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For
Shorties**

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Stories For Shorties

**101 Stories by
Sixth-grade Students of
Berkshire Middle School**

Daniel Fisher, Editor

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ISBN#: Softcover 1-4196-0575-5

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Title by Amanda Hurite.

This book was printed in the United States of America. For additional information, please visit www.booksurge.com.

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TO THE AUTHORS

This collection holds evidence of your intellectual riches
like a fat wallet with pages in place of dollars.

Mr. Fisher congratulates each of you on your accomplishment.

PAST

The German Job

*Bravery and duty are never more on display than in the actions of soldiers fighting for their country. A World War II mission takes everything that an American unit can give in **THE GERMAN JOB**, by **Josh Chae**.*

“All right, here's what we need to do. First, we need to find Jack Grill and get the explosives to destroy the Germans' weapon center. It has anti-aircraft machines, guns, and silenced snipers which must all be destroyed,” said Captain Richardson as he was reminding us.

BOOM! Gunshots fired at the truck that we stole when we kidnapped a German. Private Smith, Sergeant Anderson, Captain Richardson, Sergeant Wilson, and I scrambled out of the truck. Sergeant Wilson returned fire, killing a sentry.

While we were entering, we saw a German shooting at me (Private Johnson, of course). I returned fire. I aimed at his head for a one-hit kill. I missed. Instead, Sergeant Wilson shot at his head.

We entered an entry very quietly and slowly. I was towards the lead. As we rounded a corner, I saw something move. I told everyone to stop. There was a sentry pacing back and forth, seemingly guarding a door. He was carrying a gun and talking into a radio, reporting that he heard gunshots.

We walked slowly at first, then ran and started to shoot the sentry. We killed him. Blood leaked everywhere.

We rounded another corner. Our units saw an entrance and, of course, we approached cautiously. When we were about to enter, I took a glimpse and there were three Germans. One was standing behind a crate. As soon as I saw them, they saw me, and they shot. I reported to my unit about the Germans, “I saw three Germans, so get ready to attack.”

Smith charged in and killed one German. The rest of our unit charged as well, and then as I was about to shoot, they killed Private Smith.

Our unit shot and aimed as well as we could so we could kill the Germans. We got to the exit of that room and went to the center of the village. There was a door. Captain Richardson ordered me to check it. I did. Then all of a sudden there was a noise. All of us looked up and saw two Germans standing on one of the rooftops. One was at a machine gun, and five were scattered on another rooftop.

Our first choice was to shoot the machine gun, or else we would've been killed. My entire unit aimed at the five while I aimed at the two. One of them was standing so it was easier for me to shoot. Another was crouching, so it made it harder. I aimed at the standing one and easily killed him with two shots. He fell off the rooftop and died. The crouching German took five bullets. Blood splattered everywhere and got on my face. I turned around to see that my unit killed most of the rest.

Captain Richardson gave Sergeant Anderson and me orders to go to the mounted machine gun and use it to kill the Germans. Sergeant Anderson went first to make sure it was safe. As we opened a door leading to a staircase, a German surprisingly shot crazily. But Sergeant Anderson was ready. He shot him in the head and the German dropped to the floor.

We went to the stairs and saw the machine gun. He covered me while I was manning the machine gun. Five Germans came and shot at the Captain and Sergeant Wilson. They died. I shot, killing them as fast as I could. I eventually killed them all.

Anderson told me to go down and see if it was clear. I went down. Two Germans popped up and shot at Anderson. I went towards the door and two Germans came out. Surprised, I shot toward them. They hid behind a pillar. I threw a grenade and I got out my gun. I waited for them to run so I could shoot. They came out. I was ready and I shot. Two loud "bangs" rang out and they dropped.

I entered the door and I reloaded my gun and went around a corner. I went through a gate and saw an open entryway to a room where I saw Germans playing a card game. I charged in and shot fast. Blood was everywhere.

I went up the stairs and saw a guy in a prison. He was Jack Grill. He told me to follow him. Jack picked up a gun and went downstairs.

We went out the door and saw a guard. I shot him. Jack and I entered an entryway going downward. There were stairs that turned. Jack took me to a room with explosives. I picked them up and we left.

We were heading towards the main weapons center. We ran fast because of the lights and turrets. We entered a building. Jack and I approached carefully and quietly to the center of the building. There was a corner to round and I took a glimpse. There were five officers talking to each other. I told Jack. We would charge on three. "...three!" We went in and shot quickly, and soon it was over.

I got out the explosives and set it for one minute. We ran out of the room and Germans shot at us, so we fired quickly. We had 30 seconds. More Germans were waiting at the entrance of the building. We fought, shooting aimlessly. Bloodstains were everywhere. One German killed Jack, and I soon shot the German. I was running quickly to get enough distance between me and the building.

BOOM! My mission was over. I took one last look at where my friends would be and called HQ to send a helicopter to get me.

The Right Is Ours!

American society is constantly evolving. Amanda Hurite takes us back to a time of struggle for equal treatment in **THE RIGHT IS OURS!**

Prologue

Up to the 1920's were very difficult times for women young and old, but they made their way through it just like we make our way through life now. It was a time when women could not vote, own property, have legal rights over their child (the rights were with the fathers), or get accepted into any college that existed back then. The schools were either for all boys or they did not allow women to attend because they thought a woman's place was at home. But boy, were they wrong! This story takes place in 1920, the last year of the main movement for the right to vote.

February 21, 1920

My mother woke me up in a rush this morning so we could get an early start on the banners we were helping with. We and a few other women from around the neighborhood were heading down to the old abandoned office building just across from the town square. We had all pitched in to help fix it up. Now it has a banner that is red, white, and blue and says "LET WOMEN VOTE!" just to emphasize what we want. The building is white, and on the inside, it has all of the great leaders' pictures on the walls to remind us why we are still fighting for this today. It also has sayings and quotes on the wall from Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. We finished two banners today,

which we will be holding in the march (or parade for a cause) tomorrow. They say “WOMEN BRING ALL VOTERS INTO THIS WORLD SO LET THEM VOTE” and “GIVE US THE RIGHT TO VOTE.”

February 22, 1920

Today was the day we marched, and I got to be in it! I was so excited that I could hardly sleep last night. This morning it was FREEZING outside, so my grandmother packed mother and I some hot cocoa to take with us so we could still be warm enough not to freeze. When we got there, we were all wearing long white suit-type dresses with yellow carnations on our hats. As we were marching, I realized how many people were against our movement. There were “boo’s,” and people were throwing valuable vegetables onto the road on which we were marching. We marched down Main Street for about two miles, then we all headed home. It was a tough day.

March 1, 1920

I have been so busy, I haven’t had enough time to write, but I’ll tell you as much as I can before I have to go to bed. The Women’s group decided to go door to door with a petition to get the amount of signatures it needed for a bill to be written and then for Congress to pass the law. It was not a very good success. Mother and I were not a part of it because we were too busy with other things, but we had a lady from a different town come to our door. Of course we signed the petition, but when we looked at how many signatures were on it, I recognized almost every one from the women’s group at the women’s headquarters. That was not a good sign.

March 5, 1920

I heard a speech today by President Woodrow Wilson. Mother says he's a hypocrite. I would probably agree if I knew what that word meant. I'm not exactly sure what he said because I blanked him out after awhile. All I know is that it was about women's suffrage.

April 16, 1920

I am sorry I haven't had enough time to write in you. I have just been so caught up in my schoolwork that I forgot about you. And with the petition and all, it's just been hectic around the house. I have gotten through it just fine, though, helping mother with banners for upcoming events. School gets out in a few days, and Grandma is going to take me on a trip to see the country, or as much as we can see of it in the two months that we will be gone.

June 1, 1920

Today Grandmother and I left for our trip. We will be taking a train and stopping in various places to look at tourist sites. Also, we will be checking in periodically with other women's groups to see what is happening with the movement. We have already boarded the train and will be arriving tomorrow morning at the station in South Dakota. I am not sure what that town has to do with the women's rights movement, but Grandmother knows some friends there. I am going to head to bed so I can get a bright and early start tomorrow.

June 2, 1920

Today we unpacked so we could stay for a few days at a friend of my grandmother's house. We stayed for an hour for tea, then went to see Mount Rushmore, one of the main attractions in South Dakota. We rested a lot because tomorrow we are helping my grandmother's friend out with some banners and signs for a picket in front of the town hall.

June 3, 1920

We have pretty much settled into my grandmother's friend's house. We will be leaving tomorrow, though. Today we helped out at a local women's group with banners and signs. They were pretty simple; nothing but "Let Women Vote" and "Change the Constitution." We will not be able to attend the picket, but we will be cheering for them all the way!

June 6, 1920

We heard today on the train that the picket in South Dakota went out of control and 50 people were arrested and are being force fed in their jail cell. It's a very sad thing to hear about. Fortunately my grandmother's friend was not a prisoner.

June 20, 1920

We heard news that mother was arrested today. She was arrested when a group of about one hundred women chained themselves together in the town square in front of the town hall as a protest. I was so scared when I heard the news. I thought mother might be hurt, but luckily father was there to bail her out.

July 18, 1920

Today in the newspaper I read a quote by President Woodrow Wilson that I think might be leading up to his passing the amendment! He said, “We have made partners of the women in this past war. Shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toll and not to a partnership of right?” I wouldn’t be able to explain what it means, but I know what my grandmother says is true. Therefore, I believe her.

July 25, 1920

I am very sorry about not being able to write to you lately. With the tourist sites and marches that we have participated in, it’s hard to keep up with you. But I know that everything with the movement is going well. I just hope that we don’t have to keep doing this for much longer. I was really hoping that the president would see us through instead of torturing us with this long fight for our right to be equal.

August 26, 1920

Yesterday I heard on the news Woodrow Wilson’s speech to pass the nineteenth amendment, or the women’s right to vote and to do everything else we wanted to be able to do. The amendment states, “The right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.” Isn’t that just wonderful! There is still a lot of discrimination (seeing as most everyone is opposed to the bill) and women haven’t had enough time to get jobs or do anything that they earned, but I’m guessing by the end of the week it should be all settled.

PRESENT

Bubba the Bully

*When the favorite target of a bully gets fed up, it's time for action. Luke risks more abuse as he tries to stop his enemy's obnoxious behavior in **BUBBA THE BULLY**, by **Conor Kelley**.*

My name is Luke. For some reason, Bubba (the school bully) loves picking on me. He picks on the other boys at school, too, but I feel like he picks on me the most. Bubba has been picking on me since kindergarten when he poured milk down my shirt. I try to put Bubba to the side of my mind every day when I head off to school.

Once the bell rang to end school one particular day, I headed home on my skateboard. It had been a great day at school on account of I hadn't seen Bubba all day. Then all of a sudden, a foot stuck out of the bushes and tripped me. I fell hard to the ground, but quickly rolled over to see who it was. It was Bubba. Bubba reached down, picked up my skateboard, and rode away on it, laughing.

When I went home that night, I realized that I couldn't let Bubba keep pushing me around. I had to get my skateboard back. I had an idea. I had to take a chance.

I ran down to the garage to put together a new skateboard. I grabbed one of my old decks and put some trucks and wheels on it. I greased up the wheels and I was ready to go.

The next day after school I went up to Bubba. "I'll make you a deal," I said. "If you can beat me in a skateboard race, I'll let you keep this skateboard and the one you stole from me. But if I win, you have to give me my skateboard back."

"Okay," said Bubba. "In the park in fifteen minutes."

After fifteen minutes had passed, Bubba and I met up at the park. “We race one lap around the park. The first one to cross the finish line wins,” I said. “On your mark, get set, go!”

I pushed off with my foot and got a big lead. Bubba was close behind. I zoomed by the swing set and passed the slide, and that’s when Bubba passed me. We made the final turn and Bubba was still in the lead. The finish line was just up ahead. I gave it all my strength and managed to pull myself past Bubba and cross the finish line.

I had beaten Bubba! I turned around and saw that Bubba was running away with my skateboard.

I had to head him off. It was either that, or lose my skateboard. I quickly dashed the other way. I was running as fast as I could. I dived into the bushes. Once Bubba came by, I stuck out my foot and he fell flat on his face. I got up, grabbed my skateboard, and headed home.

Lies, Punishments, and Payback

*Shelly finds herself in a world of trouble that she doesn't deserve. She knows it is up to her to fight the bullies that caused this mess in **LIES, PUNISHMENTS, AND PAYBACK**, by **Kamya Jabari**.*

She was in the middle of third hour when the announcement came on. “Shelly Stewart to the main office; Shelly Stewart to the main office.” Mrs. Jones, the sixth-grade counselor, evidently wanted to see her. The kids in Shelly’s class said, “Ooooooh.” She ignored them and walked to the office.

Shelly Stewart is an athletic 12-year-old. She attends Nova Middle School as a sixth-grader. Walking to the office, she saw her friend Kayla. “Hey, Kayla,” Shelly said.

“Don’t talk to me,” Kayla said.

What is wrong her? Shelly thought.

When she got to Mrs. Jones’s office, she was surprised to see her parents. “Please sit down,” Mrs. Jones said. “The reason I called you all down here is because one of the staff found these in Shelly’s locker,” Mrs. Jones said, holding up a pack of cigarettes. At first Shelly felt like she was in a dream or a nightmare. Before Shelly said a word, Mrs. Jones began again. “Shelly, have you seen these before?” Mrs. Jones asked.

She wanted to say no, but she had seen them before, although she couldn’t remember where. *What should I do? Should I lie?* Shelly thought.

“Yeah, I...I have,” Shelly said. *Those cigarettes belonged to Brittany, Ayanna, and Ashley,* Shelly remembered. *Then how did they get into my locker?* she asked herself.

At the beginning of the school year, Shelly got into a fight with them. Since then, they had been nice to her and she thought they were

friends. Shortly after, they told her if she wanted to be with the popular group, she would have to take the cigarettes. She said no, and they said they would make rumors about her, and tell lies or do whatever they had to, and she had better not tell.

Shelly wasn't sure what to do. Should she rat on them and get beat up, or take the blame? Shelly decided it was best to just take the blame. When Mrs. Jones asked her if she had anything to say, she said no.

"You will be suspended from school, sports, and all after-school programs for four weeks." Shelly felt like getting out of her chair and smacking Mrs. Jones until she turned red.

For the next month, Shelly stayed home, getting madder by the second.

When she came back to school, everyone was pointing and whispering about her. When she went up to her friends Alicia, Tara, and Kayla, they walked away together and ignored her.

On her second day back to school, she went up to Ashley and started talking to her.

"I'm really sorry for what we did, Shelly. I guess I was just mad that you said no to me," Ashley said. At that moment Shelly felt like strangling her.

"Oh, it's okay. You're right; I shouldn't have said no to you," Shelly lied.

Ashley asked Shelly to help her clean out her locker. While she was helping Ashley, Shelly picked up the same kind of cigarettes that were found in her locker. She slipped the packet of cigarettes out of Ashley's locker into her own pocket. "I have to go to my locker, Ashley," Shelly lied. Shelly was really going to the office.

When Brittany, Ashley, and Ayanna came in, they were surprised to see their parents there, too. They got twice Shelly's punishment and a little bit more consequences.

"Shelly!" Kayla yelled, trying to catch up with Shelly. "Shelly, I'm sorry. Ashley said you were starting rumors about me and telling my secrets," Kayla said. "I don't know why I believed her."

"It's okay," Shelly said. This time when she said that, she meant it. Ever since then, Kayla and Shelly have been the best of friends.

Military School

*Be all you can be. Become an army of one. All you have to do is go to school—if it is the kind of learning institution described in **MILITARY SCHOOL**, by **Joey Connors**.*

My school starts in September. The school is on a remote island. The island is off the Alaskan coast and it is so cold there that planes can't fly and cars don't run, either. It is too dangerous for animals, so the only way to get around is by walking. The one good thing about it is that you get to go through an underwater tunnel on a motorcycle to get there. The motorcycle belongs to my dad, and if you've never ridden on one, you haven't lived.

I will be glad to see my friends Cyrus, Jacob, Matt, David, Ryan and Drake. We all made rifles for camping and mine was painted white for snowy conditions. I love to pretend that I am a soldier fighting for freedom in Alaska. It was this fantasy that got me into trouble on that one frigid night.

I don't know if I mentioned it or not, but the kids who go to my military school are not your everyday kids. These are the kids who take weapons to school, curse at the principal, and skateboard in the halls. They drive cars when they're 13 and shut people in their lockers just because they can. This becomes very interesting when you put all these kids together in one place and they have free time on their hands.

It wasn't exactly free time. It was actually bedtime, but I couldn't stop thinking about fighting for freedom in Alaska with my white rifle. I woke up Cyrus because he goes along with anything I say. I also woke up Jacob because he is very brave and brilliant. His great ideas got him into military school in the first place.

We were outside walking toward a snowy area that we had heard might have polar bears. That would fit perfectly with my fantasy of being in Alaska, but since this was supposed to be a pretend adventure, I hoped we wouldn't really run into a polar bear. I also don't know if I mentioned that my white rifle was not real, so it would have been no help in the crisis that was about to happen.

We were running and shooting for almost an hour. We were about ready to declare Alaska a free territory when Cyrus saw something move. Jacob saw it next and then me. It did not seem to see them because it lunged right at me! It tried to take my head off.

I consulted the brilliant one, Jacob, as I was running for my life by yelling, "HELP!" He ran away, taking his brilliant head with him! I had to think fast!

The good news was that it wasn't a polar bear. The bad news was it was six feet tall and covered in white from head to toe. Even the fur—no, hair, was white. Hair? It was human! It was a man! It was my principal!

The rest of the story is too horrible to tell. Let's just say it would have been easier if I had been attacked by a polar bear or a cougar! Was it worth it though? Yes, it was.

Miss Prickle

She's the lean, mean, substitute teaching machine. Look out for MISS PRICKLE, by Sarra Serhane.

“All right, kids, open your workbooks to page 42,” said Mr. Chow, the nicest sixth-grade math teacher at Northway Junior High. “So I will need a reader. Let's see...oh, Kyle! Please read pages 42 and 43 to the class.”

As Kyle was reading, the students heard strange humming noises coming from Mr. Chow. Mr. Chow passed out and fell to the ground. All of the students jumped out of their seats to see what had happened to their teacher. Leslie, Kyle's best friend, ran up to Mr. Chow, and said, “Mr. Chow! Mr. Chow! Are you okay?” He didn't answer.

Mr. Tanny, the school's principal, was walking by the classroom and heard the kids screaming for help. He ran into the classroom and saw Mr. Chow on the ground. Mr. Tanny grabbed the phone and frantically dialed 911.

In less than fifteen minutes, three paramedics arrived and lifted Mr. Chow onto a stretcher. Mr. Chow was immediately taken to the hospital.

“Do you think he is gonna die?” asked Kyle.

“Oh my God, Kyle, can't you just get real?” said Leslie.

One of the other students came up to Kyle and Leslie and said, “I wonder who is gonna be our sub?”

“Yeah, it just better not be Miss Prickle, because she is the meanest teacher around,” replied Kyle. The kids giggled under their breath.

Mr. Tanny announced to the class, “Children! Even though there are only a few minutes left of this class, I would like to introduce you to your substitute teacher for the next few days.

She is one of my dearest friends and I have known her for a very long time. Here she is, Miss Prickle!”

Miss Prickle smiled sweetly at Mr. Tanny as she entered the room. Leslie glanced at Kyle and he glanced back. The classroom immediately became silent. The children looked horrified. You could hear their hearts beating a mile a minute. Every last student in the room gasped.

The bell rang, and all of the students in Mr. Chow's math class ran out of the room fast. They were so happy to get out of fourth hour.

The next day came quickly, and so did fourth hour. Kyle was so scared of Miss Prickle that he got goose bumps when he walked into the classroom. For him, this all started in the second grade. Kyle had lost all of his baby teeth and his adult teeth hadn't grown in yet. Miss Prickle called him “Gutter Mouth” and “Gummy Boy” in front of his friends. But Kyle wasn't the only target. Miss Prickle would yell at all of the students and slap their hands with a ruler. She also would make them write ten paragraphs on a random topic every day!

Miss Prickle saw Kyle standing at the back of the classroom and yelled, “GET IN YOUR SEAT, GUMMY BOY!” Kyle squealed and quickly ran to his seat.

“All right, class!” screamed Miss Prickle. The students all sat in their seats like little angels and listened attentively. Miss Prickle started with, “Your homework for tonight is very simple,” then stopped. Kyle and Leslie were passing notes. Miss Prickle caught them and yelled, “EXCUSE ME,” in a sassy tone. “Give me those notes right now, Gutter Mouth!” Kyle walked up to Miss Prickle slowly and hesitantly handed her the notes.

“Good heavens, how rude of you two to say that about me!” One note said, *Now I can see why she is Miss Prickle!* Another note said, *She is as useful as a poopy-flavored Popsicle.* A third note said, *I hope Mr. Chow gets better fast because he is a way better teacher than Miss Prickle.* Miss Prickle glared at Kyle and Leslie and said, “Thanks to these two brats, your homework assignment won't be very easy! Everyone must write a 100-word essay about how I am the best sub to walk on the face of the Earth.”

Leslie raised her hand and said, "Excuse me, but this is math class. You can't make us write an essay about that! That is like child abuse!"

Miss Prickle responded, "You can also write down the meanings of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division."

All of the kids started to say "What? That's not fair!" and "Who does she think she is?"

Miss Prickle yelled "SHUT UP! You guys can make that a 500-word essay. One more outburst and it will be a 1000-word essay."

The kids were watching the clock, praying for this class to be over, when Mr. Tanny came into the classroom to check on how things were going. Mr. Tanny walked over to Miss Prickle and asked, "How is the class behaving?"

Miss Prickle gazed happily at Mr. Tanny and responded, "Just fine." The kids looked around at each other in total confusion. The bell rang and the kids piled out of the classroom. They started to gossip about Miss Prickle and Mr. Tanny.

On the second day, the kids saw Mr. Tanny and Miss Prickle talking and holding hands outside of the classroom. The kids were shocked. They immediately snickered as they entered the classroom.

Once fourth hour began, they were amazed to find Miss Prickle being uncharacteristically nice. She didn't yell, she didn't assign any homework, she let the kids do whatever they wanted, and she gave them candy! Everyone was so happy that they didn't question the change in Miss Prickle's behavior. But Leslie noticed a beautiful diamond ring on Miss Prickle's finger.

Mr. Tanny walked into the room and Miss Prickle started to blush. Kyle said to Leslie, "Do you think Miss Prickle likes Mr. Tanny?"

Leslie looked at Miss Prickle's hand again and said, "Well, yes, I think she is engaged to him! She is wearing a ring on her left ring finger that she didn't have on yesterday!"

The bell rang. Leslie and Kyle walked up to Miss Prickle and Mr. Tanny and said, "Congratulations! When is the wedding?"

Miss Prickle looked surprised. "How did you kids know?" asked Miss Prickle.

“Girls know these things,” answered Leslie.

When Mr. Chow was well enough, he returned to his classroom. The kids were so happy to see him. They told him all about their experiences with Miss Prickle. Mr. Chow told the kids, “You will probably never see Miss Prickle or Mr. Tanny again. They are getting married in a private ceremony and retiring to a small island off the coast of Hawaii.”

The Missing Assignment

An age-old problem concerning dogs and loose-leaf paper plays a big part in
THE MISSING ASSIGNMENT, by **Troy Rambo**.

Once upon a time, a boy name Sterling had a dog named Simony. Every morning, Sterling said goodbye to Simony, got on the school bus, and went to Berkshire Middle School. Everything was going well until one day, when Mr. Fisher assigned some homework. It was due the next day.

In the morning, Sterling was horrified to realize that Simony had ripped his homework to pieces! Sterling knew that Mr. Fisher was a pretty sharp guy, and all he could think of was what he would think if he walked into class with the “dog ate my homework” excuse.

He could see it now. He would explain the entire story, including the part where Simony put his tail between his legs and cried his dog eyes out. Mr. Fisher would most likely look down at him, smile and say, “Yeah, right.” Sterling wished that if Simony had to do something with his homework, he had done something more creative, like mail it to Mr. Fisher.

Facing his teacher was unavoidable, and Sterling knew as he watched the clock that it was time for Language Arts. He stalled by going to his locker, stopping in the bathroom, getting two drinks, visiting the counselor’s office just to say hello, and tying his shoes once or twice. He also returned an overdue library book. (That really did need to be done.)

He walked quietly into the classroom, hoping not to be noticed, and sat in his seat with the hood pulled over his head.

“Sterling! Do you have your homework?”

What to do, what to do? Sterling had to decide if he should just tell the truth, or try to come up with something more believable, so that he would at least have a chance of living to see the next day. As he opened his mouth, even he did not know what was he was about to say.

“My dog ripped it up!” He couldn’t believe it! All that agonizing and that’s what came out: the truth! He was certain his life was now over. As he looked up at Mr. Fisher, he waited for the storm to hit, thinking of all the possibilities; office, detention, a failing grade, a call to his parents, or worst of all...

“Bring it tomorrow.”

“All right, Mr. Fisher. Oh, yeah, thank you.”

Sterling was so relieved, and from then on, Sterling turned in his homework.

The Mystery

*When a boy named Bob has a problem with a bully at school, he turns to some good friends for help in **THE MYSTERY**, by **Yedo Lee**.*

Blam! Derrick punched Bob in his face for three minutes. When the principal came around the corner, Derrick left Bob at the area. Bob left to go to his class.

At the end of the day, Bob, Jigsaw, and Anna left the school. Derrick went to Bob's locker and took a key.

The next day Bob went to his locker and got his stuff for his classes. At the end of the day he went to go get his key to his bike and couldn't find it. He ran to Jigsaw and Anna and said, "Someone stole my key."

They went to where it happened. Jigsaw said, "Don't worry. We will find it."

The next morning they found Derrick at the bike cage with the key as he put the lock in the wheel. They ran to him and demanded that he give back the key. Derrick said, "Sure. Here," as he tossed the key and ran. But Anna caught him, and Derrick had to meet the principal.

Bob's mom bought Bob another lock—the kind without a key.

New

*A girl faces the challenges that come with moving to Canada from Greenland in NEW, by **Rachel Kaltenbach**.*

My name is Ashleigh Schmitt-Kuhn. I am 12-years-old. I have blonde hair and green blue eyes. I just moved to Canada from Greenland.

Tomorrow is my first day of Meadow Brook Junior High. I'm really nervous. It's the type of nervousness when you feel a hard gnawing at your stomach.

My mom bought me a whole new wardrobe. I still wasn't too happy about moving, but most of my family was. Just so you know, I have a huge family. There are about 34 of us together! We have a big house, though. It's much bigger than my other one.

My mom is calling me down to dinner. As I find my way around the new house, I begin memorizing the details. It's huge. To be precise, we have four floors.

As I step into the gargantuan kitchen, I smell roasted shrimp. Yum! I love shrimp! We are also having immiaq. It's a special drink.

We all have to take our plates to the table in line by age. It seems unfair, but actually it is not because the elder persons do more chores and work harder. The dinner has potatoes, onions, shrimp, immiaq, and a certain type of vegetable. It's probably American. Americans have unusual food, like little bread circles with cream inside.

Dinner is different tonight because my mother cooked quite fast. Usually she takes her time. It also tastes strange because of the American food.

I have to do school stuff now. So good night!

Last night was very, very busy since we were collecting all of the school supplies together. My brother, Caleb, took my binder. He had drawn all over it. I'm so mad at him. I mean he's nice and all, but still.

I have to be dropped off at school in an hour. My school starts at 7:55 A.M. My old school started at 6:30 A.M., so this is a good change.

First I pick out my clothes, which are a tee shirt and blue "jeans." I hope that is a good pick! I am very nervous. The gnawing feeling inside my stomach has started up. I look probably all right, I think, in an American's opinion. Should I wear my sweater or jacket? It's already October, so I decide to wear my jacket. It is plain black. It says "North Face" on it.

I step downstairs, nervously at that. My mom calls me into the van with Zak, Sydney, Lauren, Phillip, Suzy, Serrena and Jake. They're all going to the same school as me. My mom asks me if I have everything prepared. I answer yes, with a stutter.

The blue car hums as my mother starts it up. The calming heat blows softly on my face. It seems to make my nervousness go away a little. Serrena and I start talking. She is the girl closest to my age in my family.

Oh, no! We are already at the school. Our mom explains to us to go to the office and tell them that we are new. They'll give us schedules and we are to follow them. We all wave goodbye to her.

The school is incredibly huge! I seem to fall back at the sight of it. My siblings and I nervously walk inside.

There is a door labeled "Main Office." I pointed to the steel door. We stepped inside and there was a lady. I tell her, since I am the most developed in the English language, "We, my brothers and sisters, are new from Greenland. Would you please give us our schedules? And a map, that is, if you have one of the school."

The lady was round and cheerful. She said, highly accented, "Oh my, you must be the new students. Here are the schedules, dears. If you ever have a question, don't hesitate to ask. Okay?"

"Yes, of course. Thank you very much. But do you have a map on hand?" I questioned.

"There must be one somewhere here. Hold on," she answered back. The lady had a nametag that said "Mrs. Hansen."

That sounded strange. “Yup, yup, yup, here it is!” She handed me eight maps of the school.

I walked out of the office. “Good luck,” I whispered in my native language. I got a few back, although none from Phillip. He had been different since we came here.

I looked at my schedule.

<u>CLASS</u>	<u>TEACHER</u>	<u>ROOM</u>	<u>HOOR</u>	<u>SEMESTER</u>
A2	Mazis	219	A2	ALL
Science	Kaming	110	1 st	ALL
English (Special)	Kim	009	2 nd	ALL
Math (Advanced)	Ladis	119	3 rd	ALL
LUNCH	NONE	CAFETERIA		
Reading	Smith	112	4 th	ALL
L. A.	Paige	220	5 th	ALL
S. S.	Naski	205	6 th	ALL
SFL	Harris	118	7 th	1 st semester
Health	Zibell	102	7 th	2 nd semester
Eng. Tech	Halverson	007	7 th	3 rd semester
Art	Kalfis	225	7 th	4 th semester

Wow! How could I do it? I looked at the map. Okay, room 219 was on the third floor. I turned. There were the steps. Slowly and solemnly, I stepped up them. There were rooms 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, and 206. Then the hall wound the other way. Now rooms 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, and 217 were in sight. Then the hall went in another direction. So I followed.

A girl with puffy brown hair and glasses ran into me. She said apologetically, “Oh my gosh! I’m so sorry! God, I *am* a klutz, just like Lisa said! I am extremely sorry!”

“That’s all right,” I answered.

“I haven’t seen you before. Are you new here?” she asked.

“Yes, actually. I came here from—”

“AMANDA!” a voice screeched. I spun around. A kid with stubby legs, arms, and fingers walked towards us. He had a

ribbon-like thing around his waist that said “Hall Monitor,” whatever that was. “What do you think you are doing?” the kid said with a lisp in his voice. “I should report you to Mrs. Ziphis.” I had no idea who this Mrs. Ziphis was.

“No, please don’t, Melvin! I’m helping her to her A2 because she’s new, right?” Amanda said, nudging me. I guessed that meant I should follow along.

“Yeah, she was telling me where to go. So she shouldn’t get into trouble. I’m new,” I said defensively.

“I guess it’s okay this time. But don’t let me catch you out here late again!” he said.

“Thank you!” I answered.

Amanda and I walked on. She turned the corner and said, “That was close. Melvin is so weird. And here is your A2. Well, goodbye.”

“Thank you!”

I walked in. My teacher asked, “Who are you?”

“I’m Ashleigh Schmitt-Kuhn. I’m from Greenland. I’m new,” I answered.

“Okay. Welcome! You may sit next to Nicolle. Over there.” She pointed to an empty desk in the back of the stuffed room.

Nicolle said, “Hey! I know you are new and everything, so want to sit with me during lunch? I know how it is to be new because I moved here from Austria. It’s really hard when you don’t have any friends. So I’ll stick with you!”

I said gratefully, “Thank you! You are really nice!”

“Hey, you are in all my classes! Cool!” Nicolle looked really nice and popular. She looked that way because she had a lot of people around her that she was talking to. I guess we are allowed to talk in this “A2.”

Maybe this new school won’t be so bad.

U. S. Middle School

*Who wouldn't be curious when an entire school is suddenly evacuated? Two girls find themselves in the middle of a situation of national importance when they try to satisfy their curiosity in **U.S. MIDDLE SCHOOL**, by **Maya Campbell**.*

The buzz of a helicopter flying above the school could be heard. There were sirens going off from police cars as their red lights flashed from the school. The odor of gasoline and fear seem to fill the cafeteria where all the students had been directed to go by announcement from the principal.

As I peeked out the window of the cafeteria, I could see men and women dressed in military clothes, and carrying rifles five times as big. The men and women reminded me of a picture my dad had shown me of when he was in the army. The picture had four other people standing with my dad and they all had rifles similar to the ones that the men and women were carrying who appeared to be surrounding the school. Based on their appearance, these men and women must be in the U.S. Army.

In the distance, I heard the principal's voice on the P.A. system. He said for all the students to be quiet and remain in the cafeteria. He said that the visitors at the school building were part of the United States Army, and that they were in control of the situation. Then I started to ask myself, "What situation?" I asked my best friend that I've known since kindergarten, Katie Robinson, "Katie, what situation?"

Katie reacted in her normal way. "Something really stupid."

I couldn't seem to get it out of my mind, though. I had to find out what was going on at Berkshire. Why did the army take care of the situation? Why is the whole school kept in the cafeteria? I had

to know. I thought of a plan to get out of the cafeteria. I dragged Katie with me.

There are only two doorways out of the cafeteria. One doorway was stuffed with eighth-graders, and the other doorway was blocked with caution signs. I knew that someone would catch us if we went through the signs. So Katie and I rushed through the crowd of screaming, swearing 14-year-olds. We thought one of the eighth-graders would catch us, but we got through. And as long as Katie and I got out, we could find out what was happening. Maybe.

Everything was blocked off with bars or any object that could be used. But someone was near the cones. He looked like a soldier. He came up to us with a mad look on his face like he was going to kill us with his gun. He said, "Hey, girls! Go to the cafeteria! You're not supposed to be here!"

Suddenly sirens and very screechy noises were interrupting the soldier in the hall. Katie asked, "What is going on?"

He said, "Well, ok. Your school has a very serious terrorist in here. If you want to stay, it's up to you, but you might even die."

