. Let the feast begin!" Everyone was famished, so they all started furiously eating. Jake had never had a better meal in his life.

Just then, Katherine asked, "Um, how are you going to explain the General's death?"

Jake stared as a look of stupidity came over his face. "Say it was self-defense?"

"Good idea," said Katherine. "Lewis, what do you think?"

"MMMMGF MMGBHHHDD MMGGHHNNND," said Lewis. He was too busy stuffing his face with food to answer.

"That's Lewis for you," said Jake.

Soon after the banquet was finished, everyone was invited to the ceremonial crowning of the prince. Jake was pronounced Prince, and Katherine and Lewis became his royal bodyguards.

"Awww, man! Why couldn't I suddenly find out I was a prince? I mean, I get to stay home and watch TV all day, play video games..."

Katherine just pinched Lewis on the arm.

"OOOOWWWWW! What was that for?" asked Lewis.

## Epilogue

What happened to Jake? Five years later, Jake's parents found a note saying Jake had left, not telling where, to a different Inner Sphere planet with his new fiancée. Now, Jake is living a good life. He married his fiancée, Katherine, and moved to an island paradise.

**The End...?**

# DARKNESS FALLS



# BloodyHands

*In **BLOODYHANDS** by **Neila Lecland**, a young girl and her family move into a house with a chilling past. It is up to Eliza to discover the secret of her new home.*

In Hollywood, everything is perfect. Nobody ever does anything mean, and everything is calm, except for the house at 15 Rock-A-Day Street. Here the garden smells like vile, rotten meat, and stones stick out of the grass. Everybody says there is a ghost in that house.

There is also a legend about that house. A long time ago, settlers came from England and found that house. They thought it was abandoned, but pirates actually lived there. When the pirates came back, they killed the settlers and buried them. From then on their spirits have been haunting the house. After dying, the pirates' boss also haunted the house, protecting the treasure he had hidden years ago.

As it is only a legend, a family just moved in. The parents have one daughter, Eliza. She has blue eyes, black hair, and is pretty tall. She is 12 years and four months old. Eliza loves writing, drawing, researching, exploring, and dancing. She also is a bit too curious, and that is how everything started.

It was a cool July day when Eliza started wondering what the stones were for. She took a shovel and started digging around some rocks. As she was digging, she found all kinds of bones (even skulls). Sometimes, she found pieces of wood with writing on them. Every now and then, she had to go away or else she would throw up. The smell was unbearable.

After a few hours, she looked around and gasped. She realized her backyard was an ancient graveyard. At that moment,

her brain completely stopped. She didn't know what to do. After getting her mind clear, she decided to keep it as a secret.

Her next few nights weren't peaceful. She kept hearing wood cracking, funny noises, talking in an unknown language and sometimes even howling, and all of that in her backyard. One night, she peeked out of the window. There she saw two fluorescent people flying!

The next day she came to the exact spot where she saw the "ghosts" and discovered two graves she had dug out. Then she used her imagination and called the ghosts. To her astonishment, a ghost came right out of the ground. The ghost seemed like he had been waiting for her.

Eliza had so many questions to ask him, but as if he could read in her mind, the ghost started talking before her. He told her everything about her house. He recited the exact same legend her neighbors had and he said that somewhere, in one of the walls of her house, was hidden a treasure. And blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah... Eliza didn't hear any of the rest. Only one word shone in her head: TREASURE!

Cutting him off in the middle of his sentence, she asked him to tell her everything about the treasure. The only other thing he knew was that the treasure was guarded by BloodyHands. BloodyHands was one of the meanest ghosts on Earth and did not hesitate to kill. He was a pirate. He had been guarding the treasure for centuries and nobody even had touched one of the golden coins. This excited Eliza even more. She could become a "hero."

The next day, she searched her whole house for somewhere the treasure could be. She tapped on every wall of her house with her fingertips, then with her fists. She ran into walls to try to open them, but after about 30 minutes she gave up. She leaned on a wall and because she was so mad, she started banging on it. To her surprise, it opened.

Now in front of her were a key and a lock on a door. She opened the lock and behind that door were stairs. Not worrying about what the ghost had said, she went down the stairs. As she went down the stairs she saw pieces of clothing lying around,

blood stains on the wall and floor, and even skulls and bones on the stairs. On her way down it got hotter and more humid. At the bottom she met BloodyHands.

As his name says, his hands were covered in blood. With his “tough man” face, he didn’t look very nice. Until then Eliza had not realized the ghost could hurt her, but now he was here.

Eliza saw a hole that looked like it was swallowing everything around itself: the room was round, and you could see little pieces of dirt falling from the wall into the hole. As Eliza took a step forward, the ghost took one backward, protecting the treasure. She repeated this until the ghost was very close to the hole. Then she took one final step and the ghost was gone, swallowed by the hole.

Eliza was in heaven. She had beaten a ghost nobody had. With a glorious feeling, she took the treasure, locked the door, put the wall back in place, and went to her parents. After telling them her adventure, Eliza and her parents went to claim the treasure. With all that money, they built a bigger house out of the old one and cleaned up the backyard, taking out all of that graveyard stuff. Then for the rest of their lives, they lived happily surrounded by gold.

# Once Upon a Not-So-Happy Easter

*A story about the Easter Bunny must be happy and hopeful, right? Think again! In **ONCE UPON A NOT-SO-HAPPY EASTER** by **Louie DiVizio**, Easter turns into a horror story! You've been warned.*

One day, in Bunny Hollow, the Easter Bunny was buying candy and toys for girls and boys; Easter was tomorrow! This was not his usual store for these matters; his usual store was closed today. This was a kind of creepy hole in the wall. The Easter Bunny was the only person in the store except for the clerk.

Suddenly, he saw a dark shadow out of the corner of his eye. He turned to see what it was, but it was gone. The Easter Bunny thought it was his imagination until he saw it again! It was the same as before, but it got BIGGER! His mind raced. He started to run, but the shadow followed him. He was starting to feel a little disturbed. Suddenly, the shadow darted in front of him. He turned a corner and was smacked over the head with something hard. He passed out.

The Easter Bunny woke in a dark, grimy cellar full of rats. His arms were strapped down, and he couldn't move. He was still too tired from being hit over the head. He heard footsteps on the stairs. A shrill voice broke the creepy silence:

"How are you doing, my dear bunny?"

"Just fine, thank you," answered the Easter Bunny sarcastically. A flickering lamp was lit, and the Easter Bunny saw what the thing that had captured him was. It was a black bunny with a black nose and a scar under his left eye. His fur was wet and matted. He wore a black t-shirt with



red-orange letters that read “Boy Sets Fire.” The Black Bunny said, “My name is Hazard Maul. You can call me Haz.” He smiled evilly.

“OK, Haz, just cut to the chase! Why am I here?”

“I’m taking over your job. After I do that, all of your cute little boys and girls are going to help me take over the world! WHAHA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA! HA AHA HA! AHHAHAHHHHHAHHHAHHHAHAHA--”

“Oh, get on with it already!” said the Easter Bunny.

Haz glared at the Easter Bunny. “I’m going to keep you here so you can see the horrible things happen to your children. BWA! HAHA HAAAAA! HAHA HHA HAHAHAHAHAHAHA! HAAAAA HAAAAA HAA--”

“Gosh darn it, shut up already! What are you going to do to them?” screamed the Easter Bunny frantically.

“No time to explain! Tomorrow is Easter, and I have a lot to prepare before then! Gotta run!” Haz ran out and slammed the door behind him.

A blue powder began to fall from the ceiling. The Easter Bunny tried to hold his breath, but after about 45 seconds, he couldn’t any longer. He took a huge breath and began to feel woozy. Within seconds, he was asleep.

*Seven hours later*

The Easter Bunny woke to an empty room. With his great strength, he tore right through the thick bands holding him down. He got up and tried the door. It was locked! He looked around for something to break down the door with. He spotted a crowbar in the corner. He backed up and prepared to take a swing at the door. It jammed in the door with a loud crash. With two more swings, the door broke off of its hinges. Still holding the crowbar, he ran up the cellar stairs and through a kitchen to the outside door. He opened it and ran out.

It was morning already! He saw that he was in a people town. The Easter Bunny ran to the nearest house and burst in. He saw a child sinking his teeth into a chocolate egg. The Easter

Bunny figured he was too late. He assumed that Haz had poisoned all the candy, and the child would die. Suddenly, he noticed the child morphing! He wasn't dying! He was changing into a miniature Haz!

The Easter Bunny ran outside. To his horror, little Hazes were pouring out of all of the houses onto the street! In the center was the real Haz! Then, Haz began speaking to all of the little Hazes. The Easter Bunny was too far away to hear, but when all of the little Hazes began to run towards him baring their teeth, the Easter Bunny figured out what Haz had told them. The Easter Bunny plowed his way through the mass of little Hazes and came in front of the real Haz. He saw that Haz had an aluminum baseball bat!

"Let's go," muttered Haz evilly. He called off all his little Hazes.

Haz struck first with the bat at the side of the Easter Bunny's face, but the Easter Bunny blocked it with the crowbar, which he was still holding. The Easter Bunny took a swing at Haz's leg with the crowbar. Haz crumpled to the ground in agony.

"Give me the stuff that will change these kids back!" demanded the Easter Bunny.

Haz reached into his pocket and pulled out a bottle of pink powder. The Easter Bunny turned to the masses of little Hazes that were now swarming around him and sprinkled the powder over them. All the little Hazes fell to the ground, unconscious. When the Easter Bunny turned around, Haz was gone!

The Easter Bunny figured Haz must have thought himself back to Bunny Land, so the Easter Bunny did the same. He searched and searched and eventually found Haz in a phone booth. The Easter Bunny ducked down so Haz wouldn't see him. The Easter Bunny listened in on the conversation that Haz was having.

"Yeah, I have the REAL antidote," Haz was saying.

"What does the one you gave that chump do?" asked the voice on the other end.

"It will make all my little clones grow to be twice the size of me!" cackled Haz. "And then, I will take over the world! WHA

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA! AHA!  
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA AHAHAHHAHHAHA!”

Just then, the Easter Bunny saw a HUGE fox coming down the street. It must have been three feet tall! It was a giant! It bent down and ripped the phone booth to shreds with its razor-sharp teeth. Haz screamed in terror. The fox picked Haz up by the feet and shook him upside down. Something fell out of Haz’s pocket. Then the fox swallowed Haz and belched with satisfaction. It walked away without noticing the Easter Bunny.

The Easter Bunny ran up to the wreckage and picked up the little bottle that had fallen from Haz’s pocket. It was a bottle full of tiny pills. Wrapped around the bottle was a piece of masking tape on which was scrawled “REAL antidote.”

“I found the antidote!” yelled the Easter Bunny with glee.

Traveling back to the world of people, he gave a pill to each of the now huge Hazes. The Easter Bunny went home to his own house and slept well that night.

However, when he awoke in the morning, it was to find dead bodies of the giant Hazes everywhere. The Easter Bunny reached into his pocket and looked with disbelief at the small bottle that had contained the pills. In fine print, at the bottom of a partially cut off prescription label, it said, “MORPHINE: VERY POTENT. NOT TO BE ADMINSTERED TO ANYONE UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE, AS WILL CAUSE DEATH WITHIN HOURS.”

Morphine! The Easter Bunny fell over and passed out in shock.



# THE MIND'S EYE



# All a Dream

*The characters seem familiar, but then again.... In **ALL A DREAM** by **Renee Colombe**, perhaps nothing is quite as it seems.*

Once upon a time, there lived three sisters. They were Cinderella, Snow White, and me, Little Red. We all lived in the same house and wore the same things: dresses.

Now it was time for all of us to move. I was first. I just love meat, so I built my house out of meat.

Snow White was second. She just loved the season winter and that is how she got her name, Snow White. She built her house out of snow.

Cinderella was last. She built her house in a tree because she always wanted to be her own princess, in her own world.

It was a sunny day, and all the bear cubs were out playing. But a sunny day is not always the best day. Snow White's house melted. She had nowhere to go but to one of her sisters. So, she went to see if I was home. But my house had gotten green and smelly, so she didn't stop.

She ran and tripped on her dress because it was so long. She got up and ran to Cinderella's house to see Cinderella, and that is where we all met. While we were there, Cinderella got a call from the little nice wolf. As soon as she hung up with him, the three big fat biker pigs came out of the woods. "Who are they?" Snow White and I asked.

"Oh, no, we can't get out of here. That's what the nice wolf called about. They are the three big bullies. They are so mean that they gave a kid the longest swirly in the world!"

Two of them were carrying bags and the other had an ax! We all wanted to get down, but it was too late. They had already seen us.

The two pigs with the bags tried to get us while the other pig with the ax chopped our tree down!

BOOM! It fell on the two pigs as they tried to get us on the backside. The other pig was okay. He ran before the tree got to him. He ran into the woods.

We were okay, too. We were on the front of the tree. We all ran down and back to our dad's house. He was not there! Cinderella started to cry. "What did they do to him? Did he get in an accident? Why? Why?" Then we heard a voice.

"Wake up! Wake up! You guys are going to be late for school!"

It was all a dream! All a dream! There was our dad. This was great. It was a happy ending after all!

"Little Red, why does your clothing smell like bad meat? Why, Snow White, you're so wet."



# The Amazing Shoes

*When Jack finds a pair of shoes at the beach, he finds trouble at the same time. See what happens in **THE AMAZING SHOES**, by **J. B. Ross**.*

“Mom, where did you put my sandals? I’m going to the beach,” Jack said.

“In the kitchen, dear!” Mom yelled.

“Thanks, Mom.”

On the way to the beach, Jack met up with his friend, Jimmy, a tall skinny boy with light red hair. Jimmy is a selfish person.

At the beach, Jack and Jimmy decided to dig a hole. The size of it made you think somebody was being buried.

When nearly finishing the hole, Jack hit something with a shovel about six feet below the surface of the sand. He dug a little deeper and saw an ancient-looking, brown chest with cracks full of sand and dirt. Jack’s heart started to beat faster. His hands were sweating like a pig. Jack almost swallowed his tongue. Jimmy did the same except for almost vomiting because of the leeches crawling on the chest. *There had better be something good in this because this took us two hours to dig. I’m sweating like I ran five miles in two minutes*, Jack thought.

“I wonder what’s inside?” both of them asked.

Jack struggled and pulled with all of his might. When they removed the lid, Jack and Jimmy saw a pair of shoes. Both of them dove into the chest to declare the shoes theirs. They’re so selfish that they fought over them, not even disappointed that they were just shoes.

Jack pushed and shoved Jimmy while he tried to snatch the shoes. After a couple of punches here and there, Jack seized the

shoes. “That was cold!” Jimmy shouted. *I’m not sure if I want to be friends with him anymore*, he thought.

At home, Jack tried the pair of shoes on. They fit perfectly except for the fact that they had a big strap on each shoe for some reason. Jack stomped a couple of times. A couple of seconds later, Jack began to float a couple of feet in the air. Jack felt as light as a feather. “This is incredible!” he said to himself. He thought about showing his mom, but she might not like him flying around town on shoes that fly.

Jack started to try and swim in the air, thinking that he could get somewhere. He then kicked his shoes together and began racing out the front door. “I wonder how I turn.” Jack tried waving his arms but failed to fly. He then thought of what he wanted to do and started to fly in the air like an eagle.

“Wow! All I have to do is think of what I want to do and I can do it.”

Jack headed for downtown. “I can see everything from up here,” Jack said. “It’s awesome!”

On his flight around town, Jack spotted a fortune telling place. He stopped in and found a creepy person in there, or so he thought. He sat down at the crusty looking, half-sanded table.

“What is with these shoes?” he asked the fortuneteller.

“Ah, let me see them for a second,” she mumbled. “If you wear these for over a half hour at one time, they will take over your body. If you would’ve looked under the sole of the shoe, you would see that there is a ‘taking over your body’ device.”

“Aren’t those illegal?” Jack asked.

“Yes, but some people sell them on the black market,” she replied.

“Thanks for the tip.”

For the next couple of days, Jack was very careful not to use the shoes over a half hour at a time. But one day he crossed the line.

He was playing basketball when the Channel 4 network truck drove up.

“Hi there, Jack,” the news reporter said. “We’d like you to fly up on those shoes you have tomorrow afternoon for about 25

minutes. Some fortuneteller told me you had those and where you lived. This could be the greatest thing ever! And, you would be paid fifty dollars.” Jack decided to fly up on his shoes the next day. He could buy a video game with the fifty dollars.

That next day, Jack was very shaky about flying up on his shoes with everyone watching. *What if I mess up?* he thought.

Later on at 2:55, Jack was very sure of himself. A few minutes later, the clock read 2:59. And... “Dong, Dong, Dong!” the clock struck the hour.

“Here I go,” he said, and up he went. It wasn’t too bad for a little while. Well, he’d only been up there 20 minutes.

About five minutes later, Jack lost track of the time and continued to fly. Five minutes later, the clock struck 3:30. Jack’s body started to go crazy! The news reporter looked very confused. Then, Jack started heading towards the ground at a very high speed.

“I’m flying, I’m flying,” Jack repeated in an ignorant voice. Trying to convince himself to stop falling didn’t work. “I cannot control my legs.” Then in the bottom of Jack’s body, he said, “I must control myself!” He started to think how he loved his family and life. He then started to slow down.

“That won’t be enough,” he said to himself. “I must use all of my strength to overpower the shoes. I have to take the shoes off!” Jack started to reach down and get a hold of his right foot. He knew he couldn’t hit the ground.

“I’ve got it!” Jack said as he untied his right shoe. “Now for the left.” He grabbed his left shoe but slipped. At the same time, an ambulance brought a huge trampoline and set it in the path where Jack was falling. Just as he got a grip on the shoe, he hit the trampoline. “Crack!” The trampoline collapsed.

“That hurt,” Jack said in a whisper. Then, Jack heard the voice of his friend. It sounded like Jimmy.

“Hey, Jack, you can keep those shoes if you want to,” Jimmy said. “I’ve really changed my mind about them.”

“Sorry, Jimmy.”

“Sorry, Jack,” said Jimmy.

“Let’s be friends again,” they both said. Jack and Jimmy became best friends for life. After that, they would never argue about that kind of stuff ever again.

*One month later*

“Hey, Jack, my little sweetheart, we’re going to look for new shoes. Do you want to come?” Jack’s mother asked.

“No!” Jack screamed. “Never again will I shop for new shoes. I’m fine with the ones I have.”

“Okay, dear,” Jack’s mother replied.

Never again did Jack shop for new shoes. His feet put holes in his shoes until he was 80. And then, he remembered...sandals.

# Captured

*The village king is captured. A group of four must go on a thrilling adventure to save their king in **CAPTURED**, by **Max Grossman**.*

One day in magical world, news came to a village of about 100 people that their king was captured. They were all frantic. The king was by far the smartest and made all of the decisions for the village. The whole village was puzzled why the king would have been captured.

During the night in the king's room, a piece of clothing had been left. It was a special type of clothing that only goblins wear.

Later that night the council of the village, which was made up of the most elderly people, was asked to pick four people to go on a quest to find the king. The council voted on Osmond the Wizard, Talon the Elf, Goro the Dwarf, and Deacon the Warrior. They were to set out at dawn. The council also told Osmond the Wizard that he would be in charge of guiding the group.

At dawn almost everybody in the village was at the gate, and the four people were each presented with weapons. To Osmond went a magical staff, to Talon a bow and arrow, to Goro the ax, and to Deacon a sword. Then they set out to find the king.

They started north at dawn and traveled till nightfall. The day had been uneventful until late night. They were about to start camp until they realized they were no more than fifty feet from a dragon lair. They figured that the only way to get past was to go as quietly as they could past the dragon lair. They tried that, but suddenly Talon fell into some sort of quicksand that was sucking him in. Not realizing what was going on, he screamed.

They heard a loud booming noise from the dragon. All three of them helped Talon out as quickly as possible. They were going to make a run for it.

As they were running, Talon let off some arrows at the dragon. They tried everything they could but nothing worked. The dragon was catching up to them fast. It was no more than thirty yards away. They were doomed.

Everything seemed hopeless until the most unlikely thing happened. They all tripped into a big pile of mud. The thing is, dragons are very stupid. Their bodies were almost completely camouflaged. The dragon was pacing back and forth and could not find them.

The dragon flew back into his lair after a short time of looking for them. That mud had just saved all four of their lives. They got up and tiptoed and tried to get as far away as possible.

After they thought it was safe to make camp about a mile away from the dragon lair, they all fell asleep within a very short time. The next morning they predicted that they were about five or six miles away from the land of the goblins.

That day they got a good distance without any trouble. The good thing was that they were making progress. They were only about three or four days away.

The next day went smoothly until about nightfall. Deacon was on watch that night and during the middle of the night he heard some strange noises. He decided to walk a little bit. After inspecting the land he realized it must have been some birds or something. But then suddenly an arrow went right by his head. He ran as fast as he could back to camp and woke everybody up and they grabbed their weapons. Six goblins jumped out and shot arrows. They missed, but Talon was very fast and killed two. Deacon battled one of the goblins and ended up slicing his head off. The whole time nobody knew where the dwarf was during the battle until he jumped out from behind a tree and chopped off two goblins' heads. It was a very bloody battle.

They now realized they were no more than a day away. None of them slept that night. When morning came they were quick to leave.

After about two hours of walking they heard a bunch of noises. Some kind of ceremony was going on. Suddenly they realized their king was being lowered into a pit of lava.

Osmond got up and muttered words to himself. Suddenly his staff gave off a huge ray of light. All the goblins were astonished. Then out of the light came sudden lightning bolts. Everybody was terrified. Two goblins got struck and were killed. They had no chance against the lightning bolts, which were right in front of them.

Somehow Osmond ran in there and got the king. They ran so fast, they were like leopards. After about a mile, they stopped and asked the king why he was captured. He said, "The goblins wanted to become the most powerful in the world. By killing me they would become stronger."

They returned home safely with no harm from the dragons. When they returned, the village had a feast the rest of the night, honoring the four people who saved the king. They were remembered as heroes. They will always be remembered as the four who saved the king.

# A Day in the Life of Flyer

*What does your dog do when you're not around?* **A DAY IN THE LIFE OF FLYER**, by **Margaret Albrecht**, may make you wonder.

Hi! My name is Flyer. I am now a member of the Albrecht family. They brought me home from something they call a “dog breeder.” I can't figure that out because I am just a person with a fur suit and a tail, after all. Anyway, the dog breeder was a nice lady.

At first I didn't want to leave, but enough about that. I'm just going to tell you about the job I have and explain a typical day in my life.

First of all, in exchange for love, care, food, water and shelter against the blazing sun and bitter cold (not to mention things such as toys), I loyally protect my family against vermin. These are some of the following that fit under this category: chipmunks, cats, and my archenemy, squirrels.

Every day my mom wakes me up and “sends” me outside. I pretend to act reluctant, because she mustn't know about my job; only my sister, Margaret, knows a little about it. (If you need proof that I'm not just being a stubborn mule, check my reference book, entitled *A Guide to Adopting Your Pet Family*, by Grommet Woof'n'bark.) Then I begin the daily patrol.

One day—oh, man that day was so terrible, it was worse than a cat's litter box!—I was patrolling around the crabapple tree; I heard a faint rustling noise somewhere in the mid- to upper-branches of the tree. I looked up, and glowered at whatever it might be disturbing my peaceful patrol. There it was, the worst sort of vermin imaginable: a squirrel.



The fur on my back and neck bristled. I felt my tail going straight up into the air. It started as a low, rumbling growl, but slowly crescendoed into a mighty, warrior bark! The chase was on! Up and down the tree that infested fleabag darted. Back and forth I raced. Our hearts raced as one. It was sooo unfair! If it would dare to set one evil foot down here, it would be shreds faster than you could probably say "moldy Milk Bones." Teeny, eenie, weenie microscopic pieces.

As I was thinking this, little did I know this was all part of the squirreliest scheme to take over the nut trees and bird feeders. These are the particular bird feeders and trees I protect against Mephistopheles, the evil king-squirrel and his henchsquirrels: Diablo, Lucifer and Old Nick. At this very second, back in squirreldom's secret squirrel lair, they were baiting two cages with my favorite kind of cheese, extra-sharp provolone.

Holy Milk Bones! I was so absorbed in chasing the squirrel named (as I later found out) Dirt Devil that I didn't hear the rustling of the vermin closing in on me! If I could count accurately, then I would be able to tell you how many squirrels there were, but I can't. I was petrified!

With a mighty shriek they were upon me! I was helpless! Finally, I was driven mad and my instincts took over. I bit and scratched with all the power and ferocity I could muster. Ha ha! Pinned you down!

After I had got most of them down and out cold, the mob parted. Soon I found myself staring eye-to-eye with the most repulsive, butt-ugly, and not to mention biggest squirrel I have ever seen. "This squirrel," I thought, "must be the leader."

"I am Mephistopheles, the king squirrel." He sniffed arrogantly, which I know was meant for me. He goose-stepped back and forth in front of me (which I found highly annoying) and stepped right under my nose. I tried to scare him and his mob off with my intimidating bark, but it didn't do the trick. Those clusters of squirrels just kept right on smirking at me.

Then with a sudden movement that appeared to be a snap, the most beautiful she-border terrier appeared, being dragged mercilessly about by Mephistopheles' henchsquirrels, Diablo,

Lucifer and Old Nick. I was enveloped in a sensation of anger and love. I knew this pulchritudinous she-border terrier; her name was Jackie. She looked so pitiful lying there, her feet bound crudely to one another, and a rope harness attached around her middle, which those varmints were using to drag her around.

Then, to my great surprise, I found myself sniffing the air, for a familiar aroma was wafting its way down to my nostrils. I smelled CHEESE! Oh, man-oh-man, I was going to hyperventilate. Cheese AND a girl border terrier. Not once did it cross my mind that this might be part of some evil scheme and/or trap (and this I very much regret). The raging hormones and my stomach took control. For my sake, and for Jackie's sake, I fought that evil disgusting squirrel. He tried to mutilate me with his razor-sharp teeth and claws, but I dodged them. Then I struck him with a mighty blow to the face, which I swear on my lucky box of Jerky Treats temporarily knocked the wind right out of his puny, disgraceful body.

Then, to my great astonishment and sorrow, I found myself covered in squirrels! I knew I had lost when I looked toward Jackie to see if it was happening to her, and stopped to sniff that tantalizingly cheesy smell. In less than a minute's time, I found myself bound in twine and being lugged up a tree. A TREE! How would I be able to get down? Oh, holy Milk Bones! This was sooo unfair!

The next thing I realized, I was being locked in a cage in the Dungeon of Squirreldom. The only good parts about this were that I was in a cage with extra-sharp provolone, and that Jackie was in a cage right next to mine. Now was a chance to win Jackie's heart by playing hero! I just had to think of an idea to get us out of here. Unfortunately, we were both very distracted. It sounded as if all of squirreldom was celebrating our capture! Then I got an idea. I whispered it to Jackie. She giggled but nodded her head, and soon we found ourselves picking the locks with our toenails.

When we finally got out, we sneaked around heaps of nuts and squirrels that were so drunk, they were either in a stupor or they were deep in sleep. UGH! I just stepped on one of those

putrid vermin! When I looked back to see if it had awakened, I found that he, like the others, was too drunk to notice. It just rolled over and kept right on sleeping. Oh well, it's not my business what the squirrels do in their free time. I just needed to find the exit. Gosh darn it, there were so many squirrels that I could have destroyed, but I didn't think Jackie would be too keen on that.

Suddenly, I noticed that Jackie's fur was standing on end. When I turned to see what it was, I almost vomited at the sight I saw. I was still dizzy because I had turned around so fast, but I was able to make out a tiny, furry, and not-to-mention butt-ugly little creature. Holy Milk Bones! It was Mephistopheles, the evil king-squirrel again!

Then the amazing combat began. I bit to the left and slashed to the right. The squirrel clawed and clawed for all he was worth until I struck him a mighty blow to the stomach, sending fur and blood every which way. After many other countless gory details that I shall not mention, Jackie and I won. We left the dead, evil king-squirrel on the battlefield, while I escorted Jackie back to her hole in the fence and started the walk back home to clean up the excess nutshells and fur. This way, my family would never know what went on. I started my short but powerful victory march back to my house.

Whew! I made it just in time...my sister just got home from school. You will have to excuse me now, but SHHHHHH! Don't tell anyone about the battle. Please? Thanks!

# Everything Isn't as It Seems

*Leave no stone unturned, or you could miss the magic one!*  
**EVERYTHING ISN'T AS IT SEEMS**, by **Andrew Schelberg-Miller**, is the story of an astounding secret and how it charmed its keeper's life.

One day, an 11-year-old boy named John was outside playing in his friend's backyard when he stumbled upon a shimmering, rainbow-colored stone. The stone changed colors right before his eyes, so he knew it was special, and put it in the zippered pocket of his windbreaker.

That night, when John was supposed to be sleeping, he gingerly took the stone out of the pocket and it glowed in an array of colors. As he was staring at it in awe, a blazing message appeared: "The holder of this stone will have a life blessed with magic." Even before John had the stone, he was always making jokes and being funny. Now, as the holder of the spectacular stone, he could also see things others could not.

John was outside shoveling snow with his father one bitterly cold day and he saw a witch zoom by on a broom. When he shouted at his father to look, the witch was gone. Another time, when he was in school, he saw a frog hopping around. John assumed that a wizard had turned the principal into a frog because it had the principal's name badge around its neck. When he caught the frog to show the other kids, the frog vanished in thin air, leaving the name badge dangling from his fingers. John, of course, was honest, so he immediately returned the name badge to the office.

At the next regularly scheduled council meeting of witches and wizards, the witches and wizards were excitedly discussing

that John could see them and their magic. They unanimously agreed that it was not good that John could see their magic because he might reveal their secret. They dispatched a young wizard to become John's friend and companion.

Willy, the wizard, was supposed to ensure that his new friend did not tell other people about his ability to see magic and that there were witches and wizards. Willy showed up in the classroom as a new boy who just moved to the neighborhood. John liked Willy immediately. They began spending all their free time together.

The first time Willy walked home from school with John, John told Willy about the menacing man who lived at the corner of his block. Every time Willy was over, they saw the evil Count Rictchen peering out of his window at them. Count Rictchen was suspicious of John's new friend Willy and he figured they were hiding a secret. Count Rictchen tried to break into John's house. But of course, young Willy had thought of that so he had made John's house burglar proof. The young wizard decided to tell his new friend who he was so they could fight and keep their secret together. The Count made it his life's work to discover John's secret.

One time, Count Rictchen was driving by in a car and he tried to snatch John. Willy thought fast and made the bones in the Count's arms break. When the Count reached out to grab John, he screeched in pain. John and Willy battled the Count with feats of magic and tremendous strength for many years.

On his last attempt, the evil Count was disguised as a truck driver driving a semi. He was scheming to pull over and claim he had a flat and ask the boys to help him. The Count was running late and had to speed to get to where the boys were going to be. Because he was traveling at a racecar's pace, the police set up a row of spikes to blow his tires. When the tires burst, the truck swerved out of control and plummeted into the valley beside the road. The Count was killed instantly. After the Count died, his son took over the quest to find the secret. The Count's son was not as evil or devious as the Count, and John and Willy had no problem avoiding him.