Katie and I both thought about it. "Wow, Katie, should we go?" I said. We both agreed to go with the soldier.

He said, "I'll let you go, but you have to be very quiet and you have to stick with me."

We walked around the school and we found a tank in the girls' locker rooms. I said, "Mr. Soldier, umm, I think we found something." The tank said CAUTION: NUCLEAR BOMBS. There was a note inside.

To Berkshire Middle School:

I have put four nuclear bombs inside your school. In order to find me, you need to find the bombs around the school. The last bomb I hid shows you where I am.

Your enemy, the terrorist

Katie asked, "Why would a terrorist tell us where he is hiding?"

“I don't have a clue,” I said. We weren't as terrified because he couldn't be in every hiding spot to blow us up. We found a lot of nuclear bombs in the gym. I had never seen a bomb before. The one I saw was a long tube of a green color that needed some serious protection. Everyone else looked like they didn't care. But this is more interesting than going home early because I know my parents would ask me what happened.

Katie said that she was going to the bathroom and I went with her so we would stay together. She got in one of the stalls, and inside the toilet was a nuclear bomb. It had a note on it that said the terrorist was hiding in that same bathroom!

We walked around the bathroom and saw one chipped tile. I picked up one of the tiles, and there was a black hole under the floor. Katie and I started digging and found the terrorist in the hole!

He looked like a very sad man that was covered in dirt and wore at least an army outfit. I could barely look at him. His arms were free so he could bomb us, but he was really tired and barely could move a muscle.

We screamed and screamed for the soldier. He came running, prepared to take action. The soldier stopped like he had done something wrong. He started to cry and looked about to kill the terrorist, but he calmed down. He talked to one of the soldiers on his walkie-talkie, and they threw the terrorist in their truck to deal with him after.

Katie and I thanked the soldier and started walking to the school bus that would take us home. The soldier grabbed me and told me that he was crying because for a very long time, he had not been to his foreign country, and his town was very safe. But he could tell that the terrorist felt like he needed to die in this situation. With all the bombings and the rumors, it was very sad to him.

On the way home I was thinking to myself, *I feel bad for the world today because of all the humiliations. Famous people try to help people in very serious need, but it seem they haven't helped me or anyone else that needed help just this second.*

I never knew the book would end this way. What if your school turned into a U.S. Middle School?

FUTURE

The Adventures of Mufy and Lurve

*Pirates are bloodthirsty, murderous, deadly—children? On second thought, there are many things wrong with that description, as least according to **THE ADVENTURES OF MUFY AND LURVE**, by **Dee Agomuoh**.*

My name is Mufy and I've got a bizarre story to tell of how I, Mufy Advancer, and my sister, Lurve Advancer, became the pirates of the overlords' seas. It all started shortly after I was born.

I always wondered what it would be like to be able to understand what my mom was saying when she pointed at a weird and noisy object she called a toilet. I had not learned to use it yet when my sister was born. This was two years later and it was the year 2012. Birth was a simple thing at that time, but I once read in my history book that in the year 2004 they actually had to Anyway, when Lurve was born, my mother became very sick. In two more years, she passed away.

Life then became very tough for me. I was only about five years old and I had to go to work at the only place that would let a five-year-old uneducated child work: the daycare center. I don't think that was legal, but since they took care of kids all day, they felt bad for me. This was also good because I was able to bring Lurve to work.

The hard part was when I rode my bike to work with Lurve in the front basket. It was very hard, but I worked harder, and as time went on I had enough money to ride a taxi and afford an education at a school called Berkshire Middle School.

By this time I was eleven years old. Lurve was nine years old, so she got hired at my work. With double the income, eventually we got an apartment, and for a time we actually had a normal life, until a chain of events that started one day when we were at the drug store.

“Would that be all, young man?” said the cashier.

“Ummmm, yeah, that’s it,” I said.

“Would you like a lottery ticket at least?” asked the cashier.

“OK,” I said. After that day, I checked the lottery channel, but sadly, I had lost. Lurve suggested we go to the beach to cheer me up.

“Hey, Mufy,” asked Lurve.

“Yeah?” I answered.

“What’s that?” She pointed up at the sky. That’s when a green light abducted us onto a spacecraft.

As we stared around, we spotted two aliens too hideous to look at. They were brown with scales on their tongues and bodies. They were blue and short with no noses or legs, and they had eyes in the backs of their heads in addition to the ones in front.

What did we do? We beat the crud out of them.

After we had thrown them out of the ship, we started to wonder why they picked us, but we never made sense out of it all. Eventually the ship ran out of fuel and fell into the water. Luckily for us, it was designed for this. With a lack of food, but with hi-tech items, we figured we could take food from others.

So when someone tells you that we can’t be beat, now you know why.

Alien Cosmo

*Cosmo's parents say aliens don't exist. But as you'll see in **ALIEN COSMO** by **Thomas Caussat**, Cosmo knows better.*

Most people believe that Earth is the only inhabited planet in the whole galaxy. But small amounts of people think exactly the opposite. Cosmo Spectacle was one of them. He had believed in aliens since he saw one.

It was a hot, steamy summer day. Cosmo was only six at that time. Like any other six-year-old kid, he would go to the beach, roll in the grass, play in the sand or even sometimes go fishing. But not today. Today he had to go to the most boring place ever imagined: Grandma's old, tiny house. The only thing to do there was to observe bugs. That's pretty boring. But today, Cosmo would be the first human to ever set eyes on an extraterrestrial being.

There they were at Grandma's place. Cosmo hated above all Grandma's kisses. Cosmo describes it as a suction that sucked skin and squirted out sticky saliva. Horrible, isn't it? Well, as I was saying, Granny's kisses are despicable. After greetings, hugs, and disgusting smooches, Cosmo walked, already desperately bored, to the backyard. But he quickly froze. Standing there was a red-eyed six-foot-high slug.

The creature seemed to glow. Like any ordinary six-year-old kid, Cosmo ran for cover behind a rock. When he thought it was safe, he took a quick glimpse at the creature. It was gone, vanished, disappeared. Now that was weird.

Here is Cosmo now. He is 11 and he still believes. Cosmo has told his parents about the incident about a million times by now. Unfortunately for him, his parents are scientists who don't and will never believe. They always have a scientific explanation for every phenomenon, even for his sitting with the alien. They said he was hallucinating from the heat of the sun there was that day. But that never changed Cosmo's mind a bit. He still believes. But he had to prove that they really did exist. That's why he set a trap. It was not just any kind of old wooden trap, but a modern technological trap. His dad had built it for his tenth birthday. It closes when something interferes with the trap's lasers. Well, anyway, it was a sweet trap.

One day, instead of catching any ordinary squirrel or rabbit, the trap caught an alien! It wasn't a green slimy slob. It was a small two-legged creature that balanced his pinky-size body on a strong tail. Its skin didn't glow, but its yellow eyes did.

Cosmo didn't want this one to vanish, too. So he didn't move. He kept staring at it.

Suddenly, the alien disappeared. But he had left something: his ship! Well, it kind of looked like a ship. It was only as big as Cosmo's head. It was full of spikes at the bottom, and rounded at the top. Every spike had some sort of green light at their very tip. There were no doors, only a little square filled with what seemed to be water.

Intrigued, Cosmo touched it. His finger went right through it. He could now feel something at his fingertip. Not knowing what it was, he pushed his finger in a little more.

"I give up, I give up!"

"What? Who said that? Show yourself."

"I could show myself if you would stop squishing me with your finger!"

"Ho! I'm so sorry." He immediately took his finger out.

"Now, I shall explain. I am a Glox from planet Gloxet. The 'square' you put your fat finger in is called an X5HMN9."

"What!"

"Oh, yes, forgot. I think you Earth humans call it a door."

“That’s a door?”

“Indeed. It is a door, which does not need to open. Water and plasma cannot come through it. But anything else can. Well, I guess I have to go now.”

“No, wait! I saw an alien when I was six. But it didn’t look like you at all. It was tall and had a glowing green skin.”

“Oh, it was probably a Lameck. They match their names; they’re really lame. The only thing they do all their lives is go to a planet with oxygen, bury their roots underground, and stay there, sucking oxygen their whole lives.”

“Wow, that is pretty lame. But one more thing. It then suddenly disappeared.”

“Don’t you humans know anything? It’s called invisibility. Humans are the only species who can’t do it.”

“Then that explains everything. See ya, Mister Glox.”

“Call me Android 56387429875532569, or I guess you can call me Andy. I need to go now...oh, nooooo!”

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m out of fuel!”

“That’s no problem.”

“It isn’t?”

“Of course it isn’t. I have some gasoline for you in my garage.”

“How could you use gasoline as a fuel? It tastes so good!”

“You eat it?”

“Of course we do.”

“Disgusting! Well, anyway, on what do you fuel?”

“On Z3...oh, I mean maple syrup.”

“That’s what we eat!”

“You humans really are weird. So, do you have any of your so-called ‘food?’”

“Unfortunately not. But, I can get some. The only problem is, it’s pretty far away.”

“That’s no problem, I can teleport you there.”

“Teleport?”

“Sure, with this.” He took out a white box and said “Android 56387429875532569.” The box opened. He took out a white

glowing sphere. “Picture in your mind where you want to go, and touch it. Just whistle when you want to come back.”

That’s what Cosmo did. He thought of a small boring house. Sound familiar?

“Granny!”

“Hello, my little sunshine.”

Yep. It was Grandma’s place. After getting the syrup, Cosmo whistled. He then found himself back at his place.

“You did it! How can I ever repay you? Oh, I know.” He took out a gun. “This is a volume gun. It can shrink or enlarge objects.”

“Cool! Thanks a lot!”

“Maybe humans aren’t that weird after all.”

When the alien left, Cosmo never told his parents. But in the future, Cosmo will observe the sky forever.

Aliens

*The truth is out there. According to **ALIENS** by **Robert M. Misiak**, it may be closer than we think.*

I used to think my life was boring. The only time anything ever happened was once when I was eight I found a ten-dollar bill. My name is Tyrac, and last month is a month I will never forget.

It all started when my friend Felac and I were in science class. His dad is a sheep farmer and donated the eyes that we were dissecting. All of a sudden I fell over headfirst and got knocked unconscious.

The teacher called the nurse but she didn't know what was wrong with me. They sent me to the hospital. They figured that it had to do with the sheep eye that I was dissecting. When my stainless steel knife cut into the eye, some type of poison sprayed out, hitting me directly in the face.

It turns out that, all over the world, people were getting poisoned by sheep products. Poison was found in not only sheep eyes, but food people were eating, like lamb chops, and also clothing that was made out of wool. Anything that came from sheep had poison in it.

Three weeks later, a man was caught selling sheep feed to people, mainly sheep farmers. It turns out he was the same guy I had seen at Felac's dad's farm. The man was really an alien who was trying to destroy mankind by putting poison in sheep food. His plan was to slowly kill us off. His planet was slowly dying and he was to get rid of us before the rest of the alien fleet got here. They caught the alien responsible, and in a couple of more weeks I'll be fine.

The alien confessed that his ship was hidden on an island in the South Pacific Ocean called Macquarte. Once the alien was caught, he sent a signal to the alien fleet to find a different planet to take over, since the humans had evolved too fast and our technology would destroy the aliens. Even though they had ships, they were only for traveling and not battle or defense. The fleet left without the captured alien on Earth because it was afraid that it would be found and wiped out.

The alien who was left provided much information about his people's space ships, although he did not provide the whereabouts of the alien fleet.

Soon we will be able to go to space also. The alien did not have long to live, but because he gave us information he was treated fairly. He gave the formula for the cure for the poison and soon all people were better.

So now I guess after those exciting few weeks, I can't say my life is boring anymore.

Another World

*Something out of the ordinary is happening in the woods. Matt makes a discovery that is both great and small in **ANOTHER WORLD**, by Erik Young.*

“Come on, Bryan. Why won’t you go hiking with me?” asked Matt.

“I told you, Matt. Since the meteor hit, I’ve been hearing strange noises coming from the old mining camp in the woods,” replied Bryan, “like someone is building something.”

“Fine, I’ll go alone then,” Matt said.

As Matt got to the logging camp he thought to himself, *Bryan’s just being a wimp. I’ll go in there and nothing will happen to me.*

Matt decided to go in. He found old logging tools. It looked like no one had been there for years. But as he ventured further into the logging camp, he got the uncomfortable feeling someone was watching him.

Then he came across a long building. He decided to go inside. It was dark and musty. As his eyes adjusted to the dark, he realized he was in the logging camp’s mess hall. There were wooden tables lined up in rows and benches on each side of the tables.

Then he realized a light was coming from the kitchen. *Strange*, he thought. All of a sudden he got that feeling again that someone was watching him. *No*, he thought, *Bryan’s just getting to me.*

As he was walking towards the door, he thought he heard whispering. He stopped and looked around. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw movement.

As he got closer to the doorway, the whispering got louder and louder. When he walked in he could not believe his eyes. There was a TINY CITY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM!

There were small buildings and houses everywhere. There were cars and little creatures walking all over. They even had a zoo filled with tiny little animals that Matt had never seen before.

All of a sudden one of the creatures looked up at Matt. The creatures yelled and dashed for cover. Matt yelled, "I mean you no harm." No one came out.

Then a creaky old light from the ceiling fell, heading towards the city. Matt dashed to the light and grabbed it when it was just a couple of inches from the city. When he did that, one very old creature stepped out of the little buildings and said, "You saved us. We are very grateful. Who are you?"

"I am a human named Matt. I don't want to hurt you. What are you doing here?"

"We are Marchipians," the alien said. "Our planet was overrun by Marvarts, so we gathered as many of us together as we could and escaped to Earth. We have been living here ever since, but rats and other Earth animals keep destroying our town."

"Well, maybe I can help. I'm much bigger and stronger than you, and I could protect you from the animals. I could help you rebuild your town. In return, you can teach me about you guys."

"Well, ok," said the alien.

So for the next few years the aliens told Matt all about their culture, planet and other things, like their fighting styles and food. In return, Matt protected and helped them until he was old enough to buy the camp and protect the aliens forever.

Matt told his sons about the aliens, and they told their sons, and so on. Matt became the great, great, great grandfather of Denis Golhan, the founder of A.P.P.—the Alien Protection Program.

Area 53

A group of hikers stumble on a scientific experiment that threatens their lives in AREA 53, by Jheryl Lezama.

Today is Wednesday, January 21, 2004 and my friends and I are about to embark on a remarkable, thrilling moonlight hike in California's premiere hiking trails for the adventure of our lifetime.

Four of my best buddies reviewed brochures and we decided that Trail 53 out of 56 would be our challenge out of all the trails that were open. My name is Jal. I wondered what surprises awaited us on this journey. We were about to find out!

About four hours into the hike, my friend Mike decided we should take a short rest. After about half an hour, we began hiking the trail again when we noticed a sign. It read "Continue on Trail 54." Nonsense! Someone must have put that up to fool us. We continued on the original trail, which we later regretted. Our horror was about to begin!

There was a crack from the bushes and a screech! We all jolted up and held our ground in fear. The mist on the ground was gleaming from the moonlight and the lingering mist was frightening. Suddenly a hawk swooped out from the bushes. We gasped!

Beside the bushes, we saw a silver door, which looked like a submarine hatch. We walked up to it. There was an archway covered by two small trees. The door was in the center of the archway, covered by fake grass, and labeled "AREA 53."

We approached the door to open the hatch, and in a split second the door swung open and our pal Mike suddenly disappeared. The sign on the inside of the door read "EXPERIMENT 53. WARNING: IF RELEASED, OBJECTS

WILL DISAPPEAR WITH A TOUCH. Anything touched that disappeared will come back when it's destroyed.” There was a tear in the paper. “It hates ght lights.” Something “lights.’

At that instant a creature emerged from the open hatch. It was gray and had fire red eyes. The scales on its body made a frightening sight.

The creature pointed at my friends and I and jolted at us, which made a chill go down my spine! My friend Scott yelled, “Run!” and he did! When he said it, there was an echo, as if the arch we saw earlier was part of a building. I didn't have much time to think as the creature dashed for Scott and us! (Scott is my friend. I met him in the sixth grade.) He ran between the trees and so did I.

When I got behind them, I ran into a steel wall. It felt like I broke my nose. It was cold and on the left there were steps that were decaying. I ran up as my other two friends vanished.

Then I saw we were in a building. It was gray and had chemicals lying around other objects. On the other side of the walkway was a light switch. That's it! “ ght lights” is “bright lights”! Bright light does something. I'll give it a shot!

The creature was almost to the walkway. I found a chain dangling from a high beam. I grabbed the chain, swung across the room, and jumped on a platform near the light switch. I activated the switch, but nothing happened. I saw it was unplugged.

I shouted out to Scott. He ran to plug it in with the creature hot on his trail. However, our daring move was successful. Scott reached the plug and flooded the area with light.

We conquered the creature. He shrieked and vanished without a trace. Suddenly, my friends and the lab workers reappeared. We had won!

After that adventurous hike, we never ventured to hike again in the night. With the experimental lab destroyed, we understood from the workers that the creature happened by accident due to their experiments.

We still dream about it!

Attack of the Nerds

*The nerds have had enough bullying! In **ATTACK OF THE NERDS** by **David Rivera**, they apply their technological skills to revenge. But when clans of nerds meet clans of bullies, can anyone survive?*

“Geek, nerd, techno, freak!” taunted Beadle, as Nerd, Geek, Techno, and Freak sluggishly went to the library (also known as = HB =, or home base).

“I hate it when we get bullied,” said Techno, a super nerd.

In the library, Techno and his friends said, “We should make robots.” They decided they were going to eliminate the bullies.

Techno made the robots in one day. They looked like humans.

They attacked Beadle. His guts were everywhere. Dung was with him, but he got away.

At first, no one believed Dung when he claimed that a robot that looked like a human being had attacked him. But Dung was the smartest in clan 1B=B1, which is the best bully clan. Dung told the story to the clan, whose members realized he was telling the truth. This caused clan 1B=B1 to run away. In doing so, B40000 from the clan had his head blown off.

The clan needed a safe school haven, or S.S.H. Since Dung skipped band every day, he provided the S.S.H.

The nerds found that no more bullies were eliminated. So the nerds made an upgrade. The nerd bots were now like bloodhounds plus the FBI. They found the S.S.H. and attacked the clan.

The nerds emailed other nerds who made other, better, motor bots—which was fortunate for them, since the overworked nerd bots exploded.

The members of clan 1B=B1 got to their underground base. They emailed all the other clans. Then they emailed nerd bullies. The nerd bullies (bully nerds) made Greek bots that looked like Greek warriors plus Bully bots.

The Greek plus Bully bots attacked the motor bots. Circuits and power boxes flew everywhere. Then the motor bots made army bots.

All clans attacked the schools, avoiding lasers, pits, lava, bombs, force fields, drowning, dangerous chemicals, stonings, and electrocutions.

Finally, the bullies attacked the nerds. Then it became World War III. It became WORLDWIDE MAYHEM! Then everyone put so much pressure on the Earth that it EXPLODED! Finally, aliens did the same and DESTROYED THE GALAXY!

A Boy in Space

*In **A BOY IN SPACE** by **Ben Dapkus**, the son of a famous scientist must finish his father's important work. But what will he find after a long journey through space?*

The final descent to Pluto has begun. Star Toad, the last of a half-human, half-robot army, is about to land on Pluto. Why Pluto? Pluto is the only position in space from which to blast down a deadly asteroid heading toward Earth.

Star Toad sees his landing spot from his spaceship. Mission Control talks to him and tells him he is free to land. Star Toad shuts down his spaceship after a perfect landing.

Now begins a seemingly impossible task for Star Toad. He must find his father's abandoned lab to get the correct calculations to melt down the deadly asteroid.

Star Toad looks out his window and sees a dust storm on the horizon. He uses his binoculars and sees an object coming towards him. Could it be? Yes, it is his father, Captain Yeager, in a Landrover!

Star Toad's father, Captain Yeager, was originally sent on this mission, but was believed to have been killed in an explosion. Star Toad hasn't heard from him in over a year.

Star Toad quickly gets on his spacesuit and greets his father. "Dad, we thought you were dead! How did you know I was here?"

"I saw your space ship land. We don't get many visitors here," said Captain Yeager. "I am a survivor and about to finish my mission here. Let's get back to the lab so I can show you my plans to destroy the asteroid."

Back at his lab, Captain Yeager shows Star Toad his telescope. “Son, if I point this telescope at just the right angle and hit the sun’s heat and light, it should do the job.” Star Toad aims the telescope while his father calculates the speed and distance of the asteroid.

Finally the telescope focuses its heat on the speeding rock. The flash of the light is blinding, and then there is a massive explosion. The universe seems to blink. “Direct hit! Dad, we have done it!”

Captain Yeager smiles at Star Toad and says, “Mission accomplished, Son!”

The Mysterious Object

*If we want to know what is happening beyond our world, someone has to explore outer space. It's Abby's turn in **THE MYSTERIOUS OBJECT**, by **Emily Kinsella**.*

As Abby stepped out of the ship, she thought to herself, “Why did they have to send me on this expedition?” It was March 3 of 2034 and 23-year-old Abby Jay had been sent into outer space to explore the newly discovered planet Juju. “They should have sent someone with more experience with new planets,” she said to herself.

She was a bit scared knowing that she was the first person ever to visit this planet, but as she stepped out of the ship she then realized there was nothing to be scared of. She had two new inventions called the Blocker 3000, which was like an electronic shield, and the Caster 4000, which could x-ray and put a cast on a broken bone.

But she was wrong about there being nothing to be scared of. Very wrong.

As she got further away from the ship, the more danger was coming. Suddenly, she saw a light. A bright blue light was coming from far away. She wanted to go see what it was, but hesitated. “What if it’s dangerous? I could get hurt,” she thought to herself. But then she thought, “All of NASA is counting on me to explore this new planet, and I am worrying too much.”

She started walking toward the mysterious light. After about ten minutes, she had reached the mysterious light. It was about 15 feet tall and about 8 feet wide. It was the biggest, brightest thing Abby had ever seen.

She decided to poke it with something. She bent down, picked up a long twig, and—*BAM!* She was flung backward by some sort of gravitational pull and hit the ground very hard.

Abby was in aching pain. “I think I broke my arm,” she said to herself. She remembered the Caster 4000. All she had to do was lay her broken arm, leg, rib, or any other broken bone on the cushion and the machine would x-ray it and put a cast on it. Abby placed her arm on the cushion and in no time, she had a bright green cast on her arm.

“Oh, yeah!” Abby remembered “The light!” Just then the light got smaller and smaller and smaller until there was just a small shiny object left. It was about the size of a cantaloupe. It was a beautiful shiny swirl of pink and orange and red and green. “I’m going to take this back to the ship,” she said to herself, “and show everyone back at NASA this beautiful object.”

Just then she remembered that she had brought a third invention called the Identifier that could tell what an unidentified object could be used for. She pulled the Identifier out of her pack and inserted the mysterious object into it. It took a while for the invention to see what the object could be used for, but after about three minutes, it read something. It read that the mysterious object could be a cure for any type of cancer. Abby was so happy that she jumped up and let out a yell of happiness.

She started to walk back to the ship when she was done celebrating. After about two minutes a loud voice said, “STOP!”

Abby froze. It sounded like the voice was coming from behind her. She decided that maybe she worried so much about exploring the new planet alone that she had started hearing things. She decided that she needed to get it together and keep walking back to the ship.

“I SAID ‘STOP!’ ” the voice said again.

Abby froze even more this time, knowing that it was not just a voice in her head. She turned around and there stood a little purple thing. It was about three feet tall and looked kind of like a mix of a pig and a dog. It had the body of a bunny. “GIVE ME THAT CRYSTAL BALL!” yelled the thing.

“Why?” said Abby.

“BECAUSE I WANT TO USE IT TO ENSLAVE PLANET EARTH!” yelled the thing.

How stupid, Abby thought. This tiny little alien thinks that it can get this crystal ball away from me.

“No, I need it more than you do,” said Abby. “I need it to cure all of the sick people who have cancer.”

“GIVE ME THAT OR I WILL HAVE YOU EXECUTED!” yelled the thing.

Oh no, Abby thought, I guess this little thing is more than just a tiny alien.

“No!” said Abby, and she began to run back to her ship.

“AFTER HER!” yelled the thing.

Before she knew it, a bunch of clones of the thing began chasing her back to her ship. They also started firing blades at her to try to cut the rope that connected her to her ship and gave her air.

Just then she remembered something that she thought might save her. She reached into her pack and pulled out the Blocker 3000. All she had to do to use the Blocker 3000 was press the button that said “Defend” and the Blocker 3000 was at work. She held the mysterious object in one hand and with the other hand she held over her the Blocker 3000.

After a few minutes of running with the Blocker 3000, she reached the ship, climbed in, and headed back to earth.

On her way back, she thought of how many people she would help and how famous she would be for finding a cure for cancer. When she landed the ship, she was greeted by almost all of NASA. They were thrilled that she had found a cure for every kind of cancer. She became famous for finding the cure, but what she was most happy about was that she had helped many people by exploring the new planet Juju.

The President Gets Kidnapped

*Lawbreakers from beyond Earth are the culprits in **THE PRESIDENT GETS KIDNAPPED**, by **Sydney Rachel Wolf**. It's a good thing they didn't know about Earth's secret weapon: Ms. Piggle.*

The security cameras in the White House suddenly went crazy and shut off. Security guards were swarming everywhere, frantically running around.

The President was whisked away and had no clue what was going on. The security guard told him, "There is no time to explain. Just go to the secret hiding spot. There will be someone waiting there for you."

The President ran through the long, eerie hallways of the White House to the secret passageway behind the bookcase. There waiting for him was his secretary, Ms. Piggle. Ms. Piggle knew everything about the secret hideaway and it was her job to get the President to safety.

All of a sudden, Ms. Piggle gave out a shrieking scream. She saw thick purple foam start to seep under the door. She knew she had to protect the President and take him to safety before the purple foam attacked. Ms. Piggle ran to get masks for her and the President, but when she got back, the President was missing.

She looked outside the window and saw the President being beamed up to a spaceship by weird-looking aliens. The aliens were purple with square heads, bulging eyes, and tiny bodies with long tongues hanging down to their toes. The aliens were dressed in tie-dyed shirts and bellbottom pants, and had peace signs around their necks. They apparently were stuck in the 60's.

Ms. Piggle watched the spaceship drift away in the sky. She had to act fast and get the President back before the world found out that he was not in control.

Ms. Piggle let down her long blonde hair that was in a bun, and slowly removed her Gucci glasses. She removed her outer clothes and revealed her Super Piggle Body Suit underneath.

She put on a jet pack and flew to Mars where the aliens had taken the President.

When Ms. Piggle arrived on Mars, she hid behind some rocks and lava. She saw the President right away and noticed that he still had his earpiece in.

All of a sudden the President heard Ms. Piggle's voice in his earpiece. She had decided to try to communicate with him.

Mr. President whispered back, "I will meet the aliens' demands so we can get out of here and go home."

Ms. Piggle said, "No, I have a better idea. I brought the alien blaster. On the count of 3, you run, and I'll blast the aliens. But I only brought one jetpack, so we'll have to fly home together."

When the President heard "1,2,3," he ran, and Ms. Piggle blasted the aliens one by one. The President saw the aliens melt to the ground.

The President cheered for Ms. Piggle and couldn't thank her enough. They strapped themselves together and flew back to the White House.

Ms. Piggle and the President snuck back into the White House and into the secret room so that no one knew that they were gone.

Finally a security guard came in and said everything was ok and that the President and Ms. Piggle could come out.

For Ms. Piggle's braveness, the President promoted her to head of security of the country.

No one ever heard or saw the purple foam or aliens again.

Ral and Fizzel vs. The Smegas

Intelligent creatures unite! Those on the side of good must stand against evil wherever it takes them in **RAL AND FIZZEL VS. THE SMEGAS**,
by **Franz V. H. Lothringen**.

Five thousand years have passed since 2005. Ral just went into retirement from the wars. He lives in a shack and he looks like a lion, but he has the characteristics of a human.

One day Ral was tuning up a ship when a meteoroid flew by. Ral went to check it out. There seemed to be a ship with a robot in there. Ral thought to himself, *I could sell this robot to someone.*

Ral put the robot on his desk. When Ral was just about to go out to finish tuning, the robot woke and said, “My name is Fizzel. I have been run out of my planet by some strange aliens.” Then he said, “Aren’t you that famous soldier Ral?”

Ral said, “Yes, I am. I could help you if you want.”

Fizzel said, “All right.”

Ral said, “I’ll strap you to my back.”

Ral and Fizzel went back to Fizzel’s planet. When Ral got out, no one was there. Ral almost forgot Fizzel was with him.

They were walking and walking when, out of nowhere, an alien came out. Ral started to run with Fizzel on his back. Fizzel said, “Run faster! He’s gaining on us.”

Ral and Fizzel hurried and ran to the ship. Ral said, “Thank God we made it. Fizzel, can you check out what that was?”

Fizzel scanned the alien. Fizzel said, “They’re Smegas, one of the deadliest aliens in the galaxy.”

They flew back to Ral's shack. Fizzel said, "Can you fight the aliens I scanned?"

Ral said, "Ok."

Fizzel said, "Do you have any weapons here?"

Ral said, "No, I don't have any weapons except a wrench."

Fizzel said, "I know a man who sells weapons."

Ral said, "What planet does he sell that stuff on?"

Fizzel said, "Planet Finvar."

Ral and Fizzel traveled to Finvar. Then they went back to their ship. Ral thought of an idea just as he went in the ship. Ral said, "Hey, Fizzel, is there a transformation gadget?"

Fizzel said, "Yes, there is, but you have to go through a tournament to get it."

Ral said, "Which planet is the tournament on?"

Fizzel said, "Freashvard."

They went to Freashvard. When they got there, one space was left in the tournament. Ral said "Just in time."

It was their turn up; everyone was eliminated except Ral and Fizzel. They got the transformation gadget.

Ral and Fizzel went back to Fizzel's planet. They used the transformation gadget to disguise themselves and sneak by the aliens. They were just in front of the gate when Fizzel accidentally touched the transformation button. They turned back into themselves. Ral said, "That's not good."

They hurried and ran through the castle. When they came into the room, there must have been about a thousand aliens going to attack them. Ral and Fizzel decided to fight.

Ral had to take out all the Smegas on the balcony. One alien was right behind Ral. When Fizzel threw antidote at the alien, Ral got some kind of gunk on his face. Ral said, "Eww!"

Ral threw his wrench like a boomerang at three aliens. They were just in front of the door. Ral said, "Here we go!" They went through the door and found King Smega.

King Smega said, "You defeated my army. Now you must fight me." Ral almost got hit with acid. When he dodged it, he kept shooting him. King Smega transformed into Singa, the

deadliest scientist in the galaxy. Ral said, “Didn’t you take over ten different planets?”

Singa said, “Yes, I did.”

Then Ral threw Fizzel.

Fizzel had a self-destruct button. Fizzel blew up.

Ral was crying because Fizzel sacrificed himself to save the planet. Ral walked over to the broken pieces of Fizzel. They started to come back together. Ral said, “You’re alive!”

Fizzel said, “What happened?”

Ral said, “You blew up Singa.”

The mayor congratulated Ral and Fizzel for their courage. The mayor said, “Thank you for saving our planet!”

Fizzel said, “All in a day’s work!”

Ral moved to Fizzel’s apartment on Venfar. The mayor said, “Ral, would you like to be a commando?”

Ral said, “Yes.”

Stuck in the Future

*We still don't have the robots and flying cars that were supposed to be here by the beginning of the 21st century. If only we could have gone on the same adventure as the narrator of **STUCK IN THE FUTURE** by **Jack DiLaura**, we would have known what to expect.*

It all started that one September day I missed the bus. How would I know this would lead to events I would never forget?

When I got home, I found a box on our doorstep addressed to me. I realized later if I had not missed the bus, I probably wouldn't even have seen the box, as it was neatly tucked next to the door, where I only noticed it walking up the steps. Usually, when I ride the bus, I go in the garage door and don't even glance at the front door.

Finally! I thought. I had sent in for a remote control car months ago. Being 1961, this was a big deal. Not many kids on my block had a model car, let alone a remote control car.

However, when I opened the box, it ended up being a small TV-like machine. This amazed me, since televisions usually were bigger and bulkier. I was curious, so I pressed the POWER button. The whole screen lit up, and a small stick, like a pencil without lead, popped out of one of the sides. At the top of the tiny screen, the words "Time Traveler 3000 SE" were shown. At the bottom there were the symbols "© 2010."

"2010?" I said aloud. That was 49 years from now!

A list of options popped up. There was a menu inside that said "Future" and another that said "Past." I figured the pencil-like stick was to touch the screen. I tapped "Future" and more options came up. This menu had numbers on it. I selected "2004."

Suddenly everything started spinning in front of me. I looked around. Things looked the same, or did they? Our tree in the front yard was gone. We had three cars in the garage that looked different than Mom's old Bel-Air and Dad's Ford Skyliner. These cars looked quite bizarre. In 1961, most cars had large tailfins, while these had rounded backs.

I decided to look around town. It was then I realized it. *This must be the future*, I thought. But that seemed impossible!

I saw that instead of a diner, there was something called a "McDonalds" and a "Wendy's." What were these? *Man*, I thought, *this place is packed with cars*. The street seemed wider too.

Instead of the old 5 and 10, there was a "Computer Store" that had white plastic cubes with screens on them inside. They looked a little like President Kennedy's small portable TV. "What are computers?" I said to myself.

Next to that, there was a "Radio Shack." It looked like a cool store so I went in. This place was full of gadgets! There were even cordless telephones! "Impossible" is what our teacher had said. In 2004, though, it was a reality. There were rows of what I thought were larger time machines. (It would be years before I discovered that these were really plasma screen televisions.) Also, I found computers were like TVs, but you could use programs on them. These programs could vary from games to typing processors (as the man at the counter put it).

After leaving Radio Shack, I saw a "Meijer" down the road. I decided to go there, since the parking lot was filled with cars. I went to the Meijer and found it was a store with everything you ever wanted rolled into one.

I went to the "video games" section, because I was curious to find out what video games were. There were three controllers, one labeled "PS2," another labeled "Xbox," and another labeled "Gamecube." I wondered what these did. I pressed "X" on the "PS2" controller and a little car on a screen above moved forward. "Wow, this is so neat!" I said.

I looked around the store some more. There were cameras with screens on them! I was flabbergasted! *This stuff is great!* I thought.

I then wanted to go to the boy's department, to see what would be in style. It looked like blue jeans and t-shirts with words or pictures printed on them.

I then found I was hungry. At least I found, after I left Meijer, the Dairy Queen was still around. I got a small cone with vanilla ice cream. Then I remembered how my brother and I used to compete to be first in line.

Thinking about my family made me feel homesick. I walked around our town a little more, then decided I wanted to go home and see my family. But, I had better not tell anyone about this, I thought.

I pressed POWER, selected "Past," and found the menu where I tapped "1961." The world in front of me spun before my face, and soon I was back in my front yard, that day I missed the bus in September

The Way In

*When a curious child becomes obsessed with a secret room, adventure is bound to follow. Nevertheless, expect the unexpected from **THE WAY IN**, by Allison Woodberg.*

A wisp of cool air felt relaxing as I stepped out the door. “Oh, how I love Fridays,” I said to Abby as I reached the bus stop. We stood there for several minutes, waiting for the big flashing lights of the bus.

Ding! went the sound of the bell for first period. I stepped into Language Arts and sat down as I read the board for our morning writing assignment. We were supposed to write about something we were curious about, or something we had never done that we wanted to do. As I thought carefully about the topic, I realized that I had never been in my parents’ lab. It was a big secret and I wanted desperately to go in there. Although I had always wanted to, I never had the guts. This is what I wrote:

Do your parents have a secret room that you’re not allowed in? Well, mine do! I have absolutely no idea what is in there, but I really want to find out! I’ve lived there my whole life, but I’ve never been allowed to go into that room! Do you have any idea how I could get into that room?

All the rest of that long morning, I was thinking about that room!

I met up with Abby at lunch. I was starved! I started to tell her about the writing assignment and how curious I was to find out about that room. “That’s it,” I said as I slammed my lunch tray down on the wooden table. “I am going to find out exactly what’s in that room.”

“That’s great, but how will you do it?” asked Abby.

“That’s gonna be the hard part,” I answered.

I thought school would never end. The afternoon’s three hours felt like six! I just wanted to get home.

Finally, the last bell of the day rang, and I ran toward the bus. I grabbed a seat next to Abby and prepared for the most interesting story of my life.

I came home and ran to my room. I came up with a clever list of ways to figure out how to get into or see what was in that room:

1. Look through crack under door.
2. Pick the lock to the room.
3. Make a hole in the wall.

This won’t be easy, I thought to myself. *I have no time to waste!*

I tiptoed out of my room and looked around carefully. My parents were in the kitchen, so the coast was clear. “This is it,” I whispered quietly. I got down level with the ground and I tried to see. It was just too small of an area.

Well, I thought, *nobody’s looking. I’ll just go in.* As I stood up, I felt a light tap on my shoulder. I turned around to find my mom standing, peering over me.

“Please go clean your room, honey,” she said.

“Okay,” I responded, not in the mood to protest with her.

After I cleaned my room, I picked up the phone and dialed Abby’s phone number. “Hello,” said Abby.

“Hey,” I said.

“What’s up?” she asked.

“You’ll never guess,” I responded. “I looked through the crack in the door.”

“Did you see anything?”

“Nope. But I actually tried!”

“You’re not gonna give up, are you?” questioned Abby.

“Of course not. I won’t give up until I find out!” I said sternly.

“Good,” responded Abby.

“I’ve got to go now, but I just wanted to tell you,” I said.

“Okay. Bye!” said Abby, sounding surprised I wasn’t going to give up.

I rolled out of my bed and the alarm clock read “11:00.” I stretched and got dressed in a blue shirt and a pair of black pants. “Breakfast!” I heard my mom shout from the kitchen.

I sat down and saw pancakes with maple syrup, apple juice, and strawberries. “It looks delicious,” I said as I was sticking my fork into the light, fluffy pancakes.

“What are you doing today?” questioned my mom.

“I’m going to Abby’s house, but we might come back here after,” I answered.

“That’s fine with me,” responded Mom.

I walked down the street to Abby’s house in the hot sun that I could already feel burning on my skin like eggs on a frying pan. I went to ring the doorbell, but Abby just popped out and I jumped back. We went inside and up to her room.

“So what are you going to do now?” asked Abby.

“What do you mean?”

“You know, what will you do next about the room?”

“Oh, I have an idea.... Do you have a hair clip?” I asked.

“Yeah. Do you need it for something?”

“Yeah, I’m going to pick the lock on the door,” I said.

“Great idea,” Abby said confidently.

“Thanks.”

“Do you want to go try it out?” said Abby.

“Sure,” I responded.

We walked downstairs and out the door, back into the flaming hot sun of midday.

We stepped in my house and sneaked to the room. I placed the sharp edge of the barrette into the small keyhole and twisted it. It didn't work, so we kept twisting, hoping and praying the barrette would open it. *Snap!* The plastic barrette broke in two. "Oh, no!" said Abby. "My barrette!"

"I'm so sorry," I replied.

"It's okay."

We walked back to my room, very upset. "Time for Plan C, I guess," I said unhappily.

"Yeah, time for Plan C. But what is Plan C?" she asked. I didn't answer as we made our way to the family room.

"Would you like to stay for dinner, Abby?" offered my mom as we walked in.

"Sure. What are you having?"

"Chicken and soup," answered Mom.

The next day, I woke up as the bright streaming light from the rising sun outside my window shone through. I slowly crawled out of bed and walked to my dresser to pick out my clothes. I looked over at my calendar. It was Sunday, which meant...Sunday School.

I walked into Jewish History class, and there waited Mrs. Goodman, who was really nice and made it fun to be at school on Sunday. Still, the time went by seeming like class would never end! Eventually, it did. I happily rushed out of Temple and met my Dad at our silver minivan. We drove home with the windows open, trying to get a bit of cool summer breeze.

When we got home, I ate a quick lunch—just a PB and J sandwich—and decided to try my third idea. I walked into the creepy old attic to grab the hammer. I brushed the dirt off the rusty hammer.

I quietly crept back into the house and to the room. Before I did anything, I checked and saw my mom and dad deep into a movie.

I couldn't believe what I was going to do! I pulled the hammer back, and with a huge booming sound, the hammer

crashed against the wall. All that was there was a crack. I heard my parents get up.

I sprinted to my room, threw the hammer under my bed, and pretended I was doing homework. My dad came into my room and asked, “Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?” I responded cluelessly.

I sat in my room, unsure what to do next. I was thinking and thinking, *What can I do? Well...there is one thing I never tried. Maybe, just maybe, there is a spare key somewhere. Now I had better start figuring out places I wouldn't normally look.* I decided I would look for it the next day, once I got home.

After school, I came home to find my dad at work and my mom reading her new book. I crept into the family room and stuck my hand into the couch cushions to check if there was a key there. I felt around, but no luck. All that was there were a few popcorn kernels.

Next, I searched the garage. I looked in corners and boxes. I looked everywhere in that garage that you could imagine! By then I had to go eat dinner.

I was busy doing things the rest of the night, so I didn't have time to continue looking. But I knew I would look the next day.

I walked in the door. My parents weren't in sight, so I ran straight to the backyard and went into the old red shed. I peered around the shed and found...a map. It was a map of our backyard!

I looked at the faded old map and saw a large red “X” next to the pine tree. So I grabbed a large shovel and started digging.

I was flinging dirt up into my face. All of a sudden, I hit something! I dropped the shovel and bent down to find a key!

I ran inside, straight to the room. I bit my lip, closed my eyes, and took a deep breath. This was the moment I had been waiting for.... I turned the key and opened the door.

I walked into the room and opened my eyes. I couldn't believe what I saw.

There was a TV with little antennas. The TV was labeled “Space Connection”! I walked around and saw a computer, and a weird-looking drink next to a bottle of chemicals of all colors. Then I heard a *ding* as an elevator opened its doors.

Out came my parents!

“I, uh, didn’t know you were home yet,” I stammered.

“You’re ready now.”

“Ready for what?”

My parents reached behind their backs and each pulled a zipper. They dropped their human suits and just stood there. They were aliens!

“Oh my gosh!” I said, amazed. There were just no words for it.

“You are an alien, too,” said Mom.

“What!” I said, confused.

“I know this is hard to believe, but it’s true,” said Dad. “We knew you were going to come in here, so we waited for you.”

“How did you know?”

“Well, there was the time I tapped you on the shoulder when you were by the door. Also, there was a piece of a hair clip in the keyhole, and a huge crack in the wall,” said Mom.

“Oh. I guess I didn’t hide things too well,” I said.

“Well, at least you know the truth now,” said Dad.

“There’s something we want you to have,” my mom said. She placed a key into my hand.

“It’s a key to this room. Now you are free to come here whenever you want,” said Dad.

“Come on, what are we waiting for? We’ll show you how all of this stuff works,” said Mom.

We got up, and I was still clenching the key, just like I knew I always would.

When Aliens Attack

*The fate of the world is on the shoulders of a boy who invited aliens to visit Earth in **WHEN ALIENS ATTACK**, by **Ishpinder Sahni**.*

There was a boy named James. He was in the fifth grade and was very, very smart. He made cool things, like a way to back to the past, and a way to change his voice so no one would know that it was him. James was the smartest boy in the whole class.

But one day, he sent a message to the aliens on the planet Zotopia by shooting a rocket he made. It said, "Hi, my name is James. I live on the planet Earth. The town where I live is called Glacier Hill. I would love for you to come."

The aliens' plan was that they would be very nice to humans by washing their cars and mowing their lawns and doing other things. Then they would get a bear that is ten times bigger than a regular bear for an attack on Earth. It had a green face and a blue body because the bear ate souls.

The aliens came to Earth and started with their plan. But James knew that aliens might not be very nice. James went to investigate and overheard them talking because he was behind a wall. He heard the plan that they would invite the people of the town to a party. The aliens would get their bear to eat all the souls, then take them back to Zotopia and make them slaves.

James told other people, and they said that he was crazy.

James had three days to plan how to get rid of the bear. He decided that he would get a very big pool and put acid in it so the bear would melt.

It was the day of the party. James went very early to set the pool up. At the party, everyone had a very good time. But after a while, the bear came. James was ready, but he had to get the bear

into the acid. He threw an apple, and the bear went into the pool and melted. The aliens got scared and left.

The town told James it was sorry, and the people said they would believe James from then on.

UNREAL

Angel

*An old house can be spooky for its new occupants. Eighth-grader Hannah wants to know what goes bump in the night at her new home in **ANGEL**, by **Annie Haberlein**.*

Monday, September 1

Dear Hannah,

I am giving you this notebook as a going away present since you are moving to California. We can still be BFF's, right? I love you so much and we have to email each other every day. I know I can count on you. I am going to miss you so much! IM (instant message) me every day and call me on the phone. Tell me how your new life is going. I bet that it's great! TTYL (talk to you later).

Today is my first day of the eighth grade. I just got a new diary for my moving party and this is the first time I have written in it. My friend Jane gave it to me when I lived in Georgia. She used to be my BFF (Best Friend Forever) and we are still friends now. We have to write and IM each other online, though, or call, but not a lot.

I was so excited and nervous for my first day here. I have never told a single lie my whole life and everyone can trust me. I just moved to San Francisco. A lot of stars live here and it is really fun. It is really hot here and I love to go swimming all the time in the summer in California.

It was pretty cool there. I lived on a street named Hannah Blvd. I really like that name because that is what my name is. My name is Hannah Browning. I have two sisters named Haley and Zoë and I have one brother named Scott. I also have a mom and a

dad. They are not really regular parents. They let me do some things that other parents would never let their kids do. I am 13 and I will be turning 14 next year. I have long wavy brown hair and green eyes. I love to play tennis and to shop.

It is September 1st. I have met but one friend so far and her name is Rose Smith. She also lives on my street.

Tuesday, September 2

Well, as you know I had just moved into a new house and it is big and sort of creepy. My parents thought it was a historic antique, but I think it's sort of junky and old. All the kids in the neighborhood so far have mentioned to me that my house is haunted and that the family that lived here before moved out because they couldn't take the house's haunting anymore! I am a little scared, but Rose thought it was a ridiculous idea. So do I in some ways, but the thing is that I kept hearing noises coming from my attic! (Creepy!)

Well, this Friday I am inviting Rose to come sleep over so that she can hear it, too, and maybe we can find out what it is, even.

Saturday, September 6

Yesterday evening, Rose came over at about 7:00 and we got ready for bed and watched a movie. Our curfew was at 12:00, so at 11:00 we lay down and listened for the noises. After about 15 minutes we heard them: rumbling and tumbling, moaning and groaning! I was freaked out but I had to know what it was.

Rose and I then went out into the hall and we could feel the noises getting louder and louder in our ears. We slowly tiptoed up the stairs to the attic and tried to turn on the light, but the bulb was burned out! We were really scared when we decided to leave. Then we heard a huge "THUMP!" and we looked down the stairs to find that the door had blown shut and we were locked in the attic! We screamed and banged at the door but nobody answered!

We finally stopped, crept back upstairs, and found a place to sit down.

We could hear all these noises around us like we were surrounded by something. We could feel the wet floor under us and we were so freaked out! We were terrified just sitting there for the whole night, wondering if we were ever going to get out. Of course we knew we would, but we were still terrified. Then, we heard a voice.

“Girls?” We jumped out of our skin at the sound of this! Then we turned around to find a little girl standing there! We asked her where she was from and how she got into my house! She said she heard things from outside when she was taking her dog for a walk! It was already 9:00!

She said she heard us and climbed up the storm ladder into the attic to help us. She helped us get out. She told us her name was Angela and she told us where she lived, and if we ever needed help we should come over to her.

We went home to find that my parents were furious! We had to tell them the whole story so we did. Turns out they hadn’t called the police yet because they slept in and they only noticed we were gone 30 minutes before. Thank goodness! Our parents always make us act “polite,” so they made us walk over to Angela’s house to thank her.

We went up to her door and asked her mother, “Can we talk to Angela?” and the mother said, “Huh? What? Are you trying to pull some kind of evil prank? My daughter Angela disappeared ten years ago when she was five and no one ever found her.”

I was speechless. Rose and I were astounded. We just pretended like it was the wrong house. We also told our parents that she was really nice and that she said “You’re welcome.” This was the first time I had ever had to lie, but I thought I needed to.

Rose and I haven’t told a soul our story about our little ghost friend Angela and we would totally like to keep it that way. We wonder if Angela has been making the noises and if she would ever come back, but that’s another story. I guess it will always be a mystery. We also wondered if Angela was long for “Angel.”

The Ants' Big Move

There's a world going on underground—and it makes its way to the surface, too.
THE ANTS' BIG MOVE, by **Bradley Almeter**, looks into the secret life of ants.

"I hate you! Get away!" the queen ant said with hatred.

"I hate this entire hill," Young William said.

"Then go find a new one, and don't come back till you do!" shouted the queen. "Don't talk about it, because you are just getting me more mad talking about it."

"How you doin', Bill?" asked Eric.

"Just fine," replied Bill.

"How can you be only 'just fine'? 'Just fine' in the middle of Hill Party?"

"You see," said Bill, "the queen ant is kicking my out unless I find us a new home before the end of Hill Party."

"How are you supposed to do that? Hill Party is over in less than 72 hours," said Eric.

"I don't know," Bill replied.

"I have an idea!" exclaimed Eric. "We could find a few others that want to come, and—*voilà*—we go find a new home."

"Yeah, right; who is gonna want to skip Hill Party to go find a new home during the cold and rainy season?"

"Good question," said Eric. "But I think I know where to find some."

Meanwhile at the anthill, things were going along perfectly. The queen and the 500 other ants were having a jolly old time.

"Too bad those loser are missing out on the fun," said the queen.

“Oh, don’t worry about them,” an ant reassured her. “Hill Party comes only once every four years. Why waste it on those seven crazy ants anyway?”

“Well, it is not his fault you were still wiped out over the fencing match when you were screaming at him,” an ant said. “But he cheated.”

“You have a point. They chose to go.”

“We didn’t make them go, did we?” asked the queen.

“No, no,” an ant reassured her, “and since this is your last Hill Party as Queen, you might as well enjoy it.”

Early the next morning, Eric, Bill, and a few others set out to find a new home. There was Eric, Young William (Bill), Joey, George, Fred, Luke and William Senior that set out on this expedition. It was really crummy weather and Joey was complaining to Young William about the severe conditions in this forest. Pockets of water were falling from the sky. The group of seven men decided to take a rest under a large umbrella type plant.

The pockets of water had turned to large white flakes and the lakes had become slippery. Nevertheless, the journey rolled on, through the forest, onto the black desert, across the plains of the sidewalk, and from house to shining house.

One of the scouts ahead reported back an urgent message of giants on long things reaching very fast speeds, and that Fred had gotten killed by the smaller one. He advised not to come that way. The youngest of the group, who happened to be Young William, decided this danger was too great.

“What should we do? Provide a burial service?”

“Yes, we should provide a proper burial service.”

“But I want to celebrate Hill Party.”

“Too bad. We have dead friends. We are not going to celebrate Hill Party.”

Then out of nowhere, this HUGE box on wheels came and wiped out William Senior, Luke, and George in one hit.

They didn’t know what to make of it. Then there were more. Out of nowhere, two more came. Soon it was a steady stream of boxes on wheels.

It was three days after Hill Party had ended when the queen sent a few people to look for them. They asked Bill where everybody was, and why they weren't back at the anthill. "Well, you see, this box on wheels came out of nowhere and killed some. It was a big black thing that just took them out. It was going so fast you could hardly see it, so we didn't have time to react," Bill replied. "We need your help."

"Ah, actually, over half the ant hill is looking for you."

"Why would she send so many?" Bill asked.

"Well, after Hill Party ended, she thought it would be a good time to move. So about half the hill was sent out looking for you."

"So what are you saying?" Bill asked.

"We are moving," replied the young stray ant.

"I knew she wanted to all along," said Bill.

Back on their never-ending quest for a new home, they marched on. Then they came upon an enormous structure. "This is it!" Bill cried out. "The queen will be so happy."

They crawled under a large cliff and were in the best place they had been in their entire lives. Eric said, "We must get the queen."

"Already on her way," exclaimed one of the newcomers.

"But how—never mind. Let's get settled."

The next day the rest of the hill arrived. That day a new holiday was formed: All Ants Day! "This holiday is the best," Bill said.

"Duh!" said the queen. "It is celebrated after you."

Crumbs were served and the new holiday All Ants Day was a great way to end Hill Party. "I have one question," said the queen. "What happened to the other ants?"

"They didn't make the long journey."

"Then we must provide a proper burial service."

"This is beautiful," said the queen. There were leaves, a soft floor, and lots of tears. "I wish these ants could be here to see our wonderful new home." *DONG, DONG.* "Time to get our seats," the queen said.

"We gather here to welcome these four ants into the gates of Heaven," said the priest in a low voice.

"That was the best ant funeral I've been to," said the queen.

"It's the only ant funeral you've been to," Bill told her.

The Baldwin Library Mystery

In THE BALDWIN LIBRARY MYSTERY by Courtney Thomas, the fury of nature threatens the safety of a group of children and their librarian. But there may be other forces at work....

Today at the Baldwin Library, the youth librarian has scheduled storytelling to community kids. The librarian announced today's topic: ghost stories. She said, "Everyone gather around."

The story was about a racecar that was missing. When the owner found it, no one was driving it. The car was driving itself! Although the story was interesting, what happened at the library was more interesting.

Outside it was unusually dark, and it had been raining all day. Kids were coming in soaked, and they appreciated the nice cozy room. The librarian continued reading. As she was reading, the lights began to flicker on and off and on and off. Although this was annoying and strange, the librarian acted as if nothing was happening. The kids began to move about and were more interested in what was happening in the room than in the story she was telling.

Poof! The room went dark and silent. Then the mayhem began. Kids were out of control, screaming, weeping, and yelling, "What's going on?"

The librarian had to think quickly. She ran to her desk, opened the drawer, pulled out her whistle, and blew it three times to get their attention. "Everyone calm down," she said in the calmest voice she could. "I will call for help, but I need you to sit quietly and I will call for assistance." Almost everyone had

calmed down, but the younger children proved to be more difficult. Shrieks and cries penetrated the room, and there wasn't anything she could do.

Jerry the technician finally arrived, and she turned her attention to him, saying, "Please help me get the children out of here and into a room with lights." Jerry did not respond. He instead reached behind the desk, used a tool, and the lights were back on.

The librarian was relieved, but still had a room of unsettled kids to calm down. She blew her whistle once and said, "It's okay; the lights are back on." In that instant, Jerry left the room and it started all over again. *Ob no*, she thought, *this is not good*. Lights were on, off, on, off, and suddenly the two double doors slammed shut. Jerry was not in sight as he had escaped before the doors closed.

Everything was so dark the librarian began to realize more was going on outside than a few rain showers. They were experiencing a tornado! The librarian blew her whistle three times and began to say these words, almost screaming: "Everyone! It is okay! Please listen!" She began to turn over the tables and asked them to come to the middle of the room behind the tables that were turned over. She said, "We're having terrible weather. It is very important you listen to me, and everyone will be okay."

At that moment, Jerry was back in the room. Mysteriously he appeared. The doors did not open and the windows were not open. It was apparent Jerry was not human; he was something different. He never responded when the librarian asked him questions, and he did not appear concerned about the weather outside. There was some connection to Jerry and the lights.

Later when the weather was better, the librarian went to the basement to get paper and found a bag with the name "Jerry" on it. It was directly below the floor of the youth room. He liked to listen to the stories. Jerry may have been an angel who protected the kids when they were in the library. The librarian began to realize Jerry was always there when she needed him. He had to have been an angel!

Bermuda Triangle

*Is there such a thing as alien abductions? Make up your own mind about the mystery behind **BERMUDA TRIANGLE**, by **Nathan Brickman**.*

“It looks like a gigantic rainbow or alien. Don’t come after us.” That was the last the control tower in Miami heard from Flight 19 when they were flying over the Bermuda Triangle.

On a bright blue-sky day, Al Grosky was sitting on the couch sipping his coffee next to his partner at Miami airbase in Florida. Al said, “It is a gorgeous day for flying today, isn’t it?”

Al’s partner said, “It sure is.”

Suddenly, on the loudspeaker, Al heard, “All pilots report to your aircrafts now. Flight 19 has gone missing.” At that point Al and his partner ran outside into the hot air and jumped into their fighter jet. He was a little worried that he might come up missing, too. Al and his partner started up the plane and rode into the sun-filled sky.

After about three hours of searching, a weird green haze started to gather around the jet. Al said, “Do you see that green haze?”

His partner replied, “No, what green haze?”

Suddenly everything shut off and it was pitch black. Al heard a moaning sound coming from his partner. Al said to his partner, “Are you okay?” He did not respond. Then the light turned on, and his partner was gone. Again, the lights turned off. Al heard the moaning sound once again. He screamed and then the plane started to jerk and twisted in all different directions. He could not take it anymore, so he closed his eyes and hoped it would be over soon.

Everything had turned still and bright when he finally decided to open his eyes. He started to tremble and shake nervously.

Where am I? What happened? Why is it so cold? Is this a dream? Al wondered. He noticed everything around him was bright silver chrome, and he was sitting on a hard metal bench.

Then he heard a clanging noise. He froze like an ice cube. The pilots from Flight 19 walked around the corner. All six of them were still there.

Al was totally shocked and petrified by their appearance. He was paralyzed and frozen stiff as a stick. Finally, one of the pilots said, "Are you okay?" Al was speechless. No words came out. All he could do was stare.

His daze lasted for about five minutes, and the only words he could think of saying were, "Am I dead?"

One of the pilots said, "I think we were all abducted by strange-looking things, possibly aliens, and we might never make it back home!"

Al could not remember how he got to this place with the others. He asked them, "Did I faint? Did I get knocked out? What happened?" The pilots told him he had indeed fainted and was dragged into this prison room by the aliens.

All of a sudden, Al heard the moaning sound again, except this time it was worse. The sound was thumping in his head. Al said to the pilot in a frightened tone, "Do you hear that moaning?" There was no time for a response.

The door flung open and there stood a tall, green, slimy, big-eyed thing with a white and orange spacesuit with the words "Nebula 7" written on it. Al became numb all over. He could not believe what he was seeing.

One of the pilots from Flight 19 pulled out a handgun and started firing at the alien. But the bullets just deflected right off the alien, and after about five shots he gave up. The alien made a hand gesture that signaled them to follow him.

The alien took them through a long chrome corridor, with chrome floors and walls. The walls were covered with paintings of aliens wearing crowns. They came to a door with two alien guards blocking the door. The aliens began speaking some weird kind of gibberish alien language and the guards stepped aside.

The doors opened and the room ahead was dim with a wood creaky floor and wood paneled walls. In one of the corners, there

was a big window that looked like a pyramid with some other type of alien figure standing in front of it. A table with an army's worth of food came up from the floor and the alien next to the window said, "Please sit down and eat."

Everyone looked at each other, and Al stepped forward and said, "We are not eating this; it may be poison."

The alien said, "Fine, I will enjoy it by myself."

One by one, the pilots sat down and started eating. Al was the last one standing and eventually sat down to eat. In the middle of the meal the alien said, "We are going to put you in rectangular tubes and do testing on you so we can take over the world."

Al stood up and said, "We will never let you do testing on us."

The alien said, "I doubt that."

The alien pushed a red button and everyone fell down a chute into the cube the alien described. Al heard the moaning sound again. He closed his eyes and tried to fight it off. Out of nowhere, bright, pretty lights came on and then...*BAM!*

He was on his front porch and no one in the world knew that he had been gone. Al himself was not quite sure whether he had truly been gone!

He decided to check out the airbase. When he arrived, everything seemed normal. Even his plane was sitting on the runway as if it had never left.

Cartoon World

*The universe that cartoons operate in seems like it would be a fun place to visit. After all, what could go wrong in the happy land of cartoon characters? You are about to find out in **CARTOON WORLD**, by **John Downey**.*

“Hey, Phil, how many skips was that?”

“Ten. How many was yours?”

“None. I tied my all time record. Yeah! Hey, Phil, try throwing this multicolored rock.”

“Hey, Dill, doesn’t this rock look like it came from a cartoon? Well, here it goes, Dill.” It skipped into the middle of the lake. Then it made a huge splash. “Dill, look where I skipped the rock to. There’s a whirlpool getting larger and larger.”

“Why is a whirlpool that’s multicolored just like the rock sucking us in, Phil? I’m scared!”

“I don’t know, Dill.”

The whirlpool sucked them into another dimension. When they got there, they were standing in a cartoon-like place. It had a lot of blue trees that did the polka while wearing tutus, and a lake that constantly laughed.

“Where are we, Phil?”

“I don’t really know where we are. Let’s ask that guy wearing a pink bunny costume.”

“Where are we, sir?”

“Ahh! You’re intruder cartoons! Wait, you’re the real people I went to get. Sorry about that.

“You’re in cartoon world, sucked in by a whirlpool. You have to save this cartoon, or else everyone who is a cartoon would turn into armor for the monkey. Help us, please!”

“But how?”

The guy was gone.

They fought almost every kind of evil. Most of them had aqua color star-shaped heads that always laughed. Dill and Phil both laughed at all the different types of laughs. The cartoons laughed like pigs and every kind of language in the world—even horses and bears.

Dill was hit by an anvil, but it didn't hurt him. And it wasn't over.

They would have to face the evil giant monkey who hated everyone but cartoons. The monkey was as big as the Empire State Building, as white as a sheet of paper, and had a clown nose that was green instead of red. He had tiny beady eyes the size of a drop of water and had buckteeth as large as a tire.

They fought and fought, but couldn't destroy the giant monkey. They tried feeding the giant monkey big, fat, blue, juicy bananas, but it didn't work. The monkey then took a big golf driver and whacked them. Phil dodged it by using his reflexes to do the splits.

Then Phil thought of something. He thought that they could use a shrinker, shrink the monkey, and step on him.

They drew the shrinker with a marker. It didn't work the first time. The boys were in shock. Dill even fainted. Phil then realized they forgot the batteries.

After Dill got up, they drew the batteries. They tried again and shrunk the monkey. Then they used their feet to destroy him.

In a flash, they were sent home. They found another multicolored rock and threw it, but it didn't work.

“Cartoon world can have peace and quiet, Dill.”

“Yup, you're right, Phil.” They decided to keep it a secret to themselves.

Cat People

*When the cat's away, the mice will play, but what do the cats do when their owners are away? You may never look at your pets in the same way after reading **CAT PEOPLE**, by **Antoinette Hill**.*

One breezy autumn day, the two owners of a house on Cherry Hill thought it would be a nice day to go out for a ride in the Jag they had. Tony was turning out of the drive and everything was fine. They had the music and they were just enjoying themselves. Tony was saying, "We're getting old. Enjoy life and be happy with what we have." Velma just smiled and let down the car window and smelled the autumn breeze. Velma loved working around people and enjoying life. As Tony turned the corner, two cats jumped into the road, which surprised Velma.

Tony didn't really care, but Velma was a very sweet, kind lady. So Velma got out of the car and said, "I'm going to take you home and feed you the greatest meal you ever had." Tony was looking at Velma as if to say, "You'd better not bring those things into my car."

Velma Hill came into the car with the kittens. Tony looked at her and said, "You are not taking those cats home."

Velma said, "They're homeless and in need of help."

Tony said, "I will let you keep them."

So Tony went home with Velma and they fed the kittens. What they did not know is these cats had cat powers. These cats could turn into humans when they felt they wanted to go out and discover the world.

One day Tony went out to take Velma to dinner. The cats waited until Tony and Velma were gone. The cats slowly came from up under the couch and started talking to each other. "Sam," India yelled out.

Sam said, "What?"

India said, "This house is boring, but the people are nice."

Sam went upstairs although he knew better not to. India followed and said, "Sam, you can't go up there."

Sam said, "What's there to worry about?"

India said, "You have a point."

Sam said, "I'm going to change into a human and I'm going to walk around the neighborhood." And Sam said, "I'm going to transform outside."

India said, "Ok. I will pick out the clothes." India went to go pick out a jacket for Sam and a matching outfit. She picked out some jeans and a sweatshirt for her.

Off India and Sam went. They opened the door and kept the door unlocked. The cats went to walk around the block. They did not know the neighbor, Jill, was looking at them transform.

Sam said, "This is nice."

Sam went on the sidewalk where the neighbor's house was. The neighbor said, "Who are you, and what are you doing in Tony and Velma's house?"

Sam and India said, "Tony and Velma just got cats and we were watching them."

She said, "Ohh," but then she looked confused. She looked at them and said, "My imagination drives me nuts."

India and Sam continued to walk, but India said she had a bad feeling about being out there, so she decided to go home. Sam said, "Fine."

The cats transformed back, went back into the house, and sat by the fireplace. India said, "I wonder if the neighbors will ask any questions about what happened today."

Sam said, "I doubt it, India. I doubt it."

Right after they got in the house, Tony pulled up. India and Sam just looked at each other and smiled while Tony and Velma walked in. Then they quietly went to sleep.

Clean Up Your Room

Kevin needs to stop living like a slob. CLEAN UP YOUR ROOM, by Rodney Hill, gets the job done.

Kevin is not annoyed by moldy donuts. He's not annoyed by smashed sandwiches on the doorknob and the cheesy socks in the fish tank. The water in the fish tank is green and it's making the fish really sick.

There were crickets in his wall where the plug is. All the crickets were different colors, like the rainbow, but there is a main black cricket that is the leader of all crickets. All the crickets wanted the boy to clean up his room because they wanted to move out for more sweet and tasty food. So one night when the boy was snoring, all the crickets gathered up. The main black cricket said, "Start eating," so some of the bugs ate his shirt. Deeper and deeper they went, and thicker and thicker they got. The other bugs were biting him just to make him scratch himself.

One morning Kevin went downstairs to make himself a Pop-Tart. His mom woke up, and then she caught Kevin. She said, "Don't eat that yet, because you have to clean up your room first." So he cleaned everything that was on the floor, and he cleaned the fish tank. He was so happy once he cleaned his room because he was able to smell the fresh air.

He told his mom that he cleaned up his room. His mom was so proud that she let him have his Pop-Tart.

Then he was watching cartoons. His friends said, "Do you want to come outside and play?"

His mom said, "Yes, because you cleaned up your room."

Then it was getting dark, so he ate dinner with his mom and dad, grandma, and cousins. Then he had to go to bed. Then everyone was happy ever after.

Demon Busters

*Their mission is more dangerous than any they have taken on before. But there seems to be no other choice for the heroes of **DEMON BUSTERS**, by **Tatiana Boinais**.*

Ricardo woke up on the second floor of an abandoned warehouse. The floor-to-ceiling windows revealed a dark, starry night. The room was slightly aglow from the starlight, and he could just make out the silhouette of Balto, who was sleeping next to him on a rickety old cot, snoring gently. He turned and peeked over the back of the beat-up purple couch he used as a bed and spotted the old torn hammock, drooping. Laura, however, was nowhere to be seen.

Ricardo forced himself to place his feet on the cold cement floor. He shuffled over to the rusty old freight elevator, lifted up the large gate-like door and rode up to the roof. When he stepped out of the elevator, he saw Laura sitting in the loose gravel on the far side of the roof, wrapped tightly in a faded sleeping bag, gazing up at the shimmering stars.

Ricardo glanced up and said, "They're really bright tonight."

"You think?" asked Laura, without even turning to look at him.

"Yep... Why are you up here?" asked Ricardo.

"I couldn't sleep. I was thinking of Carmen. Do you think she is up in heaven with her mother?"

There was a slight pause, while each was lost in his or her own memories. Ricardo was the first to speak, "Well, she's in heaven somewhere!" Laura didn't reply. Ricardo watched his friend in the pale moonlight that gave a cool glow to her skin. He remembered the moment when he first met Laura at the orphanage, The Institute of Heart Broken Children. Her parents had just died in a car crash, and

she had been sent to live there. If your heart wasn't broken when you arrived, they broke it for you.

The orphanage is a dark gloomy square building with long lifeless hallways where the children are treated like nothing more than test animals. Ricardo doesn't know his real name. He was found when he was about one year old in Santiago Park, and the orphanage gave him the name Ricardo de Santiago. The Institute would use all kinds of remedies on the children and would mark down the kind of reactions they would have. Then the orphans would be given the cure and more results would be marked down.