So far, no other human knew the secret. John was doing homework on the computer when he noticed his pocket glowing. He reached in and grabbed his magical stone and saw that another message was being revealed. The message said: "The magic of this stone can only be passed to an 11-year-old boy."

As John grew older, Willy changed his appearance so he would look the same age as John. Really, Willy was still a kid. Through the years, John experienced many magical and hilarious things. The most enchanting was when Willy whisked John away to the magical world of witches and wizards. Willy introduced John to all of the famous witches and wizards. After the visit to the magical world, John could see it any time he wanted by just humming a tune. Whenever John was troubled, scared or unhappy, he would just hum the tune and be packed with miraculous feelings and visions of magic.

One night, John was fooling around with his magical stone and the stone sent a message that said: "If you tell someone else the secret, you will die." John really wanted to keep his secret going in the family even after he was dead. John was convinced that even a short life with the secret was superior to a long life without it. It was very electrifying and amusing to live seeing magic all around.

John married a lovely lady named Sue. John was very happy that his first child was a boy. They named him Alan. John and his family had many fantastic adventures with Willy. On the night of Alan's eleventh birthday, John came into his room and began to tell him about the secret of magic. Alan figured this was just another one of his dad's crazy stories until John displayed the stone. Alan's eyes lit up when he saw the fantastic, brilliant stone. John told him the secret and how it worked and about his wizard guardian.

Two days later, Alan found John dead on the floor of the bathroom. Willy turned himself back into an 11-year-old boy. The day after the funeral when Alan went to school, Willy introduced himself as a new boy in the class. Alan knew exactly who Willy was.

Even though Alan missed his dad, he knew the secret and now had Willy to be his friend and to protect him. Living with magic was so magnificent that Alan understood why his father passed along the magic stone and its secret and was willing to die so that Alan could have it. Alan continued the tradition started by his father and passed it along to his first son. This tradition continued from generation to generation and only one human at a time knew the secret of magic. Willy was friends with and protected each boy, but John was always his favorite.

# Friend or Foe?

*In FRIEND OR FOE? by Salem A. Ezz, an ancient puzzle unleashes powerful forces that threaten the world. This calls for fearlessness, quick action--and a sense of humor.*

On one cold Wednesday school night, Michael Crow, father of Terry Crow, was getting ready for another one of his archeological trips. He was so excited because he has been looking for the site for four years. But his daughter did not think it was exactly that exciting.

“DAD! You just came back from another dig. Why do I have to go with you this time?” Terry yelled.

“Terry, because I couldn’t find anyone to stay with you this time and you’re not the type of kid that can stay by herself,” Michael replied.

“WHAT?” Terry replied.

Michael walked back into Terry’s room and came out with a bag in his hand. “Here are your things. We’re leaving on Friday morning at 8:30 for Greece.”

The next day at Terry’s school, Terry told her friends that they wouldn’t be seeing her for a while.

“Again? But I thought that your dad just came back from a trip,” her friends said.

“I know. I don’t know when these stupid trips are going to end,” Terry said miserably.

The next day at 8:30 Terry and her dad were about ready to board the plane. Terry saw a very odd man watching her carrying a bag that said “Archeology.” Her attention was soon drawn away when her dad gave her boarding pass to her.



“You keep this. It is very important,” her dad told her.

When she looked back, the old man was gone. She shook her head and convinced herself that she was just seeing things.

When they were up in the air, Terry asked her dad, “What fistful of boredom are we going to this time?”

“It’s not boring. See, the ancient Greeks believed that there were eight elemental birds standing for fire, wind, water, and thunder. Four fought for good and the other four fought for evil. Legend says they will arise from the earth once again, and we found artifacts about them,” Terry’s dad stated.

“Wow, how interesting,” Terry said sarcastically.

When they landed in Greece, they got a cab and went to a hotel. Terry and her dad went right to sleep because they were so tired from the trip. The next morning, Terry’s dad asked Terry if she wanted to come with him to the dig.

“Fine, I’ll come, but only because Greek TV is really weird,” Terry said.

When they arrived at the site there was a man waiting for them. “Terry, this is our sponsor for the dig, Mr. Clarkson,” Michael introduced.

“H-h-hello,” Terry said curiously. Terry thought that the man looked oddly familiar.

“Um, Mr. Crow, we have found some new artifacts. They appear to be some kind of puzzle that we are really unable to identify,” Mr. Clarkson said.

“Puzzle? We’ve found it!” Michael yelled. Michael ran into the cave that had the paintings on its walls with Mr. Clarkson, but Terry stayed behind. When they got into the cave Michael said, “That’s odd.”

“What?” Mr. Clarkson asked.

“Where is the puzzle of Socran?” Michael wondered

“WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?” Mr. Clarkson yelled.

“The puzzle of Socran, which supposedly when put together unleashes the evil birds. The same thing occurs with this puzzle for the good birds. It says right here on the walls.”

“Really?” Mr. Clarkson said suspiciously.

“I won’t be able to put the puzzle together here. I will need to take it to the hotel for further study,” Michael said.

Mr. Clarkson and Michael came out of the cave. Michael told Terry that they had to go back to the hotel.

“Oh, joy, more Greek TV,” Terry smirked.

When they got to the hotel, Michael received a call from the front desk saying that there was someone waiting for him. Michael left the room, telling Terry not to leave.

After Michael left, Terry started to watch TV and soon got bored. Then she saw the three-dimensional puzzle on the table. She walked over to it and started to try to solve it.

Thirty minutes later, Michael was still in the lobby and Terry was about finished with the puzzle. It was in the shape of a pyramid with a picture of a bird on each side. Right after she put the last piece in, four bright beams shot out of each side of the puzzle and out of the beam sprouted four birds as big as Terry, each with a wingspan of ten feet!

“Fire, wind, thunder, water; this is so cool!” Terry thought to herself.

Terry heard her dad coming up the stairs. As nervous as she could be, Terry quickly tried to hide the birds. The door opened and Terry’s dad came in and said: “Sorry it took so long. It was just about work and...THE PUZZLE! You finished it!” Michael said, surprised. “AAHH! B-B-B-B-B-B-B-BIRDS! ALL THE ELEMENTAL BIRDS ARE RIGHT THERE!” Terry’s dad yelled.

“Can I keep them?” Terry asked.

“WHAT?” Michael said in shock.

“I’ve never had four of my own crime-fighting elemental birds,” Terry stated.

“NO!” Michael insisted.

“But they’re nice.”

“You’re too young to have your own crime-fighting elemental birds. We’ll just have to hide them for now. We’d better not take the puzzle apart because worse things might happen.”

“Yes, I don’t want anything to happen to Flame, Icy, Puffy, and Thunderbolt,” Terry said.

“You’ve got to be kidding me. You can’t name them. They all ready have a name: Birds of Yoshi-Shama, not Flame, Icy, Puffy, and Thunderbolt,” Michael exclaimed.

“Whatever, but where are we going to hide them?” Terry asked.

They both turned their heads and found their answer. The building right next to the hotel had a sign on it saying “Storage Garages” with the phone number under it.

“That looks good,” Michael stated the obvious.

“Well, *du and uh*, but how are we going to take them there?” Terry said.

Michael walked over to the phone and called the garage and asked them to bring them some moving boxes. When the moving boxes came they took them to their room and put the birds in them. They were screeching but eventually they calmed down. Next they put the boxes in their pickup truck. Little did they know they were being followed.

When they got all the boxes to the garage, Michael walk over to the front desk and said, “We need storage for these four boxes.”

“Sure. Let me take you back to the garages,” said the man at the front desk. “Wow, these boxes are heavy.”

When they were walking in the garage area something odd happened. Terry looked back and thought she saw the man she had seen at the airport, but again she convinced herself that she did not. “Psst, Dad, the birds are, like, glowing,” Terry whispered.

The birds smashed out of the boxes.

“AAAHHH, B-B-B-B-BIRDS!” said the man from the front desk.

“That’s exactly what I said,” Michael said.

“They’re the four birds of the Yoshi-Shima puzzle,” stated the man from the front desk.

“Wait, how do you know about the myth?” Michael asked.

“Well...” the man at the front desk said but got interrupted.

“There’s that that same guy that I saw at the airport and just right now,” Terry interrupted.

The man walked out of the shadows.

“MR. CLARKSON!” both Terry and Michael said together, astonished.

“Not Mr. Clarkson, but Cransa, master of evil magic, and now, thanks to you, Michael Crow, I have control over the birds of Socran. It was so easy to follow you.”

“So who now?” Terry asked.

“Evil birds,” Michael explained.

“I see. Oh, that’s a bad thing,” Terry said.

“Yes, and here’s even more bad news for you. You see, since the birds don’t have a master, they are defenseless,” explained Cransa.

“And I am Sona, master of good magic, and I need the puzzle of Yoshi-Shima to control the good birds,” said the man from the front desk.

“WOW, this is a lot better than having my own four elemental birds, but also a lot more complicated,” Terry said excitedly.

“WAIT! I saw your panting at the cave, and your name. You are the warrior that put the birds away.” Whispering, Michael said, “Um, Terry, now would be a good time to get the puzzle.”

“R-right,” Terry said. Terry started to run for the hotel. Cransa was about to shoot a beam at Terry out of his staff. Then Sona got his staff out and shot the staff out of Cransa’s hand.

Terry ran to the hotel room. When she opened the door she saw four men standing in the room taking the puzzle. They were wearing strange clothes and had ancient marks all over their body and were very masculine. Suddenly they vanished into thin air. Terry ran back to the storage building and saw that Cransa was gone and all eight birds, too.

“The puzzle is gone, too,” Terry yelled.

“WHAT!” yelled Sona.

“There were these guys. They looked like circus freaks. They were covered with all these weird tattoos and they disa--” Terry got interrupted.

“The dark warriors of Cransa,” Sona said.

“Great. So now we’re on a chase. I think we can find more answers at the dig,” Michael suggested.

“Hey, I have questions, too, like how did the warriors disappear into thin air? And where the heck did Cran-sana-fana whatever go?” Terry asked.

“Same way the warriors disappeared. Cransa and his warriors have disappearing powder,” Sona said.

“So, I guess we’re going to the dig,” Terry said.

About 30 minutes later they arrived at the dig. They got out of the car and went into the cave.

“We’re getting pretty deep in the cave,” Michael stated.

“This is deep enough,” said Sona.

“But...” He got interrupted.

“No, look at this drawing. It says that if the two puzzles are connected, one set of four birds will merge together into one tremendous bird that has the powers of all four birds, and the person that put the puzzle together chooses whether the birds of Yoshi-Shima merge or the birds of Socran,” Sona interrupted.

“Hey, everybody!” Michael said. He was carrying an artifact that had four bird head coming out of each side. “Look! This artifact says that it glows in the direction of whatever puzzle you choose, so... Yoshi-Shima!”

The bird head that had an N on it glowed.

“We go north,” Michael said brilliantly.

They followed the puzzle, and after a very long time they reached the ancient coliseum. The artifact pointed straight inside, so they walked in. Cransa was about to merge the puzzles but he paused when he saw Terry, Michael, and Sona. The four men that Terry saw at the hotel were there, too.

“Get them, warriors!” Cransa yelled.

“I’ll go for the warriors,” Michael said.

“I’ll go for Cransa,” Sona said.

“What about me?” Terry asked.

“You’re too young to fight the forces of evil,” Michael said.

“Fine, I’ll steal,” Terry thought.

“Come on, you circus freaks,” Michael said

They all shot bright blinding yellow beams out of their hands. Michael yelled, then did a back flip and missed a beam. “I did not know I could do that,” Michael said.

Meanwhile, Sona and Cransa each shot a beam out of his staff. The beams--one was pure blue, the other was bloody red--smashed against each other. Then Terry ran for the puzzle.

“NO!” Sona and Michael yelled. Sona got distracted and got blown away.

Michael did, too, when the warriors’ beams blew him away.

“Look, it’s someone from Kiss,” Terry yelled.

“What?” Cransa said, confused.

“*Duh!* Look in a mirror,” Terry said.

Terry had the puzzles in her hand and put them together. Right after, one of the warriors flung her 100 feet in the air. And there she was, doing cartwheels end over end, then she started to fall straight down to the ground. Terry was only thinking about smacking the ground when she yelled, “YOSHI-SHIMA!”

Suddenly, a magnificent bird with thunder on one wing, water on the other, a tail of wind, and a Mohawk of fire, more beautiful and magnificent than everything in the world put together, caught Terry in the air. Terry, on the back of the bird, yelled, “Yoshi-Shima, attack the four birds and men, and Cransa, Cransa, bye-bye.” Then a huge beam of fire, wind, water, and thunder blew Cransa, the four men, and the birds away. The bird landed, and Terry came off its back. After that it flew away into the sea.

“Wow, what an adventure. My daughter flew 100 feet in the air and I almost got my butt whipped by circus freaks,” Michael said.

Sona walk over to the puzzle and saw nothing but a pile of sand. “The puzzles have vanished because they were merged,” Sona said.

“Um, Dad, can we go home?” Terry asked.

“Yes. And I don’t think were going on any more trips,” Michael answered.

“What happened to Yoshi-Shima?” Terry asked again.

“He has vanished into the sea,” Sona answered. And when Terry and Michael were not looking, he picked up a feather.

The next day at the airport Terry and Michael were saying good-bye to Sona. “The next time you need help, call me, if reincarnated warriors do have phones,” Michael insisted

“Same to you, but not the reincarnated part,” Sona said. Sona pulled a feather out of his pocket. “Keep this. It’s from Yoshi-Shima,” Sona said.

“Thanks and, um, goodbye,” Terry replied.

Terry and Michael walked into the plane, waving goodbye to their friend. When they got on the plane, Michael’s work cell phone rang. He talked for a while, and then he broke the phone in half.

“What was that?” Terry asked.

“Another archeological job,” Michael said.

# The Galactic Magician

*In THE GALACTIC MAGICIAN by Martell Ducker, the keepers of good and evil meet on the field of battle. With magic on each side, the struggle intensifies until one victor emerges.*

Once on the planet of Sanatoria there was a great and powerful giant named Obelisk. His life's goal was to destroy the universe. This was because he was evil. The only reason he couldn't is because there was a very powerful magician always getting in his way. The magician called himself Kane. He was the king of Sanatoria. He was invincible. He was invincible because he had the strongest warriors. But they will be chickens at times.

One day Obelisk went to the River of Souls to get a drink. The River of Souls is a river of dark power. He was unaware of the power the River of Souls could give a dark demon like him. When he drank a little of the water, he felt a huge jolt of energy like never before.

After the feeling went away, Obelisk blasted a nearby post that was made of the hardest metal in the universe. The post was there to hold up a small house. To his surprise, the post broke! Obelisk thought to himself, *I could never break that before.*

Little did he know that the river not only made him stronger, but smarter. He thought that if he used his newfound power he would be able to defeat Kane.

Meanwhile in his mansion, Kane was feeding his newborn daughter, Kandace, when he heard a blast. He used his transportation power to get to the nearest window. When he looked out he saw Obelisk, as usual, destroying everything. He asked himself, *Why won't he give up?* He flew out the window to stop Obelisk. As he was about to put a dent in the demon's face,



he noticed Obelisk was ten times stronger than before. He knew that he couldn't beat him alone.

He rushed back to his castle to call his warriors and pet dragon. Their names were Ratchet, Clank, Griffore, and the Skull Dragon. Kane told everyone how they would attack at 8:00 that night.

When they got there, they saw that Obelisk was sleeping. "All that carnage must have worn him out," said Clank. Kane thought he could use this to his advantage. He used his mind-reading power to see how Obelisk got all his energy. He found that Obelisk had gone to the River of Souls and had gotten stronger. He was not happy, for he knew that the River of Souls constantly made demons stronger.

Kane had to act quickly. He told Clank to go get the package in the safe. "The combination is 1123942," Kane said. In 15 minutes Clank returned. He had a package marked **CLASSIFIED**. When Kane opened the package he revealed three stones: the POWER STONES. He said, "When I use these, I will have more power than the River of Souls could ever give Obelisk." When he gripped the stones, he turned into the Magician of Black Chaos.

As Obelisk was about to wake up, Kane gave a huge energy wave to his head and stunned Obelisk for the moment. When Obelisk got up he wasn't happy with Kane. As Obelisk was about to attack, Clank shot Obelisk in the back of his kneecap with his devastating rocket launcher. Ratchet and Griffore just watched.

Obelisk didn't show a sign of pain. As the skull dragon was about to attack, Obelisk caught him and sucked the energy out him. After everyone saw that, they all ran, except for Kane. He stayed to battle the beast because he knew Obelisk's weakness. He knew that one time during the fight, Obelisk would open his body and try to absorb Kane. He knew that when he did this he could be inside Obelisk's body.

He charged at Obelisk and his plan came into play. Obelisk opened up and Kane took advantage. He was inside Obelisk and threw his mighty sword up and transformed it into two swords. He was spinning his swords and then gave an energy blast that

destroyed Obelisk and freed Kane. He had left no trace of Obelisk.

After that he returned home. He punished his warriors and revived his dragon. And then the world of Sanatoria was at peace again.

# The Girl with Rosebud Hair: A Mystery

*In a small, old, spooky town lived a girl who was a mystery to all around her. What will happen when the clock strikes 12:00? Ariana Hillary Barkin reveals all in THE GIRL WITH ROSEBUD HAIR: A MYSTERY.*

It was the season of fall, when October came around. October was the only month that the girl with rosebud hair would step a foot out of her house. Her house was painted dark, murky colors, like a haunted house. There were magnificent rosebud vines along the sides of her house. Out of everything, there was no driveway, nor an opening in the spooky, black, murky-colored, picket fence. What was she hiding from us, and why was she called “the girl with rosebud hair?”

It was October 1, 1955, the first day of the girl with rosebud hair’s show. She was wearing a traditional dress of the 1850’s, which was of her time. Her eyes were covered with a dark shaded pair of odd sunglasses. There was a silky, black bonnet covering her hair. She walked down street after street, with her black basket. When she got to the corner market, she filled her basket with as much raw fish as possible. Why, just why? What would some old crazy lady do with all that fish?

Here are a few words from some of the ladies at the Sunshine Retirement Center.

“That lady wears the same thing everyday.”

“She needs some better hygiene.”

“Yeah, remember about all that fish!”

Four days had now passed, and it was around noon. The girl with rosebud hair stepped outside with her black basket filled with raw fish. Then she began to slip one piece of fish at a time in between the vines of the house. To everyone's surprise there was enough fish to go around the whole house, and even from the top of the house to the bottom of the house.

Here are some more comments of the ladies from the Sunshine Retirement Center.

"How old are you?"

"93."

"Talk about age, that awkward lady seems to be 100!"

The next morning, the smell and all of the fish had vanished. "Where did all of it go?" the townspeople said. "How could someone or something eat or need all that fish?"

That night, there was only one person up who saw the fish vanish. It was little six-year-old Lucy-Jane. She saw it all, but never told a single soul. Instead, she wrote the story down in her journal. It went like this...

*Dear Journal,*

*I just saw the most amazing thing tonight! The awkward lady down the street ate all of the smelly fish! It seemed to be cooked, unlike the raw fish from this afternoon; weird. One side at a time she would eat. From top to bottom she ate every single piece of fish. I don't know exactly why she did this, but I think it was for some special experiment or something. Weird, huh? Got to go, bye.*

*Sincerely,  
Lucy-Jane*

Only the witch (the girl with rosebud hair) knew about the fish. It would be used for a potion, a simple mental-connected potion (all in the head).

A week had passed, and it was Saturday the twelfth. That night at around midnight, the girl with rosebud hair left, without a peep of sound. The full moon was out that foggy dark night, along with the gentle swaying of willow trees. She was going to a meeting for all the witches in Melcan Township. That night, she was assigned to bring all of Melcan Township's people as slaves to the witches, but she only had one month to do it.

It was now the third week of October, and there were only two weeks left.

Those two weeks were spent preparing her potion.

That night when everyone was snuggled up in bed, the girl with rosebud hair made a special potion. Then, she sprinkled a little into everyone's mouth. The next morning when the townspeople woke up, they started walking to different witches' homes, to be their slaves forever. No one tried to stop them, and they became their slaves forever. What will happen next October month?

### *Epilogue*

Later on, it was found that the girl with rosebud hair was called this because of her brilliant hair color. (Her hair was the magnificent bright color of a red rosebud.) The reason witches only come out in the fall is they believe that if you sleep during the seasons of winter, spring, and summer, you will live longer. This theory is true, but only to those who believe (witches). Her secret was that she was a witch, including her beliefs. One of her beliefs was that if something was kept out for a certain amount of days (usually four) and then aired out, it would be better. The taste would be magnificent; raw would turn to cooked, just like magic! This came true for her with the raw fish. It made it much easier to eat when cooked.

She was born in the 1800's. The 1800's were a popular time for witchcraft. This story took place in 1955 because she lived her life through the 1800's to 1955 and beyond.

The girl with rosebud hair lived a miserable life. No one knew her true name, nor talked to her, except for some other witches. She tried to fit in, but never did. Every day was out of the ordinary for the girl with rosebud hair.

# Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Destiny

*In GOLD, SILVER, BRONZE, AND DESTINY, Jay Winkler writes of a boy who travels to a planet far from home to meet his true fate.*

A long time ago there was a planet called Samballe. Samballe had trees of all shapes and sizes. It had a sun, red as blood. It was flat as far as the eye could see, and it had some of the oddest creatures anyone ever has and ever will see.

On Samballe there was a creature called Hunaku. Hunaku had 20 legs that looked like snake tails. His body looked like that of a snake, except he had arms and stood up. He held a bronze staff that had amazing powers, including the power of making other things like him, bringing the dead to life, and putting things to death. Hunaku was the ruler of Samballe, and all of the people thought he was evil.

Once there was a boy named Joshua Nabbero. He was five-foot six-inch tall brown haired thin boy. He was a human, born on the planet Rivalbelt. But there was one thing that separated him from all other humans. He had a heart made of pure gold, and he had bright, metallic yellow eyes. He tried to save the people of Samballe from Hunaku.

This is his story.

Joshua landed on Samballe early in the day. He walked until he found a large tent village. "Who goes there?" an old woman barked. The woman, who was the town guard, stepped out of a tent.

"I am Joshua Nabbero of Rivalbelt," Joshua said.

A man, painted red, stepped out of his tent. "Are you the one with the golden heart?" the man said.

"Yes. How did you know?" Joshua asked.

"I am Namu. I lead this planet in the struggle against Hunaku. On behalf of all the people in the village, we are completely at your disposal."

"What exactly is Hunaku? I heard he was an evil creature and I came here to investigate." Namu explained who Hunaku was.

"How am I going to fight this vile beast?" Joshua asked.

"With the Spear of Wonder," Namu replied.

"The what?" Joshua and other villagers exclaimed.

"The Golden Spear of Wonder," Namu said. "It has the powers of Hunaku when you are ready to possess them."

"When will I be ready to possess them?" Joshua asked.

Another man, also painted red, came out of a tent. "When you are fighting Hunaku, he will try to make something else like him. A beam will come out of his bronze staff. You will put your spear in the beam and turn into Munaku, the blue counterpart of Hunaku. You will use your powers for good."

"This is Aku," Namu said, smiling. "He will guide you on your way to Hunaku's lair."

"Two questions: Why are you painted red? And if you had the spear, why didn't you do this all yourself?"

"I'll answer the first question," Namu said. "We are part of an organization called the Redmen. We help the village in the struggle against Hunaku."

"I'll answer question two," Aku said. "We couldn't do anything with the spear because it's a golden spear, and a golden spear must match a golden heart, just as a bronze staff must match a bronze heart. Hunaku has a bronze heart."

"Hunaku is one of the three metal hearts!" Joshua gasped. "There's me, with a gold heart, Hunaku, with a bronze heart, and there was a silver heart. Do you know him?"

"Yes. His name was Tunaku. He died. He used to rule the planet. He was a nice ruler. He looked like Hunaku, but he was red. He's the reason we chose red as our color. Before you kill Hunaku, bring Tunaku back," Namu said.



“I will,” Joshua promised. “Let’s go.”

They traveled for days. They eventually came to a cave, guarded by a four-legged beast. “Who are you?” the beast scowled.

“I am an ambassador from the planet Ringerbank. I have come with a gift for Hunaku,” Joshua lied.

“You can go, but the Redman can not,” the beast snarled.

Joshua held the point of the spear to the beast’s neck. “Are you sure?”

“You may both proceed,” the beast said in a scared tone.

They walked for a long time until they reached a room. A creature who looked exactly like the one guarding the door said, “In this room you will wait until Hunaku calls you in.”

“These creatures we’ve been seeing are what Hunaku, and soon you, will be able to make things into. They look exactly like Hunaku, just with fewer legs,” Aku explained.

“Is it good to look like that?” Joshua asked.

“It depends on who made you like that,” Aku said. “If you or Tunaku made someone like that it would be good. To get made like that by Hunaku is bad.”

“When I become Munaku, you’ll be the first one I make like that, and you will be advisor to the king, Aku. On this trip you have not only been my guide, but you have been my friend. Like when that pair of giant, mutant Manaks attacked us. I would have never known their weak spot if you hadn’t been there,” Joshua said.

“Well, it was your spear that got us out. Thank you for the honor of being your advisor,” Aku said.

“On my home planet, Rivalbelt, and also on planets like Ringerbank, Koni, and Earth, they call Manaks cockroaches,” Joshua said.

“Speaking of Ringerbank, why did you tell the guard you were an ambassador from Ringerbank?” Aku asked.

“Because I used to be an ambassador from Ringerbank. I grew up there,” Joshua said.

Another creature came out. “Hunaku is ready.” He led them into a room.

“Joshua Nabbero,” Hunaku said. “I was expecting you.”

“How did you know I was coming?” Joshua yelled.

“What, do you think I don’t have spies all over the place? Come on, if you’re a king you have to have good spies all over the place,” Hunaku said.

“Let’s fight.” Joshua said.

A great fight began. Joshua fought with his gold spear, and Hunaku fought with his staff. They got tired, and Hunaku decided to make something else like him. A white beam came out of Hunaku’s staff. Joshua put his spear into the beam, and became Munaku. Munaku used the magic he possessed to bring back Tunaku. Together, Tunaku and Munaku killed Hunaku.

As promised, Munaku turned Aku into one of the creatures that looks like him, and Tunaku did the same to Namu. Together Munaku and Tunaku peacefully ruled Samballe. Namu and Aku were advisors to the kings and heirs to the throne.

And all was well.

# Gwen's Gift

*When a young girl becomes prisoner of an evil sorceress, she realizes she must do something about it. She faces many hardships throughout her quest for freedom in **GWEN'S GIFT**, by **Kristyn Lewis**.*

June 28, 1506

Hi, my name is Gwendolyn Rose McGaren. Most people call me Gwen for short. I am eleven years old and I live in the village of Kwenmor, in the country known as Wytrany. Wytrany is a large country, and it is very different from any other country you'll ever hear about. In Wytrany we have ogres, fairies, trolls, wizards, sorceresses, unicorns, and other mystical creatures and people. My home in Kwenmor is near the eastern coast of Wytrany, where most of the people live. The Stormy Mountain range divides Wytrany into two halves. Mostly people live east of the mountains, and the western side of the mountains has many, many odd creatures. Many are odd, but in a bad way. I don't know much about the western side, but I do know that I hope I never visit there. Things like ogres and trolls live over there.

I live with my family in our home. My family is made up of my parents, my brother, my two sisters, and myself. My siblings' names are Jed (the oldest, 15), Lana (she's 13), and Sadie, my younger sister who is four. My mother and father gave me this diary as a gift for my birthday last month. They know I love to write, and so they gave me this because they said it was a good place for me to write down my thoughts and stories, and even to draw. Well, I'd better go. Lana's practicing her cooking skills by

trying to cook dinner today, and I'm pretty sure that she is going to need some help!

June 30, 1506

Something horrible has happened. I don't even know where to begin! This terrifying event occurred yesterday, which is why I didn't write. When I woke up yesterday morning, I had a weird feeling that something was different. If only I would have known what would change, because if I did, I could have done something about it. An ogre escaped from somewhere (probably the ogre prison) and entered our village. He was rampaging through Kwenmor, burning down buildings, madly crushing everything in his path, and even...eating people! People's screams rang in my ears as everyone scurried through the streets of Kwenmor like mice escaping from a cat.

My family and I tried to stay together, but as we were running away from the beast, my foot got stuck (probably in mud) and I tripped. In all of the commotion, I was separated from my family. As I sluggishly got back up on my feet after the fall, I felt a tug on my leg and I was lifted up, high, high in the air to find myself in the ogre's hand! I looked up at his hideous face, and I could tell he wanted so badly to chomp on my little body (which must have looked like a little piece of food just waiting to be eaten), but for some reason he told himself not to. Sure, I knew he wasn't going to eat me right then, but I was still panicking. This ogre was gigantic! He had greenish-brown skin and ugly black warts all over his body. His breath smelled like rotting human flesh (most likely because he had just eaten several people), and his teeth looked as if he had not brushed them for twenty years, or, knowing ogres, maybe he had never brushed his teeth!

Anyway, you can imagine how frightened I was being in this monster's hand. My whole body began to quiver, and my eyes felt like they were about to pop out! The last thing I remember was looking at his face, and then I felt a shock of pain and everything went black. I later found out that he knocked me out and put me

in his pocket! Now I am here, in this ogre's stinky and dark pocket! What am I going to do? Where is he taking me? Is he going to eat me eventually? Oh, I have so many questions! I must figure out a way to get out of here!

July 1, 1506

It has been two whole days already! I'm still stuck in the ogre's smelly pocket! I'm writing now because the ogre is taking his mid-day nap, so I'm not being too jostled around to write. Also, it is daytime, so the sun peeks through the top of the ogre's pocket that I'm in, which is giving me enough light to see what I'm writing.

I haven't eaten anything but slices of bread and a little water! I think the ogre is trying to forget about me, so he doesn't get so anxious to eat me. What I don't get is why he won't eat me. I mean, I don't have a problem with that, but he can't possibly be full from just one or two people! He is an ogre! I don't know much about ogres, but I do know that they'll eat anything they can get their hands on (as long as it has a lot of meat). I don't even know where I am anymore. All I know is that he's taking me somewhere, and for some reason he can't eat me. The weird thing is that I'm not sure if I want to go where he's taking me or not. If he's taking me to his family to be a part of their Thanksgiving dinner, then I hope he takes his time. But if he's taking me somewhere that I can get help to escape somehow, than let's get moving!

It probably doesn't matter, though, because I have a feeling that this ogre has almost reached his destination. His knowing that food is in his pocket doesn't seem to bother him as much as before, because he must know that he doesn't have to put up with this much longer. I miss my family so much! Do they even know I'm gone? If they do, do they think I'm dead and so they're giving up hope, or are they trying to find me? I'm extremely bored and worrisome. I'm so worried that I've been having insomnia! I'm not only concerned about myself, but I'm concerned about my

family, too! Are they all right? I haven't seen them since the attack on our village. I want to go home so badly!

July 5, 1506

We've arrived at the ogre's destination. Neither of my ideas of where he was taking me was correct. I must go now. I'll write later, when I have a chance to really get into things.