Then his thoughts wandered to the time Laura had kissed him on the cheek. She was a beautiful 15-year-old English girl. Her long, jet-black hair lay tangled over her strong shoulders, and her sky blue eyes sparkled like crystals. A tomboy, she was afraid of dresses, but not much else. She had a wonderful personality and was friendly to all those she knew to be trustworthy, but to those who weren't—well, you understand. She could be very dangerous, and was not afraid to shoot a gun.

All of a sudden his thoughts turned to Carmen, and how brave she had been. She was the one who started this little band of renegade orphans. She was responsible for everything they had done. She wanted to stop the Toros, a gang of no-good people who killed anything and anyone who got in their way. Though Carmen was so close to reaching her goal, on their last encounter with the Toros she got shot with a bullet and died.

Balto, or Balthazar, was the one that made it easier for her to pass on. He is a Pengami, a gene experiment gone wrong. Scientists conducted experiments to find a way to create super humans. Unfortunately, the results were the opposite of what they had hoped for. Although he is 22, Balto is the size of a six-year-old. His dark brown hair is cropped very short, his nose is too big for his body, and he has jade green eyes. His small hands, instead of inflicting pain, could suck pain. He used this talent working as a medic in every hospital in the city.

Carmen died when the Toros had taken the band to their secret hideout. *Wait*, thought Ricardo, *if they captured us, they know where we are and they could be...*

Ricardo never finished his thought, because right then Laura screamed. It was this scream that brought Ricardo back to the present, in the year 2055, in Horizon City, on Sunset Street, on the roof of the abandoned warehouse.

There stood seven Toro thugs. Laura grabbed two by their heads and banged them together. Ricardo grabbed his gun and shot three. Laura yelled a warning, but it was too late. Ricardo spun around to find a Toro holding Laura, pointing a gun at her, and another pointing a gun at him.

Balto, who had been sleeping when the attack began, heard Laura's scream, grabbed his gun and quietly crept up the back staircase to find two his friends being held hostage at gunpoint. He moved in unnoticed.

"Don't move, or pretty princess here will be going down!" smirked one of the Toros.

Balto caught Ricardo's attention and winked. Then Balto and Ricardo shot simultaneously, and both Toros fell to the floor. Laura kicked the one that had previously been holding her.

"Pretty princess!" she spat in disgust.

"We may need to get a new place to stay. They do know where we are," suggested Balto.

"Why do they do such horrible things?" asked Ricardo.

"They have evildoers," answered Balto matter-of-factly.

"They have evil-what-ers?" questioned Laura and Ricardo in unison.

"Shoulder demons. They sit on your shoulder and persuade you to do evil things. But you don't hear them; you just have ideas."

"Oh," said Ricardo, shocked by the news.

"Is there a way to stop them?" asked Laura.

"Kill them."

"How?" piped up Ricardo.

"Shoot them, I guess," suggested Balto.

"Well, they need to breathe to talk," thought Laura out loud.

"So all we have to do is stop them from breathing. We..."

"Could use slugs to stop them," finished Balto.

"But how do we see them?" asked Ricardo.

"Well, since they sit on your shoulder, they are just out of eyesight, so we need to find a way to make your eyesight wider."

“We could install mirrors on glasses!” said Laura.

“That would work!” said Ricardo, excited by the thought of another adventure.

“Let’s try it out. But first, we need to find a better place to stay,” said Balto.

“After you,” said Laura while bowing.

The small troop went into the main room where Ricardo, Laura, and Balto started packing the few possessions that they had in brown paper grocery bags.

“I’ve got a place to stay!” Balto exclaimed, making the two others jump in surprise. “When I was working in the Sacred Heart Hospital, there was this patient that came in once. He had fallen off the stage and broken his leg. They were forced to close the theatre because it wasn’t safe. I bet no one’s been in there for years!”

“Maybe they still have costumes we could use to disguise ourselves with!” Laura said with enthusiasm.

Later that night they trudged across the city, and by morning they had set up their new home. They were exhausted and all fell asleep quickly.

At noon, Laura woke up and started getting materials out. By nightfall they had three pairs of shoulder-demon-proof glasses and three guns armed and ready for an adventure.

“The only thing left to do is track them down and locate their owners,” said Balto with a little too much confidence.

“Well, we know that some of the Toros have them,” said Laura.

“We could plant a tracker over there,” added Ricardo.

“Where do we find that?” asked Balto.

“We make it, of course,” Ricardo snorted.

“It can’t be that hard. I’m a mechanic,” said Laura.

“For now, we need rest,” said Balto, and he walked promptly to his new bunk and lay down. Ricardo and Laura looked at each other and followed suit. Within minutes, they were all sleeping undisturbed.

In the morning Ricardo got up to find Balto eating and Laura making something mechanical. Ricardo made a cheese sandwich from the basket of food they had brought with them. “What’s that?” he said through a mouthful of food.

“It’s a 360 camera,” answered Laura.

“What’s that?” asked Ricardo.

“A camera that films a video in 360 degrees.”

“How is that going to help us?” questioned Ricardo.

“We will put it at Toros’ headquarters, it will send a video signal to the background display equipment here in the theatre, then we can locate the people who have demons on their shoulders and track their every move by DNA.”

“But how do we put the camera in the Toros’ headquarters?” asked Ricardo.

“We found some costumes used for the theater. We can dress up like them and plant the camera. If we are lucky, the costumes may distract them long enough that we can plant the camera and get out before they realize who we are,” answered Balto. But of course, this is not what happened.

That night, three new Toro gang members were wandering around. They seemed to be meeting old friends. To any other passerby it would look rather casual, but it was exactly the opposite. These three Toros were Laura, Balto and Ricardo. They would find gang members and head in the direction their enemies had come from. After a couple of dead ends, they found the Toro base. Laura went in while Balto and Ricardo stayed by the door to make sure no one dangerous entered.

Laura had her glasses on and saw that not just some of the people had shoulder demons, but everyone had one! She resisted the urge to grab the gun she had hiding under her jacket. The gun was armed with slugs, bullets made from a combination of plastic, rubber, glass, and cement that immediately takes the shape of whatever it hits, then solidifies to form an unbreakable wall, making it impossible to move or breathe.

Laura found a nice quiet spot where there were only occasional passersby. They were spread out enough that she could put up the camera, but there was still enough traffic so that they could log the DNA down on the computer. What Laura had not realized was that the door right next to her was the door to the main conference room!

The weekly status meeting was just finishing and the best fighters were coming out. When they did, Laura acted as if she had been walking by. She said hello and kept on walking. It wouldn’t have mattered if it weren’t for one general who noticed that Laura’s hair

was not up in a braid. Unfortunately, Laura didn't know that wearing your hair down is not allowed, since it could bother you while fighting. He called out in a rough manner, "You there! Why is your hair not in a braid?"

"My rubber band broke, sir. I was just on my way to get another one," said Laura nervously.

The general, dressed from head to toe in a khaki uniform, walked over to her and handed her a rubber band. That was when he noticed he had never seen her before.

Laura immediately set to putting her hair in a braid. The general examined her closely. Squinting his eyes, standing at perfect attention, a puzzled look on his face, he started questioning her. "Why haven't I seen you before?"

"I'm new, sir," stammered Laura.

"How new? Have you gone through the training yet? Well, you don't seem to have memorized the manual. Who was your recruiter?" he asked, giving Laura the third degree.

"Yes, sir. I mean no sir. I'll try to do better, sir, I promise!"

"See that you do! I'll be paying very close attention to you from now on," he said. He turned on his heel and marched away.

Laura let out a sigh of relief. That was too close for comfort. She had already installed most of the camera. If she didn't finish soon, someone would be sure to notice. Laura quickly set up the rest of the camera, and put it in position where it filmed every aspect of the dull gray hallway, including the people that passed through it.

Outside, Ricardo and Balto had started a little gathering. Everyone headed for the door was invited to join them. No one went inside. The growing group of Toros was laughing and yelling. Balto and Ricardo were pretending to do the same. Suddenly Laura burst through the doors.

"You two," she yelled, pointing a grease-stained finger at Balto and Ricardo, "need to see me out by the gate. They shall be back after they have been punished." Balto and Ricardo followed, doing their best to act as though they were somewhat scared and reluctant. When they were out of the gate, they all took off running.

Once they were out of telescope range, they stopped and turned to Laura. She told them about her close call with the general, and explained to the two boys how to manipulate the camera. Worried

someone would figure things out, they headed back to the theater quickly, undressed themselves and got back into normal clothes.

“We won’t be able to use those costumes anymore. They would probably kill us,” commented Laura.

“Probably will anyway,” sulked Balto.

“No, they won’t. We are in a new hiding place. They can’t find us, and even if they do, we can disguise ourselves,” argued Ricardo.

“Will you two stop arguing and look at this?” interrupted Laura.

The three of them sat down and looked. The computer had logged in all of the DNA’s information from the Toros’ base, and they discovered how many demons there really were. Balto started calculating how many slug packets they needed. “Twenty if each pack holds 30 slugs and we don’t miss,” said Balto.

“Better make that thirty,” said Ricardo, still impressed by the number of shoulder demons there were in one building.

“Rick, are you okay? You look pale. I think you need a rest. You are too tired,” said Balto. Ricardo went to bed without complaining. He was tired.

When he woke up, Laura had the three packs armed, loaded, and ready to go. Balto had all the DNA information on his cell phone and a tracker ready.

That afternoon, the three went out as abandoned kids. They went toward the Toros’ base and walked in, saying that they were there to escape the police, and asking to join the gang.

“Please, sir, we have nowhere else to go,” begged Balto, who pretended to be a six-year-old.

“At least the little one. He is our little brother. We do not have food or shelter for him. He won’t do anything bad, but you will have to teach him how to shoot,” finished Laura.

“You may all stay. You look like good fighters, and the little one can learn,” said the Toro working the gate.

“Thank you so very much,” said Laura.

Each night after everyone was asleep, they took their guns, equipped them with silencers, then went from dorm room to dorm room shooting all the demons in each room, then disposing of their mess. They did the same thing every night and every day they had training.

The Toros were rough. Laura, Balto and Ricardo were being taught to fight.

Within a week the three were tough, and done getting rid of the demons. But the next morning, they woke up to find that everyone that had lost a demon now had another. They were all back.

Balto, Rick and Laura were up all night. They came to a conclusion: either they were being made, or someone was laying more of their eggs. They decided to follow the demons on Balto's radar, find the source, and destroy it. But how would they get out of the Toros' base?

Two days later in the dead of night, three Toros were sneaking out of the base. The stars were clouded; they had only the dim city lights to guide them. Laura, Balto and Ricardo were following a radar. They were walking toward what looked like a cluster of red dots, but were actually shoulder demons.

When they reached the shoulder demons' lair, they saw what seemed to be eggs. They picked their way through the eggs and hurried on to find none other than a huge queen shoulder demon.

Her devilish body was a fiery red with two glaring, coal-black eyes and two horns on top of her head. As they entered the chamber where she was laying eggs, she bared her razor sharp teeth and swished her pointed tail. A pair of hands with dagger-like claws clutched a pitchfork that flamed at the top. Sparks flew everywhere.

The three adventurers stared, unprepared for this sight. Laura drew her own gun and pointed it toward the queen, who pointed her flaming pitchfork back. Before Laura could fire, a flame shot out and burnt her on the arm. She crumpled to the floor in a small heap, writhing with pain. The two boys took her gun and dragged her close to the eggs, out of harm's way.

"I want to fight," protested Laura, barely audible.

"Quick, Balto, use you power to take away her pain. She can barely talk!" yelled Ricardo over the roaring of the flames behind them. Balthazar did. Then Laura fell into a restless asleep.

The two boys stood and turned. Both were as mad at the queen as she was at them. They worked their way around the room until they stood opposite each other, one at the demon's back and one at the demon's front. Neither left the ring of eggs around the queen.

She would not fire at them for fear of hitting the eggs instead of the enemy.

The two alternated firing, but she would dodge most of the blasts. They kept shooting. The only time they would pause was to reload.

They had fired about twenty shots each but still had not killed the queen, although they had managed to wound her. Rick had an idea.

“Balto, keep shooting. I need to reload,” shouted Rick.

“Okay,” replied Balto.

Instead of reloading, he ran to wake up Laura.

“What?” said Laura after being shaken out of her sleep.

“You wanted to help? Well, here is your chance.” Ricardo handed Laura her gun and explained his theory.

Laura got up. She and Ricardo quickly got situated. Ricardo counted to three, and Laura and he fired simultaneously. After a couple of tries, Balto realized that if he joined forces with them, there was no way the queen would be able to dodge their shots.

“One, two, three!” Three shots ring out in unison.

It took a moment for the queen to realize what had happened. She was shocked. She couldn’t breathe, and she toppled over backwards. The queen was dead! In a chain reaction all the eggs wilted, and existing shoulder demons crumpled and died.

The three exhausted adventurers headed back toward the theatre. They all fell thankfully into their beds and closed their eyes. Balto was the first asleep. Soon Ricardo heard the soft breathing of Laura and then, for the first time in what seemed like months, Ricardo fell into a peaceful sleep.

Elizabeth

Secrets abound in the life of a lonely girl who lives in a huge old house. But the answers to much that has been hidden could be within her grasp in
ELIZABETH, by *Marlena Schizas*.

In a tall, tall house by a cemetery, there lived a woman with her 12-year-old daughter. The woman's name was Kate and her daughter's name was Elizabeth. Kate had black hair and brown eyes. She always put her hair up in a bun. She wore a green button-down dress and she was tall and thin. Elizabeth had long brown curly hair and blue eyes. She wore a light blue dress with a bow on the back. She, too, was tall and thin.

Their house was very big at four stories. Kate's room was on the second story and Elizabeth's room was on the third story. Their large house was surrounded by woods, with no roads or other houses near. Elizabeth had never seen another person besides her mother. She never knew her dad and she never had seen him. Her mom said that he died but she didn't tell her how he died. She had to stay at home and her mother told her that she was not allowed to leave their property, so she didn't. She always listened to her mother. Because she wasn't allowed to leave their property, she didn't have any real friends.

One thing Elizabeth was really scared of was her big and empty house. There were lots and lots of hallways, and at night Elizabeth was scared to walk around her house. But one room Elizabeth loved to be in was their library. She spent all of her time in there.

One day she was looking for a book to read when she saw a book she had never noticed before. It said "Samuel" on the spine of the book. She tried pulling it out. It wouldn't budge. She pulled harder, but still it wouldn't come out.

All of a sudden she heard a noise and she saw that the wall was moving...it was opening. She got scared and backed away. She hesitated, but then tried to look inside.

She couldn't see anything so she got closer. Finally she was close enough to see what was inside. It was a brick pathway.

She couldn't see where it led to, so she decided to follow it. She walked and walked until she came to an end. There was a wooden door. The door had markings all over it. She wasn't sure as to what she should do. She said to herself, "Well, I don't know what could be behind that door. It might be something dangerous!" She decided to go back to the library.

She walked back down the way she had come, but she stopped. It was a dead end. She knew what had happened. The door she had entered had closed and she could not get out. She knew that her only choice was to walk back to the other door and find out what was behind that door. For all she knew it could have been a way out.

And so, once again, she walked and walked and walked and stopped at the door. She took a deep breath and slowly turned the knob. She opened the door to a room with candles all over and portraits of a specific man. At the bottom of each frame, the name "Samuel" was written. So the man in the portraits was Samuel, but who was he, and why was his name on the spine of the book?

She wondered why that room was there, and if her mother knew of it. Just then, she heard her mother call her, interrupting her thoughts. She panicked. She didn't know how to get out of the room and back into the main part of the house.

She discovered a door, and so, just as she did before, she took a deep breath and slowly opened the door. It led through another hall and she followed that hall and then she soon came to some stairs going up. She wondered what the stairs went to and followed them. At the top of the stairs she pushed open a door and stepped up into a bedroom with a big bed and a dresser and other things that you might see in a bedroom.

She had never seen this room before. Then she saw another door and walked up to the door and slowly opened it while praying it wasn't leading to another dark maze of halls and rooms. She looked out of the door and saw a familiar hall leading to stairs going down. She went down the stairs and soon saw the door to her room.

She kept going down the stairs to her mother waiting at the table to eat dinner. Right away, her mother told her to sit down and eat. So she did and her mother said nothing more to Elizabeth.

After dinner Elizabeth went back the library and looked for the book that said “Samuel” on it. She looked and looked, but she couldn’t find it. She remembered where it was, but she didn’t find it there. After looking for a while, Elizabeth decided to go to bed. Later in the middle of the night, Elizabeth woke up, hearing a voice cry out. She knew that she had to find out what it was. She got up out of bed and listened to the crying. As she listened she realized the man was crying out her name!

She got a little scared, but she once again knew she had to find out what it was. She went through her house and followed the voice to the library. She opened the library door and looked around and saw a book opened on a desk. She walked up to the book. It was opened to a page with a picture. The picture was a picture of the man Samuel. But in the book the picture was moving! The man’s mouth was opening and his eyes were shifting!

At first she was shocked. Then the picture started talking to her and she got really scared! He said, “I am Samuel, as you might know, but what you don’t know is that I am your father.”

At first, Elizabeth didn’t believe him, but then she really thought about it and saw he did resemble her a little. Still, she was kind of scared. She asked him, “Why are you here, in a book?”

He answered back, “I only get two chances to become a ghost and come to your world, and this is my first chance. It is very important that you help me. I was murdered, but I don’t know by who. That’s your job, to find out who it was.” She stayed silent and he continued. “I was asleep when I woke up to a noise, and then I was out, dead, of course. I didn’t get a chance to see who it was in the dark, and neither has anyone else.”

Elizabeth gave a confused look. She wasn’t sure if she could take on a job like this.

“Oh, please, you have got to do it. That’s the only way. I can’t rest until it’s done, and you are the only one who can do it!”

“What about mother?” Elizabeth asked.

“Well, your mother is very ill. She was heartbroken and shocked when I died. If I came to her, she wouldn’t believe me, and I would only hurt her more,” he said with a sad expression on his face. “Oh, please, you’ve got to do it!”

“Ok,” she said, realizing she had to, for her father. “How do I do it?” she asked.

“That I don’t know, but you will find a way. You’re very smart. Remember what you’ve seen and what you know!” he said as his picture faded.

Elizabeth closed the book, picked it up, and took it into her room so she wouldn’t lose it. She decided she would start her job the next day as she went back to sleep.

In the morning, she woke up and the book was gone. She got out of her bed and ran into the library and found the book open to a page with a bunch of writing. As she read, she found out a lot about him. The only thing it didn’t say was how he died. Then her mother called her into the kitchen for breakfast.

Elizabeth sat down and hesitated, but then asked, “How did Dad die?” Although she already knew, she had to ease into the conversation so that maybe her mother could reveal who the murderer was.

Her mother looked at her in shock and quickly said, “I’m not sure.”

“Mother, I really must know. It’s important,” Elizabeth said.

Her mother looked back up at her, looking older than she had ever seen her before. “He was killed,” she responded, looking back down.

“I know, but by who?”

Looking shocked, her mother asked, “How did you know he was killed?”

“I, uh, I can’t, I’m not supposed to tell you,” Elizabeth said.

Her mother suddenly looked extremely angry and yelled, “You tell me right now, young lady!” And so, with no other choice, she did, and her mother started to cry. “No, no, I don’t believe that, it can’t be true!” her mother said through tears.

Elizabeth told her why her father didn’t tell her mother, and her mother said that she wanted to help. They both went through books. Her mother found an article that had something about men who had murdered people and robbed them, and confessed to other killings

from about 12 years before. Elizabeth thought, *Wait, that was when my father was murdered, 12 years ago. That must be his murderer!*

Her mom saw a number to call if anyone had information that might help solve the mysteries. Her mother told the man that she thought her husband was one of those murdered by the men.

After they made the phone call, Elizabeth's mother decided that they had to go to a public library and get some more news or history on the killer. The most important thing was to find out his name.

They went to a public library and looked in some books and found some more killings. Then they found out that the guy's name was Seamore J. Butts, and he had been executed three years before. After studying a lot as quickly as they could, they rushed home and opened the book that said "Samuel" on the spine of the book.

Her father's face was there. Elizabeth looked at him and said, "Dad, Dad, you don't have to worry anymore. We found out a lot about who killed you. It was a guy named Seamore J. Butts." Also she told him that he was executed three years before.

Her mother was extremely happy to see her husband. She cried. She missed him so much.

Then he told them that unfortunately he had to go. He told them that he loved them and he would never forget them. Sadly, he said goodbye. Elizabeth and her mother said goodbye.

After that, Elizabeth and her mother talked more often. They went out into the town more. They even found a smaller home that was in the town, where Elizabeth made new friends.

One thing that Elizabeth wanted to know was why that room was there, what it meant, and who put all those pictures in it. She asked her mother about the room. Her mother explained that she had done it, because she was so sad that her husband had died. Seeing his face would make her cry because she was so horribly sad that he wasn't in her and Elizabeth's lives.

Elizabeth was very happy that she finally found out about her dad, and she was happy that her life was becoming better. She would always remember her father and what had happened those very days.

The Evil Class of Horror

It's not a surprise that some people don't like school. There are good reasons for it in **THE EVIL CLASS OF HORROR**, *by* **Brian Jackson**.

I walked into Berkshire to do some research in our lab with Brian and Chris. In our lab, we test and discover fuel cells. Berkshire owns 225 different labs and 70 rooms. They own 150 acres of land. We have 135 planes and one gigantic wind tunnel to test them in.

I was almost to the lab when I bumped into Brian and Chris. They usually walk, but it was different today. They looked into one particular room, and all of a sudden, they ran. They were screaming their heads off. They were screaming, "Monster, monster!" They said they saw a monster in the room. They got up scrambling and hit each other in the head and left a big mark.

I asked them what was wrong, but all I got was a nod and John screamed, "Run for your life!" I ran, not even knowing what I was running from.

Outside of the school, Brian and Chris just dropped. They had fainted. I guessed that it was from whatever they were running from. I got my super strength gloves from my secret hole in the ground where I keep some of my inventions from some friends. There was one problem. I hadn't tested the gloves out yet and neither had my friend. I thought to myself and said, "Well, now is a good time to test them."

I picked Brian and Chris up and took Chris's super speed shoes off him and put them on me. I ran them to the hospital as fast as I could.

When I got there, the nurses asked what had happened. I said, "We were running out of the Berkshire—"

The doctor interrupted and said immediately, “Berkshire Middle School?”

“Yes,” I replied. “We were outside and they just fell.”

The doctor said, “Very interesting. We had some people come in here a couple of hours ago. They claimed they saw something through a classroom window at Berkshire Middle School. What were they doing before they fell?”

I said, “They looked through a window of a classroom, and then screamed. I don’t know what door it was exactly, but it was somewhere near room 112. I will go check.”

I checked, and what I saw surely amazed me, too. I saw a class full of students. They weren’t regular students. They were mutants! They had eyes falling out of their own eye sockets and ears almost completely torn off. Worst of all, they weren’t moving. They weren’t even breathing. They were just sitting there.

One person had his brain almost completely pulled out and an eye was in his hand. Unfortunately, that was Mr. Fisher.

By that time, Brian and Chris were awake and found me. They took me to the hospital and told the doctor they saw a mutant class! It was in room 112, too. That was Mr. Fisher’s room! Kids would go in for a one-hour class, but they wouldn’t come out of the school, even three hours later. People are now wondering what happens in there, but no one can find out.

We decided to go in and find out what was happening. We called our old friend, Telguhs. He was a good friend that worked in the lab with us. He was inventing a machine called the Telepen 4000. This magnificent machine would be as small as a pen, but as powerful as an earthquake. This machine could be a grappler hook, a paralyzer, a powerful net, and a cord shooter. We would use it to capture Mr. Fisher and to bring peace and quiet to Berkshire.

We went to the school and went into Mr. Fisher’s classroom. We each had a Telepen 4000.

Right as we walked in, we fell in a hole. The hole went twenty feet below the surface. We fell into three chairs. We were tied up immediately. We tried to get our weapons out, but all three of us dropped them.

Mr. Fisher picked them up. He was looking at them with an interesting look on his face. He said, "Time to make a little adjustment to these. Oh, did I forget to show you my evil class of horror? Everybody, front and center."

A lot of kids came running over as fast as they could. Suddenly a scrawny little man walked over to Mr. Fisher and told him he was dismissed. He walked over to the line of mutant children and stood in line.

The little man said, "Welcome to my lair. My name is Shuglet. I have put a spell on every mammal that has come here. For instance, I have a mutant dog and a mutant cat. I have mutant boys and girls. They follow every one of the commands I tell them. My purpose in doing this is to take over all of Berkshire's land and material. Do you hear any screaming in here? Well, you should, because I will show you what I have done to everyone else in this lair. Bring the test subjects out."

Chris tried to ask him what he was doing, but Shuglet cut him off. "I will show you two tests. The first one will be on a fake dummy doll. I will put a potion on him and he will do whatever I tell him to. I will do the same with a human." He did, and sure enough, it worked.

He untied us and put each of us on a small, dark, cold steel table. He called for our Telepens. "Now it's time to test out my new toy." He put one in laser mode.

John said, "How did you make it better already, and in such little time?" He answered, "I told my class to go work on them, and they did. I have put this in laser mode. Now it's time to kill you."

He tied us down with steel chains. Brian asked, "How powerful is it?" Shuglet answered that it was powerful enough to break through almost anything.

Brian went first on the table. Shuglet shot toward Brian and somehow got kicked in the face. Brian had made Shuglet shoot the chain off. Brian got up and kicked him, picked his Telepen up, and shot a cord at him that wrapped around him 13 times. He couldn't talk because the cord was squeezing his gut too tightly. Telguhs's new weapon was a success!

They captured Shuglet and put him in jail. Since the spell only worked when Shuglet was at least in the same room, everyone fell down.

An hour later the first person awoke. It was Mr. Fisher who woke up first. Everyone went to the hospital and everyone was fine, except for Shuglet, who died of a mental illness and a deadly flu. Everyone else returned home and told his or her parents what had happened.

That is how the story “The Evil Class of Horror” ends, and, yes, it was a true story. It happened 50 years ago to my dad, John.

The Invisible Butler

*An accident in the laboratory has unexpected consequences for a scientist's helper. Things become clear for at least one man in **THE INVISIBLE BUTLER**, by **Lisa Surnow**.*

“Stand back!” Cantopolis yelled. Unfortunately, it was too late. Jinkens did not hear it in time.

BAM! The explosion happened. Scientist Cantopolis ducked just in time. Jinkens was not as lucky.

A long time ago, far, far away, there was a little town called Radiance. In this little town there lived a man named Scientist Cantopolis. He was a tall man with light gray hair. He was 56 years old and wore circular glasses. Scientist Cantopolis was very, very shy because he was afraid that the townspeople would make fun of his inventions. That's why he did not talk to anyone except his butlers and maids. Scientist Cantopolis knew that they were behind him on every invention that he made.

One day while he was working in his secret laboratory, he was mixing two very hazardous chemicals. The two chemicals' names were “twit” and “slug.” Twit was in a clear bottle with a hazardous sticker on it. Twit was a dark red color, which looked like spoiled blood. Slug was also in a clear bottle with a hazardous sticker on it, but it was a very dark-colored turquoise. Right when scientist Cantopolis was about to mix the two deadly substances, his loyal butler Jinkens came in to put his dinner down. “Don't move,” the scientist said.

“Yes, sir,” Jinkens replied. Scientist Cantopolis mixed the two chemicals together... smoke flew up everywhere. After a couple of minutes the smoke was gone, but the scientist did not see Jinkens. The scientist called and called him until his throat was sore. Finally Jinkens answered.

“Yes, sir, you rang for me?”

“Where are you? Show yourself!” the scientist said. Why didn’t Scientist Cantopolis see anything?

“I’m right in front of you, sir.” Jinkens raised his hands. Then in shock put them down. “Oh, no!” Jinkens said in a panic. “Where are my feet, my hands, my body...? Ahhh! Where am I?”

“I think the chemicals didn’t go too well with your skin! You must have gotten touched by the smoke of the chemicals. You know, we could do really good and bad things with this. We could get all of the people who mocked my ingenious work!”

“Sir, I am a butler, not a circus clown. I need to be seen! I feel very weird being invisible; I do not want people to be frightened of me because they think I’m a haunted ghost!” The butler was raising his voice.

“Well, I am sorry, but it will take me a little bit to make the right antidote. Are you ok like this for now?”

“Yes, sir, of course. Just try to hurry.”

The scientist worked days and nights, but could not find the antidote. Then he figured out that there was only one thing that would do the trick: the chemical invisiblind. You poured it with two other chemicals that turned you invisible. The only problem was the only man who owned it lived many days away. So Scientist Cantopolis knew there was going to be a fee involved in this job. Jinkens agreed to go on the journey, but he had to travel by himself. When the scientists were younger, they always fought about who was smarter!

Right before the butler was about to leave, Scientist Cantopolis asked him some questions. “How do you feel about traveling when you’re invisible?”

“I am fine, sir, and if I run out of food, it is much easier to hunt, even if I hate to kill animals.”

“Also, are you ok traveling on foot?”

“Yes, sir. Of course, I couldn’t take a train or car. Don’t you think it would be awkward to look like just a floating backpack?” Jinkens said humorously. “Well, goodbye, sir. I will see you soon, I hope!”

Jinkens set off to get to his destination.

After many days and many nights, Jinkens finally reached it. He marched in wearing a coat, gloves, a hat, pants, shoes, and paint on his face (just so people wouldn't get suspicious). "I need the potion invisibind," he said to the man he met there.

"Why?" Scientist Heatnotes said.

"Well, um...", he opened his coat.

"Oh, I knew it! You were too white to be actual."

"Just wondering, don't you feel weird talking to me?"

"Well, why would you say that?"

"Well, um, if you haven't noticed, I'm kind of invisible."

"I am a scientist. Of course not. I turn things invisible all the time."

"Let's get back to why I am here. I need the potion. Will you please give it to me? I have money if that is what you want for it." Jinkens said it so desperately.

"Fine. It is \$200 for half a bottle, or \$350 for a whole bottle," Scientist Heatnotes said.

"Fine. I will take a whole bottle. Here is \$350."

On the way back, Jinkens stopped for a little rest. While sitting under a big willow, he heard yelping! Jinkens ran and saw a poacher trying to shoot a very cute bunny. Jinkens was not happy. He loved animals, and he hated poachers.

He thought, *I know this would go against everything I was brought up with, but I am so fond of animals. Just this once I will do it.*

Jinkens took off everything until he was completely invisible. He slowly went up to the tall poacher with a big yellow hat on with flowers on it. Jinkens took the mean poacher's hat and started running.

"Huh... what happened? Where is my wife's hat? Oh, well, it was probably just the wind." Jinkens was on the ground, laughing hard. He wasn't done, though. He put the hat down and walked over to the bunny. Jinkens picked it up and made it do the Macarena.

"Ahhh! Haunted bunny! Run!" The poacher screamed so loud that Jinkens had to cover his ears!

"Don't you ever shoot at a helpless animal. HA, HA!" Jinkens giggled again.

After a long time, Jinkens finally got home and gave Scientist Cantopolis the potion. He worked for hours.

What if I want to stay invisible? I underestimated what I can do with this amazing gift! Jinken's thought. *I'll go tell him now!*

He was running to tell the scientist the big news, but at the same time Scientist Cantopolis was running with the potion to Jinkens.

"Jinkens, Jinkens, I have the potion!"

"Sir, I have to tell you something."

BAM! Jinkens and Scientist Cantopolis ran into each other. The potion spilled all over Jinkens, and also in him. Some fell in his mouth. Finally, he was visible!

"So, Jinkens, what did you want to tell me?"

"Never mind, sir," Jinkens said sarcastically!

It's Not for Sale

*Here is a tale of friendship, but with a twist. A girl with mysterious talents finds that her powers don't solve everything in **IT'S NOT FOR SALE** by Breana Turner.*

"Hey, Casey, wait up!" Marin yelled, out of breath, as she ran up to Casey. "Why didn't you stop when you heard me calling you?" Marin asked, annoyed.

"I am sort of freaked out about something," Casey answered.

"What's so freaky you couldn't stop?"

Casey pulled Marin into the nearest empty class room. "Look at the globe." Casey pointed her finger toward the globe and it started to spin in the air.

"Cool!" Marin yelled. "You could sell that on eBay and people would come from all over to see that."

"Yeah," Casey said, "well, it's not for sale. Plus, I just used some string and glue to make it float," she lied.

"Well, I thought it was magic," Marin said.

As they walked out of the room, Millsa Grand walked up to them. "Hey, Marin," Millsa started to blab about something. Casey stood there and waited for Millsa to say hi to her. But when Millsa just kept on blabbing, Casey got mad.

"Hi, Millsa," Casey said in an annoyed tone.

Millsa turned to face Casey. "Get lost. Can't you see I am talking?" Millsa turned back to Marin. "Let's do lunch!"

"Sure," said Marin.

As soon as Millsa left, Casey asked Marin, "How come you didn't stick up for me when Millsa told me to get lost?"

"I don't know, I guess it just slipped my mind," Marin replied.

"It slipped your mind!" Casey yelled angrily. "Well, a real friend would have stood up for me," Casey yelled.

“So what are you trying to say, that we aren’t friends anymore?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I’m saying.” Marin and Casey both stormed off in different directions.

When lunch came, Casey spotted Marin sitting next to Millsa. Casey took a seat close by. Casey overheard Marin saying, “She has magical powers. You are right. She is crazy.”

Casey stood up so fast her chair flipped over. Not bothering to pick it up, she ran outside.

“Cool down.” She whispered to herself. Then a smile appeared. She was just going to get revenge.

Casey walked into Lucky High the next morning. She saw Marin wearing a new white dress, walking down a crowded hall. This was the perfect setting.

Casey dashed behind a trashcan and pointed her finger. Right then, Marin’s heel broke and she tripped. Marin tried to grab onto someone, but just knocked down a cup of grape juice someone was holding. As Marin hit the ground, the grape juice spilled all over her new dress.

Casey stood and, feeling a little better, walked away.

During lunch Casey was practicing her skills when an awful thought came into mind. What if something really bad happened? She would feel guilty her whole life. She decided to write a poem that said

*Sorry
Sorry
Sorry
For every thing I’ve done
Sorry
Sorry
Sorry
Let’s be friends again
To
The end*

Casey hurried and stuck the poem in Marin’s locker, then ran off to her next class.

When Casey got out of her class she hurried to Marin's locker. Marin met her half way.

"I'm sorry," Marin said.

"Me, too," Casey said.

There was a moment of silence.

"You should really sell that on eBay."

Casey replied, "Yeah, well, it's not for sale!"

The Liar

To save his friend, Johnny must do something he never thought he could in
THE LIAR, by *Cedrine Bernard*

In a big city, on a big avenue, in a big house but in a small room lived a little orphan called Johnny. This orphan was really particular. He never lied. *One morning the lady with whom he lived came in the little room and said, "I found a job for you."*

"I don't want to work," he answered back.

"I don't care. You are going to go there tomorrow!"

So the next day he went there. He pushed the elevator's buttons all day long. It was the most boring thing he had done in his life.

One boring day he decided to go on floor number five. Floor five was one of these floors where he never went. He pushed the button that said "5." The door opened to a funny noise, and the room in which it opened was not really pleasant. It was dusty and dark, and a huge cauldron was sitting in the middle.

Suddenly the elevator door shut itself! Five minutes later, the door opened again. The establishment manager came out with a bird in a cage in one hand and a huge bag in the other. When she saw the poor orphan she said with a dark voice, "Your little friend Elisabeth wanted to see you," and she showed the little bird.

"You changed her into a bird!" Johnny said with a strange voice.

"Yes, I did," she answered. "Now, listen to me. For two years I've been searching for a little boy that NEVER lied, and I found you! So at the full moon, you will recite a spell so I can get my full powers back. HA HA HA!" Johnny, too scared to say anything, ran back home.

In his room, he saw a little envelope. He opened it and he saw a little piece of paper that said, "Lie three times and your friend will be free at the full moon." He ran downstairs and said to the lady, "I love you, I have no friends, and I love my job." He had lied three times! So at full moon, his friend got her normal form, her parents adopted Johnny, and, hopefully, the spell did not work!

Little Johnny was now safe and happy. He would never have to lie again.

Loser League NOW!

*A villain known as the President is on the loose at Kitchen Island. It is up to the members of the Loser League to stop this half-baked bad guy in **LOSER LEAGUE NOW!**, by **Andrew C. Bennett**.*

This is a story about the Loser League, a group of heroes that isn't very super! They are only five inches tall. Munchman is one of the "heroes" in the League. He is Superfat and Superhungry, but also Superstrong and Superstupid! He is big and strong for a five-inch Superhero. He always has a backpack full of snacks for when he gets hungry. He gets so busy eating that he doesn't notice that his clothes are always on backwards!

Lightning Girl flies like lightning, but she gets electric shocks all the time! She wears a costume that looks like a swimsuit. It is shiny gold with a lightning bolt across the chest. Her hair matches her golden costume, and she always wants her hair to be perfect.

Skunkman is Superstinky! You don't want to be behind him when he gets surprised! He wears black clothes with a white stripe down the back. He has a tail, which is where the stench gets released. He doesn't notice that he is smelly because he has gotten used to it. If he did notice his smell, it would smell like a garbage dumpster with old milk, dog doo-doo and rotten broccoli in it.

The Boss is the person who leads the League. I guess you could say he's not a very great leader! It's not easy trying to keep all of these Losers out of trouble! The Boss is a crabby guy. He is always angry because of all of the goof-ups of the Loser League. He wishes he were the Boss of a better group of Superheroes.

The President is evil. No one knows quite what he is President of, but he doesn't seem to care! He always wears the same business suit. He has stolen the Sacred Tools of

Destruction—the Fork of Doom, the Ginsu Knife of Terror, and the Bottomless Spoon—from the Kitchen Drawer Armory.

The battle takes place at the terrifying Kitchen Island, where danger lurks at every corner! We find the President hiding himself and the Sacred Tools of Destruction in the Deadly Convection Cave of Heat! Along comes Munchman who, as always, is starving hungry! Seeing the Deadly Convection Cave of Heat, he decides to rustle up some grub for lunch, or is it breakfast? Or is it dinner? He has lost track and he doesn't care!

The Boss yells, “You moron! We’re supposed to be looking for the President, not looking for a midnight snack!” The Boss spies some particularly yummy looking rolls and some sliced lunchmeat. Hmm, a little tomato sauce and some lettuce....

Seeing that The Boss is obviously busy, Munchman stumbles around and hits a button that has some big numbers on it, like 350, 400, 475. He hears a beep and wonders what has happened.

Just then, the President starts to sweat! Will Munchman find his hiding place with the Sacred Tools of Destruction and take them away from him? Things just get hotter and hotter! Soon the President can't take it anymore! He makes a break for it and slams into the door of the Deadly Convection Cave of Heat! The door slams open just as Lightning Girl is flying by!

Dzzzzzzzz! Lightning Girl gets zapped again! Her hair is spiking out like a porcupine and it smells like cooked Lightning Girl! She falls down onto the door of the Convection Cave of Heat!

Just then, Skunkman happens to be walking by. The zap from Lightning Girl scares him so badly that he let off a powerful stench! Whooooooeeeeeee! I wouldn't go near him for a while if I were you! The President couldn't take it! The heat, the zap, and the stench were too much! He came running out and screamed, “Here! You Losers take the Sacred Tools of Destruction! Nothing is worth having to be around you gigantic losers!”

The Boss said, “You Losers actually did it! You saved Kitchen Island from disaster! This is the first time you morons ever succeeded in a mission! This calls for a celebration! Now! Who wants a hoagie?”

Magic Doll

*There are all kinds of discoveries to make in Grandmother's attic. But not everything is what it seems to be in **MAGIC DOLL**, by **Olivia C. Sewell**.*

My name is Corzon. My sister Mallaya and I have a really strange story to tell you.

We were at our grandmother's house. She and my Uncle Geo live in Cambodia. We were there visiting for the summer. My grandmother lives in a very old house. She gave us permission to play with some of the old things she had in her attic. Uncle Geo said that some of those things up there were over 200 years old.

We were enjoying playing with many of these old things when we saw a porcelain doll. The doll was very unusual. She had big round eyes like the Mona Lisa that just stared at us and followed us wherever we went. The doll had a small nose and little red lips, and she looked so cute that we just had to keep her.

We took our new doll downstairs into our bedroom and put her on the dresser. We fell asleep with happy thoughts of all the things we would do with our new doll the next day.

The next morning, the daylight shining through the windows woke me and Mallaya up at the same time. We smiled at each other and turned to the dresser to look at our beautiful doll. That is when we knew there was something wrong. The doll was on the dresser, but the dresser was different. In fact, the whole room of furniture was different. The furniture was old looking, and the window curtains had all changed. Instead of pull-down shades, there were silk- and gold-trimmed curtains at the windows.

At first we thought our grandmother and Uncle Geo had come into our room in the middle of the night and changed things around. But then we realized that two people could not have done

all of this by themselves. We both had an eerie feeling about all of this.

As we got out of bed, we looked toward the closet and noticed our clothes were not the same, either. Our American shorts and tee shirts had been replaced with ancient Cambodian wrap-around skirts. Our Birkenstocks had been replaced with pointy curly-toed slip-on shoes that looked old. When we went over to the closet to get a better look at these clothes, we were shocked to find there was no light switch or light bulbs, and only candles on a table nearby. Now we were scared!

We ran from the room and down the stairs, calling for our grandmother. She was not in the house, so we ran outside. We were still looking for her and calling her when we noticed how strange all the people around us on the streets were looking. Everyone was dressed in the same unusual style of clothes that we found in our closet. They all had on those same funny-looking curly-toed shoes, and they each had on a fancy headpiece, even the men! We grabbed onto each other.

“What in the world is going on here?” we said. Mallaya turned to a woman who was walking by and asked, “Why is everyone dressed like this?”

The woman turned to Mallaya and said, “What do you mean?”

I said, “I mean, why are you dressed in those wrap skirts and not in the shorts and tops you all had on yesterday?”

“What are shorts and tops?” the woman said. “We are all wearing our traditional Cambodian costumes.”

Mallaya turned to me with a puzzled look and I said to the woman, “I thought traditional Cambodian clothes were like our American clothes.” The woman looked really confused and asked me, “What is American?”

I said, “You know, American; the United States of America.”

The woman, now looking almost angry, said to us, “I do not know what kind of trick this is you are playing, but you both know very well what the traditional dress of Cambodia is in 1701. Now go home and get properly dressed, and stop bothering me!”

We both must have looked like we had been hit by a truck. “Did she say 1701?” We looked at each other and realized we were standing in the street with our nightgowns on.

We ran back into the house as fast as we could and slammed the door behind us. We were on our way back up the stairs to get dressed when we heard a knock at the door. We looked out the window and saw it was our Uncle Geo.

Happy to see someone we knew, we opened the door. He had a look on his face that said we were in BIG trouble.

“Uncle Geo! Boy, are we glad to see you. Something weird is going on. All of our stuff has changed. Our room is different, our clothes are different, and the people in this town say it is 1701 and you know we live in the year 2005. What’s going on?”

“Calm down, both of you. There is a logical explanation to all of this. Come and sit down, and let me try to explain what’s going on.” Uncle Geo then began to explain how most of the stuff in the attic was over 200 years old, and how some of the stuff was believed to have come to our family from a guy who once owned a pawnshop. In Cambodian, the word for pawnshop is “chucklotuck.” The guy was really weird and was into Asian magic. Uncle Geo told us how many people believe he put spells on many of his items that he sold to people. He told us how the doll in grandmother’s attic may have come from his shop and may have had a spell on it. He said it sounded like this was a time spell, and these spells did not usually last very long. They were just very scary.

Almost as soon as Uncle Geo had finished explaining what could have happened, Mallaya and I noticed the room changing again. The furniture in the living rooms was all the way it had been the night before. We ran upstairs and saw the furniture in our bedroom was now back to the way it was. The shades were at the windows, and our clothes were back to normal. Our old Birkenstocks were back on the closet floor. We looked out the window and saw everyone in the street was dressed in casual clothes again, and had normal looking hairstyles again. We looked at each other and gave each other a hug and said, “Boy, am I happy all of this is over!”

We left Cambodia about three weeks later. Grandmother and Uncle Geo took us to the airport. We had never said a word of this to Grandmother, who had been in town shopping that morning.

As we hugged Uncle Geo goodbye, he offered us a box to take with us. We asked him what was this surprise. He said he thought we might want to take the porcelain doll back to America with us. Mallaya and I looked at each other and without hesitation said, "NO THANK YOU, she can stay with YOU!"

He smiled and said, "Have a safe trip, and see you next summer."

Messed with the Wrong House

*Not every story about a haunted house is scary. In **MESSED WITH THE WRONG HOUSE** by **Timpriss Ratliff**, the ghosts are the good guys.*

Once there were two kids, a girl named Summer and a boy named Jack. They lived in a house where two kids used to live who had been killed by a robber. Blair and Conner had been playing in their attic when someone broke into their house and killed both of them. Their spirits stayed in the house. When Jack and Summer moved in, no one told them about Blair and Conner.

Summer and Jack had a babysitter named Crystal. Crystal was fun and she played with them all the time. When Jack and Summer had a problem, Crystal could solve it.

One day someone broke into Summer and Jack's house. Jack, Summer, and Crystal were upstairs. The robber broke in from the basement window. No one heard him because there was a bed under the window. The spirits of Blair and Conner were in the attic, so they didn't know what was going on.

The robber dropped something and Jack heard it. He told Summer and Crystal. Crystal grabbed the cordless phone so she could call the police.

Blair and Conner flew downstairs to see what was happening. Crystal, Jack, and Summer were making their way into the closet.

Blair and Conner suddenly appeared in the closet. Crystal got so scared she almost had a heart attack. It took a little while for Crystal to gain her confidence, but eventually she did. She was kind of scared, but she started talking to Blair and Conner. Crystal got right back on track and called 911. She said, "There is a man

in the house. He's taking the valuables. Can you come fast?" The police station was kind of far away, so that was not going to help much.

Crystal asked Blair and Conner to scare the robber away. "Make sure he doesn't take anything or break anything." They did just that.

Summer, Jack, Crystal, Blair, and Conner were best friends forever.

Monsters' Realm

*Four boys not only become lost on a hike, but they enter a strange world where monsters rule in **MONSTERS' REALM**, by **Marcus Allen**.*

One dark night, four boys were hiking in the woods when something strange happened.

"Hey, Richi, did I tell you that we are lost?"

"Ssshhhhh!"

"I'm still telling you we're--"

"Be quiet, Zak."

"Pull yourselves together. I see light."

"Where?"

"Over there; see, Ryan?"

"No!"

"Well, it's over there by that bending tree."

"Oh! Now I see it, Jake."

"Good. Let's go!"

They went to the weird light and found out that it turned out to be a glowing crystal.

"Cool; a crystal. I call it!"

"Hey, no fair. I--"

"Knock it off! Uuuggghhhh!"

"Hey! What's happening?"

ZAP!

They disappeared into thin air with no traces, no footprints, nothing. They were going to a place where they had never been: another realm.

"Aaahhhhhh!"

"Ouch!"

"Herge."

“Ilk ulk.”

Crunch!

“I’m starting to get the creeps.”

“Aaaaaahhhhhh....”

“Wha-wha-what was that?”

“I don’t know. Let’s find out.”

They went to the cave where the shrieking sounds were, which were inside a cave. As soon as they came in, a troll broke out and grabbed Zak. His friends tried to fight him off, but vampires stopped them in their tracks. They couldn’t get to Zak until Jake got in between them, got a club, and cracked their heads.

“Hissssss....”

“Look out!”

“Whoa!”

“Duck from that bat!”

“Hey, where’s Richi?”

“Went to get the crystal. Since it got us in, it should get us out.”

“Are you nuts?”

“He could get eaten or beaten!”

“Okay, calm your circuits. I’ll get him.”

A few minuets later, Ryan came back with Richi, holding the crystal.

“Okay, guys, let’s get out of he--” *ZAP!*

“I hope we’re home”

“We are, we are home!”

“Hey, where’s our tent?”

“I think you should ask him.”

“Aaaahhh! Run!”

“Wait, stay! That’s my brother, Cody.”

“Ha, ha, ha! You we’re so scared.”

“C’mon, Cody, let’s go home.”

“Bye, guys. See you to--”

Rooaaarr!

“Stop it, Cody.”

“It’s not me.”

“What?”

“Run!”

My Dog's Embarrassing Wedding

*A wedding can be such a big event that there are bound to be problems planning it. Of course, putting a dog in charge doesn't help matters in **MY DOG'S EMBARRASSING WEDDING**, by **Katie Williams**.*

"Ahhhh! It's almost time for the wedding! Oh my gosh, I don't have my tux and I haven't been getting the church ready! Ahhh!" Chewy started to panic when he realized the trouble he was in. It was only 21 days until he and Roxy would say, "I do." Chewy was usually an organized fluffy blue bichon frise. But today he was worried about the wedding and the problems he was having on what was supposed to be the happiest day of a dog's life.

Chewy lost track of time because he had spent days planning the honeymoon. He forgot to make other important wedding arrangements, like sending invitations and ordering his tux. "Okay, Coco, can you get a size 10 tux for me and some wedding dog biscuits?"

Coco, a dark blue sheep dog and poodle mix, was Chewy's best dog. He answered Chewy right away with "Yes!"

"Smiley, can you pick up my black patent leather dress shoes, size 8 ½, from Doggie Bet?"

"Yep, indeed," said Smiley, a yellow retriever who was always smiling. Chewy told everyone he would get the invitations ready to send, and check his mail.

Chewy decided to check his own mail, and as he sorted through it he said, "Trash...trash...PARTY! Oh, NO! What day is it? The 28th? That's the same day as my wedding!" he exclaimed. Magic, one of Chewy's best friends, was throwing a

party to honor their friend, Mo, who just starred as the father in a show called *The Fairy Dogparents*. Chewy had agreed to give a speech at the party because Magic asked him to. “What should I do? My gosh. Why did I ever agree to give the speech?” wondered Chewy.

The doorbell rang. “Coming!” Chewy shouted. When Chewy opened the door, Magic said, “Hi, Chewy. Are you coming to my party?”

Chewy didn’t know what to do because the party was on the same day as his wedding. Chewy replied, “Um. I... I... I can! What time does it start?”

“Three o’clock,” said Magic.

Chewy was panicking, but he was trying so hard to hide his dilemma from his friend. “It’s cold outside,” said Chewy. “Why don’t you come in?” Magic said no, because she had to go to other people’s houses to see if they were coming to her party. They said good-bye to each other.

Chewy decided to send the wedding invitations and wondered whether the Animal Post was still open at six o’clock. When Chewy arrived at the Animal Post, there was very long line, but he decided to wait so the invitations would go out that day.

Chewy returned home to find Smiley already there waiting for him. “Okay, good, good! Smiley, you’re back. What size shoes did you get?” asked Chewy. Smiley said he got size 8 ½. “Great! That’s my size,” said Chewy.

DING DONG! Chewy went to the door and Coco was there with Chewy’s tux. Chewy was relieved that now at least he had his shoes and tux. That was one less thing he had to worry about.

Meanwhile, over at Roxy’s house, everything was under control. Roxy, Chewy’s fiancée, was a beautiful pink bichon frise with fluffy cotton ball fur. She was a happy, punctual frise who was very fashionable. “Okay, I have my dress. I have my white, skinny, high heels.” Roxy decided to call Chewy.

Riiiiiiiiing! “Hi, Chewy! Are you ready for our wedding next week?” asked Roxy.

“Yes, yup, I am,” said Chewy.

“Can I come over and see your tux?” asked Roxy.

“Sure, if you want to,” said Chewy.

“I’m coming right over, OK?” said Roxy.

“OK,” said Chewy.

Chewy was really worried that Roxy might find out that he wasn’t ready, so he tried his best to clean up the whole house and make sure he was finished with everything before Roxy arrived. He ordered some pizza bones from Hungry Bow Wows.

When Roxy arrived, she asked Chewy to see his tux. Since the house was so clean, Roxy believed Chewy was ready for the wedding.

The day of the wedding finally arrived. All the guests were in the church as Roxy started down the aisle. “Here comes the bride dog, all dressed in white. Here comes the bride dog, all dressed in white.”

Chewy, on one hand, was feeling happy and excited about his wedding, but on the other hand, he was so stressed about needing to be in two places at once, he felt like he might fall down and die! He said to Coco, “I’ll be right back. Okay?” She did not understand what was going on.

“Where are you going?” asked Coco.

“Somewhere for Mo. Can I borrow \$20?” said Chewy.

“Fine,” said Coco. She was confused, but agreed.

“Whatever you do, don’t turn on Channel 5. Okay?” asked Chewy.

“Okay,” said Coco.

Chewy took a taxi to 1637 Bemis Drive, where Mo’s party was happening.

Meanwhile, back at the church, everyone was waiting for the wedding to start. The TV mysteriously turned on. The TV dog said, “There’s a dog party at 1637 Bemis Drive and all are invited. My gosh! Look at this blue bichon frise.”

Roxy was watching TV and was shocked to see Chewy on TV at a party. She asked Coco for \$20 for a taxi. Coco had been afraid Roxy would find out that Chewy was at the party, and now it had happened. Coco said, “I knew this would happen,” and gave Roxy the \$20.

Roxy took a taxi to 1637 Bemis Drive and found Chewy dancing with Mo! Chewy was surprised to see Roxy and said, “Oh my gosh! Roxy, what are you doing here?”

“What do you think I’m doing here? It’s our wedding day and *you’re* at a party!”

“I’ll explain the whole thing later. Let’s get back to the church!” Chewy pleaded.

Roxy agreed and off they went in the taxi to the church.

“Do you take this dog to be your husband?” the minister asked.

“I do,” said Roxy.

“Do you take this dog to be your wife?” the minister asked Chewy.

“I do,” said Chewy.

“I now pronounce you husband and wife.” Everybody clapped for the bichon couple.

“When we are on our honeymoon, we will talk about the party,” teased Roxy.

“Ohhhh! I thought I was going to be in the doghouse for our honeymoon!” sighed Chewy. “Come on. Let’s go back to the church,” he said.

A Night in the Zoo

*Being left behind in a strange place could be terrifying. Then again, it could be a fun adventure with someone to show you around. **A NIGHT IN THE ZOO**, by **Shelby Lowe**, is one of these!*

My twin brother, Alex, and I had just spent the day with our family at the Toledo Zoo. We were all very tired and ready to go home. Alex and I decided to make one last trip to the restrooms.

When we returned to the front gate of the zoo, which was our meeting place for our family, no one was there. Alex and I agreed that the family was just playing a joke on us and would appear any minute. The joke was not very funny. In fact, we were only eleven years old and we were very frightened. After about fifteen minutes we realized that it was no joke. Our family had really left without us. I yelled to Alex, “This is a serious situation, but let’s not panic. How could this happen to us?” I knew then that we had to come up with a plan.

I thought back to that morning when I woke up. I didn’t have school that day and our dad didn’t have to go to work. I didn’t want to be bored and hang around the house all day, so I begged my dad to take us to the zoo. The zoo was my favorite hangout in the whole wide world. I loved the animals and I visited there every chance I got. My dad said, “Lizzy, you’ve been to the Detroit Zoo a million times this summer. I’ve got a better idea. Let’s go to the Toledo Zoo for a change. We’ve never been there and we can get there in about two hours.”

I jumped up and down because I was so excited. My dad was the best dad ever! He was a veterinarian and he loved his kids as much as he loved his job of taking care of animals. He took me to the zoo every chance he got, because he realized how much I loved animals, too.

I was more excited than I had ever been; my life was perfect this morning. I was going on an adventure with my entire family, which included my dad, my mother, my baby sister, Rachel, my twin brother, Alex, and my older brother, Derrick. Derrick had just turned 17, and had just gotten his driver's license. He wanted to drive to the zoo with a couple of his friends in his own car. My dad really didn't like the idea, but he said it was all right, mostly because our car was loaded with the rest of the family and our supplies. Taking two cars must be how the mix-up happened that caused us to be left at the zoo. Derrick must have thought we were driving back with my dad, and my dad must have thought we were driving back with Derrick. My adventure that started out so nicely this morning had turned into a real nightmare.

Alex and I had some decision-making to do. Since the zoo was closed and locked up, we had to decide how to handle this situation. We could do one of three things. We could find a zoo worker and have him let us out, but it would be too scary to be out in the cold, dark parking lot by ourselves all night. We could just sit by the gate until a zoo worker found us or our parents realized we were missing and came back to get us, which would be very boring. Our third choice was to wander around the zoo all night and have some real adventures. I said to Alex, "Let's have some fun and wander around the zoo and look at the animals all by ourselves. We will have to stay out of sight of the workers or our adventure will be over."

The first animals we visited were the elephants. The leader of the elephants, a very big and old elephant, made a noise and it sounded like he said, "Hello, children, what are you guys doing here so late at night?"

I thought I was hearing things, because I knew that was not possible. I looked at Alex and said, "Did you hear what that elephant said? He said hello to us."

Alex yelled back at me, "Are you nuts? Elephants don't talk!"

We turned to leave and the elephant made another noise. This time it sounded like, "Climb on my back, and I'll show you around the zoo for a while."

I asked Alex again, "Did you hear what the elephant said this time?"

Alex sounded nervous and replied, “You are really beginning to scare me! Please stop it!” Then he shouted, “Get it through your head, Lizzy: Animals don’t talk!”

I made up my mind that I could never convince him that I could understand the elephant talk, and I didn’t want to scare him anymore, so I decided to let him believe that I was just pretending to talk to the elephant. It was so amazing that I could understand the animal. I believed it was possible that I had a special talent because I loved animals so much. I wondered if I would be lucky enough to talk to other animals. As far back as I could remember, I wanted to spend my whole life taking care of animals, and I had always dreamed of being a veterinarian or zoologist. My dad always told me that when I grew up, I could be anything I wanted to be, and all of a sudden I really believed him. I was convinced that with this newly discovered talent, my dreams would come true.

I pretended to make introductions, and I learned the elephant’s name was Trump. Since Alex didn’t believe I could talk to Trump, and didn’t know Trump had invited us to ride on his back, I knew I was going to have a tough time convincing him to climb on the elephant. I knew no matter how much I begged and pleaded, he would not come along.

I knew Alex’s one weak spot, and that was that he could not be beaten by me or any other girl. I looked at Alex, rolled my eyes, and said, “I’m riding. You go ahead and walk, get sore feet, be a chicken, and don’t worry. When we are rescued, I won’t tell anyone that your one-minute younger sister is braver than you.”

I very carefully climbed over the fence. From the inside of the elephant enclosure I unlocked the gate and opened it so Trump could get out and we could be on our way. Trump kneeled over, picked me up with his trunk, and scooped me up on his back.

Since Alex didn’t want to be beaten by a girl, especially me, he did exactly what I thought he would do. He tugged on my leg and screamed, “I can compete with you any day! Help me up!” Trump must have understood him, because he leaned down, scooped Alex up, and placed him on his back.

Alex and I were off for our grand tour. Trump must have thought we were dirty, because he leaned down and sucked up a whole trunk full of water from his pond and squirted us all over. When Trump bent over to suck up the water, I thought we would slide down his trunk, but we held on tight and stayed on his back. Alex shouted over and over, "We're gonna die! We're gonna be killed!"

Being on Trump's back was such a thrill, and such a mixture of emotions. We went from being afraid and nervous to being comfortable and trusting. It was so much fun being squirted by Trump; Alex and I both started laughing and couldn't stop. We laughed until our sides hurt, and I knew the night was going to be a happy and exciting time.

Trump took us to the see the monkeys, who were swinging from the trees by their tails. Two of the monkeys introduced themselves as Billy and Lucy, and that proved to me that I could talk to more than elephants. They asked Trump if they could help him show us around the zoo. Trump said, "Why not? The more, the merrier."

"Okay," I said, "Hop on the Trump Express." I said to Alex, "If the monkeys go with us, they can be lookouts for us and help us hide from the zoo workers." The monkeys agreed to help us.

Every few minutes, Billy and Lucy would jump off Trump's back onto a tree branch and swing high up into a tree. From the treetops they could see for far distances. If the monkeys saw a zoo worker, they would start screeching over and over again to Trump and me, "The keepers are coming! The keepers are coming!" When they warned us, Trump would know to go in another direction, and this way we could avoid the zoo workers' finding us. It was like playing a great game of hide-and-seek.

Alex yelled over the noisy monkeys, "I can't believe the monkeys are riding on the elephant's back! They must be awesome friends! They are such cool animals!" I was glad Alex was finally having a good time, but he still couldn't talk to the animals, so he was missing so much fun. This whole time he thought I was just playing a pretend game with the animals. He still couldn't hear the animals talking and he certainly didn't believe I could.

We headed for the reptile house. When we got there, all the snakes were talking really meanly to us and saying nasty things, like where they would like to bite us or shoot their venom into us. One of the monkeys opened every single cage and let all of the reptiles out. When we were in the middle of the exhibit, I turned around and saw all the snakes, alligators and lizards and the frogs following us. I said in a very frightened voice, “Get back in your cages and we will leave all of you alone.”

One very slimy and scary looking snake hissed back to me, “Good idea. Get out and stay out. We have to put up with you humans all day and we don’t want you here at night. Leave us to our privacy.”

We left in a big hurry. After we were a safe distance from the reptiles, I said to Alex, “I don’t know about you, but that was the most frightening moment of my life.”

Alex said, “I can think of a few more words to describe how I felt, like horrified, mortified, terrified, and petrified.”

It was getting very late and Alex and I were starving. I said to the monkey, “I want food.” He offered me some of his bananas and I replied, “I need more for dinner than that, and I can only eat so many bananas.” The monkeys then offered some of their lice and fleas. I said, “Yuk, I don’t eat lice, fleas, or any other kind of bug.” We all decided to take a walk to the concession stand to see what we could find there.

We were so lucky, because we had everything we could dream of eating. We had hotdogs, chips, sodas, cookies, ice cream and soft-pretzels with cheese. We had everything we wanted to eat, except fresh fruit and vegetables.

After dinner we stopped to see the beautiful butterfly house. It was so nice and warm in there, and with our full tummies, we fell asleep. We didn’t wake up until the sun was coming up. We decided to head back to the main gate and wait till someone found us, but on the way we decided to stop and see the Artic Ring of Life with the polar bears, seals and sea lions.

We watched them playing for a little while and I said to them as we were leaving, “You are so beautiful and so much fun.” They thanked me for the compliment and invited us to come back.

We passed by the dolphins and one of them yelled out to us, “Would you like to go for a ride on my back?”

That was something that I had always wanted to do, and I shouted back, “Yes, we would love to ride on a dolphin.”

The dolphin shouted, “Hop on and hold on!”

I said to Alex, “Come on, Alex, one more adventure. Please, let’s go for a ride on the friendly dolphin. He is looking at us and I can tell he will be gentle.”

Alex said, “I don’t know how much more my heart will take, but so far I’ve trusted you and you haven’t caused me any harm.” He ran toward the dolphins yelling, “Come on, little sis. Let’s go!”

The ride was thrilling, and it was a something Alex and I will always remember. The dolphins were so friendly and cute, and they all looked like they had smiles on their faces.

It was morning now and we were walking back to the gate with Billy, Lucy, and Trump. It was hard to say good-bye because they didn’t want us to leave, and kept begging us to stay. I said, “We will come back again someday very soon.” I told the animals, “When I am old enough, I will get a job here at the Toledo Zoo, and I will be with you guys all the time. It was a great adventure being locked in the zoo with all of you.”

After we said good-bye to the animals, we realized we had not had any contact with the zoo workers that night, so no one knew we were in the zoo. Billy and Lucy had done a fine job of being our lookouts. Alex decided we shouldn’t make it so easy for our family to find us. He said, “Let’s make them worry for a while, like we did last night.”

We hid behind the entrance sign, and my family came in and started to search for us and call our names. My mother, father, and brother looked like they hadn’t slept all night, and they seemed really worried. After about ten minutes of hiding, I decided it wasn’t a very funny joke, because our family was in a panic, and also it wasn’t very comfortable where we were hiding, so we jumped out from behind the entrance sign and shouted, “Surprise!”

My family was so happy to see us they weren’t even upset that we had been hiding. I have never gotten so many hugs and kisses in my whole life!

Dad said, “We got all the way home before we realized you guys were missing. I thought you two were with Derrick, and Derrick thought you were with me.”

I looked at Alex and said, “We were right about that.”

Derrick said, “I was terrified when I realized that we had left you guys at the zoo. I am so sorry!” I told him that he was very irresponsible for leaving us, but I would forgive him, although I would never again think of him as my older and wiser brother.

My mother said, “We drove back immediately, but we could not get into the zoo because it was closed, and we had to wait in the dark parking lot all night long, and we were so cold.” If Alex and I had decided on letting the zoo workers know we were locked in the zoo, we would have been reunited with our family sooner, but then I thought of the adventure we would have missed. I was glad we made the choice we did.

I decided not to tell Derrick about my conversations with the animals. He would be just like Alex and not believe me. I decided not to tell my mother, because she would just comment on how proud she was of me for having such a good imagination. My dad was different, though. When I told him my secret, he didn’t act surprised at all, but he did act very excited. He said, “I wondered if you would inherit that from me. I can talk to the animals, too! I have just never told anyone else because I knew no one would ever believe me. I have been talking to animals since I was about your age.” It startled me when he said, “Why do you think I became a veterinarian?”

I thought about how much fun it would be if my dad and I ever got locked in a zoo overnight. What an adventure that would be!

Once Upon a Star

*For reasons she can't explain, a girl is called to the defense of her universe. She answers the call in **ONCE UPON A STAR**, by **Laura Sabourin**.*

Prologue

I was eight years old when I met my soul connection. It was like I was supposed to know her, but I didn't know why. I remember the day that she was introduced to the class. Mrs. Smith brought her to the front of the room and told the class, "This is Lea; everyone say hello to Lea." In the droned-out voice that students always use when repeating the teacher, we all repeated, "Hello, Lea," and Mrs. Smith directed Lea to the seat next to Emily Richmond, the richest, excellent, popular girl with a Dad on the school council. As far as I knew, Lea didn't even notice me. I was the little nerd girl that never spoke and had weird daydreams during class. But when I looked into Lea's eyes, I knew that she was not the kind of girl that hung out with girls like Emily Richmond.

Sure enough, at lunch Lea avoided Emily Richmond's "posse" (as they liked to call it) altogether. Instead, avoiding the calls of Emily and her friends, she came to me! Why would a girl that had everything going for her come to me, Hope Starr, the quiet kid in the corner that had never had any friends? I mean, I was the kind of kid that no one cared about until someone really wanted a good grade on the next test. That day my life changed when Lea sat down at the third grade lunch table and said, "I don't know why, but something told me to come to you."

* * *

"Lea," I whispered. It was three o'clock in the morning, but I needed her awake. She didn't stir. "Lea," I said a little bit louder, hoping that I wouldn't have to yell to get her up.

“It’s time for bed...” she started to say, but then noticed the urgent look on my face. She looked at the ceiling, just a quick glance to see if the problem was what she thought that it might be. That quick glance at the ceiling was enough for her to see that there was, in fact, the symbol of an S and C interlocking, glowing in blue and green. It was time for a consultation.

Lea and I dressed quickly into rubber traveling suits, each embossed with the symbol that had controlled our lives for the past four years. We went outside and, sure enough, a bubble vehicle was waiting for us. The vehicle, consisting of two bubbles made of one-sided glass (we could see out, but no one else could see in) was only visible to us. To anyone else, it would have looked like two twelve-year-old girls standing outside a car with our street clothes on. If only what everyone else saw that night could have been true.

We climbed into our vehicle, each in our own bubble, and walked to the chairs in the middle, sitting around a control panel of different colored buttons. We pressed the purple button. The bubble vehicle blasted away faster than any spaceship would ever travel. We were on our way to Stargazer Central Station.

Even the ancient Greeks knew that there was something beyond the Earth. But no one except the board members and stargazers knew that there were many different universes. We were there to protect the universes, keeping peace between the people of one universe and making sure that others do not cause havoc. We were the stargazers.

Going to Central Station was something that we didn’t do very often. Lea and I had never actually been to any of the other universes. Usually one universe did not threaten another one. All of them had stargazers, and they usually stopped the other things from making problems that could turn into a lot bigger things. But going to Central Station was where every stargazer went when they were about to go on a mission.

We had only been to Central Station twice before. Once was for our initial swearing-in session. The second was to stop a domestic problem brewing up. It was an oil spill, threatening to kill off a lot of animals and pollute water in many places. Nature can never actually be shut down, and the storm happened, the oil spilled and we heard about it on the news. The oil spill that would have polluted at least

two of the enormous oceans that cover our planet was contained to a tiny lake in Italy. Only twenty animals, including small fish, were killed, a success to us.