July 7, 1506

You'll never guess where I'm stuck now. I am prisoner of the evil sorceress Pandora. Pandora is very mean. She has a high-pitched, screechy voice that snaps at you like a snapping turtle. Her eyes have a cold, icy look to them, and when she stares deeply into your eyes it will make you freeze and even shiver! She always wears a black gown, and ties her black hair up tightly into a large bun. She told me that she cast a spell on the ogre that made him kidnap me and deliver me to her! Now I am her servant! I feel like Cinderella in these rags. I haven't had anything to eat but scraps of food and bread. It was the same in the ogre's pocket, but this lady is cruel. She took away all of my good items, even the clothes I was wearing, and she made me wear rags! At least I was able to hide this diary from her. I've been thinking of escape plans for days now, but none of them could possibly work. She lives in this big, stone castle by a forest. She watches every move I make. When I sleep (which is rarely now), she uses her crystal ball to watch me. She also uses the ball to watch me when she doesn't feel like following me as I clean, or when she's busy working on a potion of some sort. I guess I'll figure something out...in a few years! I am so angry! I don't even know why she kidnapped me! I must get home! I can't stand being away from my dear family, especially since I'm stuck here! Uh oh, she's calling for me again, and if I'm not there in 5...4...3 seconds she might turn me into a toad or something!

July 15, 1506

My entire body aches. Pandora makes me scrub, dust, and wash everything! Then, once I sit down to rest, she says, “Oh, you dreadful child! Look at this castle! You aren’t nearly finished cleaning! You aren’t allowed to rest until every room in this castle is spotless! And that includes your room!” Speaking of my room, it isn’t much of one, but to her it’s *generous*. It’s up in one of the small towers of the castle. All that’s in there is a wooden cot (no mattress, just hay with a blanket), a candle, and a small chest (for the very few items I have). There is a narrow slit in the wall, which I guess is supposed to be a window, and the floor is made of pebbles and dirt, making it impossible to clean. Before she kidnapped me, I think Pandora used this room for storage. Even her cats have a nicer room!

Anyway, I’ve been cleaning so much that I think I’m even cleaning in my sleep! I’m so tired; I could fall asleep right now. Actually, since I have the time right now, I think I will go to sleep. Goodnight.

July 18, 1506

The most magical event happened to me today! Earlier today (around noon), Pandora sent me to the stream in the forest to get 15 gallons of water for her to use in her new potions.

I love these woods by the castle, but I especially love going to the stream. All the animals go to the stream for drinks, and I love watching them play and have fun. Every day I wish I could be like them, free and with no worries. Out here, the animals are my only friends. I talk to them about my thoughts, and I think they listen (but of course they don’t talk back). Today while watching some fox pups play, I heard a faint noise. I listened closer, and it sounded like a cry for help. The foxes heard it, too, and they led me to where it was coming from.

“Help, help me!” cried the voice. I looked, and hanging from a stone by the stream was a fairy! The poor fairy had broken her

wing and was about to fall into the stream. I quickly but gently lifted her up and set her down on a small rock. As the fairy cleaned herself off, I looked at her more and I realized what beautiful creatures fairies are! I had never seen a real fairy before today in my life! This fairy happened to have long red hair tied up in a bun on the top of her head with lilacs circling the bun, and emerald green eyes that seemed to twinkle! She had some freckles on her rosy cheeks and on her nose. Her dress was made of lilacs like the ones in her hair, and her wings were light blue with sparkles. She was lovelier than any flower I had ever picked, and lovelier than any princesses or fairies in my little sister's picture books. She finally finished cleaning herself off when she spoke.

"Oh thank you, thank you very much!" she exclaimed. "You saved my life! My name is Lorelei, and since you helped me, how can I help *you*, my darling?" the fairy sweetly remarked. Of course the only thing I would ever wish for was to get home to my family, so that's what I wished for. Unfortunately, Lorelei said she couldn't grant any wishes, but could only help me find a way to get home because she needed both of her magic wings to make any wishes come true. I am a bit disappointed, but help is better than nothing. We've already started to think up an escape plan! I can't wait to get out of here and go home again!

Unfortunately, Pandora caught me talking with the fairy. She was furious! As soon as I walked in the door, I heard, "Oh, and just where have you been? Getting water for me, right? I DON'T THINK SO! I SAW YOU OUT THERE, YOU NASTY, HORRIBLE GIRL! NOW GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE I REALLY GET MAD!" Pandora screamed. Now she watches me whenever I go out to get water for her from the stream. I'm suspicious now. Why would Pandora care if I was speaking to a fairy or not? I'm not getting into trouble. Still, Pandora said if she caught me talking to "that fairy" again, then I would regret it. Now I don't know what I'm going to do, but somehow, Lorelei and I will think up a plan that will work, even though Pandora watches me closely. I'm very excited!



July 21, 1506

It has been three days, and Lorelei and I have finally come up with an escape plan. I was able to sneak Lorelei into the castle while Pandora was busy making a potion in her potion room. Over the past few days, while Pandora slept, Lorelei and I were able to talk (Pandora is a sound sleeper). Lorelei wrote everything down as we were discussing the plan (she's forgetful and she didn't want to forget our master plan), so I'm just pasting what she wrote in here. Here it is:

*Escape Plan* (will take place July 22, 1506)

*Step 1: The Chore*

*After being commanded to get water for Pandora's potions, Gwen will go to the stream in the forest as usual. Pandora will probably watch Gwen (as she has the past few days). Everything is done the same way as usual, until Step 2.*

*Step 2: The Distraction*

*While Gwen is at the stream being closely watched by Pandora, Lorelei shall knock over several beakers in the potion room, making enough noise to distract Pandora. While Pandora is having a fit over the mess in the other room, Gwen will run deep into the forest, up to the foxes' den. There she will wait for Lorelei to call one of the horses from the stable, and Lorelei will come and get her.*

*Step 3: The Get-Away*

*Once Lorelei and the horse reach Gwen, they will both get on the horse and ride away as fast as possible. This is because Pandora is likely to notice Gwen's disappearance and chase after her.*

#### *Step 4: The Traps*

*In case of the emergency of Pandora catching up to Gwen and Lorelei, many traps will be set up throughout the forest. The traps will be a net over by the weeping willows, a large pit (covered with grass) near the foxes' den, and an "invisible" net spread across four of the tallest maple trees. Gwen and Lorelei shall ride away closely to these traps, which will lead Pandora right into them.*

So that is our plan. I hope it works! Lorelei will put up the traps tomorrow (I can't, since Pandora watches me when I go outside). I snuck her out of the castle today when I had to go get a bucket of mud for Pandora so she could put up the traps within the next two days. And on the 22<sup>nd</sup> (in two days), our devious plan will take place. I can't wait!

July 22, 1506

It worked! It worked! Our plan really worked! I AM FREE! At first, I felt a little nervous about our plan. I mean, what would Pandora do to me if she had caught us? The trap really surprised her, and the look on her face was hilarious! Yesterday, I thought of another idea to "sweeten-up" the plan. I made it so that each of the traps had a bucket of honey connected to it, so when Pandora ran into the traps, she got sticky honey all over her! Also, Lorelei had the idea of adding feathers in with the honey. Pandora ran into the net over by the weeping willows, and as we were rushing away on the horse, I took one last glance at Pandora. She looked like a giant chicken! She screamed and hollered at me, "Get back here! Get back here, you wretched girl! I'll get you!" Her screechy voice only helped me visualize her as a giant chicken; it didn't send chills down my spine anymore. I'm still laughing about it, and I'm so happy that I'm finally free! Now I begin my journey home!

July 23, 1506

Today we began our trip back to Kwenmor. Luckily, Lorelei always carries a map of Wytrany, so we know where we are going and how to get home. According to the map, it should take us about two more days until we arrive in Evergreen Valley, which is right next to Kwenmor. I'm so anxious to get home! Now I long to see my family even more since I know that I'm getting close! I can almost hear my mother's voice in the wind, saying, "Come home, Gwen, come home, my darling. You are almost here! Don't give up!" I think that is what motivates me. Knowing that my family is counting on me, and hoping that I will get home safely, helps me to be determined to get home.

July 24, 1506

We've already passed through Jenspar and Isomielez (two large villages). Now we have to go through Zowlyurch Forest! Legends say that the foulest creatures live in that forest, and that anyone that has gone in has never come out! I'm worried about what will happen to Lorelei and me. When I was little, just hearing stories where knights traveled through the forest frightened me, and some gave me nightmares. Now, my nightmare is coming true, but I have to face it. I can't turn back now, not when I'm so close to home. Lorelei is worried, too. Whenever I mention the forest, she gets a look in her eye showing how afraid she is. I tell her how I hear my mother's voice, and how we have to be determined and strong if we ever want to get back to Kwenmor. It turns out Lorelei's family lives in Kwenmor's forest. She was only in the forest behind Pandora's castle because she was coming back from her cousin's house (which is in the forest behind Pandora's castle). She was getting a drink by the stream when she slipped, broke her wing, and started calling for help until I saved her. I started to change the subject and ask her about that because I didn't want to get her too

worried about when we go into the forest. Tomorrow we go in, and I sure hope we come out.

July 25, 1506

I have never been so scared in my life! We walked through the forest for the longest time. I heard noises that made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up straight. I saw many glowing eyes that were staring at me. The leaves on the trees quivered as the cold whistling wind blew. The forest was almost pitch black except for the lantern that I carried in my hand. I could tell Lorelei was scared, too, but she tried to hide it. And this wasn't even what frightened me the most! Let me tell you what happened.

As Lorelei, the horse, and I crept through the forest, I thought I heard a cackle. I jumped, which made the leaves on the ground rustle, and that scared Lorelei. Just as I was about to calm down, out of some bushes jumped a gigantic troll! This troll wasn't like the ones I saw in pictures in my books; it was worse! This troll's teeth were as long as swords and as sharp as daggers! Its eyes were red, and glowing in the darkness. Its feet were the size of logs getting ready to stomp on my little head. And the troll was as tall as a mountain. He cackled and said, "Ha, ha! You little pipsqueaks! Who do you think you are, marching around through MY forest?" His voice made me tremble. "Afraid, are we?" he mocked. "I'll show you afraid!" he yelled. Suddenly he lifted me up so I was face to face with him. I actually thought I felt my skin slide away from my body, and I was frozen staring at the beast. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest, and I even held my chest because I feared my heart would jump out.

All this time, Lorelei was hiding behind a rock, watching to see what the troll would do next. As I lay there in the troll's enormous hand, I thought I heard someone speak. A very small someone said, "Hey, you! Why don't you go p-pick on s-someone your own size?" The troll looked surprised. I turned to look to see whose the voice was and I was about as astonished as the troll

once I realized that the small voice was Lorelei's! The troll looked at Lorelei, puzzled. "Excuse me! Yeah, you! Mister Troll! I was talking to you, and I said pick on someone your own size! Just because you are bigger than everyone else doesn't mean you can be mean! You know what, you are just a big bully!" Lorelei continued on with her speech, moving towards the troll a step with every word. The troll put me down and slowly backed away with caution. I could see fear in the troll's eyes. Lorelei continued to tell the troll how rude it was of him to treat us like that, up until that big old sissy looked like he was about to cry!

Finally Lorelei stopped with a satisfied look on her face. After she stopped, the troll calmed down from crying and told us about how he had no friends as a kid. He said all the other trolls picked on him because his hair stuck up, and he had big buckteeth. I tried not to laugh, but I was surprised at the time. I didn't know trolls had feelings, too! The troll (whose name turned out to be George) apologized for being mean and frightening me, and he took Lorelei and me to the other side of the forest where we got off in Evergreen Valley. We promised to stay in touch with George, and we continued on through the valley. Now I'm almost home!

July 26, 1506

I'M HOME AT LAST! My family told me about how they looked everywhere in the area for me, until they found out from some neighbors that the ogre had kidnapped me. Then, they said all they could do was hope and wait. Well, it worked! I told them everything that happened, and my little sister said her favorite part was when we met the troll! Now she wants my parents to tell the story to her at bedtime! We all hugged several times, and I introduced my family to Lorelei. I told them about when she faced the troll and saved my life, and I told them about what a great friend she had been to me. My parents asked where Lorelei lived, and when she told them how close her family lives to us, it looked as if my parents were about to jump for joy! We all had a

fantastic time together talking. Now my parents are insisting that they meet Lorelei's family. My father said that since Lorelei and I get along as well as we do, her family and ours should be wonderful friends!

Later that night, I asked my mother why on earth an evil sorceress would kidnap me. I knew she wanted to move on and get past all this, but I just HAD to know. By the look on her face I could tell that this was a difficult question for her to answer, but right when I was about to say, "Never mind," she told me everything. "My darling Gwen," she smiled at me as she spoke, "your father and I never told you this before because we thought it was too much for a young girl to handle, but after this event I think it is best that you know that you have a great gift. You, my dear, can communicate and even become friends for life with animals and fairies!" When my mother told me that, she looked the proudest that I have ever seen her. "When you were talking to the animals and Lorelei, it probably felt natural, and you probably had no idea that it is an unusual talent to be able to speak and get along so well with fairies and animals as you do, Gwen." My mother continued to explain my gift. My mother also told me that Pandora kidnapped me because she was making a potion that could steal my gift from me, and transfer it to her to make her more powerful! I guess she knew that since I didn't know about my gift, she could take advantage of that and steal my gift from me while I was being her servant and not suspecting a thing. Also, since I didn't know about my gift, I couldn't use it to get away. No wonder she's called an evil sorceress! Now I know why she didn't want me speaking to Lorelei. She was afraid I would discover my gift and escape. Well, I didn't know, but I escaped anyway!

My gift explains why I love the forests and the animals in it. It also explains partly why I got along with Lorelei so well from the start, and why we're now best friends! Everything makes sense to me now. But now, I'm luckily no longer Pandora's servant, and I know about a gift that I can put to good use in the future. The best thing of all, though, is that now I have my family and my best friend all with me, living happily ever after.

# The Horrible, Unbearable, Unrealistically Terrible, Scary, and Not Scrumdidliumptious Truth About Middle School

*School doesn't come with an instruction manual. Maybe that's why*  
**Rebecca Wurster wrote THE HORRIBLE, UNBEARABLE,  
UNREALISTICALLY TERRIBLE, SCARY, AND NOT  
SCRUMDIDLUMPTIOUS TRUTH ABOUT MIDDLE  
SCHOOL.**

They are everywhere. They'll never stop watching *you*. They are called *teachers*.

## **Teachers**

Teachers used to be students before they got caught. They know what you like. They know what you want. They will use it against you. They will stop at nothing.

## **Hall Passes**

Every teacher and everything is watching you. It will try to catch you at every possible time. It wants to catch you without a pass.

## **Spies**

Teachers train animals to watch you. They were trained to catch you without a pass.

### **Bad Students**

Bad students are students that turn to the dark side and watch you as peers. You can tell that they are dark because they never need a pass. If you look closely at them, you will see that they have a sort of greenish tinge to their skin. We call these **SITS: Students In Training**.

## **Things**

Do you have pictures in your school? If you do, check the eyes. Do they look cut out? Hopefully not.

### **This One's Taken**

Sometimes they put things in your lockers to watch you.

## **Strange Things**

Whether you know it or not, they are waiting for you to mess up. Quick, look up! You missed it.

## **Holes**

If you see the tiniest hole, look into it. You'll probably see another pair of eyes on the other side.

## **Teachers Again**

The typical teacher tries to catch one student a week. In a year, that would be 52 students caught! Here is the scary part: There is more than one teacher in your school!



### **Another Warning**

Stop! Don't read on; you already know too much! Sto--

Sorry, my inner teacher got to me. You see, everyone has the teacher inside. How you handle it is what makes the difference.

### **Subs**

“Subs” stands for **S**cary **U**nrealistically mean **B**arbaric **S**trangers. They are worse than teachers. They can torture you in a way that a regular teacher cannot. They can apply loads of homework because they want to stall in class.

### **Another Food Thing**

Sometimes, lunch ladies, munch maids, or material digestional guidance units put strange things in your food, so I must say **PACK, PACK, PACK YOUR LUNCH!**

### **Codes**

Remember these codes and you will be just fine.

GH2O: Give Help 2 Other Students

SU2T: Suck Up 2 Teachers

DSBAT: Don't Show Bonds Around Teachers

Remember these!



Good luck with these mad teachers. You're going to need it.

# The Last Legends

*In THE LAST LEGENDS by Patrick Heuser, a boy stumbles into a situation beyond normal human experience. Will he back off, or attempt to handle events on his own?*

I'm Zack; I live in a little town called Hyozonryu. It's small, but it's got everything we need. I found a little book that would change my life forever. It was about a person being chased by the cops into the forest. Then the rest of the pages were blank. It didn't even tell who the author was. This is where my story began.

It all started when I stole a freakishly large piece of bread. The cops were chasing me into the forest, like the kid in the story. The cops gave up at about half way, but I kept running just to be safe.

At the end of the forest there was a solid gold castle. I was amazed at it. I went inside to see if there was any fallen stuff from the ceiling. I turned a corner into a stone room and it was a ruin. But there was a diamond sword with a gold handle that glistened in the sun.

I thought, "Wow, if I could sell that sword I would be so rich I could brag about it!"

I walked up to it and five beings descended from the ceiling like runaway comets. Their bodies looked like blurs as they came down. All of them said in unison, "We are the protectors of the Diamond Blade Sword. Leave now or perish."

If you thought that stopped me, you obviously don't know me very well.

I thought maybe I could fool them so I could get the sword. I walked back the way I came so they would go up again. They went up as fast as they had come down. Once I couldn't see them

anymore, I darted for the sword. The five beings came down again. Their hands started to glow and a beam came out. I dodged them and the beam as I took a plunge toward the sword. The beings started to attack in rapid-fire order. One was about to hit me when I grabbed the sword and the beam reflected off me.

As the sword was coming out of the stone, some black smoke came out. A feather came and disintegrated a few feet in front of me. The sword sucked up the smoke and it came out as hot air.

When the smoke cleared, you could see a person with a wizard hat and a chicken beak. The person ran and I ran after him.

We stopped in a room full of gold. We fought in that room. I thought that the fight was only going to last about a minute because on the first blow the sword broke. He must have hit the weak spot on the blade.

That's when I had an idea. If I threw the broken end at him, it might go through him. But it could break on impact and I would be open for any attack. It was a risk I was willing to take. I threw the sword at him, and it worked! It pierced right through him!

I heard him chanting something. Then I imploded. I guess it was something to connect us so if one of us died the other would, too. It worked because that's the last time anyone ever saw me again.

# The Magic of Capseen

*In THE MAGIC OF CAPSEEN by Erin Elizabeth Bay, a girl learns that life cannot be lived only through the pages of books.*

One early morning, Jessie was walking down the street to the library. The library was her favorite place to go because she loved to read. Jessie would read all day. She would never go outside. Her parents were always telling her to go outside or have a friend over. Jessie used to have a lot of friends, but now she would much rather read.

When Jessie reached the library she went to her favorite section, the fantasy section, where she found the crazy old librarian who always forgets what she is supposed to do. The librarian knew Jessie very well. Jessie said hello.

“We just got a new book in. I think you might like it,” said the librarian. She pulled down a leather-bound book. The title of the book was *The Magic of Capseen*.

“I thought it was a new book. Where did you get it?”

“Some old man brought it in.”

Jessie took the book and then went to go look at other books. Then Jessie started home.

When she got home, she looked at the book. It looked like it was 100 years old. Then she went to bed.

The next morning she started to read. As she read she felt the room start to change. It went from a regular room to a land of green. Jessie looked up and realized she was sitting against a rock, looking out at a huge blue ocean.

Jessie could see a little figure coming over a nearby hill. Jessie stared to see the moving body. Jessie ran up to see the moving

thing. Jessie had never seen anything like this before. It was part man and part lion.

When the man got close enough, Jessie had to know where she was. She ran up to him. "Do you know where I am?"

"Don't you know you're in Capseen? I've never seen you before. How did you get here?"

"I think I went through the book. It's so beautiful here. It's so green."

"Isn't it green where you live?"

"I don't really know. I don't go outside much."

"Why?"

"Because I read so much."

"You should spend more time outside."

"How do I get home?"

"How did you get here?"

"By reading the book."

"So read the book."

Jessie started to read and the land started to change back into her room. Jessie stopped reading and ran downstairs and went outside.

# Margaret's Wolf

In **MARGARET'S WOLF**, by *Luciana Davies*, an unexpected detour leads to an ancient mystery and a new friend.

“Margaret, hurry! We’re going to miss the plane!”

I really hate it when my dad starts yelling at me like that. I’m the oldest child and always get yelled at, unlike my two brothers, Kevin and Chris. Kevin is eleven years old and Chris is eight years old. I’m fourteen years old and I call it the worst age in life history. Fourteen is the worst age because I can’t yet drive and my parents never pay attention to me! But I am a good artist and....

“Margaret, I’m not going to say it again!” my dad yelled even harder. How long have I been waiting here? I should hurry.

I finally got on the plane, found my seat and sat quietly. To my left was a skinny old man who was busy reading a cookbook. He was so interested in some recipe that he didn’t notice his glasses were at the tip of his nose and about to fall off. I was just about to push his glasses up when I felt a jab to my right side. It came from the elbow of a very large young man who had just sat down.

There I was, stuck in the middle. Every time I moved, the large man gave me annoying looks. What was he looking at me like that for? He was the annoying one.

The plane took off smoothly. I listened to music and then read a comic book I had shoved in my backpack. With no one interesting to talk to, I was bored. My parents were across the aisle.

I was getting fidgety, and searched for a piece of paper in my backpack. I had none left except a special one that my grandma gave me before she died. (I keep it inside my pocket so I can

always remember her.) I remember her whispering in my ear that anything I drew on that paper would come alive. I didn't believe in magic anymore, so I started drawing a wolf. It was black with green eyes and it had sharp teeth and... What's happening? I quickly put the paper in my pocket. Then I started looking for my parents, but I couldn't find them, though I could hear my mom and Chris screaming! The plane was going around and around and everyone was screaming! Something is probably wrong with the plane! I'm going to die; I just know I'm a goner!

Wait! The attendants always said that there was something underneath your seat that could save your life during a problem with the plane. The problem was that I didn't know how to put it on! So I decided to wrap it around my foot. But before I could open the plane's door, the door opened by itself and I plummeted through the air upside down. I landed on something soft and smelly. It was animal poop. When I got to my feet I ran to find water and washed my head.

I looked around and I was shocked. I was nowhere near the plane. I was on an island!

The island looked just like the ones you see in movies. It had wide, tall palm trees with coconuts as big as basketballs, and some were about the size of a small football. When I looked up at the bright blue sky, the sun's hot rays made me squint. I was beginning to feel dizzy. Everywhere I looked I saw bright colors. Even the warm sand under my feet glowed as if it were a bright, flat orange.

I just stood there unable to move my feet. This spectacular sight was so breathtaking that my eyes didn't know what to focus on. I turned to look behind me . . . Aaaaaah! A wolf was standing right in front of me. He's going to probably eat me. I shrieked.

My ears could not believe what they heard. He said, "I will not harm you. Take out your paper that your grandma gave you." I did as I was told and found my drawing of my wolf had disappeared! And the wolf right in front of me looked exactly like the one I drew. Instead of eating me, he was actually talking to me.





“Aaaaaah!” I screamed.

The wolf suddenly pounced on me. “Shhhh!” he said. “We mustn’t let that dragon hear us. But why did it have to be a dragon? I hate dragons. The first time I tried killing a dragon it bit my bottom instead, and I’ll assure you it hurts!”

“You mean that the thing that just screamed was a dragon?” I shrieked in horror. I started to panic, but then the wolf calmed me.

While we were setting up a plan, my parents insisted on joining the air search. The doctor advised them to stay put in the hospital for a week or so because of their minor injuries, but my parents wouldn’t listen to the doctor. They were only thinking of me. Though the doctor insisted, my parents joined the pilot on his air search. But I did not know that at the time.

“Well, I’ll tell you what; we’ll sneak behind the dragon when he’s not looking so we won’t have to interfere with it,” the wolf said. Well, that was a piece of cake, I thought, but then the challenges started.

“Do we have to climb the side of this cliff?” I asked.

“Well...” The wolf hesitated for a minute and then said, “Yep. I think we have to climb it. Let’s get started.

“But I can’t do it. I just can’t climb that cliff; and I won’t!” I said in a nasty way. However, when I looked up in the wolf’s eyes, it seemed as if he needed to get that treasure. But why would a wolf want gold when he can’t even use it like a human could? Still, I encouraged myself to try climbing the cliff, but it was only for him.

“Will you do it?” the wolf asked.

“Yes, I will do it,” I said.

I started climbing and I hated the feeling of the rocks. They were really slippery, and they were really slimy. The wolf was climbing the cliff so easily that he made it seem like he was walking up stairs, while I was partly falling off. “Ow! I broke a nail!” I shrieked. I had scratched a rock and blood started bursting out of it! “Rocks don’t have blood!” I said, horrified. We suddenly realized that we were climbing on a dragon!

The dragon awoke from his sleep and we both were looking helplessly at him. Its face was hideous. He was so close to me that I could feel his hot smoke coming out of his nostrils onto my dry skin. His eyes were glaring at me as if he wanted to eat me, which he did. If we let go we will certainly split our heads open and die, I thought. I waited for the dragon to eat me, but then I started crying. I didn't want to die; I hadn't passed ninth grade yet! "Jump on the dragon's tail!" the wolf said.

We jumped on his tail and it started swinging all over the place. I could no longer hold on, and with one strong swing I was flying in the sky. "Ow! I hit my head on a rock," I said.

I looked up to see what I had hit. It wasn't a rock. It was a large box that almost looked like an old, moldy suitcase. The leather was a dark green and it was very shabby. The strange thing was that it was half buried in the cave I was in. As I reached to examine it further, the wolf saw me and ran up to me. "You found the treasure!" he said happily.

"Really, you think this is it?" I asked excitedly. "Come on. Help me pull it out," I said.

When we got it out I looked at the box and started to brush away the cobwebs. At the corner of my eye I caught a sudden glimpse of gold. It was a design of a half-dragon and half-wolf. I lifted the lid and saw pearls, gems, diamonds and lots of gold! I opened my backpack and started getting handfuls and handfuls of jewels. The wolf just looked at me like something was wrong. Then I thought that I understood. He did deserve to have half of it to, so I pushed aside half of the gold to his side.

"Who's this for?" he asked.

"For you, of course. You deserve the same amount as I do, because you helped both of us get here," I said.

There was a sudden burst of light surrounding the wolf. I couldn't see anything. A rainbow rose upon the wolf, and the wolf was changing into a different form! The lights settled down and I didn't see the wolf. Instead I saw a boy!

"Who are you?" I asked trembling in fear.

“My name is Jason. One night when I was a baby, an evil half-dragon and half-wolf crept in my bedroom and put a curse on me. I remember it whispering in my ear:

*This curse shall last forever, unless someone will risk life itself to help a wolf get to the treasure. If that person is selfish and doesn't share at least half of the treasure, he or she will become a wolf and fall to the curse. But everything must start with one piece of paper. It will be a special paper. And whoever gets it must draw a wolf, because you shall be trapped in a wolf's body and inside the paper. If you tell the person about this curse before you get to the treasure, the person will die along with the paper. So be wise, little child, and remember that you mustn't...*

“Well, I can't remember all of it, but that's mostly what she said,” he said.

“So you're the wolf boy,” I said.

He laughed and said, “You can call me that, but please don't call me...”

An enormous howl shook the ground. “Was that you?” I asked.

“You can see for yourself.” His voice trembled in fear and I was afraid to turn around to see what it was.

The half-dragon and half-wolf that I saw in front of the treasure rose upon us. Ahhhhh! We both started screaming! The horrible monster laughed and said, “You were doing a fairly good job until now. The last sentence that you forgot was the most important one. This was easier for you than I thought, so now it would be my pleasure to eat you two.” The half-dragon and half-wolf started running after us.

“Run!” I yelled. “What are we going to do,” I asked, “and what was the last line of the curse?”

“I don't know...wait, I think I remember. ‘*You must press the half-wolf and half-dragon on the treasure and say some magical words in wolf language.*’ I should have told you that. Look, there's a cliff ahead of us,” Jason said.

“Jump!” I yelled without thinking.

Ow! We were on a helicopter! A pilot was at the wheel and my mom, dad, Chris and Kevin were there, too! (Mom probably made them come for fear of losing them, too.) “Mom, Dad!” I exclaimed as my heart pounded. They turned around to see who was calling them and when they saw me they burst into tears while my brothers laughed hysterically.

Mom started to squeeze the guts out of me. “We’ve been looking all over for you!” my mom said, still sobbing on my shoulder. My mom and dad were so concerned about me that they didn’t even notice Jason.

When they calmed down I introduced them to Jason and told them my story. (Jason was playing Game Boy with Kevin.) They looked at me like I was crazy, and I knew that if someone told me a story like this I wouldn’t believe them, either.

When we got home Dad said, “Stay next to the telephone because someone might report a missing person who fits Jason’s description.”

“But, Dad, I told you, he was the wolf in my story.”

“Don’t ‘but’ me, young lady. You should accept the fact that he’s not going to live with us. Besides, we’ve got enough boys to take care of,” he said.

I went in my room and I found Jason on my bed, weeping. “What’s wrong?” I asked.

“I really miss the island. It’s my home and now I’ve lost it,” he said in sorrow. I felt real pain for him, so I decided to get a plan so he could go back to the island.

“Dad, I forgot something very important on the island,” I lied.

“What is it?” he asked.

I hesitated, but then I said, “I forgot my wallet that has my credit card in it and it had a limit of one million dollars,” I lied again. We went back anyway (my dad would never leave money behind). Jason hid underneath a blanket. When we landed on the island, Jason quickly ran out without my dad noticing.

“Did you get it?” Dad asked.

“Yep,” I said.

“And did anyone call for Jason?” my dad asked.

“Yes. But don’t worry about driving Jason to their house because they came to our house to pick him up,” I lied again. Then we started taking off and that was certainly the last time that I would see him.

When we arrived home it seemed that more than half of the world knew about Jason and me. I became very famous then while my brothers acted immaturely, but every once in awhile I’ll sit on my bed and cry, for I miss Jason. And I will always think of him as my wolf.

# A Ninja Named Scorpion

*Even the strongest warrior must learn to lose. That lesson is part of*  
**A NINJA NAMED SCORPION**, by *RJ Gibson*.

My name is Scorpion. I have six brothers. They are named Sub-Zero, Noob Saibot, Ermac, Reptile, Smoke, and Rain. I am the youngest out of the seven, but I am more powerful.

I always have to fight with a human named Jack. He is very strong for a human because he is a samurai and he has a magic sword, and I like to fight him. Jack challenged me to battle again. I wanted to kill him but my father will not let me kill him, so I just used my agility to hit him from behind, and I used my string to bring him to me. I said, "Get over here," and here came my father, Liu Kang.

He said, "Stop, Scorpion, Jack is my friend." Liu Kang took Jack home to give him some sushi to revive him.

Jack said, "Thank you, I am very grateful," and he left.

My brothers, our father, our grandfather Hayden, and I went to my lair in the underworld to train to boost our stamina. I trained with Reptile to boost my speed and strength. I beat him by calling the Power of the Scorpion. The Power of the Scorpion is a finishing move I like to use: coming from behind him and kicking my opponent until he dies (but I did not kill Reptile).

Training was over. We went to our own lairs. Sub-Zero had a Polar area like Antarctica. I had a lair with skulls and scorpions. Noob Saibot had a dark portal lair. Smoke has a smoky lair. Ermac has a volcano lair. Rain has a thunder-type lair. Reptile has a swamp lair.

My brothers and father and grandfather and I went to sleep. When we woke up we all were turning into animals to finish

people we beat. Hayden was eating breakfast at the table. Liu Kang was practicing turning into animals. My brothers and I went into the Hyperbolic Time Chamber to battle each other in practice. We can only use the Hyperbolic Time Chamber twice to train. We were all a little tired but that's what we combaters do: We will do anything to get stronger. This time I trained with Ermac and he kept on throwing fireballs at me so I had to dodge them. I was losing the battle so I had to hit him quickly, but I lost the battle anyway. My day was done. When I lost, I said, "You win some, you lose some."

# Puppy Trouble

*Two puppies in search of their father find themselves in all sorts of adventures in PUPPY TROUBLE, by Hilary Biskner.*

“How come we always have to go to the park?” asked Fang.

“Because I am the oldest, strongest, and the leader of our family and what I say is what we will do,” answered his brother Fierce.

Fierce, who is grayish black with a long thick coat, pointed ears and bright yellow eyes, has great natural instincts. His brother, though, is a follower with no common sense. Even though the two puppies look the same, they act the complete opposite of each other.

It was a foggy day at the park. “Hey, Fierce, what are those dogs hanging up?” asked Fang.

“It’s a big sign, but it’s too foggy out to read it.” It was getting sunnier outside and Fierce could read it a little better.

“Hey, Fang, I can read it now,” Fierce said. “It says ‘Father’s Day at the park on Wednesday.’”

“What is Father’s Day?” asked Fang.

“It is a celebration where you get your dad gifts and tell him how great he is.”

“Well, who is our father?”

“I don’t know, but it’s time to find out. Let’s go home and ask our mom.”

“Mom? Who’s our father?” Fang asked.

“Oh, he is grand and very special, even though he can’t be with us,” answered Mother.

“GRRR!” the puppies said in unison.



“Now go out and play. I have work to do,” said Mother.  
“Fang? Mother didn’t tell us who our father is.”  
“We’re going to have to find him ourselves,” said Fierce.  
“Well, I don’t know if we should,” said Fang.  
“Have I ever led you wrong before, Fang?”  
“Fine. Let’s go. Wait a minute, Fierce. Where are we going to look?”  
“Let’s start off at Taco Bell. I hear there’s a dog there.”

“Are you sure there’s a dog here?” asked Fang.  
“Whoa, Fang. Watch out for that car! You’re standing in the drive-through.”  
“YIP, YIP, YIP,” they heard.  
“What was that? Is that a squirrel I see?” asked Fang.  
“That’s not a squirrel; that’s a Chihuahua.”  
“Is that our father?”  
“No way! We’re already twice as big as him. He couldn’t be our father.”  
“Well, now where are we going to look?”  
“We will go to the fire station next. They have a dog over there, too.”

“I don’t see anything but big red trucks,” said Fang. All of a sudden, an alarm rang and men were sliding down poles and jumping into the trucks. “Hey, there’s the dog! Is he our dad?”  
“No, he has white fur with black spots. We don’t look anything like him,” said Fierce.  
“Well, where do you suppose we look now?” asked Fang.  
“We’re going over to the junkyard.”  
“Oh, no,” Fang mumbled under his breath.

“Man, this place looks like junk,” said Fang.  
“That’s because it’s a *junk* yard!”  
“GRRR...Get off of my property!” a mean voice said. Fang and Fierce turned around and saw a huge dog. The dog angrily chased them outside of the junkyard, growling and biting at their heels.

“Was that our father?” asked Fang.

“No way! He was too mean to be our father,” answered Fierce.

“Where are we going to look now?”

“I don’t know.” Just then, a truck turned the corner and a big man jumped out, grabbed the puppies, and threw them in the back of the truck.

“Where are we?” asked Fang in a scared voice.

“We’re at the pound.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s where they take innocent pups and lock them up.” All the dogs there were whimpering and barking.

“How are we going to get out?” asked Fang.

“I have no idea.”

“Hey, kids, what do you need help with?” asked the dog in the next-door pen.

“We need to get out of here so we can find our father.”

“Hmm, I think I could help you with that.”

“How?”

“Just tear the fence apart with your huge fangs.” So they did as they were told, and sure enough, it worked. They were free.

“Hey, Fierce. Can we go home now?”

“Sure.”

On the way home as they were passing the zoo, they heard a great howl. “I’ve always wanted to go to the zoo,” said Fang.

“Let’s go,” said Fierce.

“But Mother said to never go there alone.”

“Well, I want to go in there and since I’m the oldest, strongest, and the leader, what I say goes! Besides, maybe we will find our dad in there,” said Fierce.

So in they went. “Hey, Fierce, is he our father?” asked Fang.

“No, he’s a lion, plus he’s part of the cat family.”

“Hey, Fierce, is he our father?”

“No, he’s a giraffe, and he’s way too tall.”

“Maybe one of the prairie dogs is our father,” said Fang.  
“Let’s go ask them.”

“Are any of you our father?”

“No. You are dogs and we are prairie dogs.”

“Well, do you know who he is?”

“What is your last name?”

“It’s King.”

“Oh, my goodness. You’re Pates’s kids. I should have known from your long grayish coat, pointed ears and yellow eyes.”

“Do you know where we can find him?” asked Fierce.

“He’s down the street, past the turtles, and next to the cafeteria.”

“Thank you so much, sir.”

Fierce and Fang ran down the street, past the turtles, and next to the cafeteria. “Dad!” Fierce and Fang screamed.

“Kids!” their dad said.

“Are we wolves, too?”

“Yes, you are. Half wolves, anyway.”

“Let’s go, Dad.”

“I can’t.”

“Why?”

“Because, I can’t get out of this pen.”

“Dad, let me give you some advice that was given to us a short time ago. Use your big sharp fangs to tear through the fence.”

Fierce’s advice worked, and the pups ran away with their dad.

“Hey, Dad, does this mean we’re a family now?”

“Yes, it does.”

# The Quest of a Lifetime

**THE QUEST OF A LIFETIME**, by *Joshua Thomas*, is about three boys who go on a dangerous quest to win back a magical ring from a dark wizard.

I have been training for years to prepare me for the battle to get a magical ring back from the powerful dark wizard, Rehsifnad, who stole it from me in our last battle. This ring has lots of awesome powers. It can heal people from illness and injury. It can melt huge blocks of ice with its own fire. When the ring is safely inside the King's castle, it protects our whole village from evil. The day of the battle to get the ring back has finally come.

I pack up anything I think I might need and leave for my friend John's house to ask for his help in my dangerous, death-defying quest. After some discussion, he agrees to come with me. He quickly packs up his things and we set off through the tall dry grass and on our quest towards Rehsifnad's dark castle.

After a morning of walking we heard our names being yelled from far behind us. "Josh! John! Wait for me!" It's Zack, our good friend and loyal buddy. Zack explained, as he caught his breath, that he had been to our houses and noticed that our swords and armor were missing. He knew then that we had left on a dangerous journey. John and I explained what we were doing and Zack asked to join us. Fortunately, because he saw that we had, Zack had brought his sword, armor and some supplies for a journey. I was thankful that he had brought more food because our stomachs were gnawing with hunger already!

We spread out a feast on a nearby large flat rock and ate. Right in the middle of eating lunch we heard an ear-shattering explosion! **BOOOOOOOOOOM!** The three of us leapt quickly

to our feet, as rocks, earth and ice rained down around us. We saw a gigantic ice-breathing dragon looking hungrily at us as if we were HIS lunch! Before we could blink the dragon started inhaling a giant breath, preparing to pummel us with ice shards. The breath went in so strongly it started to lift us off the ground and fling us towards the dragon! Luckily, John and Zack grabbed onto the large flat rock we were sitting around and hung on for dear life. But I had a plan!

Like lightening, I snatched my sword from its sheath and at the last second possible, just before being sucked up its nose, took a single powerful swing and sliced off its head! Shards of ice went shooting everywhere. I fell to the ground with a thud, safe in the grass and not too far from my friends.

I stood up, brushed myself off, and noticed that each of us had caught a piece of the dragon's ice. Next thing I knew the ice shards began to glow an eerie color of blue. Beams of light shot out of the pieces of ice and surrounded us in a weird field of power. Zack and John stood mesmerized as my sword began to glow with the same blue light that encircled us. Suddenly everything stopped, the world was quiet and we knew that my sword and each of us had supernatural powers just like the dragon.

"Time to get out of here!" Zack said, and we took off again towards Rehsifnad's castle. After an episode with vicious toy poodles and one with an enormous man-eating squirrel, we were finally at the entrance of Rehsifnad's castle.

As we looked all around us we saw nothing but green murky surroundings. No sunlight peeked through the thick clouds here and the air smelled of swamp-creatures. Rehsifnad had built his castle out of his dark powers and even the tall stone walls felt like they had his power. It looked impossible but we knew we had to get inside to battle Rehsifnad, the dark wizard.

Although there were guards up on the looming castle walls, there were no guards on the ground by the door. We snuck carefully up and took a look at the huge wooden doors that towered above us. Zack noticed that the hinges of the doors were rusted, old and weak. I drew my sword as my friends stood protected behind me. The dragon's ice shot out of my sword and

hit the hinges with a crash. All together we rammed our shoulders against the weakened door and it fell in.

Rehsifnad was sprinting towards the door when it fell. There we were, face to face with the most dark, evil wizard in the land. I felt a mix of terror and confidence all at the same time. I was suddenly glad to have had years of training and my two good friends with me now. Rehsifnad waved his hand and suddenly the battle for the ring had started. Great balls of fire flew like meteors towards us! John, Zack and I used the dragon's power and bounded into the air, dodging the fireballs Rehsifnad flung at us.

It seemed like ages until the dark wizard switched his attack to electricity-filled bubbles. The bubbles of energy chased after us as we dodged through the air! Again using the powers of the ice-dragon, each of us started to throw ice-bolts from our hands and targeted them at the bubbles and evil Rehsifnad. The trick was to pop the bubbles and not get touched by the dangerous, shocking electricity: not an easy feat!

Finally, John struck a lucky blow and speared Rehsifnad in the shoulder with an ice bolt! Hurray! Zack and I followed with ice bolts of our own, hitting Rehsifnad with deadly aim. The evil wizard screamed in pain on the floor and then was silent. Rehsifnad the wizard was dead. I was relieved and exhausted. Rehsifnad would never torture our town again. The ring flew from his hand and back to me, its owner.

John, Zack and I took the long journey home, protected by the power of the ring, and told everyone about our dangerous, death-defying adventure. The villagers were amazed that we had succeeded in returning the ring and killing evil Rehsifnad, and threw a party for us. The king gave each of us sacks of gold coins. From that day on the ring protected our village from all evil and harm. Even now, the children hear the story about Josh, John, Zack and the magical ring!

# Tatsu

*Who is this bandit who robs from the rich and gives to the poor? It might not be the one you think. Find out more in the story TATSU, by Trevor Lybeck.*

“There he is, get him, on the roof. Go riflemen, shoot him...or whatever you’re good at!” screamed Samurai Captain Josh.

Samurai Captain Josh, who had short brown hair and was thin, was 22 years old. He worked for the governor.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

“I can hear the screams from the men. Captain Josh, what are we to do? He’ll take my money...again,” said the sad governor.

*“Don’t worry, Governor Chris. No more money shall be taken,” said Josh.*

“Are you sure?” asked the panicking governor.

“Uh...yeah...of course...” said Josh.

“Take that,” said the masked man. Down fell the last remaining samurai warrior.

“EGADS! Tatsu’s in my house,” said the whimpering governor.

“Hello, Chris, how long has it been? Ah, yes...last week, was it?” said Tatsu.

“Tatsu, leave now or he will deal with you,” said Chris.

“Who?” asked Josh.

“You!” responded Chris.

“Huh? Oh right, what he said. Leave or die, your choi-”

“HA, HA, HA, HA, HA, HA. Oh boy. Good one, Josh. HO, HO. Let me catch my breath.” Tatsu laughed so hard, tears came out of his eyes.

“Grrrrrr...no one laughs at me like that,” yelled Josh.

“He, he, he,” laughed Chris.

“What? You, too, Governor Chris?”

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t hold it in. He, he,” Chris answered.  
“Well, anyway, Tatsu, if you want--”

“Fifty million yen,” said Tatsu.

“Shut up,” Josh interrupted. “If you want fifty million yen, get through me fir--” KLONK. Tatsu threw a rock directly at Josh’s head. Josh blacked out.

“Hand it over, Chris, or lose body parts one...by...one, such as fingers, toes, and so on,” said Tatsu in a demanding voice.

“Errrrrrahhhhhhh! Take it and leave.... I like my fingers.”

“Thank you,” Tatsu said.

Many years into the future, in the year 2569, there lives a ninja from Japan. His name is Tatsu. Tatsu means dragon in Japanese. He is about five feet six inches tall and has short black hair. He is 22 years old. He is thin and can run as fast as a cheetah. He likes to gallivant from rooftop to rooftop.

He has a long sword made of platinum named Tsunami. The name *Tsunami* is engraved on the sides. Its hilt is gold with various emeralds and rubies.

When Tatsu was 10, his mother was murdered because she had not enough money to pay taxes. His father died when Tatsu was just 15. Tatsu had no other family. He grew up with the thought, *People die every day because they have not enough money.* Tatsu wanted that thought gone. That is how he gave himself a career. When he was three, he liked the animated Disney movie *Robin Hood* a lot, so he decided to steal from rich people and give to poor people. Tatsu’s disguise name was John Fisher. He used that name when he wasn’t “working” at his ninja work.

“Hello, welcome to my shop. How may I help you?”

“Hey, John, WOOF, it’s me Billy, WOOF, wazzup?”

“Nothing much,” Tatsu replied. Billy was not a “full-fledged” human. He had a human body and wore clothes like everyone else did. But, his mom was a dog and his dad was human, so he had a dog head.



“Hey, I heard that that stupid, WOOF, idiotic, WOOF, jerk, WOOF, dumbo, WOOF, bum, WOOF, imbecile, WOOF, thief Tatsu stole more of the governor’s yen,” said Billy.

Tatsu got mad. “I think Tatsu is doing something nice. He donates to charity a lot,” he responded angrily.

“You’re all wrong. Tatsu’s horrible!”

“No way,” said Tatsu.

“Yes way, WOOF!” said Billy.

“No way!” said Tatsu.

“Yes way, WOOF!” said Billy.

“Shut up! We old folks are trying to eat out here!” said the 135-year-old man across the street.

“Sorry,” said Tatsu.

“Mr. Governor Chris, you have let him get away with it for the last time,” said the mysterious man. “Next time this happens...I’ll slit your throat.”

“Please, sir, not my throat. I like my throat,” replied Chris.

“We aren’t money trees. We can’t keep giving you money every time you and your pathetic partner screw up,” said the man in the red and white clothing.

Josh got mad. His eyes looked like they were on fire. “SIR, MY SOLDIERS TRY AND TRY! EVERY TIME HE COMES, THEY’RE ALWAYS INJURED...OR EVEN KILLED, ALL OF THEM! YOU’RE NOT MONEY TREES, HUH? WELL, WE AREN’T SOLDIER TREES, ARE WE? HUH? HUH? I’M SORRY, I CANT HEAR YOU--”

“Silence! Nobody talks like that to Emperor Kushiba!” Emperor Kushiba screamed. There was complete silence.

Chris whispered, “Run, Josh, run!” Chris tried to stall Kushiba and let Josh get away. “So, emperor, how ya been lately?”

“Silence! Stop trying to help him or you’ll die, too,” said the emperor. “Get him! Get that Josh guy!”

“The store is closed,” said Tatsu.

“Aww, man, c’mon,” said the upset pedestrians.

On his way home, he saw a girl that he really liked. Her name was Emma Amber. She was 21, and had long brown hair. She was thin and smart. He felt really nervous around her. He tried talking to her once and got all messed up with his words and said “fly” (which was supposed to be bye) and ran away. He felt embarrassed because he was 22 and didn’t even have a girlfriend. He was extremely sensitive about it. People laughed a lot...then they paid for a cast on the arm because of Tatsu’s retaliation to their laughter. Tatsu had an idea. *Now’s my chance to talk to her. Then I’ll continue my “business.”*

“Hey, Emma,” said Tatsu.

“Oh, hi, um...Okay, I remember the face, but...” said Emma. She had forgotten that his name (for now) was John Fisher.

“Ta...” *Oops*, Tatsu thought. He almost gave his true identity. “John, John Fisher.” *That was close*, he thought again.

“Oh, yeah, uh...sorry,” she said.

“No problem. Happens all the time,” Tatsu smiled.

“Hey, John!” said some random person across the street.

“It doesn’t happen a lot, does it?” she asked.

“No, not really...well, see ya,” said Tatsu. *WHOOSH!* He was gone within the blink of an eye. *I’m such an idiot. What was I thinking? How embarrassing. I can steal from just about anyone, but I can’t even talk to this one girl. I’m just pathetic*, thought Tatsu. *I need a good building hop.* Tatsu put on his ninja outfit.

“Wooooo hooooo! Oh yeah!” Tatsu screamed in excitement. “Nothin’ like a good building hop to throw away sorrow and embarrassment. Oh...there are some needy people. Where’s the money...? Ah hah, here it is. Take this, people of Japan. From Tatsu.”

“Oh my god! Is this mine?” asked the needy mother.

“You bet,” Tatsu responded.

“Cool! George, Jeff, Fred. Come here. Kids, this is Tatsu,” said the woman.

“My friends said that their dads told them that you were the son of the devil,” said Jeff. Tatsu put his hand on the hilt of Tsunami (which was attached to his belt).

“Yeah, you’re dumb, stupid and mean...did I already say dumb?” said George. Tatsu grasped harder.

“And my giwlfwend thaid that you awe an awien fwom outa thpathe,” said Fred. Tatsu could not take one more insult. “I bet you don’t have a giwlfwend who wiketh you back!” said Fred. Tatsu pulled Tsunami out of his sheath.

“That’s...enough!” Tatsu cried. He jumped down into their backyard with tears coming out of his eyes. He knew he did things that were bad, but he didn’t know this many people hated him. He wasn’t planning on hurting the children. He just tried to scare them.

“Please, Tatsu. Please don’t hurt us. They’re just seven. Please, their friends make up lies. Fred can’t even speak right,” cried the mother.

“No more insults. Take the money. As for me, I’m leaving.”

“Bye, Crybaby,” said the three kids, laughing. Tatsu threw three throwing knives right in front of their feet. He just missed because he wasn’t trying to hit them.

“Thanks for the money and for teaching my kids a lesson,” cried the mom.

The kids stared at the three knives in front of their feet. They were so scared.

“There he is...ready, fire!” *WHOOSH!* Josh dodged the bullets.

“Hah, you miss--” *SPLAT!* A machine gun bullet hit Josh directly in the shoulder. “AAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” screamed the ex-captain. “I never knew it could hurt this badly.” As he ran toward the exit, blood was spewing out of his arm. He made it out of the castle alive, but hurt so badly he wished he wasn’t.

*What was that?* Tatsu asked himself. He heard screams from the castle. Tatsu ran as fast as he could.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhh!” screamed Josh.

“What happened to you?” asked Tatsu. Josh was running like a chicken with his head cut off.

“Tatsu? Oh god. Tatsu, ya gotta help me.”

“Why is your arm bleeding?” asked Tatsu.

“I yelled at the emperor and he was going to cut my head off and I ran and he sent his soldiers and one shot me and, and, and, and, and, and...”

“O.K. I understand...I think. You can stop telling me now, you’re starting to stutter. Here, eat this bean, it should make your arm feel better,” said Tatsu.

“O.K. (*Gulp.*) Wow, my arm doesn’t hurt anymore, thanks. Tatsu...can I join you?” asked Josh.

“Are you sure you have what it takes to change from samurai captain to ninja thief?” asked Tatsu

“I think,” said the ex-captain.

“O.K. then, welcome,” said Tatsu.

“Really?” asked Josh.

“Yeah,” said Tatsu.

“Cool,” said Josh

“Well, time for mission number one: steal from Chris,” said Tatsu.

“Chris helped me. Can I steal from Kushiba instead?” asked the new ninja.

“Sure...but I warn you, I have not tried him yet,” warned Tatsu.

The next night, they set out to the emperor’s castle. “Let me take out security,” said Tatsu. *CRASH!* The security camera fell like a sandbag. “We’re in.”

*Snore. Snore. Snore.*

“You can hear that pig emperor all the way from over here,” Josh exclaimed.

“WEREEEOU, WEREEEOU, WEREEEOU, SECURITY BREACH, SECURITY BREACH. EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY, KUSHIBA. HAVE A NICE DAY,” said the speaker.

“Curse those hidden motion sensors,” said Tatsu.

“Well, I’m not worried. Whenever there’s trouble, Tatsu to the rescue. Right?” asked Josh.

“Josh, I’ve never been busted before,” said Tatsu

“AAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH! ARE YOU SERIOUS?”

“Here come the samurai warriors. Can I trust you and your sword Onisha to take them out?” asked Tatsu. Josh smiled. “Good. Now just in case we die...John Fisher is my fake name.”

“You mean all this time you were John Fisher?”

“No, John Fisher is not my real name; Tatsu is. Tell anyone and I will kill you,” said Tatsu.

“So...Tatsu and someone else are here, eh? Finally we meet, Tatsu. Mua, ha, ha, ha, ha (*cough, cough*). I’m choking on (*chuck a spat*)...it was a butterfly?” the emperor was as confused as the butterfly that was in his mouth that flew away.

“So. You’re the one they call Kushiba, huh?”

“Tatsu...how’d you get here?” asked the king, who was once again confused.

“Oh, I have my ways,” said Tatsu.

“I see,” said Kushiba.

“You’re uglier than I thought you would be,” Tatsu exclaimed.

“So you really think I’m ugly? Well, when I’m done with you, you’ll be uglier than you could ever imagine,” said Kushiba.

*SHING.* Tatsu pulled Tsunami out of its sheath.

“Now we start this...JOHN FISHER,” yelled the emperor.

“How’d you know my fake name?” asked Tatsu.

“There is something I must te--”

“Is this gonna be like *Star Wars*?” Tatsu interrupted.

“SHUT UP AND LET ME FINISH THIS...by the way, I’ve never seen *Star Wars*. Eh-em, I am your grandpa’s uncle’s son’s friend’s daughter’s husband’s best friend,” stated Kushiba

“SO?” asked Tatsu.

“That’s how I know you, kludge brain,” said the emperor.

“How old are you...70?” asked Tatsu.

“57 to be exact,” stated Kushiba

“Whatever. C’mon...let’s go, Kushi, Kushi, Kushi.”

“Stop it!” screamed Kushiba.

“This is going well so far,” said Josh. Josh had already destroyed 156 samurai warriors on his own. But Chris had heard about the Tatsu/Josh invasion, so he decided to be on

Tatsu/Josh's side. He commanded Josh's samurai team and they helped Josh.

*SWISH. VOOSH. SLASH.*

"Die, emperor scum!" Tatsu yelled.

"How 'bout...no!" laughed Kushiba.

"Oww, my arm!" screamed Tatsu.

"I overpower you, Tatsu," said Kushiba.

"The most important thing my father taught me was to concentrate on my enemy." Tatsu went into meditation.

"Fool...NOW DIE!" said Kushiba. Tatsu found an opening for attack around Kushiba's neck area.

"You first," said Tatsu. *SLICE.* As Kushiba's head fell to the ground, Tatsu yelled in pain, for his right arm had been cut really deeply.

"We came as fast as...gross, did ya have to behead him?" asked Josh.

"Josh, help. My arm has been wounded," cried Tatsu.

"Ha, ha, ha, no more selfish emperor," said Josh.

The governor walked through the door. "Tatsu, for all of the money you have stolen in your life, you should get the same fate as he," said Chris.

"Yeah, yeah," said Tatsu.

"But, on the other hand...yes.... Since Kushiba died, I get all of his money. Tatsu, you will not be killed," said Chris.

"Sorry, Tatsu, but I should go back to my samurai army. No offense, but without me, they're brainless idiots wearing armor and yielding swords," said Josh.

"Ha, ha. I understand," said Tatsu.

*ONE MONTH LATER*

"Hey, John!"

"Emma?" said Tatsu.

"Hi, John. Hey, you wanna see a movie this Friday?" asked Emma.

"Sure, Emma," said Tatsu.

“Hey, John, do you think Tatsu is good or bad?” asked the curious girl.

“I think he’s doing good things,” he responded.

“Me, too,” said Emma. “The news reporters on *News of the Future* also said Tatsu killed Emperor Kushiba last night. But, wait...wow. Tatsu got cut in the arm in the same spot your arm is cut...no way! My boyfriend is Tatsu?” asked Emma. Tatsu blushed.

“Yeah, good investigating. Please don’t tell,” said Tatsu.

“I would never do that to you. So Tatsu, Friday night?” asked Emma.

“It’s a date,” said Tatsu.

### **The End**

(Or is it?)

(Probably.)

(Shhhhhh, I’m trying to build suspense.)

(Oh. sorry.)

# Time Twisters

*In TIME TWISTERS by Myles Williams, King Arthur never pulled Excalibur from its stone! Now Kim and Taylor have traveled back through time, trying to correct history.*

“This place is smelly, messy, and I think people have been going to the bathroom here. Let’s just find him and go.” I was getting restless. We had been sitting in the hot sun for some time, and I could use a cold drink. I was sweating, thirsty and tired. I looked around and shouted, “Maybe he’s over there.”

Taylor put his finger to his lips to signal me to be quiet and whispered, “Kim, don’t you see there is a big crowd down there? He is probably down there.” Maybe he was right; it was possible that Arthur, the future king of Camelot, was down in the midst of the crowd.

I looked over at my friend Taylor who was looking down over the crowd from our hiding place on a hill. Taylor is eleven years old like me. He is a little taller than I am, with black curly hair, brown eyes, a skinny body, and a great big cheesy smile. We have been friends since first grade. Taylor says that he puts up with me, even though I am a girl. He is always teasing me about my thick glasses and brown freckles. He makes me mad when he pulls on my long, thick black braids. Despite all this, I like being friends with Taylor because we both are very intelligent.

The fact that we are very intelligent is the reason we are in the Middle Ages during King Arthur’s time and not at home in Mountain View, California in the twenty-first century. We are on a mission to correct time. Our objective is to make sure that Arthur pulls the magical sword from the rock to become King of Camelot. Our time machine warned us that history was about to



be changed because Arthur never pulled the sword to become king. Taylor and I decided to go back in time to correct an error in history. That is why we named ourselves “Twisters,” because we twist historical events back into place.

“Pull it, pull it!” the crowd yelled at the top of their lungs. A very strong man was standing on a huge rock, pulling with all his might. The man was tall and dark, with big muscles. His huge hands were tugging at the sword. The crowd was shouting words of encouragement at the man. “You can do it!” “You are the strongest knight in the whole world.” One man shouted, “I am betting a cow that you can do it.”

I looked at Taylor excitedly and exclaimed that the knight had to be Arthur. Taylor was not sure and said so. I was sure because the big man looked like he could move anything he wanted, especially the sword out of the rock. We waited with the crowd for a long time while the knight pulled at the sword, making noises and turning different colors.

After a while, Taylor said, “He is not Arthur.” I hate being wrong, so I bet him a can of soda that the knight was Arthur. The man was still pulling at the sword, but a few seconds later he fell. The crowd was stunned. A person from the crowd yelled, “Ooh. Sir GeLoen Fisher failed. Our strongest warrior failed.” Another man groaned, “There goes my cow!”

“I told you that he wasn’t Arthur. I want a cold can of Coca-Cola soda after the mission.” Taylor was gloating and had the nerve to jump up and down in happiness.

“Fine, Taylor, I will give you the soda after this mission.” I was mad and turned my back on Taylor. He called me a spoiled brat and pulled one of my braids. Sometimes I did not like Taylor, especially when he was right.

Suddenly we heard mumbling from the crowd. Everybody was looking at a small, slenderly built man who looked like Steven Urkel. The man had long brown hair that was standing up like a clown. The crowd began to laugh to the point that some people had tears in their eyes. A large lady pointed at the man and said, “Arthur! Come down! You can’t pull the magic sword out!” The crowd continued laughing while pointing at Arthur.

Taylor and I looked at each other in disbelief. This could not be the great Arthur, the future King of Camelot. We held our breath as Arthur looked around the sword as if making a plan to help him get the sword. It took him three tries to actually put his hands on the sword. He looked around nervously, gripped the sword, and then pulled with all his might. His hair swung around wildly, he was making strange grunting noises and his blue eyes were bulging out. To everyone's amazement, the sword moved up an inch. Then it stopped. The crowd let out a groan and then started to leave in various directions for their homes.

"Kim, did you see that sword, Excalibur, move up an inch? He is the Arthur we are trying to find." We began discussing why the sword did not come out. As thin as that man looked, it did not look as if he could move the sword at all. Taylor did not seem to have a clue for this mystery. I did have one thought. I thought that a wizard was blocking Arthur from pulling out the sword. Taylor laughed and said that my hunger and thirst were damaging my brain. I angrily asked him to explain Merlin. Taylor said, "He is not real!"

Suddenly we heard a voice say, "Are you two talking about my Uncle Merlin?" We turned around to look at Arthur, who looked even stranger up close. He replied, "Merlin is real." He looked at us and his eyes told us that he was thinking that we looked strange, and dressed and talked just as strangely. Arthur did not say anything; perhaps he was too polite to ask. Or he was so disappointed in not pulling out Excalibur that his mind was on his humiliation.

After asking many questions, we were able to get Arthur to tell us that an evil wizard named Calevil kidnapped Merlin and placed him in a cave that is guarded by a huge dragon. Calevil has been Arthur's family's enemy for years. He promised to stop Arthur from pulling Excalibur from the rock because Calevil did not want Arthur to become King of Camelot. The evil wizard knew that Arthur needed his Uncle Merlin's help to pull the sword out of the rock.

We listened very quietly to the story. We learned that Calevil lived in a dark castle high up in the mountains. Finally, Taylor suggested that we help Arthur find and save Merlin.

The journey took a half-day and I was very cranky and thirsty. We found a brook and Taylor said he was glad to have me shut up and stop complaining. We arrived at the castle and were surprised to see how big and ugly it looked. I looked at Taylor and he knew what I was thinking. "What are we going to do now?" Taylor took charge and told Arthur he must return to the rock to get Excalibur. Arthur protested but Taylor explained that when Arthur returned to Excalibur he would understand what he needed to do. Meanwhile, we would distract Calevil until Arthur could return to rescue Merlin.