After an hour of memories and fears of what was coming, we arrived at Central Station. We stepped onto little high-tech people-mover type things that began to move us through the translucent, puffy walls that made up the center planet. After saying the password at the inner wall, forming around itself to make a circle, we entered a bright blue, see-through room made of the same puffy, foam-like material.

Greeting us was a small woman, the chairperson of the soul connection. We bowed to her, and sat upon two chairs of the same squishy material. We were waiting for her to talk. By the look on her face, we were not going to like what she said.

“Your universe is in great danger, and only you can save it.” Now that blew me away. She didn’t even say hello, greetings, even wave to us to show us that she had seen us there. But suddenly we knew what it was. The chairpeople (who we thought were doing it for us) would give us the power to seep in knowledge, even read minds if we needed to, in order for us to get the job done. We suddenly saw a vision of another universe, the one that was going to become a turning point in both of our lives.

“You need to stop a group of people named the Oago,” she said. We already knew that, but we figured that we should listen. Sometimes the chairpeople would not give you the exact information that they had about the crisis. “The Oago have been at war for many hundreds of years. They are envious of Earth’s peaceful people and the way that everything goes very systematically.” It seemed as though she never took a pause, let alone a breath, between sentences. “They have high technology, and have come up with a plan to launch Earth into chaos and problems.”

“A man from the Oago tribe that goes by the name Ocato discovered the bubble vehicles of the stargazers from their universe. He became suspicious, and since he was so desperate to get revenge, he found a way to see the bubble vehicles, even though the bubble vehicles have never been seen by anyone but stargazers before.” She continued, “He is almost done tweaking with it, and when he is, he will come to Earth and carry out his plan quickly.”

For what seemed like hours, we sat in that room, waiting for everything to sink in. It was our duty to stop this evil force. This wasn't man against nature any more. Nature had never actually *tried* to kill anyone in particular; it just did things that changed the way that other things happened. As far as I knew, no one was in control of nature. It was just there. But people were different. People had minds that decided who their enemies were. People used their minds to get rid of those enemies and make those enemies' lives miserable. We were going against people, people with determination to destroy not only us, but everything that we had ever known.

Three days later, Lea and I slid down into a vertical, dark, claustrophobic tunnel. There was a long, brown rope ladder that went down farther than we could see. We had to be in complete control just not to scream every time that the rope swung a fraction of an inch. Needless to say, we were terrified, desperate not to give ourselves away. But it was essential that we move quickly, lest we get caught before we could complete the mission.

Over the last few days we had discovered crucial information that would now help us on our journey. To start, we had discovered this tunnel. If everything went as we calculated, inside here somewhere was the place that Ocato kept the bubble vehicle and all of his technology. That would be the easy part. You see, the Oago were not like the people of Earth. They were animal-type people—primates that were not killed the same way that we are. This entire group of people could only be killed by each person him- or herself.

Lea and I had chosen not to talk about what might happen. We didn't want to think of what our options were, only that we needed to stop this conspiracy before it got too far out of hand. We would do anything that we could do to keep the problem here, today, without ever letting the people on Earth know about what went on.

After what seemed like days of endless climbing, we hit solid ground. Lea leapt silently to the floor; I pounced down next to her in the same soundless fashion. On our right side was a small passage that we entered cautiously, tentatively awaiting an alarm system to start blaring or security guards to start running from either side of the tunnel. But these people had no idea that anyone was tracking them. So far we had been successful—almost too successful.

Finally, we came to the end of our tunnel maze. We were at ground level, covered only by a dog-door type thick plastic that could be easily pushed up. The tunnel looked out onto a vast chamber. Thousands of ropes hung from the ceilings and walls, forming thick nets, pulleys, ladders and various other contraptions that I could not identify. In the very middle of this room was Ocato himself, leaning against a bubble vehicle. He was making war plans on what looked like a high-tech chessboard. I soon saw that on it were blue figures, representing “Earthlings” and brown, primate-type figures that were, of course, the Oago. He would mutter things at the board, and either the brown figures or blue figures would fall, or a combination of the two. He was eliminating the battle plans that would not work.

Lea was getting anxious. “We’ve gotta stop him,” she said urgently. She started to tense up, as though she was going to launch at him.

Personally, I was afraid. I didn’t want to attack him, go against him, or even look at him. I wasn’t ready for this. But ready or not, I had to do it. For Lea, for my family, and for the entire history of the Earth, I had to do it.

I ran at Ocato, knife in hand. Caught by surprise he held out his knife. I ran into it, but not before I got him right in the heart.

I awoke to a flurry of activity. I was in a sunny room, surrounded by people that seemed to be asleep, or were just waking up. There was an elderly woman standing next to my bed. “Where am I?” I asked her. This didn’t look like the universe that the Oago lived on, but it didn’t appear to be Earth, either.

“You are in the land of anodotes,” she answered calmly. Right now I felt anything but calm. I was lost, for one thing. Also, I was freaked out, and the memory of what had happened in the land of the Oago was beginning to come back to me. I asked, now more confused than ever.

“In your world, you would call it being dead, but stargazers can never really die.” She said this in one of those serious tones that my Mom used to use when she thought that whatever she was saying was very important.

“Well, if stargazers never die, than why in the world am *I here?*” I tried again. I was hysterical, and I didn’t think that anything could

calm me down now. My head hurt, and I wanted to be in my room, with Lea, having a sleepover. “I don’t want to be here. Send me back right now!” I felt like a small child. I was helpless and didn’t know how to react. This environment was completely new to me, and I wanted nothing more than to be in my comfort zone, living a life that was very boring indeed and pretending that I had never been stabbed by a monkey-man that was trying to take over the planet that I called home.

The lady went on in that annoying, soothing voice. “Stargazers help us on our mission, but they do not actually control what is happening on the universes.” She went on to explain how anodotes never actually traveled from the island until they were recycled (“I’ll explain that later, so don’t ask questions”). Also, no one had ever come to the island until they had been “killed.” Once they did arrive on the island, they were trained to assist the other anodotes in their mission. Everything was controlled from the Island of Anodotes, and a well-trained anodote could stop even the deadliest of deadly disasters. However, a poorly trained anodote could cause terrible destruction, even turn an entire universe into a war-torn territory where everyone lived in poverty. She was there to train me, since she was nearing her one-hundredth birthday, and would soon be recycled. “Before we begin saving life as we know it, though, we need to make sure that you finished off the Oago well,” she said with a bit of humor. I personally did not think that any of the situation between Lea, the Oago and I was funny. If none of that had happened, I wouldn’t be here right now. My head wouldn’t hurt, I wouldn’t be haunted by horrible memories, and I would not be told that I had just died. I was angry at life right now. It had lied to me, not really ever existing in me.

The lady saw my sadness and put on a softer face. She wasn’t really evil. “I understand how you feel, Hope,” she said, as if to console me. “But you shouldn’t be too upset. The younger the stargazer is that comes here, the more valuable he or she is, and you, as the youngest person on the Island of Anodotes, may prove yourself essential to the future of all of the universes.” She handed me a folded screen. “Open this when you need help and assurance that what you are doing is the right thing.”

That night I sat on the bed that the lady had shown me to. I held the screen in my lap, unsure of what would happen when I opened it. *Maybe I should just chuck it out the window*, I thought silently. But I knew that I needed help and assurance more than ever right now.

I opened up the screen, bracing myself for whatever might come next. It showed a picture of my room. Lea was lying on my bed, sobbing over my picture. The sight of her made my stomach flip. I wanted to reach into the screen and stroke her hair, tell her that I was okay. I tried telling her that someday we would see each other again. I knew that she couldn't hear me, but I had to try telling her. As I was about to doze off, I saw a tiny spark of light on her shoulder. She suddenly stopped crying. The little dot of light was shaped like... ME! As I closed my eyes that night, I knew that, deep down, my soul connection and I would always be together.

Epilogue

When I turned sixteen, I became the overall leader of the Island of Anodotes. My guider, as I soon learned that the elderly lady was called, went to the resting room just a year after I arrived, where she was recycled and sent back to a universe that needed a new stargazer. As ruler, I worked on the toughest problems that reached us, and did my best to restore peace throughout all of the universes. Lea came here when she was ninety-two, but time on The Island of Patience is quite a bit different than in other places, and it changed very often. I had not been able to find her yet, but she would soon be recycled. I would try to find her the next day before she was sent to the resting room.

I remember when, as a stargazer, I would tell Lea, "I bet we will always be together, no matter what happens. I bet that we are meant for each other." In a sense, that statement was true. Sometimes things happen in strange, unexpected ways.

Out of the Bottle

*“If I could have one wish...” must be a universal daydream. Could you spend your wish the way Matt and Jinny do in **OUT OF THE BOTTLE**, by **Chelsey Ramsey**?*

“Hurry, Matt!” said nine-year-old Jinny. “We are going to miss it!”

“All right, all right. I’m coming,” said twelve-year-old Matt. *Little sisters sure can be annoying*, he thought.

“Hurry, hurry!” said Jinny.

It was a Saturday afternoon and the beginning of their spring vacation. Matt’s sister, Jinny, had wanted to walk along the beach. Since they moved to Florida, that was her favorite hobby. Matt agreed to walk on the beach. The reason Jinny is so eager to go is that she loves to collect shells upon the shore. Every year Jinny and Matt go and collect these shells. This year Matt doesn’t really feel like collecting shells. But he gave his promise to Jinny. “All right, come on, Jinny,” Matt said while grabbing their shell-collecting backpacks. “Let’s go find some shells.”

When they reached the beach, they took out their shell bags and began collecting. “Hey, what’s this?” said Jinny. She picked up a fancy blue bottle with a cork in it.

“Jinny, put that down!” yelled Matt. “You don’t know what that is!” he said.

“Yes I do,” she said. “It’s a pretty blue bottle and I’m going to open it.”

“Well...fine,” he said, sighing. “Just don’t open it by me,” he said.

“Well, here goes nothing,” said Jinny. She pulled the cap off...and POOF! Green and purple smoke came swirling out of the bottle. The smoke became a figure. “Oh my gosh! It can’t be!” said Matt.

“It’s a genie!” said Jinny.

“Wow!” said the figure. “I haven't been out of that bottle for over one thousand years. Thanks!”

“No problem,” said Matt in a shaky voice.

“What is your name?” said Jinny.

“My name is Genie.”

“Genie?” said Matt.

“Matt!” Jinny whispered.

Matt giggled and then looked at Genie.

“Where did you come from, Genie?” inquired Jinny.

“Well, that's the problem. My first master and I used to live in Saudi Arabia. Next thing I know, I'm dumped in the ocean.”

“That's horrible,” said Jinny.

“Jinny, come on. It's getting dark outside. We should go home,” said Matt.

“But what about Genie? We can't just leave him outside,” Jinny protested.

“We can bring him in,” said Matt.

Only after Matt and Jinny were locked in his room did they feel safe enough to let Genie out of the bottle. “Do you think he'll grant us three wishes?” Ginny exclaimed. Matt told her to keep her voice down so as not to let their parents find out. Jinny pulled the cork out firmly.

“Well, it's about time! I thought that you two had forgotten about me,” said the Genie.

“What about our wishes?” asked Jinny.

“All I have ever wanted was to be free,” sighed the Genie sadly.

Matt and Jinny looked at one another, each with the same thought. “We could free you Genie!” said Matt. Even though the thought of having a Genie around was totally cool, he wanted to make his new friend happy.

“What would we have to do to free you?” asked Jinny.

The Genie couldn't believe his luck. He was finally going to be free. “All you have to do is wish it,” said Genie.

Without any hesitation, Matt and Jinny both exclaimed, “Genie, we wish you were free!” There was a giant crack and a puff of purple smoke. Matt and Jinny looked around. The blue bottle was on the floor and the Genie was nowhere in sight. They both laughed and hoped that they would not regret their decision to give the Genie his freedom.

The Real Story of Why the Chicken Crossed the Road

*Maybe you think you've heard this one before. But you haven't! It's **THE REAL STORY OF WHY THE CHICKEN CROSSED THE ROAD**, by **Alex Chmara**.*

Many stories have been told about exactly why the chicken crossed the road. Finally, we have uncovered the real story. Chester the Chicken had crossed many roads in his lifetime, but this one was big.

Chester the chicken was big and fat. He wobbled as he walked and it looked a little funny. Chester's feathers were downy soft and he was proud of them. He also wore glasses because he was cross-eyed. They were big on his face, but they were the only kind made for chickens. As Chester stood at the side of the road, he reflected on what had happened on his journey....

The sun slowly rose above the horizon as Rob the rooster attempted his lousy cock-a-doodle-doo to wake up the barn. The barn slowly got up. The owner of the barn was a large woman. She wore overalls and she always had her straw hat with her. Her name was Cathy. When Cathy made her special call, the barn knew it was breakfast time.

Now, this barn was a little strange because the animals could speak, read, and write English. That day, Chester got a letter from his cousin Chuck the chicken. He lived in downtown New York. It read,

Hey Chester, it's Chuck! I have some really important news for you. My friend Charles was taken away by two very odd men. If you could come downtown and meet me at my house, we

could go and rescue him from the evil poultry police. Please, I really need your help on this one, so please come and help me.

*Your Cousin,
Chuck*

Chester realized the importance of this situation and he decided that he would go. Downtown in the city was about ten kilometers away. There was one problem, though: how to get over the fence. But he was determined. "After all, there is always a logical answer to every question," Chester thought.

Chester had a brilliant idea. He would make a parachute out of straw and parachute off of the roof of the barn over the fence. Chester got right to work making his parachute. He used the cow's manure to hold it together.

He was ready to fly. Harry the horse lifted Chester up to the first flat part of the barn roof, and from there Chester did the rest. Chester felt proud to be on a mission to help his friend. He finally got to the top of the roof. He said his goodbyes to the animals of the barn and he jumped with all of his might.

At first he was gliding smoothly, but then the wind picked up. The wind hit Chester with force and sent him out of control. He was spinning like crazy and then felt a big thump. Questioning if he made it, he quickly pulled off the parachute to find himself looking at his friends through the fence. He made it! Chester had made it to the other side of the fence. His body was tingling with happiness.

Chester, fortunately, was good at navigation. He used his navigation skills to go the grueling ten kilometers to the city. When he got there, he knocked on Chuck's door. Chuck quietly let him in. Chester was so exhausted that he went to sleep immediately.

Chester woke to the sight of Chuck staring straight in his face. Chuck had everything ready. Chester got dressed, got all of his equipment on, and they headed off.

Chuck had a bird's eye view map of New York City and they looked for the poultry police's headquarters. They found it next to "The Empire State Building." They figured that they would

have to travel a few more blocks until they reached the headquarters where Charles was taken.

On their way, they saw a few interesting things. Chester had seen lots of large people with big bellies walking around, and only a few skinny ones. Earlier, Chester had seen a restaurant called McDonalds and he had seen many large people walk in and out of that place. Maybe that had something to do with it. On the next block he saw a cart with a man behind it. On the cart was a sign that said "Ballpark Hot Dogs." Chester was suddenly struck with an odd thought. He wondered if that was what happened to Porky, the pig that went missing last week. The thought was too painful, and Chester tried to erase it from his mind. In the meantime, Chuck was maintaining a grim silence.

As they turned a corner, Chester and Chuck came to a halt. Chester was amazed. In front of him was the biggest silo that Chester had ever seen! It could probably fit more than 100 pounds of fresh hay! On the silo it said "The Empire State Building." Chester figured that was the silo's name. Next to the silo was the Poultry Police's headquarters.

They knew that walking in through the front door would be a little odd, so they decided to enter through the roof. They used Chester's tail to slowly open the lock to the air vents. It was dark down in the vent. Chuck said he would go first.

Chuck used his flashlight helmet to see and they used their suction cups when they needed them. After a while they came to another latched gate. Inside the room were men in uniforms. Chester figured that those were the guys that took Charles.

Chester opened that gate and they dropped to the floor. They each took a guard and gave them a wing to the back of the neck. Chuck grabbed the guard's keys and they headed off to look for Charles in the building. They looked in every room and possible place, but they could not find him.

Chuck and Chester were walking back down the main hallway when Chester slipped and fell. He had stepped on a block that opened a secret door in the wall. The two chickens stared in awe. Amazed, they headed in. Inside were all kinds of machines and technology that the guards must have used. In the corner of the large room was Charles. He was strapped to a metal bed.

The straps were titanium and impossible to break. Chuck remembered the keys that he had stolen from the guard. He got them out and the teeth on the key fit in the hole. Chuck turned the key and the straps came free. As soon as the strap let go an alarm went off. "Uh-oh," Chuck said.

"Run!" said Chester.

The three of them ran as fast as they could through the curving hallways. The guards were just waking up as they got to the room that they came in from. "Get out now," said Chuck. "I will handle these bubs."

Chuck was fighting like it was his job. He took out the first guard by kicking him in his jaw. Then, he struck the second guard in between the eyes. They were out quickly and Chuck joined Chester and Charles.

The three of them quickly put on their suction cups and they jumped into the tube. As Charles was jumping into the tube, a guard caught Charles's leg. But Chuck's quick thinking helped. Chuck slammed the latched gate on the guard's hand, and he let go.

They climbed as fast as they could and finally they reached the roof. To get down, they all jumped into the dumpster and it acted like a cushion. Filled with joy, the three of them wobbled their butts back to Chuck's house.

Chester, having successfully completed his mission, started to head home. That brings us back to Chester standing at the side of the road.

As Chester stood at the side of the road, he thought to himself about why he had to cross the road. "After all, there is always a logical answer to every question," Chester said. After a long think, he finally came up with an answer: to get to the other side.

The Ruby Button

Adventure comes in all sizes. A big adventure on a small scale occurs in the form of **THE RUBY BUTTON**, *by* **Tierney Papp**.

The room was especially quiet this afternoon, as I lay lost under a chair. With a huge spider slowly approaching me, I wanted to scream. However, I am only a button, and buttons can not scream. My name is Ruby and I am a beautiful ruby red button. I live upon a sweater worn by my owner, Rosie. At least I did until this morning!

It is a very cold December day and Rosie is wearing her favorite sweater (which I am a part of). Rosie was cleaning out the fireplace so she could start a brand new fire to keep us warm. All of a sudden, I felt myself bounce on the floor! I rolled right under the chair and out of sight. I don't even think Rosie noticed.

After about an hour or so, the cat, OC, happened to spot me. He was batting me with his cold paws. "Oh, how I wish I were back on my sweater," I thought.

Ok, I am now under the couch. I should be safe for awhile. Oh my gosh, there is a spider under here with me! Please do not let him see me, please do not let him see me! He is a big spider with a red dot on his back, big hairy legs, and big fangs!

He spotted me! Please do not let him suck the venom out of me! Oh, yeah, spiders have venom; I am just a button.

The spider moved slowly across the floor. He was watching me as he moved closer to me. I didn't move an inch. All of a sudden, a string shot at me! Yuck, it's sticky! Here comes another one! I'm stuck to the ground. What is going to happen? Please rescue me, Rosie!

Here comes Mr. Spider again, moving a little faster than before. Oh boy, what is a small button to do? The spider is inches away from me! Suddenly he spit at me! First, he puts sticky string all over me, then he spits? Something must be wrong with him. I think this spider is crazy!

Oh no! Here comes OC again. Well, at least the spider moved away, but now the cat saw it move! OC started to meow really loud and was trying to get the spider, but his paw caught the sticky string and ME! Now, I am stuck to the foot of a cat!

OC started to walk away and Rosie looked down at OC. He was making a tapping noise when he walked. Rosie was trying to figure out where the noise was coming from. She couldn't figure it out, so she went back to reading her book. Oh no, OC is heading to the litter box! Joy, now I am lost in the kitty litter! How will Rosie find me now?

"I think I am having a very exciting day for a button!" I thought. I am so very sleepy. I do not want to fall asleep in the cat bathroom. Oh boy, my button eyes are closing! I must think happy thoughts, I must think happy thoughts, I must think happy thoughts....

And off to sleep Ruby went, all the while dreaming of being found. Ruby drifted into a deep sleep. She dreamt that OC was throwing her back and forth in the litter! "What do you think I am," Ruby asked, "catnip?" Boy, oh boy, cats are a pain!" Finally, OC left her alone. "What, I'm not fun anymore? Good riddance!" Ruby started dreaming of her nice warm spot on Rosie's sweater. She was having a nice chat with her button friend, Lavender. She lived one button down. Lavender had mentioned she was feeling kind of woozy. "Gee, I hope you feel better," Ruby said.

All of a sudden, the sound of scraping startled Ruby. She was in luck. It was clean-the-litter-box day, and after spending a few hours in the lovely litter, Rosie had come to clean!

After a few scoops, I was brought up, and Rosie found me! I now reside, back in my spot, on the lovely sweater worn by my owner, Rosie!

The Saviors of No One

*Hang on to your hat. You're in for a bumpy ride across a bizarrely comic universe in **THE SAVIORS OF NO ONE**, by **Evan M. Fried**.*

After a long summer, there was a group of kids who were broke for unknown reasons. They did have a day care job, though. These kids live on a planet called Arth. This planet was tiny compared to all the other planets nearby, like Ars and Luto. Unfortunately, this group of kids (who actually are outcasts) had lost their it'sy bitsy planet to some crazy hamburgers.

Hold up. Before we start the story, you have to know who is who, right? So here you go. The leader of the group is Nave Nitram Deirf. He's short, quick and for some reason likes carrying around a harmonica.

Second in command is the never forgettable Tiki Memorial Tablet Gravemarker Totem. This kid is just crazy. He's got long hair, he's tall, and, of course he likes eating.

Third in command is one of the strangest people in the squad. It is Kuki Dough Guy Chip. This kid speaks a lot. He's always talking so much the teachers at school literally have taped his mouth shut. He likes cookies so much he'll go for one in a dumpster. His cartography skills are atrocious but they're good enough for the group.

Fourth in command is The He E Alphabet. He's the strangest of the squad. He carries a backpack around and says it will one day help in their greatest need. He likes bunnies for an odd reason.

Fifth in command is Kun Ila Dee. Kun says "Ohhh myyy" all of the time. His brain is turned on 99.44% of the time and when it's on he can't tell the difference between water and land.

Last and least in sixth command is Mustard Mustard Mustard Mustard Mustard Mustard Yellow. He likes the opposite of his

name, as in Ketchup. No one knows how, but he can speak the language of the Sgrugianians. He has the attention span of a rodent—no, that’s rude; sorry. He has attention span of that kid across the street.

You will see two other names of people that are with them: Etan and Lumpy. They are not part of the crew, but just friends.

Now you know who everyone is. Good. No questions asked.

It all started when the Welldoneanians came and destroyed Arth. “Tiiiiiiiiikiiiiiiii, Kuuuuuuuuuuuuuuki, Kuuuun, Thhheeeeee, Mussesstarddd, Luuuuummmpy, Ettaaaaaaaaaannnn” screamed Nave.

“WHAT?” yelled the whole squad at once.

“Nothing. Why, did I say something?” asked Nave. Etan took one good whack at Nave for his annoyingness.

“Ouch, that hurt,” said Nave.

“You deserved it,” said Etan.

All of a sudden, a ship appeared that was a grill or some odd-shaped thing, with humongous ketchup and mustard bottles lined up on the side of the ship. It was looking at Tiki for some reason, so let’s find out why.

“Dude, what the heck is that thing?” asked Nave.

“I think it’s a Welldoneanian war ship,” answered Mustard.

“What the (heck)? How do you know that?” asked Nave.

“I’ve heard things, ya know. But notice its exterior. Don’t the charcoals and hotdogs make it look just like a grill?” asked Mustard grimly.

“No, no, not really. I don’t know,” said Nave.

“Hey guys. Wassap? How big of a hamburger can you cook us?” yelled The.

“Whoa, little man. Don’t yell at us, for we are the Welldoneanians. We have come to destroy Arth by the request of Tiki Memorial Tablet Gravemarker Totem,” said the leader Ruis Calendear. And of course at this moment you could tell that the whole crew was furious with Tiki.

“Ohh myyy,” said Kun.

“What? I was hungry. They said I would get an unlimited supply of wood with every flavor,” said Tiki.

“Yeah, that is true. Here ya go. Now onward, and destroy everything on this planet and blow it up,” said Ruis to the other Welldoneanians.

The Welldoneanians rampaged across the city, destroying every tiny thing, not showing mercy to any living creature.

“Ah, *gaff* Guys, get on the Trimmer,” yelled Nave.

“What’s the Trimmer?” asked Lumpy.

“This,” said Nave as he pulled the blanket off it. There, sitting under the blanket, was a—”

“Lawn mower!” yelled Lumpy.

“Yeah, you can ride on the bottom with the burning hot, sharp blades that keep us in the air,” said Nave.

“Nave, they’re coming with spatulas,” said The Alphabet.

“So what?” said Nave.

“With Rotor Blades the size of a dark blue whale!” yelled The.

“It’s not starting up!” yelled Nave.

“Kun, break a leg, NOW!” yelled Kuki.

“Okay,” said Kun in a squeaky voice. Kun took a sledgehammer and hit his leg while sticking it straight out.

“It started up. Quick, get on!” yelled Nave. And off they went.

But someone has to go. “Ahhhh! Etan, help!” yelled Lumpy.

“Huh...what?” asked Etan strongly. Etan never got his chance to help or find out what was wrong because he never saw Lumpy when he turned around. It’s not like they cared. Lumpy always got tuna and Brussels sprouts on their pizza.

The crew watched happily as their planet was destroyed. This is because they were outcasts and mobs were everywhere they went. Wouldn’t you be happy?

The young kids were all on the Trimmer, which is, in fact, a lawn mower. They were floating in space with nowhere to go. There’s nowhere to go for them.

“Outer space is so boring. There is nothing to do. Ooh, look at that Write Dork,” said Kuki annoyingly.

“So since our planet’s destroyed, what do we do next?” asked The.

“Well, first things first. We need a cartographer and food,” said Nave.

“Eep! You’re not getting my cookies. I’ll map out the area, though,” said Kuki.

“Fine, though just think what your mom would say,” said Nave.

Kuki Dough Guy Chip, you share your cookies with everybody or I’ll take away chocolate chips forever, Kuki thought of his mom saying. We all know Kuki’s a dumb-dumb since his mom was destroyed along with planet Arth.

“Okay, okay. But how are we breathing in space, Nave?” asked Kuki.

“WHAT?” asked Nave?

“I SAID, HOW CAN WE BREATHE IN SPACE?” yelled Kuki.

“It’s too loud here. They won’t stop yelling,” said Nave.

After what seemed like forever, they finally stopped yelling. “Okay, for dinner we will be having cookies with ketchup on top,” said Nave.

“Where are we going to get ketchup?” asked Mustard. Everyone looked at Mustard because he always carries around ketchup.

After dinner, the crew slept happily ever after until they landed on Revilo Viah. The squad was sleeping when all of a sudden there was a slight turbulence that woke them all up. The Trimmer, along with the squad, shot for planet Revilo. They looked like a meteor heading for a planet.

“AHHHHHHHHHHH!” yelled the whole squad.

“WE’RE GONNA CRASH!” yelled Tiki.

“Byeeee, Etan!” yelled Kun.

“Whewwwwww,” yelled Etan as he went ricocheting into space.

There was a huge explosion as the squad went flying in the air. A few hours passed until they finally landed.

“Where are we?” asked The.

“Ohh myyy, is that a big piece of lice?” asked Kun.

“Okay, Kuki, you go map out the area so we know where we are going,” said Nave.

“Okay,” said Kuki.

After a few hours passed, Kuki came back screaming and running. “Guys, thi-thi-this pla-plan-planet’s ali-aliv-alive!” yelled Kuki.

“Yeah, right, and my name’s a synonym,” said Tiki.

“It is, but anyway, how do you explain that pupil that has eye lashes with eye drops the size of a 12.9634-foot building?” said Kuki.

“Oh, let’s go poke it,” said Nave.

They got there and saw an eye sitting on a planet. Little did they know that it would be their enemy.

“Hi, my name's Nave Nitram Deirf. What’s yours?” asked Nave.

“My name is Revilo Viaho, leader of the Welldoneanians and the Sgrugianians. Is it okay if I give you a long, painful death in my mouth acid?” asked Revilo.

“Well, I like short, painful deaths. Then I know it will be short and quick,” said The.

Tiki cried, saying that he didn’t want to die, but the squad said they would be happy to sacrifice him. Unfortunately, it was denied.

“Can you help us first?” asked Nave.

“No,” Revilo answered grimly.

The group of kids and Revilo negotiated for hours and hours, and then a few more hours, and then—guess what?—one more hour. Nevertheless, the intense negotiation was over after only a few more extra hours.

“Okay, I’ve got a deal for you. You will be separated on six different planets and must regroup within five days. Deal?” said Revilo.

“Okay, but you have to help us find a new planet,” said Nave.

“Yeah, sure. Bye,” said Revilo.

So they were sent to six different planets. The planets of everyone except Nave were full of everything they could ever want. The planet Nave was on was full of bombs and other mysteries, unlike the other five planets, where they could make wishes and they had everything they ever wanted.

“Sweet, my planet’s awesome. Here’s A PZ2 and a Lamecube, and all the food I could ever want is here!” yelled Tiki happily.

“Awesome,” said Kuki.

“Gnarly,” said The.

“Oh, yeah!” said Kun wildly.

“Yeah! Ketchup!” screamed Mustard.

“Ah, jeez, there’s no way I’ll be able to stand it here for more than one day. Just my luck. There’s a mine everywhere I turn,” said Nave angrily.

As you can see, there is nothing of importance on any other planet but Nave’s.

“Jeez, it always feels like my life is being written, then deleted, and onward. One day I’ll get that guy on his computer who’s ruining my life for a report.”

All of a sudden, an unknown man shot a leaf into Nave’s arm. “Yeouuccch! That hurt! Hey, because of you my arm’s bleeding!” yelled Nave.

“Sorry. I thought you were Ogalibugu,” said the unknown man.

“What’s an Ogalibugu?” asked Nave.

“Sorry, I sneezed. I meant to say ‘a demon sorcerer from Show and Tell,’” said the unknown man.

“How’d the heck that turn into Ogalibugu?” asked Nave.

“No time for questions. We must run,” said the unknown man.

One hour later, after wandering, they came across more demon sorcerers from Show and Tell.

“WHAT? There’s more than one Ogalibugu?” yelled Nave.

“Oh, I forgot to mention that. And they’re not called Ogalibugus,” said the unknown man.

“Hey, you Ogalibugu, where do all the bombs come from?” asked Nave.

“Nave, what’s wrong with you?” yelled the unknown man.

“Quar uku hika kush yak ogidal,” answered the Ogalibugu.

“What the heck did you just say?” asked Nave.

“Nave, come on! It’s the king, who can release all the bombs in one terrifying blow,” said the unknown man.

Nave and the unknown man walked cautiously towards King Ogalibugu. “Ahhhh, Nave Deirf. There you are! I’ve heard all about your deal with Revilo. Too bad you’ll be blown to

smithereens by the bombs surrounding the core,” said King Ogalibugu calmly.

“Are you an Ogalibugu?” asked Nave.

“What? Oh, whatever. I’ll just kill you with my baby army,” yelled King Ogalibugu.

“Yeah, bring it on!” yelled Nave.

“Attaaaackkkk!” yelled an unknown baby.

“Oh no, not you guys. How’d you survive?” yelled Nave, recognizing his daycare customers.

“A space ship,” said Baby Buttons.

“Ah, dang it, this time I’ll beat you up!” yelled Nave.

As the war raged on, the babies overpowered Nave and killed the unknown man. Luckily, Nave got away. *Oh, come on. They killed that guy I was with and now I’m lost,* thought Nave.

“Nave, you have ten seconds to run until this planet blows!” yelled King Ogalibugu.

Ah, jeez, what am I going to do? I know! I’ll jump and let the bomb blow me into space, thought Nave. So Nave jumped with the bomb and landed on Revilo. The rest of the crew wished themselves on Revilo.

“Well, well, well, you’ve regrouped with two days left,” said Revilo.

“Will you help us home now?” asked Nave.

“No,” answered Revilo.

“Why?” asked Nave.

“Because I’m evil,” said Revilo.

“Pretty good point,” said Tiki.

“What happened to your shirt?” asked Kuki.

“How come you still have yours?” asked Nave.

“SILENCE!” yelled Revilo.

All of a sudden they heard someone behind them. “Hi guys,” said someone.

“Hi, Lumpy,” said Nave.

“Quick, hide in that cave!” yelled The. As they ran for the cave, The’s brain turned off, but they managed to help him.

“Okay, we’re in,” said Nave.

“Do you feel something breathing in and out?” asked Kun.

“Yeah, what is that?” asked Nave.

“I’b abbergenic to babpaps, you doovases,” said Revilo.

“Good!” yelled The. “Bye-bye, backpack. See, Nave? I told you it would help in our greatest time of need,” said The as he threw the backpack. The sent his backpack sailing into Revilo’s nose, and one final sneeze sent them flying. For now they have weakened Revilo.

“Okay, guys, I’ve got an idea so we can blow up Revilo and get on the safety planet Erth (a safety planet for planet Arth),” said Nave.

“How?” asked everyone.

“We stick an air pump in him or her, or whatever it is, and blow it up,” said Nave.

“Okay, let’s go,” said Tiki.

They stuck an air pump in him and made him bigger and bigger until they had ten seconds to get off before it blew.

“Oh god, guys, find the Trimmer. We’ve got 20 seconds or ten or 15 to find the Trimmer, or it’s off to kingdom go.”

As they were about to be blown up, Kuki and Tiki were playing Go Hike. “Hey Kuki, got any ones?” asked Tiki.

“Go hike,” said Kuki.

“Guys, what are you doing?” yelled Nave angrily.

“Well, we sent The and Kun to go find the Trimmer. Oh, and we’re playing Go Hike,” said Tiki.

Kun and The came running with the Trimmer, which was one of their wishes from their planet.

“Got the Trimmer, guys,” yelled Kun.

“Hop on,” yelled The.

“Yahooooooooo!” yelled Nave.

The Trimmer with the Crew went flying into space as they watched Revilo being blown to smithereens.

“Hey, Nave, I think I see a grill up in the distance,” said The.

“Food!” yelled Tiki.

“No, Tiki, don’t press the hyper drive but---aaaaahhhhhhh!” yelled Nave.

“Food!” yelled Tiki as he hopped aboard the grill. “Where’s the food?”