Arthur left while Taylor and I approached the scary castle. The drawbridge dropped and we entered the castle. We heard a frightening, loud voice that said, "Ha, ha, ha! I have been waiting for you, Taylor and Kim." Calevil laughed at us in a sinister way.

"Calevil, how do you know our names?" Our minds began to race as we searched for a way that the wizard would know this information. I could hear my heart beat and Taylor was sweating a lot.

Suddenly, Calevil was standing in front of us. He was really ugly! He had long, black hair, a long pointed nose and warts all over his face. He explained that he could see the future, present and the past. He knew we were from another time and that we came to correct history. He knew that we had a plan to distract him until Arthur pulled out the sword to use against the dragon to save his uncle. Merlin would want to fight Calevil and kill him. Arthur would become King. Calevil told us that he could not let this happen.

Taylor got up enough courage to ask Calevil why he hated Merlin. Calevil responded that he and Merlin went to wizard school together. One day, Merlin was playing around and put an ugly spell on Calevil. "Look what he did to me! Now I seek revenge." The ugly wizard started making weird noises and walking angrily around the room.

An idea popped into my head and I shouted, "Taylor is a wizard, too." Taylor's mouth flew open as he looked at me as if I was crazy. I nudged him and whispered for him to play along with me. Taylor said, "Ooh! I do have magical powers."

Calevil stared at us with his ugly face and told Taylor to prove it. Calevil said that if we failed he would do the most difficult, meanest and deadliest spell on us.

We had not thought our plan through, and our faces showed our fear. Taylor began to smile one of his cheesy smiles as he stuck his hand in his pocket and brought out his Game Boy. He had his Mario game in the system.

Calevil was curious about the Game Boy, and he seemed to be a little afraid. He demanded to know what Taylor was going to do. Taylor said that he was going to do the hardest and most deadly spell of all. He was going to trap the evil wizard in the Game Boy where monsters that creep in a scary forest would eat him. Taylor became braver when he saw that Calevil was becoming nervous. The evil wizard said in a small, cold voice that he wanted Taylor to prove that he could cast the spell.

Taylor slowly held up the Game Boy, turned it on, and started pushing buttons. Calevil was so scared that he began backing away and shouting, "Please don't cast a spell on me! I have not ever seen or heard anything so frightening. I promise to remove the spell off Arthur so he can pull out Excalibur." He kept repeating that he did not want to die.

I was beginning to feel a little sorry for Calevil when Arthur returned, sweating and breathing hard. He had run all the way up the mountain to Calevil's castle. He had the sword! He told us that when he got to the rock and stood up to pull out the sword, golden sparkles shot out as he pulled up Excalibur. Now he was ready to fight to save his Uncle Merlin.

Calevil wanted us to leave the castle so, he told us where to find Arthur's uncle. We left the castle and raced to the cave where the dragon was guarding Merlin. Arthur called out to his uncle and after a while we heard a weak voice say, "Arthur, is that you?"

Arthur looked very happy that his uncle was still alive. He told Merlin to hold on, that he was going to rescue him.

Suddenly we saw a big, red, fire-breathing dragon. The dragon had two horns on his head, black eyes and razor sharp teeth. The dragon let out a long breath of red, hot flames. We all stepped back to avoid the flames. Then he blew scorching flames at Arthur, but Arthur dodged it. Before the dragon could open his mouth again, Arthur got up. He killed the dragon with one mighty blow.

We entered the cave and found Merlin chained up against the wall. He was weak, but he seemed to be okay. Arthur cut off the chains with his sword, and we helped Merlin out of the cave. Once Merlin got his strength, he wanted to know what happened to Calevil. We told Merlin that he didn't have to worry about Calevil anymore. If the evil wizard tried to harm Arthur or Merlin, the Game Boy spell would take him to the forest to be eaten by the monsters.

We all went back to the hill where Taylor and I first appeared. We uncovered our time machine from its hiding place. Arthur and Merlin thanked us for our help and wished us well on our journey back home.

Taylor and I got in the machine, set the dial to the year 2005, and in fifteen minutes we were home. Taylor smiled his cheesy smile and said, "Don't forget my soda!"

# To First Grade and Back

*When two sixth-grade girls wish themselves back to first grade, they soon realize that things don't happen the way they had hoped in **TO FIRST GRADE AND BACK**, by **Stephanie Alexander**.*

It was the beginning of the school year and Katheryn Mable was very eager to get going. It was her first day of middle school. Katheryn got dressed and scurried down the stairs.

"Hi, Mom," she said enthusiastically.

"Hi, honey. Hurry up and eat your breakfast. The bus is going to be here in 15 minutes," Mrs. Mable warned.

"Okay," said Katheryn cheerfully.

After breakfast, she got her backpack and walked to the bus stop. Once on the bus, she found her best friend, Erica.

"Hi, Erica."

"Hey, Katheryn," Erica answered, sounding gloomy.

"What's wrong?" Katheryn asked. "Aren't you excited for our first day of middle school?"

"No, not really. My sister Emily told me that middle school was the worst three years of her life," Erica started. "She said that the eighth-graders make fun of you and do really mean things to you, too."

"But can't you tell the principal?"

"Yeah, but she said the worst part was the homework."

"Well, they probably won't give us much homework during the first week of school!"

"And detentions, getting lost, making new friends, and oh man, this is going to stink!"

"Chill. We're here," Katheryn said.

Erica took one look at the school and froze. “Yep, I’m definitely going to get lost.”

“No, you’re not. Come on,” said Katheryn, grabbing Erica’s arm and pulling her into the school.

Waiting at the door was the principal, Mrs. Blake, and the assistant principal, Mr. Halverson. “Good morning, students,” said Mrs. Blake with a smile.

“Good morning,” said Katheryn.

*Ring, ring, ring.* The bell rang for class.

Erica walked into her first class of the day, trembling in the knees. She took a seat near the window. Then a tall, bony man with a stern look on his face came into the room.

“Good morning, kids,” the man said. “I’m Mr. Angerman and I’ll be your Language Arts teacher.

Mr. Angerman talked and talked about rules and how to do things at this school. Everyone was practically asleep.

“--and before the bell rings, here’s your homework. Write a three-page essay on how you think middle school is going to be different from elementary school. Due tomorrow!”

*Ring, ring, ring.*

“Bye, kids,” Mr. Angerman said.

Erica met up with Katheryn in the hall. “See, Erica, middle school isn’t that bad,” said Katheryn.

“Are you serious? I have to write a three-page essay for Mr. Angerman tonight,” complained Erica.

“For art, I have to think of five ideas for projects that we could do during the year,” began Katheryn. “It’s due Thursday.”

“Lucky.”

“Gotta go! Class starts in two minutes!” Katheryn said before racing down the hall.

On the bus after school, the girls started talking about their day.

“I have sooo much homework,” said Erica. “The essay for Mr. Angerman, then making a 400-word prediction on a book we’re going to read in Reading with Mrs. Reid. For Social Studies, I have to list the presidents in order, saying the year they were born and when they died, if they are dead! For Miss Lister --”

Erica went on and on. “I even have gym homework! I have to run 18 laps around my house with a parent’s signature saying that I did it!”

“Man, you’re unlucky. I have a lot to do, too, but I’m not going to list it all,” Katheryn said.

Katheryn’s mom was waiting at the bus stop. “Hi, Katheryn. How was school?” she asked.

“Yeah, how much homework do you have? A lot? I have none,” teased Katheryn’s annoying younger brother Jake.

“Well, I have a lot.”

“Ha, ha, ha, ha,” Jake started. “You have lots of homework and I don’t,” Jake sang, dancing in circles around Katheryn.

“Jake, run home. Your favorite show’s on,” Mrs. Mable said.

“Really? Cool!”

“Mom, middle school is so hard. I’ve got so much homework,” Katheryn said.

“Really? On the first day?”

“Oh, and I have a Social Studies test on Friday.”

Every day after that was the same. The same boring bus ride, school, another boring bus ride home, a ten-minute break, homework, shower and bed. It was the same thing every day for both of them from August to October.

At the end of the first marking period, Erica exclaimed, “Yes! I’m so excited! We have a three-day weekend!”

“Yeah, and our moms planned a sleepover for us on Saturday!” said Katheryn.

Erica arrived at Katheryn’s house Saturday evening. They did the usual stuff--listened to CD’s, ate junk food, talked, watched movies...

“Okay, girls. Lights out,” said Mrs. Mable around midnight.

“Already?” they whined.

“Yes, girls.”

Erica and Katheryn still talked, though. “It’s not fair,” Erica said. “I mean, my brother has basically no homework. A math worksheet is assigned every Monday and is due on Friday. And once in a while, he has some other things to do. And Matt always makes fun of me because I have lots of work!”



“Same with Jake and me,” said Katheryn.

Finally, they got tired and were ready to sleep. “I wish there was some way we could switch places with our brothers,” Katheryn said.

“I know. Oh, well, it’ll never happen.”

“I know. Good night,” said Katheryn.

The next day, they woke up in their sleeping bags. “Good morning,” Erica said, her voice sounding much younger.

“Whooa, what’s wrong with your voice? You sound so much younger!”

“So do you,” Erica said.

They ran to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. When they saw their reflections, they looked seven years old!

“Our wish came true, Katheryn,” Erica said, astonished. “We’re first-graders!”

“I know! Can you believe it?”

“Hey, look at him,” said Katheryn, pointing to a taller boy.

“It’s Jake!” Erica exclaimed. “We switched places. He’s in sixth grade!”

“Now *we* can make fun of *him*!” Katheryn said.

The girls went back to school the next week in first grade. By Thursday, Katheryn hadn’t done her math homework yet. “Honey, do your homework. I’ll help you,” Mrs. Mable said.

Katheryn thought the homework would be easy, since she was really in sixth grade, but when she started it, she could only think like a first-grader, and she knew only what seven-year-olds know. “Mom, I don’t get it. It’s too hard,” she griped.

“Okay. Let me help you.”

After she finished her homework, Katheryn had to go to sleep at 8:00. “But Mom, Jake gets to stay up late. Why can’t I?”

“Because, Katheryn, he’s older than you. When you’re in sixth grade, you can stay up later, too.”

“Promise?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Mable.

By Friday afternoon, Erica and Katheryn started talking at school. “Being in first grade is so hard,” Erica said.

“I know. Jake makes fun of me, gets to stay up late, and watches movies with icky stuff in them, too. And when we go on vacation, he’ll get to ride big roller coasters and I’ll only get to go on little dorky rides,” Katheryn said.

“Same with Matt. And we’ll never get to see each other, because our parents think we’re too young to have sleepovers and do other fun things our brothers can do.”

“Girls, girls! Katheryn and Erica, stop talking and finish your work,” their teacher, Mrs. Lawton, said.

“This is no fun,” said Katheryn.

“Let’s try to switch back to our regular selves today,” Erica sighed.

After school, Erica’s mom was there with her bike. “Here’s your bike. You can ride around until Matt’s bus gets here,” Mrs. Terane said.

“Okay.”

She rode around for a while. It was very hard for her, since she finally became brave enough to take off the training wheels. Then she turned sharply around a corner and SMACK! She landed right on her face. Her chin was bleeding badly and she started to cry. Her mom ran to help her and Matt’s bus came.

“What happened?” asked Matt.

“Well, your sister fell off her bike and landed face first.”

“Ouch.”

“I think she might have to get stitches,” said Mrs. Terane, with a worried look.

Well, it happened. Erica had to get stitches. Katheryn came over to see her later on.

“Hi, Erica. How are you doing?”

“Ok. But these stitches are killing me!”

“Let’s wish ourselves back to normal,” said Erica.

“But what if it doesn’t work?” asked Katheryn with fear in her eyes.

“That would be a disaster,” answered Erica.

“Well, we’ll never know if we don’t try.”

They wished themselves back to being sixth-graders again. It worked! “Thank God we’re back to normal,” Katheryn said.

“Yeah,” said Erica in relief.

“So even though it seems easy being a first-grader, it’s really hard for a seven-year-old.”

“I know that now,” said Erica.

“Let’s never do that again,” said Katheryn.

“I’m with you!” Erica exclaimed.

“Unless we wish ourselves to be seventeen years old. Then we’d be in high school and get to drive cars!” said Katheryn.

“No, I don’t think so,” said Erica. “After my incident with that bike, I don’t think I can handle a car yet!”

They finally realized how much better it is to stay in sixth grade. After all, they’ll have to get it over with some day.

# Too Many Monkey Secrets

*“Monkey this...Monkey that...I can't take this anymore! I'm leaving!”*  
*That's how Nicole felt about Jessie in **TOO MANY MONKEY SECRETS**, by **Mimi Karabulut**.*

It's the year 3002 in the overpopulated state of Florida. In 3002, there is no new technology because monkeys (otherwise known as the apes) had been taking over the world. They were terrorizing everything in every state and continent except in the state of Florida. Well, this monkey stuff is a different story, so I'll go to the point

I'm Nicole and this is about my best friend Jessie. Jessie has blond hair and blue eyes, while I have brown hair and brown eyes. We're both “as skinny as a toothpick” and we were both born on June 21, 2991 (Jessie being older by one nanosecond). Jessie and I have been friends since pre-school and Jessie and I have always swapped secrets.

Actually, Jessie told the secrets (or gossip) while I had to listen to them.

Jessie knows everything about me except one thing.

I know something so big, the CIA couldn't even handle what I'm about to tell you.

The monkeys who have been terrorizing everyone are actually the apes! The apes have been framing the monkeys the whole time! Now, everyone thinks the apes are little innocent animals, but they're not!

After a while, all the stuff Jessie was telling me became a little annoying. She would always say stuff like “those stupid monkeys” and “they're so stupid!” I didn't know what I was going to do.

By August, we were going to school again. All summer Jessie had been saying mean stuff about the monkeys and I wasn't enjoying it one bit. Finally one day...

"Those monkeys are so stupid, I can't believe how ugly they are!" said Jessie

I couldn't take this anymore, so I had to tell her how I felt.

"Uhh, Jessie?"

"Yeah, Nicole? Oh wait, did you know that monkeys have a brain the size of a pea?"

"Well, actually I wanted to tell..."

"Oh, and did you know monkeys are stupid?"

"No, but I wanted to tell you..."

"They are stupid, aren't they?"

"WOULD YOU STOP TALKING ABOUT MONKEYS!" I stormed out of there and skipped school for a week. I didn't come back until I had a plan. My first plan was to catch the apes doing the terrorizing, but it sounded too complicated, so I went to plan B. That's the day I came back to school.

Jessie was all fine when I came back to school and she was even smiling! I didn't know what was going on in her brain, but I was pretty sure she was fine.

My plan was to make Jessie tell someone else all of her secrets. And I knew the perfect person.

There was this new girl named Angel who came to school, and I was pretty sure she could keep a secret or two.

For the next week I tried to avoid Jessie, but every time I saw something that reminded me of her, I heard voices saying, "*Nicole, don't do this to yourself; it's O.K. now.*"

Jessie still thought I was skipping school and she still had that weird smile on her face. During the time I was avoiding Jessie, I was getting to Angel more and more. I told Angel everything I knew about Jessie, but that wasn't as good an idea as I thought.

Finally I introduced Angel to Jessie, but I had no idea how Angel would react to her. The first words Angel said to Jessie were, "So you're the girl who sleeps with a teddy bear."

Fortunately no one else was there, so it didn't really hurt Jessie's feelings. I slapped my forehead in disgust. "How could I

do this to Jessie?” I thought to myself. “Wait, this is odd. Jessie is still smiling.” So I asked her, “Jessie, why you still smiling?”

She said, “Because, do you remember when we were in pre-school and you told me about how the apes were actually taking over the world?”

“Oh yeah, now I remember,” I said to her.

“Well, I reported it to the CIA, and they actually believed me!” said Jessie

Angel was shocked at what she heard. Eventually she said she was sorry to Jessie, and Jessie eventually forgave her. We became three best friends and when we went to college, we each gave each other a pet monkey!

### *Epilogue*

Jessie became very fond of monkeys and became the next Jane Goodall. Angel became an actress because of her sparkling long blond hair and her blue eyes. I, on the other hand, decided to start a family. I had three children and I moved across the street from Angel’s and Jessie’s house.

NOTHING BUT  
THE TRUTH





# Dance

*In DANCE by Shayna Stillman, the author tells how she was unable to make the dance team that she tried so hard to join. But wait: A happier ending is still possible....*

“1,2,3,4 – 5,6,7,8.” I have been hearing those counts almost all my life. I have been taking dance classes at Annette and Company for nine years. I take three classes. I have been waiting until fifth grade to try out for the competitive dance team. To try out for the team you have to have four years of jazz and two years of ballet.

It finally came to the week of the tryouts. I was way nervous. My hands were shaking, but what made me even more nervous was that my two cousins were also trying out. And also a lot of my friends were trying out. I thought it would be very embarrassing if all my friends and my two cousins made it and I did not. I was not quite sure what I had to do to try out, and that made me nervous, too. I thought it was just going to be about 15 kids trying out, but when I got to the dance studio there were about 60 kids trying out. I was very nervous. My hands were shaking, I was sweating, and I had millions of butterflies in my stomach. I felt like a dog that has been sitting in the hot sun for five hours.

When we started the tryout we first warmed up. Then we got into groups of two and did dance moves across the floor. The teacher taught us a combination with music. We did the combination about five times for practice, and then one final time.

This was the big moment. The teacher wrote down who made it and who didn't.

It was over. The teacher said, "I will call you tonight if you did not make it, and for the other people, the results will be up on the bulletin board on Friday."

I went home and I was very shaky and nervous. I felt like it was my first day of college. At about 8:30 the phone rang. My mom answered it, and said it was for me. I could hardly talk, I was shaking so much. It was my teacher. She said I tried very hard but I did not make it.

I was so sad I started crying before I even hung up the phone. I went to dance that next Monday, and all I heard was, "Did you make the dance team? Well, I did." The worst part was all my friends made it, and my two cousins.

That whole year I felt left out, like I was missing something so awesome. My friends were busy every Tuesday night, and they were in every night of recital. They got sweatshirts for the competition, and after competition they would be bragging about their awards. At every class they would be talking about the team. I tried ignoring them but it was hard because they were still my friends.

I decided I would not give up, but would try my hardest. I would practice, and work really hard, so I could be on the team next year. I talked to my dance teacher. She helped me think of some ideas that would help me make the team the next year. I made a tape of my dance song to practice more. I invited my friends over to practice. I smiled more and remembered to have fun. I also wrote down steps I would do in my class and practiced them, and stretched every day in order to be more flexible,

That summer at camp I took dance so I would not forget my dance steps for the next year. And what really helped was inviting my cousins over to help me practice.

The next year after tryouts I did not get a call, but it did not mean I definitely made it, because the teacher might not have gotten to call everyone.

On Friday I was extremely nervous to see if I made the team. I made my best friend come with me. Then, my wish came true. I made the dance team! I was so excited. I felt like I just won an

Academy Award. I was looking forward to going to competition, being in every night of recital, and being part of the team.

In the middle of the year, it was time to go to our first competition. I was so excited, and ready to have lots of fun. The competition was during the weekend. It was at Cobo Hall in downtown Detroit. We slept over Friday night at the Ponchatrain Hotel, then woke up Saturday morning at 6:00 and had breakfast. Then we went to Cobo Hall.

During the day at competition you have to take classes, and then at night you compete. My first class was jazz, and a professional teacher came in and taught us a combination. My second class was hip-hop. That was my favorite. The teacher was very funny, and made the class really exciting. My third class was ballet. It was fun for me, because usually I don't like ballet very much. My fourth class was tap. It was exciting, but a little easy for me because I have been taking tap since I was three. Then we went back to the hotel and put on our costumes, makeup, did our hair, and put on our shoes.

At this point I thought I would not be able to breathe. I thought I would be very nervous, but I wasn't at all. I was excited to smile, be on stage, and have fun. There were a lot of dance studios from all over Michigan. There were 98 acts, and my dance was number eight. Before we all danced, the judges gave us a talk that before we go on stage they can't see our costumes, and to smile. Then it was time to dance.

When we first walked on the stage I got nervous, so nervous that I walked to the opposite side of the stage from where I was supposed to be. Then the music started, and we started to dance. I just thought to myself, smile and look like you are having so much fun, and just think we are back at the studio in the room that we dance in. Then we were finished and walked off stage. My family was so proud of me that it felt like I won an Olympic gold medal.

I watched the rest of the acts. Some of them were very interesting, and so awesome. But some of them were just plain bad. When it was over it was so late and I was so tired I felt like I

just ran 100 miles, but I stayed until the end. Then it was time for the awards, so I sat patiently with my class to see what we scored.

They started calling awards from our division. They announced that in our division we could not receive gold. We could only receive silver because of our age. But there is a first place silver, a second place silver, and so on.

They started with seventh place silver, and by fifth place silver we still did not win an award. Then they called our name. We came in first place silver out of over 20 dance studios.

I was so proud of myself. All my hard work of dancing paid off. I was so proud I felt like I achieved something that nobody else in the world has ever achieved. I learned a lesson in all of my dancing years: If you try your hardest and practice, your dream will come true.

# A Dog's Story

*A dog finds a new family when a friend of the author helps out in **A DOG'S STORY**, by **Giovani Namou**.*

My mom and my teachers talked. My mom decided that I could get a dog if I raised my grades. So I raised my grades. She told me to call my cousin to take me to look for a dog.

My cousin said for his Christmas present to me, he would take me to get a dog. My cousin and his friend came and got me to find a dog. We searched for a few days in pet stores until my cousin's friend found a breeder of Jack Russell terriers. We went to the breeder's house at 11:00 at night because that was the only time the breeder was home.

When we got there, there were two Jack Russell terriers in a basket. I held each one. I saw that one was more playful, and I got that one.

When we got the dog, the breeder gave us some food and a blanket to hold the dog in. I named it Sabrina. The next day, we got all the supplies for the dog. We set up the cage in my room.

A couple of months later my mom said it was too messy. We had to give the dog away. I tried talking her into letting me keep the dog. She was going to give it to a guy at my dad's work. I asked her if I could find a friend who might want it. I told my friend Joe, and he said he would tell his mom.

She said, "We have to see it first," so we took it over to his house. They said okay, and that's how my dog got sold.

# My Friend Kat

*Life is not always fair, but how we face it says a lot about us. Based on a true story, **MY FRIEND KAT** by **Chasey Millar** tells how one girl gets through life even though things are tough for her.*

Kat and I have been friends ever since kindergarten. Her personality hasn't changed much since then. She has always been a nice person and a very good friend. She doesn't live with her parents. She lives with her stepsister and step-mom.

Kat's family life has been unsettled beyond belief, beginning with her dad's first marriage. Kat's dad got married to Kat's current step mom and then they had Kat's soon-to-be stepsister. Then they got divorced. He got married to Kat's mom and they had Kat. Then they got divorced. And Kat's dad got remarried to Kat's stepmom, but they got divorced again. Kat's dad then remarried Kat's mom when Kat was only one and a half years old. Kat's stepmom took custody of Kat's stepsister. Her stepsister's name is Jesse and she is 21 years old.

Kat has moved 14 times, and has gone to six different schools. Somehow we have still kept in touch. We go to the same school now.

Her life has been hard on her for the past 14 years, between moving so much and having to make so many new friends all of the time. Luckily she makes friends easily. But having to leave them makes it harder on her. She tries to write to most of them.

When Kat was only one year old, her mom left on Christmas Eve. Her mom came back a few days later. While her mom was gone, Kat's stepmom and stepsister took care of Kat. They were over at her house for Christmas and that's how they knew she was there. Kat's mom refused to tell where she was. This was a

problem because all of Kat's family feared she would do it again, but the next time her stepmom might not be there.

When Kat was two years old, her dad walked out on her. He got arrested for abusing her mom shortly after he left. Kat has not heard from him or seen him since. Kat says she has few memories of her dad.

When Kat was four years old, her mom met a guy named Matthew that she liked as a friend. Kat and her mom stayed at Matthew's for the night. When they woke up in the morning Matthew was gone. He locked them inside his apartment. Except for the stuff Kat went through with her dad, this was the most scared she had been in her life. Eventually Kat and her mom got the door open enough only for Kat to fit through. Kat waited, scared and helpless, as her mom struggled to get the door open. It took her mom well over an hour, but she got out. They called 911 for the police to come and arrest Matthew. Matthew returned before the police arrived. When he saw that they got out, he chased them and threw a phone at them. They ran to the sidewalk as the police pulled up. They took Matthew down to the station for questioning.

At age eight, Kat's mom left for good. That's when she started living with her stepmom and stepsister. Kat has no idea where her mom is. She could be in jail for all she knows.

Kat always makes the best out of a bad situation. She likes to play sports like volleyball, skiing, and snowboarding. She has a lot of friends, too.

Even though things are tough sometimes, you should try to make the best out of the situation, like Kat. If it's your parents getting divorced, a relative dying, or just a bad grade, try to look at the bright side. Appreciate everything you have while you still have it.

Out of all the people I have ever known, none of them has been able to keep a smile on her face as well as my best friend Kat.

# The Great Surgery

*When someone you care about is sick, sometimes all you can do is wait.*

**THE GREAT SURGERY** by **Claire Reid** tells what happens when a girl's best friend has an operation.

A few months ago, my dog Lucy started to look sick. It looked like big raindrops were going to come out of her eyes, because she was hurting so badly. This all was starting to worry me. A couple of days later, my mom took Lucy to the vet so they could look at her. When my mom got home she told me that Lucy had a tumor. When I heard that, my heart dropped out of my chest into my stomach.

My dog was usually a very hyper dog. But while she was feeling sick she would just lie there. She looked like she was dead. She would not eat or play. When my dog went back to the vet for her surgery my whole family got worried, but there was not a lot of talk about it.

When Lucy got home from the vet you could see a little change in her attitude. As the days moved on my dog started to show that she was feeling better.

Looking at my dog now makes me feel really good. She is eating and playing. I love my dog a lot. Lucy, acting like she does now, makes me think that she never had a tumor.



# TEAM SPIRIT



# The Life of Carlos

*A boy who loves football follows in the footsteps of his father in **THE LIFE OF CARLOS**, by **Nolan Procter**.*

From Carlos's early days of high school football, coaches and fans alike knew that Carlos Bravo was a special talent. He attended King High School in Detroit, Michigan. After his first year of high school he transferred to DePorres High School for the football team. He was the starting quarterback on the varsity football team as a tenth-grader. In the eleventh and twelfth grades he was the best football quarterback in the nation. Throughout his high school career, he dreamed of following in his dad's footsteps as a professional football player in the National Football League (NFL). During his senior year he was recruited to the University of Miami in Florida.

The summer before he began college, he trained with the college coach, trying to win the starting position. Carlos knew that he would have to win the starting position from the other quarterback on the team, who was a senior. When he was in his freshman year of college he would do everything to be the best he could be. Carlos would run a lot to be stronger and faster. He would lift weights for his calf muscles and his arm muscles. Before the season started he had a throwing contest and everyone was surprised that Carlos beat the senior.

When Carlos was a sophomore he would concentrate on his grades more than he had before. He would ask the coach to find a tutor for school so he could have good grades and stay on the football team. He always thought about football. His parents would go to all of his games to encourage him to keep that starting spot, telling him that he would be in the NFL someday.

When he was a senior in college he had a lot of NFL teams looking at him, like the Minnesota Vikings, the Chicago Bears, and the Detroit Lions. Draft day is when professional teams can choose players who are graduating from college. All of the teams wanted him but only one team could have him. Finally the draft day came and Carlos was drafted by the Vikings. The news was all over the place, like on the TV news, in the newspaper, and on the radio. Playing for the Vikings meant that he would be playing a game against his dad, who played for the Chicago Bears. His dad's name was Johnny Bravo.

Johnny Bravo was a defensive lineman. When he saw that his son was drafted by the Vikings, Johnny cried to his coach, "I don't want to hurt my son, so can I play offense?"

Johnny's coach asked, "What position would you play on offense?"

He replied, "I could play on the line."

His coach said, "You were on the line before and you couldn't block at all. We play the Vikings next Tuesday, a week from today at their house, for the first game of the season."

Johnny asked again, "Just give me a chance and you will see how well I can block!" The coach gave in and put Johnny in a position on the offensive line.

The coach told the team about the new quarterback for the Vikings. "They have a new QB that comes from the University of Miami. He is very good and he likes to throw and hand off. So if we stop that and make him run we have a good chance of winning."

The big day came and the two best teams in the NFL were going to play. The Vikings won the toss, and decided to receive the ball. The Bears kicked off all the way to the end zone for a touchdown. The Vikings would have the ball at the 20-yard line. When Carlos ran onto the field as the quarterback, the crowd went wild. The bleachers shook as people jumped up and down, waving their hands, and shouting Carlos's name. His mom was in the stands, but she did not know who to cheer for. Her husband was on one team and her son was on the other.

Carlos got the ball from the center and was under pressure by the defensive linemen. He threw the ball to Randy Moss in a heartbeat. Randy caught it and had his man beat so he ran for the touchdown. The crowd went wild again. Carlos ran down to the end zone full of joy saying, "My first touchdown pass in the NFL."

On the first Viking defensive play they caught an interception and Carlos was back on the field with the fans screaming. The center snapped the ball and the play started. In a flash Carlos was sacked and got hurt. He said, "I think my leg's hurt." The crowd went "AWWW!"

The trainer looked at it and said, "It looks pretty bad. It looks like it's a broken leg and he will be out for the rest of the season."

His dad sprinted the length of the field to be at his son's side. His mom came running from the crowd saying, "My baby! Is he hurt?" The security guards were holding her back. She said, "That is my son, so let me go." They realized who she was and let her through. She ran onto the field and got there just when they were carrying him off the field. They put Carlos on a stretcher and then in the ambulance. His mom got in also. Mrs. Bravo told her husband that he had to stay to play and she would go.

Carlos missed the rest of the season. When he was better, he called his college coach and asked him to work with him like he did during the summer before his freshman year. They worked out every day trying to get his muscles bigger and help him gain back his speed. He promised himself and his team that he would be ready for the next season.

Right before the season, the Vikings traded a couple of players to the Bears for Carlos's dad, Johnny Bravo. Since he did such a good job of blocking for the Bears, the Vikings wanted him to block and protect Carlos.

The next season came and Carlos knew he had worked harder than ever to be ready. He remembered all of the hours of running and weightlifting, all of the sit-ups and pushups, all of the times when he felt like he could not do another exercise and did it anyway. In his heart he knew he was ready.

The first game was against the Chicago Bears again. The Bears kicked off and the Vikings began the game on offense. Just like before, Carlos ran onto the field and the crowd went wild. He was afraid because he remembered his broken leg from last season. He didn't want that to happen again and was not sure how to avoid it. Right before the ball was snapped he looked down the line to his dad. His dad winked his eye and said, "Don't worry son, I will protect you. Nobody will touch you." Carlos smiled and was happy that his dad was on his team.

The Vikings won that game and won the championship. Carlos used some of his time after the season to tell kids about his injury and that they should never give up. He reminded them to stay true to their families and that it is important to keep a good relationship with your family members and to keep them by your side. He also said that working your hardest will always help you win.

# Nationals

*NATIONALS, by Zachary N. Silver, tells not only how hard work and teamwork can pay off, but shows what a terrible price a person can pay for risky behavior.*

We all were in the locker room focusing on the big game. Silence was the only sound that filled the air. And then coach said, “Okay, let’s get out there and lets win it.”

“YEA!”

It started with the buzzer for the end of the warm-ups. We lined up for the starting of the game. The ref threw the puck on the ice and our first ever nationals game had begun.

Tommy, our captain, passed the puck back to Steve. Steve threw it back up the ice. Mike caught the pass and whipped it at the goalie. Blocked. The game went on with no score. But with 3:30 left in the first, Rick Costoply scored (no assists). The buzzer rang for the end of the first.

Right off the draw in the second period, Tommy Rawster scored to make it 2-0 for us. But six minutes later, the Snow Beasts scored. Three minutes after, our first injury happened. The ref blew the whistle right after it happened. Andrew Kershaw was boarded and out with a wrist injury.

After 19 minutes of play we scored again. Jared Silverging scored off a beautiful lead pass. Our team stalled with the puck for the rest of the period.

The puck dropped for the beginning of the third and final period. We won the draw and started down the ice. We shot the

puck at the goalie, hoping for a face-off, but the goalie played it. Now they started down the ice. They shot the puck at our goalie and he froze it. With three more minutes left in the game, we scored. With 30 seconds left, unfortunately they scored. But we won the draw and stalled with the puck all the rest of the time. We had done it! We finally won our first national game.

After the game, reporters and journalists were all outside waiting for us. Coach said to not answer any of the questions and we didn't. Coach took us out for a dinner at the best restaurant in all of Alaska.

At dinner all of the parents and all of the coaches bought all of the team a dinner that felt like it would never end. There was food coming from everywhere: right, left, everywhere. Every parent spent a bundle for dinner. Everyone was so happy. In fact, I've never seen my parents this happy. When we got the check all the parents and all the coaches almost had a heart attack, though. The total bill came out to \$500.95. And the tip was \$50.00.

After dinner there was another huge party at the hotel swimming pool. Once we heard there was going to be a party, all of us swiped the keys from our parents and ran upstairs. When all the players got there, the party started. Water was splashing everywhere from kids jumping off the diving board. Even though we probably just ate three pounds of food a person, we still ate all the food that was at the pool. The party went on until 1:00 or 2:00 A.M.

In the morning the same day, nobody got up until 12:00 P.M., which kind of put us off track. Once everyone was awake, we went straight to breakfast.

Nobody ate anything. They just drank. All the parents drank coffee. And all the kids drank juice.

After breakfast the kids went to get their equipment together, while all the grownups went to put the clothes away. While the grownups were still putting stuff away, all the kids got their mini sticks and played hockey in the hall. We were all packed up and



ready to go, knowing where we all were last night. But nobody knew where the bus driver had been last night.

Everyone was excited about going home. Soon the bus was filled with snores and CD players blasting. And then it happened. Horns blasting woke everyone up, but nobody knew what was going on. The bus was out of control. And then it ended with us on our side.

Ambulances rushed over to the scene. Everyone was in critical condition. We were going to need a ton more ambulances if they were going to save all of us. Now crying, moans, and groans filled the air.

Through all the crying, moans, and groans, I heard voices and I knew whose they were. They were all the E.M.S. guys, telling us to hang on. I heard glass breaking, and more sirens. And every single minute there were less moans and groans. And then it happened. I felt hands grabbing me and picking me up. They took me out of the bus and right to the E.M.S. car.

The next thing I knew I was in the hospital. Doctors and nurses were in the room. A doctor noticed I was awake. He asked, "How do you feel, Zack?"

"In pain."

"Well, you are going to be in pain for a little while."

"That stinks, but how is everyone?"

"Oh, they are fine. Everything is okay with everyone except..."

"Except what?"

"We know why you got in the crash. The night before your team left, the driver was out drinking. He was drinking constantly till three A.M. We found all types of drugs in his pocket: marijuana, pills, crack, and so much more."

"Holy cow!"

"And that's why he's dead now."

"Oh man! If we'd know then what we know now, we wouldn't have gotten on that bus."

A couple of weeks later the whole team was out of the hospital. Everyone had a broken arm, leg, or some other damaged body part. Soon everyone will be back to playing hockey. And

coach only has one thing to say, “I’m never going to use that company of buses again.”

*Just remember: When you drink and drive, and do drugs, there’s always going to be a price to pay. Whether it’s the death penalty, or being sentenced to jail, there is always going to be a price.*

# The Slow Motion Shot

*After losing the best player on the team to an injury, a boy has to lead his basketball team to victory in **THE SLOW-MOTION SHOT** by **J.J. Bittker**.*

“Two points!” the ref said. Dan scored from outside the paint. Dan Johnson goes to Northville Middle School, and is in the seventh grade. Dan is five feet seven inches tall and weighs 135 pounds.

Dan plays for the Northville Tigers basketball team. His two best friends are Josh Thomas and Max Stephenson. They are also on his team.

Dan always says, “Basketball is my life. I love it.”

“Come on, guys!” Coach Oxford yelled, clapping his hands. “We’re down by five!” Dan looked at the scoreboard. It said Tigers 57, Visitor 62 with one minute 32 seconds left.

The timeout was over and Dan, Josh, Max, Brad Edwards, and Sam Lewis were all on the court. Max was taking the ball up and Dan was cutting back and forth, calling for the ball, but Josh was wide open at the three-point line. Max passed the ball to Josh who shot.

*Swish!*

The score was 60 to 62; the Jaguars led. The Jaguars’ point guard drove to the basket, but Sam blocked him. Sam passed it to Max who stalled for about 20 seconds. He looked at the clock and it said 11 seconds.

Coach Oxford said, “Dan’s open for a three-pointer.” Max passed it. Dan pump-faked. His guard went right by him. Dan shot it with five seconds left. “Scores!” The Tiger fans went wild.

The Tigers had won all of their games so far. They had six wins and zero losses. They were expecting a perfect season with a 7-0 record.

Dan walked home with Josh and Max. They all said their goodbyes to each other.

Dan was eating dinner when his father said, “How was your game?”

Dan said, “Good; we won 63 to 62.”

“How did you do?”

“I shot the winning shot, and scored,” Dan said.

“Good for you,” Dan’s dad said.

The next day the Tigers had a game against the Crossville Cobras. The cobras had two wins and four losses. In the locker room, Mr. Oxford was trying to pump the Tigers up. He was saying, “Let’s go, guys. They are the worst team in the league!”

Of course, the Tigers won the game, 70 to 46. The championship was on the next Tuesday. If the Tigers keep a perfect season, they would set a state record.

Dan was in his room looking at his calendar. *Only three days left*, he thought. Dan decided to go shoot some baskets. He went outside and shot for about ten minutes. Then his mom came out looking sad. “It’s Mrs. Thomas on the phone.” He went to go answer it.

“Hello?” he said.

“Dan, I have bad news.” She paused. “Josh broke his ankle. He can’t play in the championship.”

“How?”

“He was playing basketball, and he tripped and fell funny,” she said.

“Tell him to get better in three days,” Dan said. Mrs. Thomas laughed. Dan was only half-kidding.

*Josh is the best shooting guard we have*, Dan thought. *If we don't have him, we'll lose for sure.*

The game came. Without Josh. The starting five were Max, Sam, Brad, Scott Dell, and Dan. They got onto the court. They were playing the Glencoe Ninjas. They were six and one and the Tigers were seven and zero.

The game started out with Max taking it up the court. Max scored with no pressure.

After the first half the Tigers were losing 22 to 36. The coach gave them a little pep talk. Then they conquered the court. They went on a scoring spree. The score was 38 to 34 with the Ninjas still leading.

Dan was thinking, *If only Josh were here. He would know what to do. He'd end this game right now.* At the end of the third quarter, the score was 48 to 40 in favor of the Ninjas.

With two minutes left, the score was 47 to 51. Max took it up the court. Coach said, "Dan's open!" Max passed it. Dan scored. It was 49 to 51 with 40 seconds left, and the Ninja's point guard shot the ball but got blocked by Sam. Brad grabbed the ball and called timeout.

Coach Oxford called the whole team in and sat them down. "I know it's hard out there without Josh," he said, "but let's go out there and win this one for him." Coach told Max to stall and run down the clock. He told him to then pass it to Brad who would fake the shot, and at 10 seconds pass to Dan. Dan would then shoot the three-pointer for the win.

Dan glanced at the door. In limped Josh on crutches. Something about seeing Josh at that moment gave Dan the extra confidence to finish the game off. He remembered all the clutch points he and Josh scored in the regular season and it gave him the boost he needed.

With 30 seconds left, Max was wasting time. Brad, the center, called for the ball. With 20 seconds left he passed it to Dan. Dan passed it to Sam who pumped, then passed it to Dan.

"Ten seconds left!" Mr. Oxford yelled. Dan put the shot up.

It felt like a slow-motion shot. The crowd was cheering slowly. Their hands were waving in the air as slow as snails move. But all the people were screaming, wishing that the ball would go in, and then--

*Swish!*



THE TWELFTH  
MONTH





# The Christmas That Almost Didn't Happen

*One of Santa's elves has gone bad, and he's out to ruin Christmas with his evil invention. It's up to Santa to save the holiday in **THE CHRISTMAS THAT ALMOST DIDN'T HAPPEN**, by **Alex Brooks**.*

It all started at the North Pole in Santa's workshop. The elves were building toys and Santa was drinking some hot chocolate. But one particular elf named Bob was sick of working. He was sick of the way Santa treated them. *All work and no pay*, he thought to himself, *and boy is he fat. All those little kids are happy for Santa when we elves do all the work!* Bob was watching Santa sip his hot cocoa, and it just sickened him. *This is the last straw!* he said to himself. *Well, this year there's going to be someone new.*

"Play the dramatic music," Bob yelled into the distance. Then some really annoying mad scientist music started to play while he hollered, "Bwa, ha, ha; bwa, ha, ha (cough, cough)."

Bob started his plan to get rid of Santa and ruin Christmas for the children of the world. He was going to build a new Santa, a better Santa, a Santa that would give each and every child a lump of coal for Christmas. That way everyone would think Santa is a jerk.

He figured that he would need the help of at least half of all the other elves. He tried to convince all the elves, but only about 96 agreed. That's because they looked up to Bob and thought he was cool.

They were up all night working on what they called Sinister Santa, or Double S. He was a robotic Santa. He had super

strength and only listened to Bob. Santa never knew about this little project of theirs. He was always sound asleep in his bed.

Then one night, one of the tiniest elves passed by the robot Santa on his way to bed. He panicked and ran to wake the real Santa, shouting Santa's name as loud as he possibly could. Without warning, someone put a hand over the tiny elf's mouth and shoved him into a locked closet.

Santa rushed out of his room to see what was happening. There it stood--Sinister Santa! Bob pressed a button on the remote and Sinister Santa attacked. With great strength, Double S picked up a barrel filled with Toys for Girls and Boys and threw it at Santa, but missed. By now all the elves had gathered round.

Santa threw a punch, but Double S was made of metal so the punch had no effect. (In fact, Santa bruised his hand and started to whimper like a baby.) Some elves tried jumping on Double S's back, but he easily threw them off, while others tried to hurt the evil elves. While Santa wept, Double S knocked him over the head, tied him up, and stuffed him in a freezer. The good elves did not dare go near.

Next, Bob put part two into action. He took Sinister Santa and hopped on the sleigh. "Now time to ruin Christmas," cackled Bob, and he set off to do just that.

The good elves ran to the freezer to untie Santa. Now free, Santa shouted, "Get the backup sleigh." (Well, it was more like a black-on-black Dodge Viper, turbo-charged with a special V-12, but Santa likes to call it a sleigh. It had headlights as strong as searchlights. He also hooked up some laser guns just in case. And as strange as it may seem, it actually had a hot cocoa maker.) Then they set off to save Christmas.

When they caught up with Bob and Sinister Santa, Santa tried blasting them out of the sky but missed completely. *I've got to get better aim*, he thought to himself.

Suddenly Bob released all the toys from the toy bag. (While all this was happening, the elves back at the workshop were just standing there, paralyzed and amazed.) Anyway, the toys all flew toward the ground. Santa took a nosedive, barely managing to

save the children's toys, and just barely missing a collision with the ground.

Santa recovered and took one more shot, and this time his aim was perfect. Suddenly Bob and Sinister Santa went flying downward, crashing into a tree and skidding across the ground.

When they crashed, Santa had but one thing to say: "Naughty, naughty."

Finally, the real Santa flew off to deliver Toys to Girls and Boys everywhere around the world. As for Bob, Santa had one more assignment. Bob had to build Santa a brand new sleigh.

Santa used the new sleigh until the year 1996 when another elf, named Bill, destroyed it in another attempt at evil. But that's a whole other story.

# The Jewish Santa

*You may know about Santa Claus, but what about Santa Jake? Peter Nagle introduces him in THE JEWISH SANTA.*

Jake was like any other Jewish little boy who liked Hanukkah. But he did not like Christmas, because the kids who celebrated Christmas got a lot more presents than the people who celebrated Hanukkah.

Jake decided to become Santa because when he was a kid, he was looking out the window one day and saw a bunch of kids playing with their new Christmas toys. He thought that the kids that celebrated Hanukkah felt left out because they did not get as many presents. He said to himself, *When I grow up I want it to be fair*, so he thought, *When I grow up, I'll be Jewish Santa!*

Jake, the Jewish Santa, is starting his training. The training is hard, especially when you're a 50-year-old man in the training. Jake has to suck in his belly so he can go down the chimney. Jake has to train the magic penguins to fly the sleigh. Jake has to make a route to visit all the Jewish boys and girls. He has to talk to all the elves to make sure they are making good toys.

Finally it was the last night of Hanukkah. All the boys and girls were going to bed thinking that they had no more presents. They did not know Jake was leaving the South Pole and all the elves were cheering. Jake knows what houses to go to because the Jewish houses have menorahs in the windows, lit up.

He starts in South America, then heads to Australia. His sleigh goes so fast, he was going at the speed of light. Everything is going well so far....

At the fourth house he stopped at, he ran into a big mean dog. Santa Jake dropped off the presents and then ran as fast as a 50-year-old person can run.

He was going over Iceland when he figured out that he did not have enough presents left. He called his elves on the cell phone and said to ship some more gifts on his sleigh with the ten-minute postal service. Ten minutes later, Santa Jake was on his way.

Everything was going well until his next stop when one kid woke up in the middle of a present drop-off. The child watched Santa Jake do his thing in the house. The child watched the sleigh take off into the sky.

In the morning the kid tried to tell all his Jewish friends but they did not believe him. They thought that all their parents gave them more presents during the night.

The elves were cheering when Santa Jake landed in the South Pole. Santa Jake felt great! And now he gets to rest! Then Santa Jake will do it all over again next year.

# The Kid Who Sued Santa

*Is it legal to sue Santa Claus? Could a person actually win? Someone gives it a try in **THE KID WHO SUED SANTA**, by **Chelsey Jackson**.*

Jerry Prentice is a big fat brat who always gets his way. He is very snotty and sticks out his lips when he pouts. Whatever he wants he gets because his parents are two of the richest people on earth.

Everybody in the family said he'd better not act naughty because it's Christmas Eve. The more his family told him that, the worse he would act up and pull pranks.

Later that evening, Santa Claus came to Jerry's house with all of the presents. Santa went through the chimney and took out a small round gift that was wrapped tightly. He placed it under the tree.

When Jerry woke up the next morning, he was so excited. He ran down the stairs and looked under the tree and saw a small round gift. He opened it. *An orange? What kind of gift is this? I know for sure that I didn't ask for this. What's up with Santa this year? Did he eat too many cookies? I've been the most perfect boy and what do I get? An orange!* Then Jerry got a cruel look on his face and said, "I'm gonna sue Santa!"

By the next day Santa Claus was in Judge Joe Brown's Courtroom surrounded by his elves. Santa had his usual outfit on: big black boots and a red velvet jacket. Everyone took a seat.

"All rise."

When the session started, Jerry started to talk about how he got an orange for Christmas. Jerry also started to testify that you don't see too many kids getting oranges all over America. He also said that kids are supposed to get toys.

“Santa, can you say something against this?” the judge asked.

“Yes. He’s lucky he got an orange instead of a lump of coal. Jerry, do you know what I think about all the naughty things you’ve done?”

Jerry looked down with a sorrowful face, then replied, “I guess I’ve been a little naughty.”

“As I was saying,” said Santa with a voice so loud it echoed in the courtroom, “Christmas isn’t about the toys and big feast. Christmas comes from the heart.”

So Jerry dropped the charges.

Case closed.

# The Leprechauns Who Saved Christmas

*In THE LEPRECHAUNS WHO SAVED CHRISTMAS by Daniel Du Comb, Santa isn't the jolly, heartwarming man he is always portrayed to be. He is bent on world domination, and the Leprechauns must stop Santa from taking over St. Patrick's Day and all of the holidays in the world.*

It was late afternoon on Sunday, and Agent Luck was coming in from his daily work. Today he had stopped an army of 1000 elves from taking over Ireland. Not much of a day's work. Luck passed two rolling hills and then came to a small rock lying in the grass. He walked up to it and knocked three times. Then he whispered to it, "I am a Leprechaun in the LPI (Leprechauns Protecting Ireland)." There was a creak and the rock lifted up. Shamus was standing on the stairs below with a look of horror on his face. Shamus was the head Leprechaun of the LPI. "Luck," he said, "Santa's back at it again."

"I already knew that. I had to fight off 1000 elves today. What holiday is he after now, Thanksgiving?"

"No. He's after St. Patrick's Day. I fear that if he gets us, he'll take over all of the holidays in the world."

"He won't stop at anything, will he? He's already stopped Easter and Halloween. What else does he want?"

"He wants power. Power over all of the holidays so that Christmas will be the sole holiday that everyone knows and worships."

"He's crazy."

"I know, and he must be stopped!"



By this time they had reached the control room. It was a gargantuan hole, deep underground, with many hallways and smaller side rooms. There was nothing covering the dirt walls and floor. Everyone was scurrying around and running into each other from time to time. There was the constant drone of talking and the vivid blur of many colors emanating from the televisions. The control room had ten 50-inch flat screen plasma TV's and a 100-inch TV that was smack in the middle of the other 50-inch TVs. The 50-inch TVs showed shots of places from all over the world. On the 100-inch TV there were live pictures of the North Pole and of what Santa was up to. They had planted the cameras in the previous war with Santa. He was assembling an army of over one hundred thousand elves with fighting reindeer and motorized sleighs. This reminded Luck of last year when Santa took over Easter. The Leprechauns had allied with the Easter Bunny to stop Santa. At first, they were winning the battle, but soon the elves' numbers overpowered them. Santa killed the Easter Bunny and used the power of Easter to gain power for Christmas.

"We'll never win. There's too many of them," said Luck.

"We still have a chance," declared Shamus. "Even though their numbers are great, the elves are inexperienced fighters and have bad battle tactics. We, on the other hand, have fewer fighters, but we are more skilled and much stronger.

"OK, now down to business. I need you and Agent Gold to go to the North Pole and spy on Santa. I will allow you to use any method you want to get your information. I want you to figure out when they will attack, what their numbers are, and what path they are taking to Ireland."

Luck hadn't noticed it, but as they were talking, Shamus had led them to Doc's office. Doc is the genius of the LPI. He is very old and very short. He has a bright orange-red beard that looks like autumn leaves. Doc creates all of the high-tech gadgets that the LPI uses. Today, Doc had two things perfect for their mission. He had a microphone that could pick up conversations from one-half mile away. It also had a headset so that the sound went straight to your ears and no one else could hear. He also gave

them a long distance walkie-talkie and a secret frequency that he had invented. Luck took the gadgets and left to go to the North Pole with Agent Gold.

In one hour, Luck and Gold were flying in their pot o'gold to the North Pole. They landed a mile away from the North Pole so they would not be detected. In the distance, Luck could see that there was an actual pole sticking up from the ground. It had red and white stripes spiraling down from the top. Luck and Gold started to trudge toward the pole.

When they got close, they saw two elves come up from the ground out of nowhere. They looked like two very normal elves. They were short like Leprechauns and had pointy ears. One had a beard and one didn't. The beard was the color of brownish black. Leprechauns have beards, too, so they looked a little alike.

Luck and Gold hid behind an enormous snow mound and watched. They turned on the microphone and heard, "I'm going to go get some supplies. I'll be back within the hour."

The elf was gone for probably a half-hour. He came back holding swords and spears. He bent down, looked around himself, and whispered something into the pole. A normal person could not have heard this, but with their microphone, Luck and Gold heard every word. The password was, "Rudolph has a bright red nose."

When the elf said this, the pole dipped into the snow and a staircase appeared. The elf walked down the stairs into what they thought was Santa's lair. A minute later another two elves came out. Luck and Gold snuck up behind them and put them in a headlock. They took the elves' clothes and tied them up. Then Luck and Gold put the clothes on and hid the elves behind the snow mound. They put gags on them so they could not make a sound. They also took their ID passes.

Luck and Gold walked up to the pole and said, "Rudolph has a bright red nose." It worked! The pole dunked into the snow and revealed a spiral staircase. They walked down it trying to look like real elves. They actually looked like elves because their ears were pointed. The only problem was that their walk was not that of elves. You see, elves have a tendency to waddle because they are

short, and Leprechauns walk normally, even though they are short. It looked pretty goofy, but everyone on the staircase bought it.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs, they saw a room that was exactly as they expected. It was a well-lit room with elves hustling and bustling about, with Santa keeping order. There was only one slight difference. Instead of elves sitting in front of tables making every sort of toy imaginable, there were hundreds of thousands of elves sitting in front of tables making every sort of weapon imaginable. You name it, they had it. There were also thousands of elves learning how to fight military style. They were all in a colossal three-story room that had a wide-open space in the middle with walkways that went around the entire room. All you could hear was the ear-deafening screams of hammers, saws, and yelling. There were posters on the walls that said “Santa for World Leader.”

Santa was sitting in a high loft at the top of the room wearing his usual red suit and overseeing all of the action. Even though Santa looked his jolly happy self, he was very different. He was very harsh and sounded very irritated when he talked. If you looked at him hard enough, you could just tell something was different about him. There was something in his eyes that made him look sinister instead of jolly. He would occasionally yell out at some elf with a loudspeaker, but most of the time he kept quiet. The elves actually looked cheerful even with their crazy Santa.

Luck and Gold started walking into the room, but were stopped when they walked by a desk.

“Hey,” a stout elf yelled from the desk. “You have to check in first.”

“Oh,” said Luck.

Each pulled out his ID card and gave it to the elf at the desk. The elf swiped them through the scanner and said, “Are you Jack and Joe Toy?”

“Yes, we are,” said Luck.

“You are wanted on the third floor for training,” said the elf.

Luck and Gold walked to the staircase and climbed to the third floor. They got in line with the rest of the elves just as the

teacher walked into the room. He was very tall for an elf. He carried a whip and talked in a very gruff voice.

“I am here to teach you babies how to fight. But first, we need to make you strong. Now drop and give me 20!”

They all dropped and started doing push-ups.

“Come on, elves, my dead Grandma can do better than you. We only have three days until we attack. Do you think the Leprechauns are sitting around eating potato chips all day? No! They’re training too, and if you don’t train, then you’ll get blown out.”

“Mission #1 accomplished,” Luck muttered under his breath. He had figured out when they were going to attack. Now he had to figure out how many people they had, and where they were going to attack.

When they were learning how to do close combat, Luck asked his partner how many people they had for fighting the Leprechauns. He looked at Luck like he was crazy.

“I thought everyone knew that. Well, that’s an easy question. We’ve got 300,000 able-bodied soldiers, not to mention the 500 reindeer and 100,000 gigantic motorized sleds.”

“Mission 2, cashed in,” Luck thought to himself. “Now all I need to know is where they are going to attack and what path they were taking.”

By the time the session was over, it was time for the elves to go to sleep. Luck and Gold followed the elves to a giant mess hall where there were several thousand sleeping bags. This was enough because many elves worked the night shift. Gold and Luck hopped into sleeping bags. Gold fell asleep right away, but Luck lay there and processed the info that he had learned. They were going to attack in three days and they had 300,000 men, 500 reindeer, and 100,000 motorized sleds.

Luck quietly pulled out his long distance walkie-talkie that Doc had given him. He tuned to the secret frequency (which I am not allowed to disclose) and tried to get someone on the line.

“Hello, Doc, Shamus, are you there?”

“Luck, is that you?”

“Yes. Who is this?”

“This is Shamus. How is your mission going?”

“It’s going well. I called to tell you when they are attacking and how many of them there are.”

“Tell me, tell me!” Shamus begged.

“They are attacking in three days and there are 300,000 soldiers, 500 reindeer and 100,000 motorized sleds.”

“That’s great, Luck, but we still need to know what path they are taking to attack us. Hurry, we don’t have much time.”

“OK. I promise I’ll have it by tomorrow.”

Just as Luck turned off the radio and changed the frequency, a big burly elf walked up behind him.

“Do we have a spy here? Yes, I think we do.” He had a sly smile on his face

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Luck said as sincerely as he could.

“Don’t play dumb with me. I saw you on that walkie-talkie.”

Luck tried to get up and run away but the elf was too quick. He snatched Luck before he had time to get out of his sleeping bag.

He was taken to a cold, dark, musty cell and thrown into it. A few minutes later Gold was thrown in also. The elves knew Gold was a leprechaun because they had noticed the very small features that made him look different than all of the elves.

“We’ll be back tomorrow to interrogate you.” They spent the rest of the night in the cell.

In the early morning, Luck was awakened by two elves speaking to each other. Luck could only hear whispers at first, but then he turned on the microphone. The conversation went like this.

“So, are you going to the meeting today?”

“What meeting?”

“You know, the meeting where Santa is disclosing all of the top-secret info.”

“Oh, that meeting. No, I’m not going.”

“Why not?”

“Santa’s already given me the info.”

“How come he told you about it?”

“Because I am the head elf, remember?”

“Well, can you tell me? Please, please, I’m begging you.”

“I guess. We’re leaving in two days. We’re bringing 300,000 soldiers, 500 reindeer, and 100,000 motorized sleds. We will fly in motorized sleds with the reindeer attached to the back of the sleds. We will start here and fly to Iceland. There, we will refuel and go to Ireland.”

Luck switched off the microphone. That’s all he needed to know. Now, all he needed was a plan to get out of the cell. Luck had a plan in an instant. He whispered it to Gold and it caused him to smile. They both turned invisible right on the spot. If the elves knew that Leprechauns could turn invisible, his plan would have been foiled. But this was one of the best-kept secrets of Leprechauns. When the guard came to bring their lunch, he didn’t find them in the cell. Panic-stricken, the guard flung open the cell door to look around. Luck and Gold sprinted out of the cell and into the main room. Still invisible, they ran all the way to the spiral staircase and outside. They leaped over to the snow mound and jumped into their pot o’ gold. They flew through a gentle snowfall all the way to Ireland.

Back at LPI headquarters, Luck told Shamus the info that he had gathered. Shamus pulled out a map and pointed to Iceland.

“That’s where we’ll meet Santa.”

It was the day of the attack, and Santa’s army was flying over the Artic Ocean. Santa was leading them all in his special sleigh. The sleigh was dark red with metallic red and white trimming. It had “Santa” written in big gold letters across both sides. It had two V8 engines powering four rocket boosters in the back. And to top it all off, it had a one-of-a-kind padded chair shipped all the way from Texas. Santa pointed to the ground and dove toward a fiery red island. This was Iceland.

The Leprechauns saw them coming. They were all invisible, and had been waiting in the brush for about an hour. They were dripping in sweat from the sweltering heat of the boiling fissure just twenty yards away. They were carrying all sorts of weapons that made them even hotter. These included spears, bows and

arrows, maces, swords, and daggers. Every one of them was armed to the teeth. Their strategy was to force Santa's army to the edge of the volcanic fissure and push the elves over the edge into nature's furnace. This was their only way of winning because they were vastly outnumbered. They couldn't stay invisible because it was too risky. They could kill their partners if they didn't see them, because Leprechauns can't see each other when they turn invisible.

Santa's army landed. One person from each sleigh got out and grabbed a fuel tank. They dumped the fuel into the sleighs and got back in. Before they could take off, the Leprechauns charged at Santa's army. They took them by surprise and quickly gained control of the battle. Santa's army didn't know what to do. They hadn't even thought of this as a possibility. Many elves were killed right at the start because they didn't have their weapons. The survivors only had time to reach back into their sleighs and grab what few weapons were at hand. They were still a distance away from the fissure, but the elves' backs were toward the fissure. Even though the remaining elves each had a weapon, they were still very stunned. The Leprechauns were very swift in their actions and obviously the better trained of the two armies. They would block one attack, and attack the very next moment.

The stunned elves finally woke up and grasped their situation. The large number of elves began to change the direction of the battle. For every Leprechaun, there were three elves. They started driving the Leprechauns back. Also, the reindeer were charging and plowing through the Leprechauns like they were bowling pins. The Leprechauns began to lose the battle.

However, slowly but surely the Leprechauns' strategy began to kick in. They pushed Santa's army toward the fissure. They did this with their brute strength and very skilled fighting ability. They were pushing the elves back even though they were getting mauled in the process. The Leprechauns drove the elves into the burning hot lava of the fissure. They died almost immediately. The Leprechauns could hear the agonizing screams of the elves plunging down into the fissure. The Leprechauns gave no mercy. Every chance they got, they would push an elf in. The elves

fought bravely but it wasn't enough. Their strength was nowhere near the Leprechauns'. They had no hope of winning now.

By now, many if not all of the elves had surrendered or died. The battle was over except for two people. They were Santa and Luck. They were fighting fiercely. They were near the edge of the fissure. Santa had the advantage because Luck was nearest to the edge of the fissure. The only thing keeping Luck from falling in was his brute strength. Sweat was trickling down Luck's distorted face and dripping off his chin. It was getting dark and the fighting duo was illuminated by the setting sun. Their swords were clashing vigorously when they came to a sudden halt. Their swords were clung together and both were pushing as hard as they could on their swords. Luck was pushing as hard as he could, but he was slipping. His heels were over the edge. Luck fought back with all his might trying to save himself. Then, with one last breath Luck said, "When I was fighting you last year, I was just fighting for Easter. But now, it's personal."

With swift action, Luck dove between Santa's straddled legs. He whirled around and shoved Santa to the edge of the fissure. Quickly, Luck lunged toward Santa and caught him as he was falling into the fissure.

"I'll give you two options," yelled Luck under a gray sky that was mimicking the mood of the battle. "You can give up and go to jail, or you can die!"

"I'll never obey you," sneered Santa.

"Then you have chosen death."

Luck let go of Santa and he plunged into the fiery pit of Hades, disappearing from sight.

All of the Leprechauns jumped for joy. They had won the battle and were rid of the crazy Santa forever.

The Leprechauns chained all of the elves that had surrendered and brought them back to the headquarters where their fate would be decided. Luck became the new Santa and Gold became the Easter Bunny. Luck took all of the elves back to the North Pole to work on toys, and Gold based the Easter Business out of the LPI headquarters. All of the holidays were safe forever.