“Kill him,” said Ruis.

“Oh, you again. Ya wanna fight?” yelled Tiki.

“Yeah,” said Ruis.

“Ahhhh! Run for the hills!” yelled Tiki. As Tiki ran, he grabbed a piece of wood and ran for the Trimmer.

“Hey, come back here! That’s a prized piece of wood!” yelled Ruis.

“Oh myyy, you idiot, what are we gonna do now?” asked Kun.

The Welldoneanians were so mad they declared war. They even called backup from the Sgrugianians.

“Ok, now what do we do when we’re at war with the Sgrugianians and Welldoneanians?” asked Tiki.

“I’ll go talk to the Sgrugianians,” said Mustard.

Tiki snuck up there and this is what he heard: “Bleh nokujima yaka no, chafa ut e an a gobi kkkui ertwqw.” *Even I can’t translate this foreign language*, he thought.

“They said they would kill us, then lead us to our planet. What a rip off,” Tiki reported.

“Okay, then we will fight,” said Nave.

“Yahhhh!” yelled the squad all at once.

There were spatulas flinging left and right and ketchup and mustard shooting at everything. The battle raged on and on. Hamburgers were being stabbed left and right. Unfortunately, Kuki just stood there saying, “No free cookies any more.” After an intense battle, it was finally over.

Everything was destroyed around them. The squad stood there happily, since they love to see destruction and they liked all of this destruction.

“Well, they blew up Arth, then we blew up Revilo, then they blew up Erth, then we blew up the solar system by sacrificing Tiki so they could blow up our solar system and leave us alone. Pretty good deal, I’d say,” said Nave.

“Yeah, but now we have to build a planet out of our only supply... ketchup and cookies,” said The.

“It’s gonna take centuries to make this. We’ll be dead by then,” said Lumpy.

“But still, how are we able to breathe in space?” wondered Kuki.

A 6th Grade Dream Come True

*The feeling of déjà vu steals over all of us. But most of us don't experience it as extremely as Kevin does in **A 6TH GRADE DREAM COME TRUE**, by **Jaimmie Koss**.*

It was a normal midsummer night. The night sky was clear and dark. The only light showing was the light of the stars. I lay in my bed, wide awake, watching *Law and Order SVU*. There was a storm brewing. I could feel it.

Whenever a storm is coming, I can feel it. My throat closes a little and makes breathing a bit harder. There was a flash of lightning. I listened and counted, "1...2...3...4...5...6...7...." I heard a big thunder. The storm was only a few miles away. After the next flash, I counted until the thunder came once more, "1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...." I thought to myself, *At least it's getting farther away and not closer.*

As I was watching television, my watch beeped. It was ten. I knew that my brother would be home from work at any moment, so I quickly turned off the television and rolled over, pretending to be asleep. I heard my brother pass, and I turned the television back on.

I got out of bed and walked to my computer. I sat down and started to type a random story. It was about a young man named Timothy and his twin sister Tamari. They got lost in a forest and had to live their lives alone.

I had been typing for so long I didn't even feel my leg go numb. I realized it was past eleven so I went to sleep.

I woke the next morning to the smell of bacon and pancakes. I wiped my sleep-filled eyes and stood up. I grabbed a dirty shirt off of my computer chair because I knew my parents hated it when I walked around without one.

As I walked to the kitchen, I passed Kelly and Kim's room. It was all purple but it did have some interesting writing on the walls that was there when we moved in.

Kelly was the only one up in her room. She and Kim were only one year old, and they still slept in cribs. As Kelly saw me pass by she said, "Kevin, I want bekfist." I walked into their room to pick up Kelly.

As I picked her up I asked, "Did you sleep well last night? I slept horribly. That meany storm kept me up all night."

"Really? I slept great," she replied.

"Let's go eat some breakfast," I said. Of course, as I was saying this, Kim woke up.

"Yeah let's eat," she said, standing up. I walked over and picked her up, too. I'm only twelve, but I can still pick both of them up at the same time. They can walk, but it was early. I thought I could hold them.

Everyone was at the table except the three of us and our older brother, who was in college. I grabbed a plate for myself and my sisters. My fourteen-year-old brother Tom was indeed scarfing down food already. The bacon was crisp and full of grease, and the pancakes were a light golden brown, but still nice and soft.

As I was eating, I realized it was a Saturday, which meant that it was time for an ICE meeting (In Cool Evidence). My friends around the neighborhood and I loved to solve crimes in the neighborhood.

The next crime would change all of our lives forever.

"Mom, I've got to head off to my meeting. I'll be home before dark," I told my mom as I was leaving the house. I put on some new clothes and said good-bye to Kim, Kelly, and Tom.

I walked through five backyards and two streets. As soon as I approached the third street, I met up with Sam, another member of Ice. We walked together until we reached the clubhouse. It was made of a dark tree brown with a brown roof, but old twigs and branches camouflaged it, so other kids would just ignore it. We

walked up and knocked seven times: bum, bum, bum, bum, bum, bum, bum.

“What is the password, boys?” a voice came from inside. We knew that it was only Brett. He was the manager of Ice.

“Crack-a-to-ah,” Sam and I said together. Brett opened the door a little crack.

“Show your badges, men,” Brett said strictly. We each held out our badge with a fierce thrust. “You may enter,” Brett said.

As we entered, I looked at the inside of the clubhouse. Something was different. It had its same blue color with five green beanbag chairs, and a brown desk with a bunch of files and stuffed drawers that couldn’t shut, and ID cards on the members. And on the walls were pictures of all of the members. That was it. There was a door that was never there before.

“Where does that door lead?” I asked Brett.

“It leads to the new addition. It’s just a bathroom,” he replied to my question. “So let’s get started. Who are we missing?”

“Just Lu and his brother Lewis,” said Sam.

“Well, here are your ID cards anyway,” said Brett

“Thanks,” we both replied.

“So what’s the mission today, B... ?” I began to say “Boss,” but a knock at the door scared me into stopping in mid-sentence.

“Hello, Kevin. Are you in there?” I recognized that voice. It was Kim.

“Kim, is that you?” I asked suspiciously.

“Hello, Kevin. Kelly is here, too,” Kim replied.

“Come on in, guys.” They walked in with little spring sweaters. They were both holding hands.

“Mommy said we could come because she was drugged,” they said.

“WHAT DID SHE SAY?” I screamed at the top of my lungs.

I took Kim and Kelly home. The walk home was long and warm. I kept asking them why they came, but they never answered.

“I’m home,” I yelled walking into the house.

“Us, too,” Kim said.

“Oh, thank goodness you are home. I had no clue where you two had gone,” Mom said in relief, surprise, and maybe anger. “Where did you two go, anyway?” Mom yelled.

“We followed Kevin to his clubhouse,” Kelly said in a scared tone. She is the best at getting all of us out of trouble.

“I found them at the club and I walked them home. I thought that you might be a little worried,” I said.

“And worried I was. Thank you so much, Kevin. Well, what are you waiting for? Get back to your club,” Mom said. Mom is the only one who really understands how important my club is.

“Bye,” I said. I walked back to the clubhouse.

When I got there, it was time for a new mission. I hoped the mission was not too hard, even though none of them are too hard. As it turned out, this mission would be harder, more complex, and way more full of family and freaks. As I walked back to the clubhouse, it felt like someone was watching me the whole way to the club.

Right before I got there, someone grabbed me. It was a girl. *Who are you? What are you doing here?* These questions were racing in my head, but I dared not say them out loud. Before I had a choice, she started to talk.

“My name is JoJo. I’m from the future. I have an evil twin. She is going to try to convince you that she is nice and kind. Whatever you do, don’t believe her. She is a liar and a cheapo. She will try to get you to go on a mission with her. It may cost you your life. I have to go, but just remember: This dream will come back when it is time.”

* * *

“Kevin, Kevin, wake up. It’s time for breakfast.”

“What?” I said sitting up.

“It’s time for breakfast,” Kim said, jumping on my top bunk bed. “Can you get Kelly up here?”

“No, but I can get you down,” I said, sitting up fully. I picked her up and off of my bed.

Ok, so it wasn’t true. It was just a dream. I don’t have a crime-solving club, but I still have a family and a brother in

college and an older brother and, yes, two younger twin sisters. I walked into the kitchen and got a bowl of cereal.

“Bye, Mom, I’m going to school,” I yelled out the door.

“Have fun on your first day of seventh grade,” Mom replied.

Now, my school is just around the corner, so I walk to school. I always meet up with Brett because he lives a block down.

“Hey, Brett, hold up,” I yelled, running up to Brett.

“Hey,” he replied. “So are you ready for the big day of seventh grade? I hear that the school is getting a new student named Joe. People call her JoJo as a nickname, but I heard that she is a total babe.”

“Awesome. Total sweetness,” I replied. The walk to school was shorter than usual and all I could smell was the nice fresh air.

“I think I see JoJo,” I said excitedly. She was perfect. She had blond hair and her eyes were like two crystal clear pools of blue. She was wearing a jean skirt and a blue shirt that perfectly matched her blue eyes. On her shirt it said, “I love boys,” and on the back it said, “Don’t forget, I’m still free.” I wanted to talk to her badly, so I did.

I walked up to her and said, “Hi, my name is Kevin. Are you new here?” I asked.

She turned around and said, “Yes, I am new. Thank you for noticing.” She so liked me. I could tell by the way she looked at me. “You know, most people wouldn’t be caught dead talking to a new person,” she said.

“Well, I’m not that kind of person,” I said “Come on, I will show you around.”

“So,” Brett said.

“So, what?” I replied,

“So how is she?” Brett asked

“So how is who?” I asked, even though I knew completely that he was talking about Joe. (She said that everyone called her JoJo but I could call her by her real name, Joe. But I decided to call her JoJo.)

“You know who I’m talking about, you idiot!” Brett yelled at me.

“Okay, she was amazing. Eyes like an angel,” I said. “She was totally looking at me the whole time. She was so in love with me. She was checking me out the whole time,” I said, like I knew all of this already. “I think I’m going to ask her out to the dance. She’s nice, kind, sweet, and generous. I really like her.”

“JoJo, come on. Just get in the pool. It’s a pool party,” I said, jumping in the pool. This was in the summer before ninth grade.

“Kevin, I have to tell you something,” she yelled as I came up for air. I dried off.

“Yeah, what’s been bugging you?” I said.

“It’s something really important,” she began to tell me. “It started when I was maybe ten. I went to a clubhouse, just wandering around because I was bored. Someone at the door grabbed me and told me if I told anyone they would kill me.”

“Kill you over what?” I asked, interested in her story.

“Well, the guy I met was a spy,” she replied. “He told me I had to join them or I would be killed. I got scared so I joined, and I got a recent message that the person that assigned me has been murdered. And I need you to go on the mission with me.”

My mind went blank. All of a sudden, a voice came into my head from sixth grade: JoJo. “Don’t go on the mission with her or else.”

I didn’t know who to believe. All I knew was that sixth grade was better than eighth grade was. I went with my gut instinct. All I remember was that my sixth grade dream came true.

Stuck in the Volcano

*What appears on the surface often shows only part of the whole picture. Chris Kachal writes about a hidden world in **STUCK IN THE VOLCANO**.*

Once upon a time there was a boy named Chris. Chris was stuck on the mountains with all kinds of volcanoes, but the volcanoes were not active. When Chris was searching for a way to get off the mountains and away from the volcanoes, he saw a really, really big volcano.

He climbed to the top of the high volcano. There was a root from a tree sticking out of the ground, and he tripped over it.

Chris was falling for a very long time. He was really scared. Then he landed on a really big pillow cushion. Chris said to himself, "I think this is some kind of house volcano."

There were all kinds of things in the house volcano. There was a brown dusty drawer. Chris did not want to open the drawer, but he did anyway. There was a weird red monkey mask. He did not want to pick up the mask or touch it, but he did.

There appeared a door. It opened. There, in front of him, were money and a whole bunch of food that never, ever expired. There were also people that worshiped Chris and served him. That was how Chris lived his life.

The Sword of the Hero

*Some are born to greatness, and others have it thrust upon them. In **THE SWORD OF THE HERO** by **Daniel Moore**, an unsuspecting boy is chosen to fight aliens and save the oppressed inhabitants of another world.*

The sun was gleaming down, lighting the sky. With the white clouds drifting ahead, Rave was on the hill looking at the beautiful scenery. His whitish hair and dark black jacket were blowing in the wind. The big fat trees were waving their arms in the wind. The hills were towering over the small town. Rave loved just relaxing and sightseeing.

Then Rave saw a glowing light just above the hills. The bluish light came quickly. It hit the ground with a force. The force was so strong that Rave tumbled to the ground on the round, small hill.

“That hurts,” Rave murmured. “I wonder what that thing was.” He walked around the hill. He saw this blue crystal that was shining in the sun. His heart was pounding out of his chest. There was a red button below a little screen. Rave pushed the button and the TV flashed to life. A bear with a giant ax was on the tiny screen.

“My name is Soshi, the guardian,” the bear said in a strong voice. “We need your help, Rave. The sword is summoning you. I will give you more information when you get here. When the sword comes to you, you will know what to do, Rave.”

“Tell me more!” Rave shouted. “What is the sword you’re talking about?” he asked, looking surprised and confused. The TV flickered off. Then the crystal vanished in thin air. Rave was thinking of questions and trying to answer them all, but every time he thought he answered one, another question came up.

A few days went by, and he hadn't seen the sword or anything else that looked strange. Still wondering, he went to the hill where he last saw the strange crystals. There was nothing unusual up there until it started to get dark and cloudy. A face was forming in the clouds. The face was black and round. There were spikes coming out of his head and bright yellow eyes gleaming at Rave. There were fangs pointing out of the mouth. The dark creature began to talk.

"This world is going to be in complete darkness!" the creature shouted.

"No!" Rave shouted. Thousands of creatures started to rise from the ground. They were all black with their yellow eyes glowing like the sun.

"Did you say 'no,' little boy?" the creature asked. "You're no match for me! Get him!"

Rave started to back away, when a small creature scratched him on the back. Suddenly, a bright blue light came and the creatures began covering their eyes. A big, shiny, silver sword was suddenly there. Rave reached out to touch the handle, and when he did, there was a flash of blue.

He slashed a creature a couple of times. Then a weirder thing happened. The creature turned into a black mist and vanished. Also, where he was standing, there was dark ooze on the ground. It looked like some kind of blood. Then it sank into the ground.

Rave started to slash a lot of creatures. He knew some moves because of video games and TV, like doing spins or sliding across the place, slashing things. The sword was in front of him and it was glowing. Rave waved the sword across and a powerful wave destroyed a lot of creatures. There was a lot of ooze this time. He felt and smelled it. The ooze was a weird type of blood.

While he was testing it, five creatures surprised him. They all attacked at once. They did that with such force that Rave hit a tree that was on the bottom of the hill. He lost his breath for a second, then charged at them with great speed. When he attacked he missed, but that's when the creatures made a mistake. When they dodged, it was easy to hit them with the sword. The creatures were destroyed.

The giant creature's head was watching the whole battle. It decided to retreat and the dark clouds started to clear. Before Rave knew it, the sky looked like it did before.

He was very tired. He had almost caught his breath when the sword lit up and started to force Rave to move his arms. Then the sword made a portal. Rave got sucked in like a vacuum cleaner sucking up dust. The portal turned and went up and down like a roller coaster. He stood his ground.

His destination looked like Earth out in the country. When he looked around, he saw a temple. The sword was pointing at it, too, so he walked to the temple. It opened, then a bear jumped in front of him. The bear pulled out a giant ax.

"Aaah!" Rave shouted, walking backwards.

"Sorry," the bear apologized. "Come in." Rave went into the temple.

"Hi, I'm Soshi, the guardian," Soshi said. "Sit on the floor."

Rave said, "You're the guy on the TV." He fumbled with the sword, not sure where to put it.

"There is a holder on your back," Soshi advised, then he got to the point. "We need you, Rave. You see, the people of Kam are starting to get destroyed by darkness. This world will soon will be in complete darkness. The evil creature named Akoo will try to get my world and yours in complete darkness."

"Why me? Why can't it be you?" Rave asked.

"You're the chosen." Soshi continued. "You're the only one powerful enough to defeat him. That sword has powers that no one understands. You are the only one that can do this. You will naturally learn different powers. You kind of already have some powers. Will you help us?"

"I'll do my best to stop Akoo." Rave said it strongly.

"Good. Now, there is a dark star in the sky. That's where you need to go," Soshi said. "Here is a wristband communicator. This allows me to keep in touch with you all the way. Get going!"

"OK!" Rave said. Rave saw the dark star Soshi was talking about. He started to run there. He saw a lot of strange-looking creatures. Some had four eyes! Then he found a stream, so he had some water to refresh himself.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a dark thing. Out of nowhere, he was knocked 12 feet from where he was standing. There were four huge, dark, ugly creatures with blinding yellow eyes.

Rave jumped and slashed one a couple of times, but nothing happened. Then in some weird way, this blue flame went around it. He tried it again and it worked. At the same time he slashed one creature the thing blasted him back by punching him. There were three left, but his sword was 20 feet away from him. One dark creature stood in front of it.

So he did a jump kick, but one grabbed his leg, and threw him. The other one rammed him when he was a few feet from the ground. He stood up and pushed the button on the wristband, and a screen popped up.

“Houston, we have a problem!” Rave answered.

“What do you need?” Soshi asked.

“Well, these things want to kill me, and they’re blocking the way to my sword!” Rave said. “Hold on.” He ran across the river to the forest where he hid behind the tree. “What can I do?” asked Rave.

“Well, you can summon it by using a pull force that brings the sword to you,” answered Soshi. “The swordsman can do that, and it doesn’t have to be the sword. It could be anything.”

“How do you know this?” asked Rave.

“By legends,” said Soshi. Then the communicator turned off and closed.

Rave concentrated his energy on one of the beasts, and it started to rise. He used that beast to knock out the other two. He then concentrated his energy on the sword, and the sword floated back to him. It had blue flames around it again, and he ran to each creature and destroyed them all.

It was getting late, so he gathered wood. He called Soshi by his band.

“Can you make a fire with the sword?” Rave asked.

“Yes,” Soshi answered.

“Good. Thanks. Also, goodnight.”

“And goodnight to you.” The communicator turned off.

All of a sudden, a flame came out of the sword, and the twigs lit up in flames. Rave fell asleep after a while.

The next morning, Rave doused the fire and moved on. He kept walking through the forest, and he looked at the bizarre creatures. Then he came to a small town. He decided this was a good place he could refresh himself with food and drinks. He went to a restaurant and to eat.

As he moved on, he saw the dark thing in the sky. Ahead of him there was only a big valley, so he started to run. Rave didn't know that they were waiting for him. When he was five yards from it, he saw what looked like a dark castle. He told Soshi that he was there.

"Be very careful!" Soshi said. "They will do anything to kill you. The sword will show where Akoo is."

"Thanks!" said Rave. He closed the monitor. The sword was pulling him to the castle.

There was wind because of a small storm over the big black castle. The dark lightning hit the ground 50 times. Every time the lightning hit, Rave saw a dark figure was there. Rave's sword pointed up at a dark figure. It was Akoo.

"Attack, my beautiful beasts!" shouted Akoo. All different kinds of creatures attacked. Some were small and some were big. Some could fly, and they all attacked. One hit Rave, then another and another and so on. Rave pulled out his sword and started attacking. There were too many of them.

He jumped back and meditated. The things that came close got shocked. "The sword and I are one," Rave thought. There was a blue outline to him. He then knew every power that could shock and destroy the flying creature.

He made the sword's power increase. Then he ran so fast that it took him only five minutes to take down 46 creatures. Akoo jumped right in front of him.

"Very good," applauded Akoo.

"You will be destroyed, Akoo!" Rave shouted.

"Oh, really," says Akoo. "Now, I want to see that!" Rave shocked him and blasted him in the air. Right before he hit, Rave brought him closer and slashed him a lot, then hit him hard, and

he hit the ground. Akoo got up and brushed himself. Then stingers came out of his arms. Akoo kept thrashing Rave around.

“Now how come when I attack, you have no damage?” asked Rave while the sword was floating back to him.

“The jewel of darkness makes me invincible!” Akoo answered.

Akoo teleported behind Rave and blasted him to the wall of the castle. Rave put away his sword. He used force to pull in Akoo, then he took and destroyed the jewel. He threw Akoo and blasted him with fireballs and blue streaks of lightning. He charged up his sword, and when Akoo was right above ground, he charged at him. Akoo fell to the ground and exploded. Right before he died he said, “This is impossible. I can’t get defeated by a boy. I’ll get you back for this. Nooooooooooooo!”

Rave called Soshi to tell him the good news.

“Good job, Rave!” said Soshi. “You’re a hero. Also, when you are out of this world, I can still reach you, and you will still have the sword.”

“OK,” Rave said, “I have to go now.” He cut a portal open and before Rave knew it, he was on Earth.

He walked home slowly, reflecting on what he had done. “Why me?” Rave thought. “But it was cool. I wonder if anyone knew I was gone.” He kept asking himself this question that might never be answered.

Finally, he got to his house. When he walked in, he smiled from ear to ear.

The Thing Under the Bed

*It's the age-old nightmare explained. Two kids pull the covers up to find what lies beneath in **THE THING UNDER THE BED**, by **Melody Sharrak**.*

The bed was shaking, and Shelly didn't know what to do! She went and got Shawn. They both pulled up the covers....

In a little town called Springvale, there were two kids that lived alone because their mother and father had died in a car accident. However, they did have a nanny that helped them by taking them to school, making them breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and by just being in their lives. The girl's name was Shelly, and the boy's name was Shawn.

They lived in the scariest house. It had trees all around it and you could barely see anything, even in the day. Inside of their house there is a piano that is 100 years old that would play the song that Shelly's mother would play her all the time. That would make Shelly cry.

It was a cold night. They were sleeping in their rooms that were connected by a bathroom the night Shelly's bed started to shake.

After getting Shawn, the two crept slowly into Shelly's room. They both pulled up the covers as slowly as a turtle walks. They looked under the bed and saw something light, but they weren't sure of what it was. Shelly said, "I dare you to put your hand under the bed to find out what it is that is under my bed."

Shawn said, "Ok, but only if you do, too."

They both put their hands under the bed and they felt something like a spider web! Shelly screamed out, "GROSS!" as loud as a bird.

Shawn pulled the “thing” out from under the bed. He turned off the lights and saw something white. He heard, “Let go of me. You’re hurting me.”

They realized that the “thing” was a light ghost. A light ghost is a ghost that you can only see in the dark.

Shelly said, “Don’t hurt me” in a squeaky voice.

The ghost said, “I’m not going to hurt you. I just want to be your friends forever.” The ghost started to cry.

Shawn said, “Why are you crying?”

The ghost said, “Because I have never had anybody that cared about me. My parents died by the bad ghost a week after I was born.”

Shawn and Shelly said, “Of course we will be your friends.” Now all they had to do was tell their nanny that they were friends with the ghost that lived in their basement so she wouldn’t get scared.

They all became good friends, including the nanny!

Time Travel

*It might be fun to travel back in time—but not on this particular trip. Keep your head down as you experience **TIME TRAVEL**, by **Christina D. Michael**.*

It all began with a magical watch my teacher gave me when I was eleven. It was a time travel watch that could take you back in time. I was very lucky to be chosen. The only rule was you could only keep it for three years. Then you had to pass it on to someone trustworthy to take care of it. I had used the time travel watch many times over the two years that I possessed it. I had gone on many wonderful journeys, and learned many things about our history.

One weekend I was doing a school report on the Vietnam War. I thought it would be helpful if I went there and saw for myself what the war was really like. I forgot to reset the watch when I got back, and while my mom was cleaning my room, she accidentally dropped the watch. It landed on the button and my mom was sent back to the Vietnam War.

Unfortunately, she did not have the watch to bring her back. I had to go there and find her and I had to go quickly. I knew my mom must be terrified. She had no idea where she was sent until she got there.

I got scared and started panicking. What if I can't find her! I started wondering who was going to help me. Who is going to check my homework? Who is going to cook me dinner? Who is going to give me hugs when I am sad? I just could not live without my mom. So I went right to the phone and called my cousins.

My cousin Amanda answered the phone. When I told her what happened she said, "That's awful! But relax. I will get my

brother and bring our spy gear that we got for Christmas.” She came right over with her brother Michael.

I said, “I am glad you are here. I was hoping that you could help me.”

They said, “Sure, what else are cousins for?”

“Okay, hold on, here we go,” I said, as my cousins and I went to the war. “Ahhhhh! Okay, we are here.”

We were right in the middle of enemy territory. It was horrifying! Tanks and enemy soldiers surrounded us; bombs were falling from the sky like rain. I had just been there and still the sight of all the dead and wounded soldiers was horrifying. Aircrafts were burning on the ground, and B-57 bombers were flying overhead. There were sounds of helicopters in the distance. We just had to sneak by and save my mom.

“Ok, Michael, I am counting on you to help me sneak by the enemy soldiers. Here is what we are going to do.” We all rolled on the ground in the mud to camouflage ourselves, and we found three helmets and other gear from dead enemy soldiers. Amanda would pretend to be one of the enemy soldiers and keep watch, while we would go and find my mom so we could get back home as soon as possible. That was the plan.

There was a marine base I had seen when I was there earlier. I decided that was probably where my mom would have gone. It was just starting to get dark out. I knew we were going to have to hurry if we were going to find her.

We crept along a tunnel for a short distance. Then we followed a riverbank for a half-mile. Michael was using his spy goggles to help him to see further away. I used his spy hearing aid. It was very difficult crawling with a rifle and wearing combat boots and a helmet that was way too big.

Michael spotted the flag at the marine post. We only had one-fourth of a mile to go. And then suddenly, I heard a scream that I recognized. I ran towards it, and sure enough, the scream came from my mom. We moved faster now. I wasn’t sure what had made my mom scream, but I knew she needed help.

As we got closer I could see my mom. She was caught in some kind of trap. We quickly cut the ropes, and freed her from

the trap. I had found my mom, and now we needed to get Amanda and get out of there!

We had to crawl through muddy ditches and just narrowly escaped bombs dropping around us, but we made it back to where we had left Amanda standing watch.

“Amanda! I am so glad I found you. Let’s go home, take a shower, and get some hot chocolate. Being here has left me feeling chilled to the bone. Let’s goooooooooooooooooooooo!”

After that I never forgot to reset my watch again. And I don’t think that my mom will clean my room again either. I guess I have to do that myself from now on.

When Dolls Meet Evil Doctors

*These days, you can find all kinds of familiar characters in video games that are tailored for them. But in **WHEN DOLLS MEET EVIL DOCTORS** by **Erika Schmidt**, a couple of living dolls find themselves in the wrong electronic neighborhood.*

Sally and Gina pulled up to BarbieWorld Mall in Gina's sparkling hot pink convertible with the top down. It was a hot day, but not too hot—just right. Sally's long, golden hair fluttered in the soft breeze.

"Where do you want to go first, Sally?"

"How 'bout that new pastry shop? What's it called, The Cake Castle, or something?"

"Sure! I've heard how great their chocolate cake is."

The two girls parked the car and walked into the huge building. They rode up the towering glass elevator to the third floor. When they got off, the first thing they saw was a pink sign with "Cake Castle" painted in purple letters.

"Well, here it is."

"Boy, I can smell that chocolate cake you were talking about, Gina."

"Yeah! Do you want to order?"

"No, you go ahead."

"Okay. We'll have two slices of the Chocolate Cream Dream."

"That'll be four fifty," grunted the cashier.

"Thanks."

The girls took their cake to a little table in the middle of the shop. After a few bites, Sally said, "This cake tastes even better than it smells!"

"It sure does! And it smells pretty good, too," Gina agreed.

Sally and Gina finished their cake and left the shop. Later, after a few hours of shopping, the girls went home. A few blocks away from Sally's house, Gina said she had a kind of sick feeling in her stomach that made her want to throw up. Sally had the same feeling. They thought and thought of what it might be, but neither of them had ever had a feeling like this one before.

The next day, Sally woke up and looked around. She seemed to be in a slaughterhouse. There were chicken feathers scattered all over the floor, and there were dozens of chickens hanging on the wall by their feet—dead. Sally was lying on an uncomfortably hard wooden table next to Gina, who was asleep. There was a man wearing a white lab coat standing over them with a butcher's knife in his hand. The man held the knife up over his head, ready to swing.

Sally screamed and leaped off the table. The man slammed the knife down on the table, missing Gina's head by an inch, but chopping off a decent clump of her hair.

The man swore fiercely, angry that he had missed. He had hit the table with such force that the knife was stuck, and he struggled to free it.

In the meantime, Sally had crawled under the table to the other side and had begun pinching and poking Gina as hard as she could in the attempt to wake her.

Gina stirred and awakened. She saw the man and his knife and screamed louder than Sally had moments before. Sally bolted out from under the table, surprising the man so that he fell backwards, tripped on a dead chicken, and landed flat on his back in a pile of chicken guts.

Sally yanked Gina off the table and ran, dragging Gina behind her. As soon as they were through the door, Sally took a sharp turn, which made Gina lose what little balance she had, and the two girls fell on the ground next to one another. They got up quickly and dashed around the side of the slaughterhouse. Not wasting any time, they kept running full speed ahead.

They ran across the green meadow, but this was no time to stop and pick flowers! They ran until they reached a city with tall, gray buildings. In fact, everything was gray, from the cobblestone streets to the tall lampposts.

There was no time to lose. Sally and Gina scrambled over the gray chain-link fence. After running straight for about three blocks, they turned a corner and found themselves in a dark, musty-smelling alley.

They were cornered. Sally and Gina turned around only to see the murderous man running at them, knife waving wildly in one hand. The girls were helpless.

Suddenly, Gina had an idea. She had a small container of chocolate cake left over from the other day in her purse. It would have been for lunch, but this was an emergency. She found the cake and stepped forward.

The man with the knife had begun to slow down because he was nearing the wall at the end of the alley. Gina took another step forward.

Sally was about to explode. She couldn't stand the suspense. The man was now completely stopped. He lowered his knife. Gina spoke. "We come in peace." She held the cake out to him as an offering.

He snatched the container, but said nothing. "We mean no harm. All we want is to be back home." The man was still silent. He studied the cake.

He reached into the pocket of his lab coat and pulled out a little white rat. Gina yelped and jumped backwards, bumping into Sally. "I hate mice!" she squealed.

"So do I," replied the rat. "It's a good thing I'm not one!"

"Well, then...what are you?"

The man in the white lab coat spoke the first words Sally and Gina had heard him say. "Shut up, Willard." The rat looked hurt. The man turned to Sally and Gina. "He's a rat."

The rat jumped out of the man's hand and landed in his greasy black hair. The man and Willard turned around to speak to one another for a moment. All that Sally and Gina could hear was hushed mumbling, "Could...poison...don't know."

They turned back around. The man said, "Give me a fork."

Gina rummaged in her purse a minute and came out with a plastic fork. The man snatched it and began to eat the cake. When he had finished, he told Sally and Gina that his name was Dr. Yugdab. Then he turned and walked out of the alley.

Dr. Yugdab was halfway to the street when he paused. He turned around once again. He whispered something to Willard. He nodded and said to the girls, "I agree to be peaceful. Follow me."

Sally and Gina smiled at one another and went forward to follow the man. They truly thought that the man had changed. Maybe the chocolate cake was so good that it had made him want to be good.

Sally and Gina followed the man to a large gray building. They went inside. Dr. Yugdab sat them down in particularly comfy chairs, considering the fact that the girls hadn't sat down all day. He made tea for each of them.

Suddenly, the chairs Sally and Gina were sitting in sprouted arms and grabbed them. Dr. Yugdab didn't seem to care. He actually seemed happy. They had been tricked! Dr. Yugdab had always been evil and would always be evil and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

Dr. Yugdab explained to them that they were in a video game called *Dr. Yugdab and the Evil Chickens*. He said they were trapped on the fifteenth level forever unless they could find his Shoo-Away Potion, which was nearly impossible because he guarded it every second of every day. He said that if they helped him defeat the evil chickens, he would help them get home. He also said that if they didn't help him defeat the evil chickens, he would kill them.

That definitely convinced them! They weren't about to give up their lives just because of some chickens!

Dr. Yugdab spent the next few days teaching Sally and Gina evil things, such as how to properly steal candy from a baby, how to decorate a hideout, and basically how not to be nice. And the worst part of all is that Sally and Gina actually liked learning evil!

Weeks later when they were "ready," Sally and Gina set out to find the evil chickens. They had searched for no more than two minutes when they heard a warrior cluck from behind them. They turned around to see about fifteen chickens wearing suits of armor running at them.

Sally and Gina stayed where they were for a moment, then slowly began to walk toward the angry chickens. The chickens slowed to a stop a few feet away from Sally and Gina. Sally stepped forward and said to the chicken that appeared to be the leader, "We are good. We will help you defeat Dr. Yugdab. Come with us."

The chicken turned and said something in Chicken language to its fellow chickens. He turned back around and said to Sally, "We will follow you," with a Chicken-ish accent. Sally whirled around to Gina and gave her the "OK" sign with her fingers.

Sally and Gina led the chicken army to a spot in the meadow where there was a large, flat pile of sticks, leaves, and other nature junk. Sally

walked to one side of it, and Gina walked to the other side. "Please sit down." The chickens jumped onto the pile all at once.

But the pile turned out not to be a pile so much as it was a hole. The sticks broke and fell into the hole, carrying the chickens with them. Each and every one of the chickens fell into the huge ditch, jabbering and clucking the whole time.

Sally and Gina high-fived one another. Gina took a remote control out of her pants pocket and pressed a large green button. A long, wide sheet of iron slid out of one side of the hole, closing it off completely.

The girls skipped back to Dr. Yugdab's hideout to tell him the good news. As they approached the building, the door opened. There was Dr. Yugdab, standing in the doorway. Gina exclaimed in a singsong voice, "We've captured the evil chickens! We've captured the evil chickens!"

Dr. Yugdab did not seem pleased. Willard poked his head out of Dr. Yugdab's pocket. "What's the matter, Boss? Can't you hear them? They captured the evil chickens!"

"You idiot! Don't you know anything? Now that they've beat the fifteenth level, I'll have to let them go. They won't be here anymore to help me with the sixteenth level."

"I see."

Sally and Gina were now within hearing distance, so Dr. Yugdab stopped talking. The four entered the building and were led by Dr. Yugdab to a secret room with a large machine in it. The machine filled most of the room. It was all silver except for a sign that said "Transporting Machine."