# My First *Real* Christmas

*In MY FIRST REAL CHRISTMAS by Samantha Habowski, Ellen learns how important friends and family are.*

My name is Ellen. I have been homeless for most of my life. I also have no parents. I wandered around the lonely cold streets looking for any scraps of food I could find. I always felt like a stray dog. People were always telling me to go away. I looked for a good home and food constantly. I was just a homeless kid trying to make my way in this unfair world.

The real story begins a week before Christmas. My sister, our friends and I were talking in a dark alleyway as usual. We were all going to split up in pairs and try to find some food--old or dirty, we didn't care, as long as it was edible. Of course I had to go with my scared little sister. I am 13, and she is 8. She is very immature for her age. We all lived together, my sister and all our friends. We lived in New York in a cold dark alley. No food, no roof, no beds, and only the clothes we've had since forever.

You may think it is wonderful to have no parents, but it's not. No one to provide for us, no one to protect you against the dangers of the world. You may also think it's great not to go to school, but it's not. The whole world looks down on you because you have no education. The other kids and I put out for work and we succeeded, but the man who hired us would beat us. We all decided it was better to starve than to get beaten.

A while ago I heard of a kid who had stolen something and got sent to the juvenile delinquent center. I had been thinking about this, and decided to steal something to see if I could be sent there. It would be nice to have some different clothes, food, and a bed for Christmas. I only told my best friend about my secret

plan, because I wanted to see if this was all true, and I didn't want them to be disappointed if it was not true.

I carried out my secret plan at the market on Fifth Street. I was all alone. I told the others I wanted to go on a walk by myself. The fresh bread smelled so good. I had to take some. I also took some fruit and cereal. The storekeeper was furious! When he caught me he called the police right away. They were there in a flash. As they put the cuffs on me, I wondered if in the end it would all be worth it.

My sister and our friends must have heard the sirens and followed them. The police put me in the car while my sister's face streamed with tears. I felt bad for putting her through this. I was scared to death myself.

I was silent the whole way there. They took me in to the juvie center, told me what to do, and then locked me up. They put me in a room by myself, and brought my food to me so I never saw any other kids. I lay there thinking this was going to be like a night in a hotel, and for me it was, although it was very lonely without my friends. I was fed, got new clothes, and slept in a real bed. As I was trying to fall asleep, I thought of my sister and friends, and wondered how they were.

The next morning I woke up in fright, feeling for my sister. Then I remembered where I was. It was weird sleeping without my sister. In fact I woke up several times in the night looking for her, scared that she was gone.

The next day, when I was eating lunch, they unlocked my cell and told me I was excused. They told me to sit down in a chair and wait. I wondered why. They told me I had one phone call. I told them I have no one to call. "The girl was right," one of the guards said. What girl? I thought. Then it hit me: Kelsey, my best friend, the only one who knew my plan. I was devastated! How could she do such a thing? Then one of the guards said, "Come with us."

I got in a car. I did not ask questions, just sat there thinking.

I did not know it then, but Kelsey had done me a big favor. The car stopped at a house. The driver told me to get out and go inside. My sister answered the door! I was in shock! "What are you

doing here?" I asked. She told me we were being adopted. I was so happy I could not speak. My heart was about to burst with happiness and questions.

Now it is Christmas day and I have a wonderful new family. I have a new mom, dad, dog, and my old sister. I also have a house, food, clothes, a bed, schooling, and a roof over my head, and best of all, a mom and dad and a happy heart.

# You Can't Take Over Christmas

*Wondering about the secret life of dogs and cats is enough to keep you awake at night. Thank goodness **Heather Swarthout** reveals everything in **YOU CAN'T TAKE OVER CHRISTMAS.***

"Fido, come in," Spot yelled down the toilet. He hated it, but he used it like any other dog, as a form of communication.

"Here," Fido screamed back. Spot saw Fido's face in the toilet. The toilet is a sort of dog computer, except they talked instead of typing.

"I just had to tell you," Spot said urgently, "The cat knows our evil scheme."

"Do you mean the scheme where we overtake the world one holiday at a time?" Fido asked, "Because if you do, a cat can't overtake it."

"Yeah--I guess you are right," Spot agreed. "I found a rabbit who thought the Easter bunny was made to make fun of him. It was hysterical."

"Cool, a rabbit for Easter, turkeys for Thanksgiving, mice to take the candy on Halloween," Fido listed all of the animals they employed, "and last of all we can take care of Valentine's Day."

"You forgot Christmas, Hanukah and Kwanzaa," Spot reminded Fido.

"No, I was just getting to that," Fido said. "The animals at the zoo--if we let them out, they will do any--"

"What do zoo animals have to do with Christmas?"

“Shut up, I’m getting there,” Fido screamed. “We let the animals out, they do anything for us, including stealing Christmas, Kwanzaa and Hanukah!”

“Fido, I have to go, the little screamer is back,” Spot whispered. Then he was startled by a noise from above.

“You can’t steal Christmas. You’ve tried it before, and it never works.” The cat jumped off of the back of the toilet and went out into the hall. “And her name is Mandy. She does scream, but she isn’t little. She is four years old.”

“Chips, how long were you there?” Spot followed her.

“I’m not at liberty to say. I’m an Egyptian Mau, and it’s in my job description to be loyal. Loyalty includes not associating with imbeciles plotting to take over the world.” Chips then ran downstairs to greet Mandy.

Now it was almost a year later. The holidays had been awful so far. By Christmas, Mandy’s parents weren’t sure if they should put up the tree. Eventually they put it up, but without any ornaments. After the bunny attack on Easter, mice attacks on Halloween, and turkeys’ attacks on Thanksgiving, they didn’t know what to expect.

Mandy chose one present to open on Christmas Eve. That way she wouldn’t burst overnight. This year she chose one that was wrapped in shiny red paper with a sparkly gold bow. It was in a box taller than it was wide, and it was the one present her mom wouldn’t let her shake. She ripped the paper off of it, revealing a box with a nutcracker on it. And it wasn’t one of those cheap nutcrackers made only for decoration; it cracked real nuts!

That night Mandy went to bed with her nutcracker. Spot went outside to free the zoo animals. Chips dragged the wrapping paper up the attic steps and into a corner. Then she hurried back downstairs and grabbed a book that she had heard a story from once. Chips wanted to prove to Spot that you couldn’t steal Christmas. If the humans read this story, she was sure they would remember what Christmas was all about. She took the book up to the attic where she fell asleep on the wrapping paper of many Christmases past.

“Fido,” Spot screamed, “where are you?”

“I know you’re scared of the dark, but that doesn’t mean you can scream,” Fido hissed.

After the long walk to the zoo, they picked the lock off of the front gate and ran inside before the night watchman saw them. They ran towards all of the cages and let the animals out. Soon they had all of the animals, from snakes to penguins to hippopotamuses, around them,

“Divide up into groups of ten so we can pass out these charts,” Fido commanded.

“Each group has one block to cover,” Spot continued. “Go down the chimney and take everything you can out of that room. Let it burn in the fireplace or take it with you.”

“I ain’t doin’ it,” Theresa the tiger exclaimed. “All throughout history cats and humans ‘ave been close. Ain’t my place to mess it up.”

“Theresa’s right. I am the lord, the ruler of the animals in South America,” Jesse the Jaguar insisted. “Humans are animals, and I am their ruler. I’m not helping anyone overthrow my throne, especially a stupid \_\_\_\_\_.”

“You can’t be on that, much like the little housecat,” Spot complained quietly. Wildcats aren’t anyone’s first choice for enemies.

“There’s a housecat involved? She must remember Egypt, unlike you!” Lily the lion roared. “I would love to meet her. Few remember Sekhmet, God of the burning sun. She had my head.”

“Look, we ain’t messin’ this up,” Theresa explained. “Our long history with humans dates back 8,000 years, at least. We ain’t exactly free here, but the people are nice, and they don’t really like caging us up, it’s their job. Ain’t no point ta make ‘em miserable.”

“Spot,” Sam the snake hissed, “why do you want to have us do this house? What’s so special about it?” *Us* meant Sammy, Kayla the kangaroo, and Eli the elephant.

“The housecat lives here. She doesn’t think we can do this,” Spot whispered. “I have directions from Fido to go and make sure it all works, without the wildcats.”

They all went inside in their own separate ways. Sammy slithered in through the ventilation system. Kayla hopped onto the roof, and down the chimney. Eli went in the sliding door in the back, the only way she could fit. Spot naturally took the doggy door.

As soon as Eli got inside she walked around a bit, knocking everything over. Meanwhile Spot howled, to cover up the noise. Then Eli left and Kayla put many things into her pouch for later. Everything was burned except an extremely flammable nail polish remover and Spot’s dog bed.

Kayla and Sammy left. Spot had just enough time to add a few finishing touches before he fell asleep.

Christmas morning was here! Mandy ran downstairs dragging her nutcracker, hoping to see that Santa had come and left her a zillion presents. Boy, was she surprised. All that was left was Spot’s bed, nail polish remover, and a single nut. She plopped down on the ground and put the nut in her nutcracker’s mouth.

Mandy’s parents couldn’t get over it. They had bought most of the presents. Talk about money down the drain.

Chips came down the attic stairs, pushing the large book in front of her. When Mandy’s mom saw the book, her whole face brightened up. She started to tell the story Chips remembered from a long time ago.

It was about a little boy who was the Son of God. He was born in Bethlehem in a little stable. They hadn’t even had a tree and the only presents didn’t come until January 6, yet everyone was overjoyed.

That year the entire family went out for dinner. Who knew that sushi tasted so good on Christmas?

“I told you that cat was a menace.” Fido had just come over after the humans left to go caroling. “Would you listen to me?”

Nooo. A little housecat can't take over our scheme, you said. You should have listened, you should have ..."

"But Fido, it was the other way around," Spot said meekly. When Fido didn't even pause for a breath, Spot raised his voice and continued, "You thought nothing of the cat until something bad happened. How come I'm always wrong? Why are you...?"

As long as dogs think they are superior, anything could happen.



# TWISTS AND TURNS



# Computer Nerds

*In* **COMPUTER NERDS** by **Sean B. Alpin**, twin brothers are separated at birth. Neither knows about the other. Why is a computer genius trying to reunite them?

Once upon a time, a mother named Lola had twins. Their names were Jim and Bob. Lola died during childbirth while having them. One family adopted Jim and another family adopted Bob. The family that adopted Jim went to New Jersey, and the family that adopted Bob went to Michigan. Jim and Bob both knew that they had been adopted and that their birth mother's name was Lola, born August 3, 1960, and both knew that they were born on February 3, 1980. They did not; however, know that they each had a twin brother alive.

A millionaire named Bill Grates who was a computer genius decided to challenge other computer geniuses to crack a seemingly unbreakable code he had created. Over a million computer nerds entered, but only two prevailed and broke the code. The combination to the unbreakable code was deciphered by using a series of numbers. The only way to figure these numbers was by taking the date of 2-03-80, Jim and Bob's birthdays, and subtracting their birth mother's birthday. Grates went to great lengths to plan that only Jim and Bob would be able to break the code, based on information only they knew. Jim and Bob were both happy with their adopted families, but both longed to know more about their birth mother. Their interest in the contest arose when they heard about the contest that was named "Where in the World are Lola's Boys?" Jim and Bob were the two winners of this most intriguing and difficult contest.

A time and place were set for the two men to meet Bill Grates, determine who would be the winner of this code-breaking contest, and to finally reveal the grand prize. The men were to meet at The Grates Building. Jim was the first to enter. He checked into the building which utilized the latest in security technology. The guard, who was an undercover Secret Service Agent, showed him in. Within five minutes of his arrival Bob arrived and did the same. However, the guard stopped him, thinking he saw double. When questioned by the guard, Bob responded that, no, he did not have a twin brother.

The two men were put in rooms with glass windows next to each other. When Bob looked out and saw Jim and Jim looked out and saw Bob, they each thought there must be a trick mirror. They both approached the glass. This couldn't be real.

All of a sudden, the glass wall that had divided them retracted and there was only space between them. Both men were full of wonder and mystery.

He walked Bill Grates. With teary eyes he explained that he used this alleged computer contest as a way of bringing the two men together. He had been in love with Lola back in the old country. War ravaged the nation, and Bill was fighting on the front lines to save his desperate country. Lola's family was all killed in the war, and she survived by fleeing her country for the United States to safety. Bill never knew she was pregnant, and was told she was dead.

Years went by and Bill never found another love, so he turned to his affinity for computers. He found out that in fact Lola lived through the war and came to the U.S. pregnant, but had died during childbirth. He now was determined to find his lost children. He dreamt of ways to find his children, and finally settled upon a computer contest, hoping his sons would be intrigued by the title.

Jim and Bob were absolutely shocked and amazed while listening to the love story between their birth parents. Their whole lives they had questions, and in one afternoon they were almost all answered. Bill Grates was not only a computer genius and multimillionaire, but he also held the key to their past!

Now that Bill had found his family he knew that he could never in his life do anything better. Bill Grates was a now a happy man. Life had presented him with many challenges, but nothing could ever feel better than being with his family. From now on he would always be with his family, as he decided to share all of his business and fortune with his sons.

# The House of Many Riches

*A secret unfolds in the old mansion where two girls are forced to live. In **THE HOUSE OF MANY RICHES** by Sarah Silver, find out how the girls make use of what they find.*

It was pouring rain and the sky was dark. The children sat eagerly waiting for their parents to return home. The year was 1987. The two sisters were playing jacks on the kitchen floor. They were in the middle of the game when they heard a pounding on the door. They replied, "Who is it?"

"The police," said two, dark booming voices.

The sisters shuddered with fear as they cautiously opened the door. The police started talking without letting the girls reply. "Tracy, Ilana, your parents have been sent to jail for insulting our mayor behind his back. You will be sent to live with nice young woman named Madame Ivan, who is one of the mayor's relations. He feels Madame Ivan and you girls would get along very well. Also, Madame Ivan has heard all about you girls and wants desperately to meet you. So I'm sure you and Tracy will have a good time with her. Plus, Madame Ivan says she is your cousin's uncle's sisters' daughter's twice removed second aunt."

"That's not fair. We should get a fair trial."

"I am sorry, we can't do that. What the mayor says goes, so you don't get a fair trial."

"But..." Then Ilana trailed off, for she knew it was no use.

Before I go on I have denied mentioning specifically the names and ages of the children. Tracy, the youngest, is one year old. Ilana, the oldest, is 12 (almost 13) years old.

The policemen both shouted, "Get in the car!" So the girls obeyed.

It was an exceedingly long, drawn-out trip to Madame Ivan's house. As they approached her house, they found a very long driveway, so long that the house was only a speck in the distance.

As they got closer they found that the house was huge. It had hundreds of windows, all trimmed with gold. The door was completely made of glass and the doorknob was a diamond. But the color of the house itself was gray, which made the house seem very dull.

The children got out and the policemen drove away. Ilana rang the doorbell and a person who didn't seem like the person to own a house with gray walls swung the door open. She was wearing a purple polka-dotted lime green skirt, a bright yellow tank top, green alligator boots, and a panda fur coat. I hate to say that on every wall there was animal skin, just as there was on Madame Ivan.

Madame Ivan immediately introduced herself, and then simply said, "You must be Tacky and Amanda." Before one of the girls could correct her, she walked upstairs and showed them their rooms. Each of their rooms was like the rest of the house, with gray walls, a window trimmed in gold, plus animal fur on the walls. The last thing in each room was a normal twin bed with gray sheets. Each was a very dull room.

The next day, Madame Ivan gave them a tour, which took the whole day. It was very boring because all of the rooms were the same and she had at least a double of every room.

As they were walking back, they noticed a door she had missed. But this room had a lock on it, unlike the others. Tracy said, "Pick."

"Good idea; a lock pick. But what can I use? I've got it." Ilana then took a bobby pin out of her hair and tried to open the lock. It didn't work. As she started to walk back, feeling disappointed, she heard a click. Tracy had pulled on the lock and made it open.

Inside was a narrow hallway that was pitch black. The girls held their breath as they started walking into the dark passage. The hallway was long with lots of twists and turns. Then finally,

after what seemed like hours, Ilana hit the door with her hand. Slowly Tracy and Ilana pushed the door open.

Inside was a magnificent room with animal fur walls and no windows, for a good reason. On the floor, glinting in the light of the room, were hundreds of piles of gold, diamonds, gems, rings and golden goblets, what any person would want above anything else. Quickly without even thinking, the sisters took two handfuls of the riches each.

All of a sudden they heard the patter of feet. There wasn't a place to hide, so they pressed themselves tightly against the wall, hoping not to be seen. Madame Ivan walked in. "I thought I locked that door. Oh, well," she said, and flung herself on a chair. Ilana and Tracy seized their chance to get out and ran.

"That was close."

"Yeah."

The sisters continued to go back for a couple of months, until one day when they heard a pounding on the door. Ilana and Tracy both knew it could only mean one thing, which they had waited for since the day they arrived at Madame Ivan's house. If you haven't guessed yet, it was the police at the door. The girls' parents had been let out of jail and the police were here to take the girls home. They were overjoyed and could hardly speak. They grabbed their things and were about to leave when they heard Madame Ivan's voice.

"Wait, officer! These children have been stealing from me. They should be taken away immediately."

"What have they been stealing exactly?"

"Well, my money, of course."

"Excuse me, children, but let me check your bags." As he pushed the girls aside, you could hear Madame Ivan's voice over the screaming of the girls. "I knew it, I knew it; he, he, he!"

"Wait a second. All of this gold is from everywhere except the U.S.A. You, ma'am, are under arrest for stealing."

"You can't arrest me. I'm innocent, innocent, I tell you. NOOOO!"

"Not so fast, girls. Although she had stolen gold, so have you. In that case, I cannot just let you go. I need an explanation."



Ilana then told the whole story from front to back so as not to miss anything. “Well, I see your case, but I have to press charges because even though your story is believable, I cannot ignore the fact that you stole the riches.”

“But we need the money. That’s why we took it.”

“I know, but I can’t let you keep it unless you have a legal document saying you can keep it. Otherwise, I’ll have to say no.”

“Actually, we do have a legal document that says we can inherit the money from any person who holds it.”

“How did you get that?”

“From our great-great-grandfather who was the mayor once. So any relation can give it to us.”

With two enormous smiles on their faces they left the house of many riches.

When they got home, their parents were there to greet them. They hugged so tightly, Tracy and Ilana’s eyes almost popped out. Ilana then told them the whole story with immense detail and over-exaggeration. Then Tracy and Ilana handed them their suitcases with the gold in them.

The riches were used to improve their home, with separate rooms for the girls and new paint on all the walls, with one exception. The room where they kept all of their riches was painted gray in commemoration of the House of Many Riches. Even though they did not like Madame Ivan, they had to thank her for the riches somehow. They did not like that room because it reminded them too much of the cruelty that had been set upon the girls once.

But in the end everything turned out all right. Never again would they have to remember the house of many riches.

# Keetcha

*When things go wrong, “It’s a dog’s life” is one of the ways we express the situation. Well, life can be just as troublesome for a cat, as you will see in **KEETCHA**, by **Marie Sande**.*

On a cold foggy morning in March, my cat Keetcha was born. She huddled together with her sisters and brothers inside of a large trash bin. Once she had opened her eyes, she noticed her mother lying next to her. She was feeding the other kittens her milk. Keetcha was very hungry and decided to join in. The milk was warm and refreshing. After a nice long drink, Keetcha curled into a ball and fell asleep.

One night, Keetcha awoke with a start. The hair on Keetcha’s back stood on end, but only for a few seconds, when she discovered that her brother’s rolling over had disturbed her sleep. Keetcha didn’t feel very tired and she was curious to see her surroundings. She crawled out of the can as quietly as possible so as not to awaken her other siblings.

Keetcha lived in Detroit, Michigan, near a canal of the Detroit River. Keetcha looked at the silvery water, lit only by moonlight and the streetlights. She also examined the tall skyscrapers all around the canal and the trash can several times until she became too tired and crept back into the can to go to sleep.

The next morning, Keetcha awoke from the light of the sun. She couldn’t wait to see the canal again in the daylight. This time Keetcha leaped out of the can and woke up almost all of her brothers and sisters, but she wasn’t concerned. In fact, Keetcha was being so careless that she ran head-on into a man walking down the street.

The man's rubber boots and long black coat smelled strongly of fish. Keetcha, being a cat, loved the smell and purred loudly when the man bent down to pet her. He laughed and said, "You silly cat, what are you so excited about?" The man then walked over to the canal and sat down while baiting the hook on his fishing line. Keetcha watched as the man put his line in the water and took a shiny brass harmonica out of his coat pocket. The man played his harmonica and Keetcha listened. She thought the sound was very pretty and went to sit next to him so she could hear it better.

Suddenly the man shouted, "I got one!" and pulled his line out of the water, revealing a huge fish, bigger than Keetcha. Startled, Keetcha jumped backwards. Again the man laughed at her. "You crazy cat," he said, "there's nothing to be afraid of. You can have some if you want." He took a small knife from his pocket, cut a piece, and put it down in front of her nose. She licked it, then nibbled a bit, and then started gobbling as fast as she could. The fish was delicious. Keetcha decided that she liked the man very much.

When Keetcha returned to the trash can that night, she didn't feel like eating, since she was already plenty full. Instead, she lay down in a corner and fell asleep.

Each day, Keetcha would wander around the canal. She loved to sit by the fisherman and listen to the sweet sounds of his harmonica. They became great friends--such good friends, that he saved Keetcha's life.

One rainy, windy, winter day, Keetcha found a big fat rat. She ran at top speed chasing it around on the wet street. The rat scuttled toward the canal and made a sharp turn. Keetcha could not make such a turn, especially with the slippery road, and went flying into the freezing water! She yelped helplessly as the water engulfed her.

The fisherman soon realized what was happening, but by this time Keetcha had drifted to the other side of the canal, beyond reach. She was getting weaker with every passing minute! The cat's small eyes met the fisherman's. The terrible fear and sadness in them pierced his heart like a knife. The rain had turned into a

storm, and the water of the usually quiet canal became like a raging river. The fisherman knew his kitten friend would soon perish, but if he tried to save her, would he? Finally without thinking any longer, he dove into the current.

Once under the water, he saw Keetcha's sinking, lifeless body and grabbed her. Almost out of breath, he took her to the shore. Keetcha was still alive. She mewed quietly and licked the man's hand with her rough tongue. He smiled at her as he squeezed the water out of his clothes. Keetcha loved the fisherman more than anyone else in the world, but she had nothing to pay him with except her love and gratitude.

It was an extremely hot day. The fisherman had decided to take a break from fishing and stayed home. Keetcha mostly stayed in her can, but was going out to get a drink from the canal when a big truck rumbled up the street and halted right in front of her. She was not alarmed because the mailman always stopped and delivered things to nearby buildings. The man from the truck walked a little further and then suddenly from behind his back took a huge net and caught Keetcha inside of it. She struggled to get loose but couldn't, and the man locked her inside his truck. She cried out in terrible distress as the truck moved. Keetcha felt helpless and sick from the movement. She wished to be back home in her trash can.

With a jerk, the truck stopped. Then the man picked her up and brought her inside a big building with tons of other cats and dogs. He locked her in a cage and left. Tired and hungry, Keetcha fell into an uncomfortable slumber.

Keetcha awoke the next morning feeling depressed and frantic. She clawed the cage bars and cried out in agony as her yellow eyes darted around the room in utter distress. After several hours of tantrums, Keetcha finally laid herself down. All she could think of was running around the canal and how free and happy she had been. Even with all the other animals there, Keetcha felt more alone than she ever had been. She was scared and helpless. Every day she was fed tasteless food that she despised, but she had no other choice than to eat it. The days

Keetcha spent in her cage ate away at her and her despair grew deeper with each passing hour.

One day, a man and woman entered the building. Keetcha was as usual whining at the top of her lungs. As the two people passed by Keetcha's cage, the woman pointed up at her and said, "That one. I feel sorry for her, the way she is crying." A few minutes later, Keetcha saw a big gloved hand opening her cage doors. Then the hand took Keetcha out of her cage and placed her into another set of hands. Keetcha curiously looked up at her new owners. She didn't know yet that she would be spending the rest of her life with these people. They took Keetcha home and showed her their house, and to her relief, they did not lock her in a cage. They gave her lots of attention and fed her good food.

These people were my parents, and that is how I came to know Keetcha. Of course, I don't really know too much about Keetcha's past, but this is how I imagined it. I love Keetcha very much. She sleeps on my bed every night. Some funny things about Keetcha are her extremely rough tongue and her strange obsession of licking door hinges. She is also strangely attracted to harmonicas, and always comes and sits in my lap if I play mine.

# Mystery Treasure

*A normal birthday party becomes an unexpected adventure in **MYSTERY TREASURE**, by **Celia Gallou**.*

Today, Lindsey, Melissa, Jordan and Chris were invited to Peter's birthday party. They were all having fun. After the cake, they went to their secret place where they would tell each other their stories and problems--the attic. This mysterious place was black and freaky, with a bunch of old stuff. Before Peter's family moved here, his grandpa was living in this house. All the material in the attic belonged to him. Peter had always wanted to know what all this was, but he stayed away.

After their discussion, they were going back downstairs, but something made a big *BOOM*, which scared the girls. The girls stayed seated, but all the boys went in the sound's direction. They screamed, "Lindsey, Melissa, come right now!"

The girls replied, "Why don't we go downstairs and talk about it?"

"There is nothing to talk about."

Jordan grabbed the girls and went near the others. Chris was holding a big white paper with something written on it.

"What is it?" asked Melissa,

"Can't you read?" asked Peter. On the paper, we could read the words:

## TREASURE MAP

"It starts here. Let's go," explained Chris.

"Okay, three feet from the window and we should see a small trapdoor," commanded Peter. They all saw the door and got

down. Jordan went first, but he couldn't see anything, so he took a lamp.

"Look at this hallway," informed Lindsey, once they had all got down the stairs.

"I'm stopping," said Melissa.

"Wait, think about what we'll find," exclaimed Jordan.

About half an hour later, they were still walking without any idea where they were going. On the wall, there were pictures and lots of drawings. They all continued and saw a big, gold, heavy door. Peter started pushing it, but was too heavy. They all helped him.

It was a very big room and was made with gold. Everything was in gold: the walls, the floors, even the benches and statues, too. A hole was right in the middle of that place. They all ran through it and it wasn't really deep, so they got through it.

Some other people were there and they were taking the treasure...TREASURE! The kids were so excited to have found the treasure, but they had to stop these people.

"Leave the money where it belongs," commanded Jordan.

"But it's ours," came an answer.

"Mom, Dad, what are you doing here? Well? Explain," said Peter.

"Well, this treasure is ours. It belonged to your grandfather. He gave it to us before he died. What are you doing here?"

"We came and saw you. We were in the attic and found a map that brought us here. But how did you get here before us?"

"You see this door? Follow us." They all followed, opened the door, and arrived in Peter's garden.

They were all excited. They were rich, but decided to keep it as a secret. From then on, this treasure went from generation to generation.

# A New State of Mind

*After a tragic event, a girl must rebuild her life. And in **A NEW STATE OF MIND** by **Veronica Berger**, the circumstances of this new life are different, indeed.*

It all started a year ago. Whether I wanted to accept it or not, it happened like this. It was a typical morning. My parents were arguing, and my brother Malachi was up making breakfast. I decided to get up and leave before the arguing got bad. I got up and left for Kejuan's house, my boyfriend next door.

I was talking to Kejuan when a rugged van pulled up in my driveway. I didn't pay much attention until a man walked my dad to the van. I used Kejuan's phone and called the police.

"What is the license plate?"

"52PG."

Kejuan tried going after them but they had guns. The police went after them. I missed the rest of the chase but I had to go to school.

I was really spaced out and worried all day. I still paid attention and did my work but I stayed kind of quiet. I was called down to the office after lunch. My mom picked me up and took me home.

"Where's Dad?" I asked.

In the fakest voice I've ever heard, she replied, "Oh, he was taken away and they gave me this money if I didn't call the police." She pulled out large sums of money.

"How could you!"

"Shoot, I'll be real: I would have turned you in, too. Read this. It's for your dad--I mean, it was. He's dead, of course. They



killed him before the police caught up to them. To think I could have gotten twice as much for you *and* your father.”

I ran up to my room and cried. Can you blame me? My dad’s dead, my mom’s crazy, and Malachi will be home in three hours. I opened the letter to my dad and read:

*Dear George,*

*The war ended two years ago. The kingdom is up and running once more. You must come home. America is no longer safe. Napoleon Belgen is after you. Remember, if we fail to take the throne, he takes over. I miss you and Razjen dearly. We must catch up on lost time.*

*Love*

*Elizabeth*

I guessed Elizabeth was my real mom. “All right, I’m a princess,” I said to myself. How should I handle this? Who am I kidding? I can’t be a princess. But the letter did have a seal on it and all the gaps were filled. Okay, now what?

I called the police on my mom. She had gotten paid for the murder of my dad. That had to be against the law. In fact, it was illegal. I think the princess in me told me that.

Three months later, Malachi and I were assigned parents to live with us in America. My mom and Napoleon were locked up. I finally met my real mom. She told me something I would never forget: “Not all princesses live in castles, because being a princess is a state of mind.”

# Power Loss

*There is no such thing as a routine mission for the crew of the U.S.S. King. You will understand more when you read **POWER LOSS**, by **Sean M. King**.*

Hello, I am a scientist, and I'm about to tell you about a tragic accident that my crew and I almost had. My crew and I took out our science vessel. Our mission was to retrieve some lava and diamonds.

I should probably tell you about my ship. It is a glaring red with the words U.S.S. KING 1324-A on the sides. My gallant vessel can go under water and in volcanoes.

Anyhow, back to the mission. We were about to go into Mount Saint Helens to retrieve some core samples of magma and a supply of raw diamonds. There was an unbearable heat. As we crammed into the ship we didn't think to check our fuel gauge and shield energy because the heat made us forget. I started the engines and thrusters, and almost as if we were using an ion engine we darted off and into the volcano.

We weren't in very deep when the confounded shield breach siren blared like a crazy horse. "Help me turn the ship around, crewman!" I yelled. As we pulled on the wheel we watched the "shield-o-meter" in horror. Our shield strength had dropped to seven percent. It was barely enough to keep the ship's hull from superheating and starting to melt.

"We are about to blast the heck out of here!" I yelled to the crew. I hit the thrust button and--zoom--we were out. Thank God. Our shields dropped just as we came out.

Mission failed! I thought, wait, we can use water to power our shields. We had soon gathered enough water to power the shields.

“Dive in,” I ordered, “bearing 312, mark six, 20 degrees down angle.”

Soon we had collected white lava and lots of diamonds, though we did have one minor casualty. One of our ensigns got motion sickness and we didn’t have any Dramamine to give him.

It was time to leave. We left the volcano just in time because we ran out of fuel.

So we just used the water we had collected to power the shields to re-fuel the engines. All in all we completed an unforeseen adventurous mission.



WHODUNNIT?



# The Cadberry Tragedy

*In THE CADBERRY TRAGEDY by Sara Rivera, three young sisters investigate a family mystery. But when they go too far, they uncover danger for which they are unprepared.*

Three kids found something they were never supposed to see....

It started when Allison, Bethany, and Claire Cadberry were trying to solve a family mystery. There was a room at the top of the stairs that they were not allowed to enter. They weren't even allowed to ask about it. Now, while their parents were gone for a long weekend, the girls decided to take this rare opportunity to look around.

Since the door of the forbidden room was always locked, they decided to look through the photo album of their parents, Jennifer and Dave Cadberry, for clues. In many of the pictures there was an old family friend named Mark. He often appeared with their mother and another girl who looked a lot like their mom. Their mother always seemed sad when they asked about that unknown girl. Sometimes their parents even pretended not to hear them, avoiding answering the question about the girl's identity altogether.

In the album there were also ribbons and clips from the newspaper. Tucked away in the back of the album was a yellowing, crumbling, eleven-year old newspaper article about a murder. The murder had happened in their own house.

The girls were curious about a picture of Mark with the unknown girl. Bethany searched the picture for anything that they might have missed in the past. As she held the photo to the light,

a small envelope slid out of the album onto the oriental carpet. Claire gasped, “What’s this? I never noticed this before. Maybe this is the break we’ve been hoping for!”

Allison snatched the envelope before her sisters could reach it. To her delight she felt a small object poking through thin paper. It was a skeleton key.

The girls decided to play detective and “investigate.” They searched their home for clues, particularly locks that would match their newfound key. They did not really expect to find anything about the murder since it had happened so very long ago, but maybe, just maybe, the key could open that “forbidden room.” Perhaps their parents had forbidden them from entering the room so that they wouldn’t be exposed to the scene of the crime. Imaginations were running wild. Fear and excitement swept over the girls. They raced up the stairs with Allison in the lead.

Claire was the last one to reach the top of the stairs. Out of breath, she cried, “Last one to the top gets to try the key.” She had always been more brave than smart. Shaking, excited, trying not to show her fear to her sisters, Claire took the key from Allison’s hand. Would it open the door?

The girls held their breath. Claire twisted the key in the lock. CLICK. The door swung open.

The room was beautiful. It was filled with pictures of the pretty girl whose identity Claire, Bethany and Allison questioned. A wedding dress lay on the floral quilt. The girls were just beginning to relax and enjoy exploring the room when the wind slammed the door shut.

That’s when they noticed there was no way out! There was no doorknob on the inside. Their parents were not expected back for two more days. There was no food, no water and no bathroom.

The striking of the chimes on the grandfather clock startled them and brought their attention back to the present. The only thing they hadn’t inspected in the room was the clock. Allison opened the door on the clock. The door revealed a secret passageway. Desperate, the girls decided to follow the passageway in the hope that they would find a way out. Instead of finding a way out, they found another room that appeared to be connected



to their cellar, and there in front of them stood Mark Lliumi, the man from the photo album.

“Hello, my name is Mark Lliumi.”

“The old family friend?” asked Allison.

“Not just an old friend of the family, I was almost your uncle! I would have been if only Emily had married me.”

“What are you talking about? Who was Emily?”

“Don’t you know anything about your own aunt?”

“We don’t have an aunt!” the girls screamed in unison.

“Don’t listen to him. He’s obviously crazy!” whispered Allison as the girls tried to back away from the frightening figure.

“I’m not crazy. Let me explain. It all started when we were 18. We were going out. I thought Emily liked me as much as I liked her. The night I asked her to marry me was perfect – except, she said “NO”! She said “No” to Mark Lliumi! How could she? I was crushed. Then Emily went and married that loser, Tony Berrytium, but didn’t invite me. The nerve of that girl, acting like I was nothing. That’s when I decided I had to get her back and regain my standing in the community. At first, I just followed her. Stalking her wasn’t enough to satisfy me. I had to do more.

“I planned my attack to kill her. There was going to be a family get-together. That’s when I shot her.

“After I shot her, your parents tried to find the murderer. Since I’m an old ‘family friend’ the police never thought it was me. Such a rich plan. To this day, only me and you three know.

“Soon, you won’t know either, for you know too much. I will have to dispose of you.”

After his speech he planned on murdering Allison, Bethany, and Claire.

*Ring, ring.* The phone kept ringing. No one answered it. Their parents were worried. It wasn’t like their children to ignore their scheduled calls. Something had to be wrong.

They drove home from the little bed and breakfast in the next town. They had never left the girls alone before. “I know that something terrible has happened!” sobbed their mother as she ran though the house searching for her precious babies. Finally, Dave

and Jennifer decided to check the forbidden room. They couldn't believe it when the door opened easily before he even put the key into the lock. Then they heard screaming!

They automatically recognized the screams as Allison's, Bethany's, and Claire's. "Look!" screamed Dave, pointing to the opening in the clock.

The girls heard their parents calling them from upstairs. Mark was running madly, a mere three feet behind Claire.

"Come back here, you little rats!" Mark clamored. "No one will believe you. They will just think your imagination has gone wild. It's time to die!"

"Mark?" asked Dave.

While trying to regain his composure, Mark said, "Yes. Hello, Dave. Hello, Jennifer. I've been telling your children all about their Aunt Emily."

Jennifer said, "What! Who are you talking about?"

"Your sister!" yelled Mark.

"Oh, Emily, who killed you? Who? Whooooo?"

"Mark killed her!" said Bethany

"Yes, I murdered her, and I would kill her again if I could!"

"Mark, but you are an old family friend. How could you?"

"We know, we know, but first give him to the police."

Mark was thrown into jail for the murder of Emily.

The Cadberrys sealed the forbidden room so that no one could ever go in or come out again. As for Allison, Bethany, and Claire, they got more than they ever wished for by going into the forbidden room to investigate.

The little girl from the photographs who looked so much like their mother was actually their Aunt Emily. Now their mother talked freely about her sister, and the girls got to know her through their mother's stories.

The girls opened a detective agency (for kids only), but without murders and forbidden areas.

They also followed their parents' rules. Well, most of them.....

# The Hotel Case

*In THE HOTEL CASE by Alison Hunter, a tricky criminal is able to stay one step ahead of the detective tracking him down--but for how long?*

As soon as I got to work, I was given a very dangerous assignment. I was to track down a man disguised as a repairman because he broke into a very, very wealthy gentleman's house and had taken all of the money and valuables from his home. With my assignment I located a plane ticket. I was to leave for New York City tomorrow. I was to start at the scene of the crime. I didn't know how long I would have to stay after the robber, so I threw every article of clothing I owned in my suitcase.

When I arrived in New York, there was someone to meet me at the airport. I was taken by police car to the man's mansion, the scene of the crime. The mansion was completely surrounded by police cars and officers investigating the crime. It was crazy outside the mansion. I finally asked what I was supposed to do. I was told I was brought there to find who the criminal was and recover the money and valuables.

While looking around the outside of the house, I found a small napkin with oil on it and a small screwdriver. The napkin had the name "Joe's Coney Island" on it and the screwdriver said "Bill's Super Repair Company." Maybe a clue, maybe not, but worth investigating. Later that day, I looked in the phone book and found there were nineteen Joe's Coney Islands listed, and no listing for Bill's Super Repair. This was not going to be as easy as I thought.

I began to visit each Coney Island, asking if anyone knew of Bill's Super Repair. Finally, at the seventeenth restaurant, someone said Bill's had been located about three blocks away, but

had gone out of business two years ago. The owner, Bill, still lived in the neighborhood, and I was able to find out where he lived.

Bill Sampson, owner of Bill's Super Repair, was of some help. Though he had not kept up with all his former employees, he was able to give me a list of people who had worked for him for the five years before he closed. After tracking down several former employees, I learned that Donald Miller, a former employee, had been visiting, and had left town early that morning. Someone thought he had said he was working at a Fairfield Inn somewhere near Knoxville, Tennessee.

The man was on the run. He was moving across the country. First, I had to go straight from New York City to Knoxville to see if I could track down anything about Donald Miller.

When I arrived in Knoxville, I went straight to the Knoxville police to see if they knew anything about Donald Miller, the suspected robber. They knew him because he had been in trouble before with the law prior to this incident. Then I went to the Fairfield Hotel where I questioned the hotel staff to see if they knew anything about a Donald Miller. The staff said that they knew a person by that name who worked and stayed on the hotel property. They also said that he acted very peculiarly--not very friendly. One person said he thought he was from New York, and he had checked out just an hour before I got there. He also said that at about that same time, a guest reported his luggage and identification had been stolen.

The staff member thought he said he was on his way to California to live and work at a Fairfield Inn in Los Angeles. Donald Miller was headed to the airport. I left immediately for the airport myself. I caught the next plane out of Knoxville. I knew we had him cornered. There was no way we could miss him now, I thought. We were only an hour behind him.

When I reached the airport in Los Angeles, I asked an airport employee how long it had been since the last flight from Knoxville had arrived. He informed me it had landed 30 minutes before. I decided that I would go to the hotel and wait for Donald Miller to get there. As he would have had to get his luggage and find a vehicle, there was no way he would beat us there. I had already

arranged for a police car to pick me up. I found the car and got in. We left for the hotel.

When we got to the hotel, I went to the front and asked if anyone by the name of Donald Miller had checked into the hotel. The deskman said no. So we waited for about four hours. The more I thought about it, something just didn't feel right. The hotel employee in Knoxville seemed to know a lot about Donald Miller's plans--plans shared by a man who was running from the law. I began to question if the information given to us by the man at the hotel was false. I thought we needed to go immediately back to the hotel in Knoxville. I remembered that the employee's tag said his name was Ron.

Once back in Knoxville, I asked someone at the hotel if there was anyone named Ron working there. They said no. I had the police fax me a picture of Donald Miller. They had his picture because he had been in trouble before with the law. The picture they faxed me looked just like Ron. The staff members also told me that he had quit earlier that day and moved to downtown Chicago.

I assumed that Ron was the name he was using. In downtown Chicago, there is a Holiday Inn. I thought that he might take up the same line of work. I flew to Chicago and traveled to the Holiday Inn. I was right. As soon as I walked in, I saw him. He was right at the front desk. When he saw me looking at him, he took off running. He ran to the back room. I chased after him, down a long hall with tan tiles and white walls, with about six rooms on each side of the hallway. I saw it was a dead end and he was trapped.

I cuffed him and called the police. They came, took him away, and locked him up in jail. The stolen money and valuables were in his luggage. They were returned to the rightful owner. We also found the stolen identification and returned it to the guest at the Fairfield Inn in Knoxville. The case was solved, and I returned to New York. Now if I could find *my* luggage....

# The Missing Apple Juice

*A woman with a virus is also sick of having her apple juice stolen. Detective Wheeler takes the case in **THE MISSING APPLE JUICE**, by **Monique J. Wheeler**.*

A mouthful of juice and an angry woman can cause a bottle of trouble and a raging case. Hi, my name is Detective Wheeler and my last case had a sour taste. But in a way, this whole case was finger-licking good. Here is how it first started: with a phone call.

*Ring, ring, ring.* "Hello," I said.

"Yes, is this Detective Wheeler?" said an unfamiliar, angry woman's voice.

"Yes it is. Who am I speaking to?" I asked, as if I were really concerned.

"This is Jessica Mitchell, and I have a case that has got me raging mad! I heard that you can solve things and fix problems and things from a friend!" the lady's voice said as she yelled in my ear.

"I can help you if you would help me by not screaming in my ears. ARE YOU TRYING TO BREAK MY EARDRUMS?" I said as loud as I could to stop her from yelling. "Calm down and tell me what happened, Jessica, so that I can try to tell you what to do."

"It was two weeks ago," she began, "and I was at work at Desha Island, and I had lunch break. So I decided that I would go and buy some apple juice because I didn't feel well. When I got back to work, I announced that I had gone and bought some apple juice and asked that no one touch it. They all said yes. Since I already didn't feel well, I left work early because I vomited five times. When I left, I left everything, including my apple juice,

because I had gone to the hospital through emergency, because I never got sick, even if there was a virus going around the place I worked in.

"I was out sick for two weeks, and since that day I haven't been to work until now. When I went to work this morning, I went to put my lunch in the refrigerator and I noticed that my apple juice was gone. So I ran in to the working booth and I asked who drank my apple juice and no one admitted it, so I called you."

"Tell you what," I said very cautiously. "How about my going to your job to investigate all your co-workers tomorrow?"

"Okay. Well, I will see you then," Jessica said as she hung up the phone with a loud click.

The next day I went up to the job and I interviewed each co-worker. They all had different stories. There were four people that worked there and their names were Roshawn, Peyton, Eric, and Aliya.

The first one that I interviewed was Roshawn. Her reason that she didn't do it was that she had customers that were one right after another, "so I had no time to take a break."

The second one I interviewed was Eric. His reason for not being able to drink it was because he was out of town in Canada, so he couldn't have done it.

The third person that I interviewed was Peyton. Her reason for not being able to do it is because she didn't know that it was in there, because she was not there that day that Jessica announced that she had the apple juice.

The last person that I interviewed was Aliya. Her reason for not doing it was because she had her own apple juice.

After I interviewed them I packed up and headed for home to figure out this case.

After five hours had passed I came to the conclusion that Eric had to be the one that did the crime. The way to Canada was blocked because of the huge car crash on the bridge to Canada the week before.

# The Principal's Brother

*Piper learns never to lose sight of the truth in THE PRINCIPAL'S BROTHER, by Kate Kelly.*

*Rrrriinnnggg!* The bell sounded for fifth hour. Piper dashed out of English class, hoping she wouldn't be late again. She parted the crowd in the hallway, dashing between people as she ran on. She ran into the superintendent, and he hid something behind his back. Suddenly, a shot rang out. Everyone gasped, and someone screamed. The high schoolers peered to get a closer look, but the principal yelled, "Stay back!" Valerie--Piper's hyper-enthusiastic best friend--somehow managed to make her way up to Piper. "Did you see anything? Anyone? Any teachers? Any friends?"

"No," Piper said, exasperated.

The police and paramedics arrived quickly, bringing in a stretcher. Piper and Valerie did not cry until they saw who was on the stretcher. It was their other best friend, Kylie.

The superintendent walked out quickly. *No one must know it was me that shot the girl.* He cackled. How would they know? His stupid brother was always getting his way. Well, he thought nastily, since you're the principal, let's see who gets in trouble now. He had the gun right in his back pocket. No one would find out. He had the evidence. He quickly felt his pocket to make sure it was there. Oh no! How could it be? It was there when he left the school. He felt again. Nothing but a gaping hole. He cursed. He would have to leave the country. Soon. *Very* soon.

"But I'm telling you, it was him!" Piper explained for the hundredth time to her dad.



“Piper,” her father said, lowering the newspaper, “your mother and I know that you’re very concerned about the school shooting, and so are we. But there is no reason for you to accuse the superintendent!”

“But Dad!” Piper whined, plopping down in an old-fashioned chair. “You have to believe me, Dad! It’s in your job description as a parent!”

“Piper, you can not simply accuse someone without evidence.” Piper’s father was a well-respected lawyer. “Piper, why don’t you go start your homework?” her father said, rubbing his forehead.

“Whatever, Dad,” Piper said.

Later in bed, Piper thought about that day. Everything was so horrible. She could not get the image of Kylie lying in the stretcher out of her mind. She got out of her bed and sat down at her desk. She thought about what her reading teacher, Mr. Rehsifbornad, had said about mysteries. “*You need suspects with motives.*” Yes, she remembered those words exactly. “*And I need to see you after class, Piper.*” Well, she remembered those words, too, but for a different reason.

She decided to make a list of suspects. On her list were three people: the superintendent, the principal, and Robert Nielson. Robert Nielson was Kylie’s ex-boyfriend. The principal had no motive. He was too happy all the time. That led her to the superintendent. Why would he do it? Well, since he was the superintendent, that meant that he was the principal’s brother. She always remembered the superintendent’s hating the principal. But wait, she remembered the superintendent hiding something in his back pocket.... That was it! The answer!

Superintendent Resol snickered. Those fools. No one had been able to find him. He had bought a plane ticket and was now at the airport. He was leaving the country, and he knew that he would get away. Australia wasn’t exactly close by. Plus, nobody had figured out that it was he that did it.

“Why, thank you, miss. But we already know who did it,” the police officer said, looking at Piper and Kylie.

“You do?” the girls said at the same time in astonishment.

“Yes. It was a man named Emit Resol.”

“Where is he now?” Kylie asked, as she wheeled in her chair to face him, since Kylie had an infection from the bullet.

“He’s at the airport,” the policeman said. “But we have guards there,” he added quickly.

“Thank you ever so much, sir,” Piper said. And she wheeled Kylie out of the police station.

“I’m innocent, I tell you, innocent!” the superintendent yelled as two guards dragged him out of the airport.

“Sure,” one guard said sarcastically, “and I’m Minnie Mouse.” And they took him off to prison, where he could never commit another crime.

# Where Is Shari?

*Expect the unexpected when an older sister goes on a quest to find her younger sister's kidnappers in **WHERE IS SHARI?**, by **Alicia Colley**.*

My name is Lori Benson, and I'm going to tell you a mystery not just anyone can solve. No, the person who is close to the victim is the only one who can defeat the bad guys. That person is me.

It was a hot May day in New Port Richey, Florida, the kind that can make a polar bear sweat. I had just dropped my eight-year-old sister, Shari, off at her school. As I was heading to meet my friends at the bus stop, I saw a miniature yellow delivery truck screech to a halt in front of the elementary school playground as if it didn't realize the school was right here. I didn't think twice about it then, but I soon would be wanting to know a lot more.

I saw my friend Casey waving frantically for me to run as fast as my tennis shoes could carry me to catch the bus before it left. I told my other friend, Trek, as I got on the bus, "At least I've got one friend that will have the bus wait for me." He just laughed. Little did I know what a far from normal day this would turn out to be.

Finally, after a day that felt like forever, we were allowed to go home. Casey and I walked down the lines of buses until we finally found our bus. We rode to Fernfield Elementary, but the whole way we were chatting about how Mr. McDillon gives out piles of homework miles high. We got off the bus, and Casey said, "Get on line at six, okay?"

"Okay," I answered. Then we went our separate ways. As I walked up the cement steps of Fernfield Elementary to get my sister, I noticed the yellow delivery truck pass by the school. Now, I thought to myself, "Why would that truck be here in the morning and pass by...?"

But I was interrupted by one of Shari's friends, Ally. "Shari isn't here," she said.

"She isn't?" I replied.

Ally said, "No, she hasn't been here since recess. Actually, I saw her talking through the fence to woman and man in a yellow delivery truck."

"WHAT!" I screamed, startling Ally. I was nervously thinking, "Where did she go? Did the yellow delivery truck have something to do with her disappearance? What will I tell Mom and Dad?" So I asked Ally the first thing that came to mind, "When was recess?"

"In the afternoon, about two o'clock," she answered.

"Did the yellow delivery truck say 'Going There, Call Here' on it?"

"Yeah!"

"Okay, thanks. I'll call you when I find her!" I shouted as I ran. But I didn't bother waiting for an answer. I had to find my sister.

I ran into the school office building to ask if I could call my mom at work. But when I got in there I had no hope of even finding the phone.

"Excuse me, excuse me," I said as I squeezed between two women talking to each other. Once I got to the front desk I tried to get the secretary's attention. "Excuse me, uh, Mrs. Dowe," I said looking down at the nameplate in front of me, "I was..."

"You're going to have to wait in the line, young lady," she said to me as she pointed to the line that curved out the door and down the hallway.

"I just wanted to know..."

"Young lady, I'm busy!" she said to me with a voice that had a bit of annoyance in it. I decided I didn't have time to wait for a phone. But I knew that my mom's work was all the way in Tampa, which was half an hour away by car, so I couldn't run to her work. Plus, my dad was on a work trip in Thailand, so there's no way he could do anything about it. The police would take too long to get to...wherever the criminals took Shari. I figured the only person that could save my sister now would be me.

I got to the nearest pay phone as fast as I could and called Casey. "Casey...you need to come...to the library...as fast as you can!" I said, out of breath.

Casey said, "Why?"

"JUST HURRY!" I exclaimed. Then I hung up.

Casey arrived sounding just as out of breath as I had. I explained to her about how I had to find where the company Going There, Call Here is, and how I thought they had kidnapped my sister. She understood completely and we flew to a computer. I clicked the AOL icon and waited impatiently until finally I could search. I typed in "delivery companies," "delivery companies in Florida," and even "miniature yellow delivery trucks," but none worked. Casey had gotten so annoyed with how nervous I was that she pushed me out of the way and typed in "Going There, Call Here." Amazingly this worked.

"Why didn't I think of that?" I said, not really looking for an answer. But unfortunately I got one.

"Because you're so nervous you couldn't remember your own name even if it was biting your nose," she replied. I just rolled my eyes.

"Find out where it's located," I said.

"Okay," she answered. Casey typed in "location" and I wrote down the address. The address was "Port Richey, 87353 Sandyview Ln."

"Hey, that's just a couple of miles north," Casey exclaimed.

"Let's go!" I said and we ran out of the library. We sat and waited at the bus stop for what felt like forever. I was getting so antsy Casey had to calm me down by saying, "She's going to be fine, Lori." But I knew I wasn't supposed to be sitting here waiting for a bus while my sister was being tortured, or even worse, killed!

When the giant blue bus finally came we jumped on and walked past a man who was talking to his bag, a biker girl, and a girl our age in a purple hat sitting with her mother. We sat down next to the girl in the purple hat (we felt the safest next to her). We didn't talk at all until we were off the city bus.

"Okay, where are we?" Casey asked.

“Hey, what are you guys doing here?” a familiar voice said. I spun around to find Trek staring at us.

“Oh, uhh, we’re just trying to find the Going There, Call Here factory,” I said.

“What for?” he asked.

“Because we want to ask them if they’ve gotten any mail from Thailand yet,” I lied. “My mom wanted to know if we had gotten anything from my dad. I’ll call you and tell you what we got or if we got anything, okay? And if I don’t call you in an hour or so, call my mom.” I didn’t want to get Trek involved yet. If we got into any trouble he would call my mom at home and I’m sure she would call the police.

“Oh, sure. Do you know where it is?” he asked.

“We don’t even know where we are right now,” Casey said.

“*You* might not, but I know that there’s a sign right there,” I said. “We’re at Zinger Road.”

“Oh,” Casey said, kind of embarrassed.

“Okay, well, here’s my bus, talk to you later,” Trek said.

“Okay, bye,” Casey and I said at the same time. We waved to Trek as he got on the bus and we kept waving until the bus was out of sight.

“Anyway, we have to go three blocks up Zinger and two blocks over on Sandyview,” I said.

“Okay,” she replied. We jogged past Bells, Walgreens, and McDonald’s, not slowing down until we were there. Casey and I crept along the brick wall of the Going There, Call Here building. I peeked in every window we passed to try to see a person. But I never saw a single living soul.

We were turning around the corner to see if we could sneak in and look around when a woman jumped at us and got Casey’s foot. She succeeded in grabbing only one of us. She tripped Casey and scrambled on top of her so she couldn’t get away, but I ran back around the corner and around another corner until I saw a metal staircase going up the wall of the building next door. I jogged up the stairs, stepping on every other step.

When I got to the top I dove onto the paved rooftop (and got a few scrapes doing it), and lay there breathing in and out, trying

to take in all that happened. After I was breathing normally, I tried to work out a plan. Once I knew what I was going to do I looked through one of the windows I saw movement in.

"Keep your mouths SHUT!" said the woman to Casey and Shari. This was not a problem because she had taped their mouths with duct tape. She left them in a room with boxes, one window, and dust everywhere. Casey decided to try to escape by hopping in her chair to the door and get it open somehow.

Meanwhile on the roof, I was watching all that was going on with my sister and Casey. I could see Casey was hopping vigorously to the door. But I figured she could use some help. So I walked back down the fire escape stairs. I had seen a door from the roof and decided to use it to get in.

Once I was in I tried to remember all the rooms I saw. I knew that four rooms to the right of the door was the hostage room. I peeked around the corner to make sure no one was there and then I crept down the hallway like a spy trying to be unknown to the bad guys. I slowly turned the knob of the room I thought Shari and Casey were in. Just to feel safe I peeked in the crack. There staring back at me was the eye of Casey. I jumped back, but after I realized it was just my friend's huge eye, I scurried in. "Come on, you guys, let's get out of here!" I whispered, looking at the door.

"Mmmm-m-mmmmm!" Shari mumbled.

"Oh, yeah, sorry," I answered. I ran over and tried to untie the out-of-sorts-yarn-ball-of-a-mess.

After ten minutes of pulling, yanking, and frustration, we were on our way out of the horrible lady's grasp. I checked around every corner and we tiptoed down every hall. Once I could see the door to freedom we bolted toward it.

I had just reached the door when I heard a shout behind me. It was the man. "They're getting away!" shouted the sidekick of the woman. "Come back here!"

"In your dreams!" I heard Casey yell as we ran down Sandyview. I thought, "Uhh, uhh, to the police station!"

"Follow me!" I led the train of people all the way to the police station where 15 policemen were coming out.

I stopped in front of a policeman with Casey next to me, but Shari decided it would be safer behind one. “Put ‘em up!” shouted a tall, brown-haired policeman to our pursuers. Dumb and Dumber listened well because they knew the jig was up.

“How’d you know we were coming?” I asked.

“We didn’t, but we got a phone call from a Mrs. Benson. So we were heading out to, I presume, your house,” said Brown Head.

“Yeah, I’m Lori Benson.”

“Well, no need to walk home. Do you, your sister, and friend want a ride home?”

“Sure,” I heard Casey say.

On the way home I thought, “Just like Mom to call as many police to come and find us. She worries too much. She would call the Army to come and look for me if she had their number.”

Then Shari said to Brown Head, Casey, and I, “The lady told me, as she was tying me up, why she kidnapped me.” Everyone except Brown Head, who was driving, turned and gawked at her. “She said that she saw me on the news when they were interviewing me for my science project. Remember the conveyor belt machine that wrapped boxes?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Well, she wanted me to build and run my machine for her company.” We all sat petrified until we got to my house.

“Here we are,” said Brown Head. Shari and I got out and walked up to the porch where we were greeted with being almost suffocated to death by hugs from our mom. She then said to us, “Where were you? I was so worried. I can’t believe someone didn’t call me. What happened?”

“Mom, Mom, breathe. Here’s what happened.” I told her everything that happened.

All she could say was, “I’m so glad you’re safe.”

I told Mom later after all the excitement, “Shari should be put on a leash.” She just laughed. I could see a tear of joy in her eye, and I knew she just was glad we were home.







# Index of Authors and Titles

- A Day in the Life of Flyer, 96  
ALBRECHT, MARGARET, 96  
ALEXANDER, STEPHANIE, 174  
All a Dream, 87  
ALMETER, HANNAH, 13  
ALPINER, SEAN B., 235  
Always Be Yourself, 31  
Amazing Shoes, The, 89
- BARKIN, ARIANA HILLARY, 115  
BAY, ERIN ELIZABETH, 140  
Beautiful, yet Bad, 33  
BERGER, VERONICA, 248  
BISKNER, HILARY, 152  
BITTKER, J.J., 203  
BloodyHands, 77  
BROOKS, ALEX, 209
- Cadberry Tragedy, The, 255  
Captured, 93  
Christmas That Almost Didn't  
Happen, The, 209  
COLLEY, ALICIA, 267  
COLOMBE, RENEE, 87  
Computer Nerds, 235  
CYPERT, JOE, 25
- Dance, 185  
DAVIES, LUCIANA, 142  
Disappeared, 37  
DIVIZIO, LOUIS, 80  
Dog's Story, A, 189  
DU COMB, DANIEL, 216  
DUCKER, MARTELL, 112
- Everything Isn't as It Seems, 100  
EZZ, SALEM A., 104
- Family is Waiting for Me, A, 40  
Friend or Foe?, 104  
From Riches to Happiness, 43
- Galactic Magician, The, 112  
GALLOU, CELIA, 246  
GIBSON, RJ, 150  
Girl with Rosebud Hair, The:  
A Mystery, 115  
GODIN, CHRISTOPHER, 61  
Gold, Silver, Bronze, and Destiny,  
119  
Great Surgery, The, 192  
GROSSMAN, MAX, 93  
Gwen's Gift, 123

- HABOWSKI, SAMANTHA, 225  
 HEUSER, PATRICK, 138  
 Horrible, Unbearable,  
   Unrealistically Terrible, Scary,  
   and Not Scrumdidliumptious  
   Truth About Middle School,  
   The, 135  
 Hotel Case, The, 259  
 House of Many Riches, The, 238  
 HUNTER, ALISON, 259
- Idiots in Space, 61
- JACKSON, CHELSEY, 4, 214  
 Jewish Santa, The, 212
- KARABULUT, MIMI, 180  
 Keetcha, 242  
 KELLY, KATE, 264  
 Kid Who Sued Santa, The, 214  
 KING, SEAN M., 250
- Last Legends, The, 138  
 LECLAND, NEILA, 77  
 LEIER, MARY CATHERINE, 55  
 Leprechauns Who Saved  
   Christmas, The, 216  
 LEWIS, ASHLEY M., 50  
 LEWIS, KRISTYN, 123  
 Life of Carlos, The, 195  
 Little Black Book, The, 46  
 Long Lost Prince, The, 68  
 LYBECK, TREVOR, 159
- Maddie's Haircut, 50  
 Magic of Capseen, The, 140  
 MANIÈRE-SPENCER, RAMIUS,  
   4, 33  
 Margaret's Wolf, 142  
 MILLAR, CHASEY, 190  
 Missing Apple Juice, The, 262  
 My First Real Christmas, 225  
 My Friend Kat, 190  
 My Story, 13  
 Mystery Treasure, 246
- NAGLE, PETER, 212  
 NAMOU, GIOVANI, 189  
 Nationals, 199  
 New State of Mind, A, 248  
 Ninja Named Scorpion, A, 150
- Once Upon a Not-So-Happy  
   Easter, 80
- Power Loss, 250  
 Principal's Brother, The, 264  
 PROCTER, NOLAN, 195  
 Puppy Trouble, 152
- Quest of a Lifetime, The, 156
- Ramses and the Royal Family, 19  
 REID, CLAIRE, 192  
 REID, JORDAN, 43  
 RIVERA, SARA, 255  
 ROSS, J. B., 89  
 ROVINSKI, ANDREW, 68

SANDE, MARIE, 242  
SCHELBERG-MILLER, ANDREW,  
100  
SCHWARTZ, MICHELLE, 46  
SILVER, SARAH, 238  
SILVER, ZACHARY N., 199  
Slow Motion Shot, The, 203  
STILLMAN, SHAYNA, 185  
Surprise at Sea!, 25  
SWARTHOUT, HEATHER, 228  
SWARTHOUT, LINDSAY, 53

Tatsu, 159  
THOMAS, JOSHUA, 156  
TIFFANY, CARLY, 19  
Time Twisters, 168  
To First Grade and Back, 174  
Too Many Monkey Secrets, 180

Up, 53

VAN ERMEN, MARIAH, 31  
VOGL, JULIANE L., 40

WEISZ, RACHEL, 37  
WHEELER, MONIQUE J., 262  
Where Is Shari?, 267  
WILLIAMS, MYLES, 168  
WINKLER, JAY, 119  
WURSTER, REBECCA, 135

You Can't Take Over Christmas,  
228  
You Shouldn't Care, 55