Dr. Yugdab pressed a button and the door of the machine opened. He commanded the girls to get in. They got in. They could not see, but they assumed Dr. Yugdab was pushing another button. The machine filled with pink and purple smoke. The girls got the same sick-to-their-stomach feeling they had had days before on their way home from BarbieWorld Mall. The feeling stopped and the smoke cleared away.

The door of the machine was open. Sally and Gina peeked out. They were standing in front of a very familiar sign. It was the "Welcome to BarbieWorld" sign.

When Pigs Attack

*A giant, radioactive pig is on the loose. Fortunately, Billy knows just what to do in **WHEN PIGS ATTACK**, by **Ryan Chugani**.*

There Billy was, staring down the giant radioactive pig. It had all started with one of the pigs in Farmer Jack's barn.

A nuclear power plant had been built next to the barn a couple of years before. One pig, Porky, ate some feed that was contaminated with nuclear waste that had seeped up from the ground, and was mutated into an evil, giant, radioactive pig with rancid breath.

Farmer Jack's son, Billy, went to feed the pigs the next morning and found the barn deserted. The barn smelled like rancid breath, and there was a huge hole in the back of the barn. Billy thought this very bizarre. Then, in the distance, he saw a giant pig. He knew what he must do. He had to end this before it began.

He went into the kitchen and calmly took his father's butcher knife and all of the silverware. He was prepared. And so, he set off, following the giant hoof-shaped depressions in the ground.

Hours later, after hiking many miles, Billy saw Porky drinking from a river.

As Billy approached Porky, Porky stood, pointed his right fore-hoof at Billy, and said, "Your time has come... MUA-HA-HA-HA-HA!"

Then came the time of staring. Billy knew what he had to do, but he just wanted to build up dramatic tension.

Then, Billy muttered under his breath, "That pig's dead pork!"

They fought. The menacing pig blew gusts of rancid breath. Billy threw the silverware like tomahawks. This kind of backfired on Billy, because Porky just blew the spoons, forks, and knives

back at him. But as Porky took a breath, four of Billy's forks hit him squarely on the nose.

This really annoyed Porky, so he blew Billy into a lake that was next to their battleground. Billy climbed out hastily, and got back into the action. Then, when Billy ran out of silverware and Porky ran out of breath, they sprang into close range combat.

Porky punched and kicked rapidly. Billy slashed viciously with the butcher knife. It was a fierce battle, kid versus swine.

Billy slashed off Porky's tail. Unfortunately, after Billy did this, Porky kicked him with his heel, which knocked him flat. As Billy got up, Porky sent the kick again. This time Billy sidestepped the kick and slashed Porky across his thigh. Porky squealed, then collapsed. Billy snuck up behind the flailing Porky, and stabbed him in the back, literally and fatally.

In the end, everyone was happy except for Farmer Jack. Who could blame him for being angry? He had no silverware.

Because Porky was so big, he left Billy with tons of meat, with which Billy ended world hunger. At first people didn't want to eat radioactive meat, but after the Board of Health tested it and proved that it was safe to eat, everybody loved it. The radioactivity made it tangy and slightly spicy!

And so, Porky was slain, salting Porky's meat became a multi-million dollar industry, and Billy grew up to be a professional boar hunter.

You Don't Always Have to Be Right

*One person can change the world—especially if that person has the power that Elizabeth possesses in **YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO BE RIGHT**, by **Elaina N. Gardner**. Still, all good things must come to an end....*

“Oh my gosh! Jess, you’ll never guess who just talked to me!”
“Who?” Jessica said.

I took a breath and said, “Brad Chimiki!

My name is Elizabeth Right, but my friends call me Liz. My best friend’s name is Jessica Staten, but I call her Jess. I’m known as one of those nice girls who everyone says hi to and hangs out with. And you probably know that where there is a nice girl, there’s going to be a mean one. You know, that one who makes you do her homework and tells you that if you don’t give up your lunch money then she is going to beat you up. Well, for me, that girl is Stacy Arman. I really can’t stand her, but then again, what’s life without our enemies?

Anyway, Stacy’s kind of, well, a blabbermouth. And in third grade I snuck into the teachers’ lounge because my friend Jessica double-dog dared me to! I couldn’t turn down a double-dog dare; it’s against the kids’ almost-official rules! When I snuck into the teachers’ lounge, Stacy told the principal!

But, she kind of did help me find out something. You see, I am always right. I know that sounds so selfish and bratty, but still, I really am! For instance, when I did go into the teachers’ lounge and Stacy told the principal, the principal scolded me, then said, “Now what do you think I am trying to say?”

I said, “That I need to get into more trouble?”

Then he said, “No.... Oh, wait, that is correct. I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking clearly.”

But that’s just one of the times. Another time was when my mom took me to the dentist and the dentist asked, “Have you been eating a lot of candy again?”

I said, “Yes...I mean no...no, I have not.” And all of a sudden all of my teeth were perfect and white! I was so amazed.

I kept thinking this wasn’t happening. But then I really knew that it was true three years ago, when I was ten. I was at the fair with my mom and dad and the Ferris wheel came crashing down and I was right under it! Everyone knew that I had no chance of getting away. I just said, “The Ferris wheel is not crashing down,” and it was back up and everyone was fine. That time made me know that I was always right!

All I ever have to do is say something out loud and that makes it true! I’ve never been wrong before!

Well, I’m 13 now and my birthday was two days ago on Saturday. It was so awesome! Jessica came over and slept over. It was the coolest! First we turned on music, then we ate dinner, and after that, we stayed up till two in the morning talking.

“Hey, dork,” I heard from behind me. I turned around.

“Oh, hi, Stacy. Need someone to tutor you?” I said. Stacy growled. I laughed.

“Actually, I heard you were hanging out with my brother today.”

“That depends. Who’s your brother?” I asked.

She just stood there and then said, “Just stay away from my brother.”

I stood there with a lot of questions. Who was her brother? Why does she want me to stay away from him? What’s her problem? How was I supposed to stay away from her brother if I didn’t even know who her brother was?

“Liz!” Jessica said. “I need to talk to you.”

“I need to talk to you, too. Jess, it’s about Stacy,” I said.

“I need to talk to you about Stacy, too!” she said. “Brad is Stacy’s twin.”

I stood there amazed. I thought about it and then said, “Hey, I can fix that!” I went up to Stacy and said, “Brad is so not your brother!”

And all she did was roll her eyes and say, “Yeah, he is!” Then she walked away.

I stood there, astonished for the second time that day. How could this be? How could *I* be wrong?

I ran home as fast as I could. I told my parents what happened and they said they would think about it and tell me what could have happened. So I went into my room and sat and waited. And sat and waited. Finally, what seemed like hours later, my parents came into my room.

“We have the results, sweetie,” they said. They said that I just lost the power to be right. I hadn’t done anything bad or anything; I just lost it.

My point in telling this story may not be the one you’ll be telling everyone, but I learned something that day: You don’t always have to be right!

ALMOST REAL

Blizzard Madness

*What could be more fun than a ski trip in the Rocky Mountains? But in the midst of fun, two boys encounter danger in **BLIZZARD MADNESS** by **Adam Ketai**.*

It was a normal day so far in Snowmass/Aspen. My friend Scott and I were skiing together. We went off jumps and went down difficult black diamond runs, and expert-only, double black diamonds way up in the mountains.

So far, no one had gotten hurt or lost this trip, unlike last trip when my brother got hurt. He had tried to do a trick off of a jump and landed in a funny way. He landed for a second, but when he did, his foot twisted in a little bit. That caused him to fall and land on his arm. We were looking for him for a long time. Everyone was in a panic. After a while, he got down the mountain. We asked, "Where were you?" He told us what happened and we rushed him to the hospital and took care of him.

Scott and I got on the chairlift with two other people we didn't know. We were in the doubles line at a four-person chairlift, so they came with us. We heard them talking about a hard run they went on. We were up for a challenge. We walkie-talkied the condo and my mom answered. We told her what we were going to do. She said, "That's fine, but be careful."

We got off the lift and headed for the run. It would probably be our last run of the day. We had to go on another chair lift to get up that high. In the middle of the lift, a big snowstorm started. Near the top, the wind and snow were blowing so hard that our chair started going backwards.

Then Scott and I started going down the mountain. We both fell a couple of times. All of a sudden, a huge gust came out of nowhere. While we were in the gust, we lost each other. We couldn't see anything. Then all of a sudden, I hit something.

I started tumbling down the steep powdery mountain. I hit a couple of moguls on the way down, but I was laughing and having a blast. I thought I heard Scott laughing, too. Finally, I stopped and sat up with snow all over me.

My skis were halfway down the mountain while my poles were a ways up the mountain. I saw Scott right below me. I said, "Wasn't that fun?" That was when I saw he was crying. I also just realized that Scott and I had hit each other, which caused us to fall. The thing is, he had a harder fall.

It was obvious he couldn't ski. It looked as if he had broken his leg. His face was all red and wet. His eyes were scrunched up while he tossed and turned in pain. I asked him, just in case he could, "Can you ski down?"

He shook his head. "No."

I was trying to decide if I should go and get help or stay and find a way to help him down. I ended up staying with him. We started sliding ourselves down the hill. I said, "My mom is going to be really mad." He nodded his head. He was in so much pain that sometimes he couldn't answer. Sliding down the hill was too slow and I was getting colder.

We got to a small forest. I got an idea then. We both had zip-off sleeves on our coats. We zipped them off. Then I told him to take his boots out of his bindings. I put the sleeves inside the bindings, and then put the boots back in the bindings. Then I went and found some dead sticks and I weaved them into his skis. Then I put his poles perpendicular with the skis. This made a little sled for Scott to sit and rest his leg on.

We started going down the hill again. Then, I heard a beeping sound. I looked around and said, "Who is there?" That was when I remembered I had a walkie-talkie. I started walkie-talkieing my mom and dad. No one would answer. After ten minutes, the walkie-talkie died out. We just started going down the hill again.

All of a sudden, I heard a jingle, and then a bark. I heard it again. I saw a white figure coming towards me in the blizzard. Then I knew what it was. It was my dog. The jingle was from her collar. I hugged her. She was still warm. I told her, "Lead us down the hill." She knew exactly where to go.

After a couple of minutes, I saw my mom. Scott and I were so excited. My mom came running up the hill to us so fast I thought that she would pass out. She hugged us both. Then she looked at Scott and said, "Are you ok?" Scott said he was in a lot of pain.

We went straight to the hospital. It turned out Scott did break his leg. We were in the hospital for a few hours. Scott had to get a cast on, which took a while.

When we got back to the condo, we got hot cocoa and sat by the fireplace. My mom came down and sat with us while we told her everything that had happened. After we were done, all she could say was, "Don't ever do that to me again. Don't ever get lost like that, please. That scared me even more than last year. I had two kids lost, not just one like last time. I thought you two were going to be more careful knowing what could happen." For the rest of the trip, Scott couldn't ski. That ruined both of our trips, but of course, it ruined his trip more than mine. Scott ended up being fine after a couple of months.

Cyrus's Bad Day

So how is your day? Let's hope yours is better than the one told about in **CYRUS'S BAD DAY**, *by* **Cyrus Barrow**.

My bad day started when I hit my head on the top bunk because of a bad dream. Then I got up and slipped on a puddle of water from my cup that spilled on the side of my bed. That fall did NOT help my head feel better.

After that, I got up and went to the kitchen for breakfast and tripped on my baby sister's toy. She was screaming and my head was hurting. I just was going to get my teeth brushed and go to the bus.

When I got to the bathroom there was no toothpaste. I was so mad I threw my toothbrush in the sink, and it came around and hit me right in the head. After that, I just said "Forget it" and went to the bus.

The bus was coming, and the bus tire just got the tip of my toe. I screamed, the driver said "Sorry," but it still hurt.

Finally, I was at school. I enjoy school because I can talk to my friends and I have cool teachers. But of course we had subs, and they were mean ones. All I was thinking in my head was "What a great day!" The substitutes were terrible.

I saw my friends Bob and Jack and John. We were in Mr. Steack's class. He's one of the nicest subs in the universe. But there are always the mean, terrible subs like Mrs. Homes. She hates me and she was having a bad day, too. Halfway through her class, she says, "Cyrus, go to the office for talking."

So I'm on my way to the office, and this kid runs right into me, and THAT helped my head a lot.

When I got there, Mrs. Sky said, “Were you talking in Mrs. Homes’s room?” I said no, but she thought I was lying and she gave me a week of detention.

Then the next hour was with Mrs. Cans. She’s mean, but she gives us candy and that’s good. When I walked in her class I tripped flat on my face, and she said, “Go to the office for trying to be funny.”

This time I have to see Mr. Snow. He’s the meanest teacher in the WORLD. He asked me if I was trying to be funny in Mrs. Cans’s class. I said no, but teachers never believe you, and he said I was lying to him and then HE gave me a week of detention.

Then I heard the bell to freedom. I ran to my bus and fell flat on my face. Now my head felt like it was going to explode.

When I got off the bus — *BAM!* — I tripped on a pothole in the middle of the road.

The next thing you know, I’m in the hospital with a minor concussion.

The Day I Could Not Make Cookies

*Cookies can be one of the easiest desserts to make. But much depends on having the right recipe, as told in **THE DAY I COULD NOT MAKE COOKIES**, by **Anna Bond**.*

One day, my little sister Sarah and I were waiting at the bus stop with my friends. When the bus picked us up, I asked my sister if she saw any of her friends to invite to her birthday party. She said, "I see Annie, Monica, and Maya." I gave them the invitations and they said they wanted to come.

At school, I told my friends Jack, Jason and Timmy that I wanted to make cookies for my little sister Sara's birthday party that Saturday. Timmy asked, "Can we come to your sister's birthday party?"

I told him, "No, because the party is for my little sister. But I will make you guys some cookies."

When I got home from school, I saw my mom making the birthday decorations with my baby sister, Mia. When my older sister Rachel came home from high school we had a meeting to finish the rest of Sarah's birthday plans. I told my mom that I would like to make some chocolate chip cookies instead of buying a cake. My mom said that was a great idea. My sister said we could put candles on the cookies.

On Saturday, my sister and her friends were having a wonderful time at the party. They played lots of games and ate pizza. My mom asked, "Did you get the cookies done?" I told her I stayed up all night making the cookies just right for Sarah and her friends. She asked, "Where did you get the chocolate chip

cookie recipe?” I told her I made them myself with my own recipe.

When it was time to sing “Happy Birthday,” Sarah made a wish and blew out all the candles. After the kids took their first bites of the cookie, they were jumping like scared kangaroos. My mom asked, “What did you put in those cookies?” I showed her my recipe.

Chocolate Chip Cookie Recipe

1 dz. eggs
4 packs chocolate chips
5 cups flour
2 10-oz. bottles of vanilla
10 cups sugar
5 sticks of butter
10 tsp. baking soda

- 1) Mix eggs, chocolate chips and flour.
- 2) Add vanilla, sugar, butter and baking soda until mixture is smooth.
- 3) Spread mixture on 9 in. cookie sheet.
- 4) Bake at 375° F for 20 minutes
- 5) After cooling, cut into squares.
- 6) Enjoy immediately or refrigerate until ready to serve.

After my mom saw the recipe, she screamed—loud! She said, “You put ten cups of sugar in the cookies! That’s why the kids are jumping off walls!”

The Disappearance of Rebecca

*A girl disappears on her way to school. The mystery is told in **THE DISAPPEARANCE OF REBECCA**, by **Julia Williams**.*

One day, Rebecca was walking to school. Somewhere between home and school, Rebecca disappeared. When it was time for all the kids to be in their homerooms, Rebecca was not there. Where was she? Rebecca was never late for school.

They went on with their day. The school called Rebecca's mom. "Is Rebecca there?"

She said, "No, why?"

"We were wondering because she is not at school."

The mom was crying really hard and wished she could find Rebecca. The school was wondering if she was skipping school. Everyone was worried, so they sent out a search team to try to find Rebecca.

It was no use. The cops looked everywhere and could not find her. When the cops were looking for Rebecca, her dad had her hiding in the water from the cops. Rebecca was really kidnapped! Her dad did this because the mom was not there and he knew how much the mom loved her. Her parents were divorced and she never wanted to go see her dad.

Rebecca's dad took her to Lake Michigan. They were hiding in the water and in the sand dunes.

Rebecca was really mad at her dad. Her dad was not nice to her for her whole life.

One of her friends said her dad could have kidnapped her. Rebecca's friend said that because she was the only one that knew that her dad hated Rebecca.

In the end, they found them and sent the dad to jail. Rebecca was happy that her dad was in jail, but Rebecca said, "Mom, you are hugging and kissing me in front of the cops."

Rebecca got hurt really badly from her dad. Her friends felt really bad for her and they hoped that she would get better soon.

The next four weeks Rebecca was stuck in the hospital. Then she went back to school. And her friends were so happy. They were going crazy to see her. They were having a party when Rebecca was out of the hospital.

The Great Desert Adventure

*It's just another family outing, until the unexpected happens. Three brothers are thrown into a struggle to save their injured father in **THE GREAT DESERT ADVENTURE**, by **Matt Trogu**.*

Riding ATV's in the Mojave Desert on a Saturday afternoon was a weekly event for Matt, his two brothers, and their dad. It was a beautiful, sunny day, the sixteenth in a row to be exact. It hadn't rained in over two weeks and everything was dry and dusty.

The boys were comfortable on the hills and no one went beyond his ability. Dad taught them when they started riding to respect the desert and their machines. You never got on a bike without the proper equipment, no matter how hot it was. This included a jumpsuit, gloves and a helmet. Dad had a black helmet and each of the boys had his own design.

The kids were going off the jumps. You could hear the engines revving and see the dirt kicking up behind the ATV's when they landed. As soon as one jump was landed, it was on to the next one. Everyone was having a great time. That's what makes what happened so hard to believe.

The next thing anyone knew, there were only three ATV's instead of four. The black helmet was missing. That was Dad. The ATV was on its side at the bottom of a jump with Dad lying next to it. No one had seen what happened because Dad was the last in the group to make the jump.

The kids stopped and stared at their Dad. Dad was always kidding around. Matt, the oldest of the boys, was laughing as he took off his helmet and walked over to his Dad. "Nice one, Dad. That fall looked real," said Matt.

Usually Dad would start laughing and hop right up, but not this time. Dad was very still. He wasn't smiling and his leg was bent backwards at a weird angle. Matt moved a little closer.

"What's wrong, Dad?" Dad still didn't answer. Matt looked up and saw his younger brothers, Donny and Mitch, staring at him. Matt didn't want to scare them.

"It's ok, he probably just got the wind knocked out of him." Now Matt tried shaking Dad a little and kept calling his name. "Dad, Dad." But there was no response.

Mitch was kneeling by Dad and started to cry because Dad wasn't waking up. Donny leaned over, took off Dad's helmet, and checked to see if he was still alive. Maybe he could feel a pulse or hear if he was breathing. He wasn't sure, but he thought he felt something beating on the side of Dad's neck.

"I think I feel something. He's alive!" shouted Donny. He wasn't really sure what a pulse was supposed to feel like. Mitch was crying and Donny didn't know what else to do. They both looked to Matt for an answer. Matt could see the panic in their faces.

Dad always carried his cell phone in his coat pocket. Matt reached in and tried to call for help.

"I don't believe it; no signal," Matt said, very frustrated. "We need to get closer to town until we get a signal so we can call for help."

Matt knew it wasn't a good idea to try to move Dad. What if he really hurt something inside or broke some bones? Their dad was unconscious and not able to move. He needed help and he needed it fast. Someone needed to go for help and someone needed to stay with Dad. Matt didn't know how to drive the pick-up truck, so he decided the next best thing was to take an ATV and head back towards town.

Matt mustered up all the courage he had and said, "I'm going to take my ATV and head back to town. As soon as I get a signal I'll call for help. You guys stay with Dad in case he wakes up." Mitch started to cry again because he was scared and Donny put his arm around his shoulders to try and comfort him. They waved at Matt as he drove off.

Now here are two kids, scared out of their minds, with their Dad lying next to them, not moving. Luckily, they had a cooler with some food and water. They didn't know what else to do, so Donny and Mitch kept talking to Dad, trying to get him to wake up. They were careful not to shake or move him too much in case he was really hurt.

Meanwhile, Matt headed back the same way they had come earlier that morning. You wouldn't really call it a road. It was more like two ruts in the dirt, and it seemed to go on forever. Matt was concentrating very hard on those two ruts so he wouldn't veer off and start heading into the middle of the desert. The thought of getting lost in the desert scared him more than having to go for help.

Matt felt like he had been riding for hours but it had only been 30 minutes. The ATV was slower than the truck. Matt kept stopping every so often to check the cell phone, but there was still no signal.

After an hour, Matt stopped for a drink of water. The sun was blazing hot and the temperature had to be around 90 degrees. A little rain right now would sure feel good. At least he had thought to grab a bottle of water from the cooler before he left. He was sitting on the ATV, drinking his bottled water and wiping the sweat off his face, when he heard a low rumble.

"What was that noise?" Matt said out loud to himself. The rumble grew louder and louder. It sounded like an army of horses coming toward him. Thank goodness, someone had found him. Matt was so happy, he was smiling as he turned around to see the group coming toward him. But as Matt slowly turned and looked behind him, his happiness turned to confusion, then to panic. The horizon was black, and it wasn't a group of people or even an army of horses that was coming towards him, but instead it was a wall of sand.

"Sandstorm!" was all he had time to yell. Matt wasn't sure what to do, but instinct took over and he sat as close as he could get to the ATV, using it as protection.

Ouch, that sand really hurts. It felt like someone was standing 20 feet away aiming a sandblaster at him. He didn't even have time

to put his helmet back on. All he could do was tuck his head down and try to keep it covered. The ATV seemed to be shaking and moving a little, and the storm was so loud Matt couldn't even hear himself think. It only lasted a couple of minutes, but when it was done Matt was buried in sand up to his waist.

"Wow," was all Matt could say. The sand was so thick in his hair he couldn't even get his fingers through it.

"I don't know how, but the sand is even in my mouth!" Matt said. He wiggled out of the sand and then, using his hands, began to dig out the ATV.

"I sure hope that sandstorm doesn't head towards Dad," Matt mumbled to himself. He had to get moving again. He put his helmet on, started the ATV, and headed off again. Luckily, the sand hadn't damaged the ATV.

It took another 30 minutes before Matt was finally able to get a signal. He dialed 9-1-1 and told the operator what happened and how his Dad was hurt and his two brothers were waiting with him. Matt didn't know exactly where he was, but based on the closest city he remembered driving through that morning, there was only one road leading into the desert. The police told him not to move and that they were sending a helicopter to pick him up. For the first time, Matt sat down and took a deep breath. Finally, help was on the way. There were only a few more minutes.

As luck would have it, the sandstorm missed Donny and Mitch. They watched it pass them by just to the north. Dad woke up about an hour after Matt left. He had a killer headache, probably a few broken ribs and a broken leg. Dad was worried about Matt going off by himself. He kept telling himself that Matt was a smart kid and would be ok. Meanwhile, Donny and Mitch took good care of him, making sure he had enough water to drink and using an umbrella to make a little shade.

All three heard the noise at the same time and looked up to see a helicopter flying toward them. Donny and Mitch jumped up and down, waving their arms at the helicopter.

"That's them, over there," Matt was pointing and telling the pilot. The helicopter landed away from Dad and the boys so the sand wouldn't blow on them so much. Matt ran over to Donny

and Mitch and gave them a quick hug and then went over to Dad. Dad was smiling at Matt, and Matt smiled back as he squeezed Dad's hand. Everything would be ok. Matt could just feel it inside.

"Your ride is here," Matt said, smiling at Dad. After Dad and the boys were loaded on the helicopter, two men loaded the other ATVs on the trailer and drove Dad's truck back to town. They would meet them at the hospital.

During the helicopter ride to the hospital, Matt told his story about the sandstorm and being buried in sand. Donny and Mitch told their story about watching the sandstorm go right by them. Everyone was smiling again, just as it should be. Dad was smiling as he listened to the boys exchanging stories. Then Dad looked at Matt and smiled.

Dad could feel a tear at the corner of his eye and he hoped his voice wasn't shaking when he said, "I'm proud of you, Matt."

Not trusting his own emotions, Matt took Dad's hand, squeezed it and whispered, "Thanks." Matt held his hand until the helicopter landed. That simple gesture seemed to make everything all right. He could go back to being a 12-year-old boy again.

Wow, my friends at home are never going to believe this story! Matt thought to himself.

Haters and Cheaters

Jealousy leads to more bad feelings in **HATERS AND CHEATERS**,
by **Rena Collins**.

One day, Rena Collins was talking on the phone to Lindsley. “Do you want to have a double date?” asked Rena.

“Yes, let’s go to the movies,” said Lindsley.

“Ok, call Alston. I’ll call Chris. Bye,” said Rena.

“Hello,” said Alston.

“Hi, Alston. Do you want to go to the movies today?” said Lindsley.

“Yes. What time?” said Alston.

“About 5:00.”

“Okay. Bye,” said Alston.

“Bye,” said Lindsley.

Five minutes later, Rena called Chris. “Hello,” said Chris.

“Hi, Chris. Do you want to go to the movies at around 5:00 today?” said Rena.

“Ok. See you later,” said Chris.

Later that day, they all were at the movies. They bought their tickets. Alston and Lindsley sat by each other, and Chris and Rena sat by each other. Lindsley and Chris sat in the middle.

When the movie started, things were okay until Rena found out that Chris hates Alston because he is going out with his ex-girlfriend. Rena was upset because she wanted Chris to like her more than he liked Lindsley. Chris started to ask Lindsley questions, and Lindsley did the same to Chris.

After the movie, they had 45 minutes until Rena's mom would come to pick them up. They went to the restrooms. Chris and Lindsley came out first. When Alston and Rena came out, they saw them kissing outside of the theater.

Rena and Alston ran outside. Alston jumped on Chris. Rena dumped Chris and Alston dumped Lindsley. Rena told them to find another way home.

When Rena's mother arrived, she told her mother that the others had a ride home, and she and Alston left.

Rena and Alston started going to the movies with people who Chris and Lindsley didn't know so it wouldn't happen again.

The Mystery of the Lost Bracelet

*How does a person get away with something she didn't even do? In **THE MYSTERY OF THE LOST BRACELET** by **Monica Seman**, Daisy finds herself in a strange situation.*

“Hey, Daisy, do you want to go to the mall?” asked Ciara.

“Yeah, sure,” she answered.

“Okay, then let’s go right now,” said Ciara.

“Now?” said Daisy.

“Yeah,” said Ciara.

“Okay,” said Daisy.

They both went walking by the mall. “Hey, let’s go to the jewelry store,” said Ciara.

“Okay,” said Daisy. Daisy wanted a bracelet anyway.

There was a police officer there, and he was looking at Daisy with a grin. She was looking at the bracelets. She accidentally dropped one, and it got in her purse. She looked on the ground and she didn’t see anything but dirt on the floor.

Right away, the cop saw what happened. He yelled immediately, “Hey, you! Put your hands up!”

She was scared, and she put her hands up immediately. He saw the bracelet in her open purse.

“Hey, what happened?” Ciara said.

“I don’t know,” answered Daisy.

“Look in your purse,” the cop answered.

Daisy looked in her purse right away. She said, “Oh!” and frowned. Then she said, “I thought I dropped that somewhere.”

Then the cop said, "I know. I saw you. But don't worry. I'll let you get away with it."

"Oh, thank you," said Daisy.

She went home and she was scared.

"How are you?" said Ciara.

"Horrible. I'm scared. What will my mom say?"

"Nothing," answered Ciara. "Don't tell her."

"Okay, but I'll never go to the mall again for as long as I live."

"All right," said Ciara. She went home because it was late.

Then Daisy said, "I won't go to the mall" about 30 times. These were Daisy's thoughts about going out shopping.

Pie Heads

*There are many ways for children to get their parents' attention. Christen Knight writes about an unusual method in **PIE HEADS**.*

“Ha! That was funny. Remember when we were six years old?”
“Oh, yeah, I remember,” Samantha and Kamiah replied.

In 1976, there were three girls named Samantha, Kassy, and Kamiah. We were always made fun of because we were interested in bugs and school. We never got any attention from our parents. We thought we would never get any from them, but we were wrong.

“Man, I’m tired of getting treated like crap!” Samantha screamed loudly. “It is time that we get treated with respect.” We came up with wonderful but yet embarrassing plan.

We started to go gather up a lot of disgusting things you would not believe, like worms and all types of bugs. With a grin we stored the nasty things in the backyard.

After we let it dry, we put a lot of it in a huge container. We knew that our parents wouldn’t notice because we did not get that much attention.

That changed when school was over that day. Our parents came to pick us up after school. That was when we threw the nasty pie we had made in their faces.

“Ha, ha, ha!” All the kids laughed and said, “Pie Head,” but not for long. We threw some more on them, too. It was just a mud pie fight.

When we came back to school, everyone thought that we were cool. And our parents started giving us attention, too!

“I’ll always remember that day!”

Sleepover

As summer begins, a girl looks forward both to old friends and the promise of a new relationship. The end of school brings new possibilities in SLEEPOVER, by Maggie G.

It was the last day of the sixth grade at Berkshire Junior High. Jenna slammed her locker and turned to her best pal, Cristina. They walked together down the crowded halls. Kids were everywhere, pushing and shoving to escape “The Evil Lair” that they called school.

“Finally, summer is here!” Cristina cheered.

“Yeah. And don’t forget about our sleepover party to celebrate,” Jenna said. They both smiled. She was so happy that summer was here.

When she was walking out the door, Liam Evens caught up to Jenna on his skateboard. She was wondering if he was crushing on her because he annoys her every day.

“What is it, Liam?” Jenna asked.

“Are you planning anything next week?” he asked, sounding like he had butterflies in his stomach.

“Nope,” Jenna replied.

“Good, because I was wondering if you and I could go catch a movie on Friday,” he asked.

Jenna was stunned. No one had ever asked her out before. She could hardly speak. Her bus was about to leave so she thought fast.

“I’ll call you,” she said.

Jenna got on the bus and went home. When she got off the bus it began to rain. She ran quickly to her house, which was ten

minutes to walk to. When she got home, her hair was as soaked as a damp rag. She saw a note as usual.

Jenna,

I'm at the Chop Shop.

I'll be back at 9:00.

Feed Ringo at 5:45.

Love you,

Mom

Jenna placed down the note and looked out the window. The Chop Shop was her mother's cooking business that was becoming a huge success now. She stared at the storm for hours. She was thinking happily about a date with Liam.

Three hours later the doorbell rang. It was Cristina. They started to turn on the music when the doorbell rang again. It was Maya and Elena. They did everything together. That night they enjoyed pillow fights, scary stories, modeling, pedicures, and hair braiding.

Maya told Jenna that the boys were having a sleepover at Jonathon's that night. She heard they were going to play truth or dare. Liam was there.

"Dare me," Liam commanded at the boys' party.

"Ok. I dare you to go over to Jenna's house and sing a love song to her," Brad dared. Everyone laughed.

"Fine, I will," Liam said.

The boys' had a really huge reaction when Liam accepted. Brad started to talk like a girl and said, "Hey, Liam! Let's go get a milkshake!"

Jonathon showed him where Jenna lived. He brought his video camera and the rest of the boys hid behind the bushes. Liam sang the "Barney Theme" at her window so loud they could hear. Elena opened the window.

“Jenna, Liam’s at your window!” Elena shouted. Jenna ran to the window. “Jenna, can I throw your heels at him?” Cristina asked.

“Go ahead.” Jenna said. Cristina threw the heels and hit Liam on the head.

“Yippee, that hurt!” Liam shouted.

They all laughed. “So did you make up your mind about Friday?” he asked, throwing back the heels. Jenna caught them.

“Yes,” she said.

The girls watched a movie and didn’t go to bed until 1:00 A.M. Liam went back to Jonathon’s and had fun. Both Jenna and Liam went to sleep looking forward to their first date.

The Soup

*All she wanted was to eat lunch. If only that were as easy to do as it sounds. A temperamental girl loses her cool while home alone in **THE SOUP**, by **Rebekah Malover**.*

It was a cold, rainy morning in early December. My parents were going carpet shopping. They asked if I wanted to come with them. First, I was amazed that they'd ask if I wanted to come. The last time we went shopping for new carpet, we went to this tiny store. It had only one banner in the window. There were about six parking spots and one entrance in the rear. We parked in CVS's parking lot across the street because there was no more room at the carpet place. I stepped into the store. OUCH! A huge family who had gigantic feet trampled me! I tried looking for my dad. I practically stepped all over the family's feet! They almost took up the whole floor of the store! Oh, how I hate carpet shopping! Now, whenever carpet shopping is mentioned, I try to stay away!

My parents finally left. I love it when they're gone. There is no one to tell me to turn down my music or when to do my homework! They left me chicken noodle soup to make for lunch. Little did I know that soup was evil.

It was about two o'clock. I went down the stairs to get the can of soup. I slowly climbed up the stairs, examining the can. This soup can was different. You pulled it open with a tab, almost like a pop can. I read the directions to open it. I did what they said. The can didn't open! I read the instructions another time to make sure I wasn't missing something like I always do.

I was in no mood for this! I wanted to punch the maker of this type of can! Instead of thinking.... Ouch! Oh, that hurts.

Never punch a can! Think before you act! I snatched the ice pack. Ah. Cold!

Then my favorite song came on the radio. Finally, some relief in my life! I turned the volume up as loud as it went. I did the whole rock star routine...you know, the one you do when you pretend you're on stage and nobody's looking.

I unexpectedly heard a knock on the door. An unusual voice started talking. I couldn't hear the speaker clearly over my dog's high-pitched barking with my music. Why do people always call or visit when I'm at peace listening to awesome music? People these days. I turned down my music unwillingly and looked through the peephole in the door. *Gasp!* It was a police officer! Yikes! What did he want? He was really tall and had short, dark brown hair. He looked tough and muscular. Uh oh. He had huge feet, like Bigfoot! I had another flashback... At camp last year, swimming was terrible. A kid always kicked me in the face while swimming laps. Oh, how that was terrible! I have a lot of bad incidents with people who have big feet.

The officer showed his shiny badge. I slowly and carefully opened the door. I could tell that he was waiting impatiently. He told me that he received a call from a neighbor about a "dog-barking problem." He asked, "Where are your parents?"

I told him that they were out shopping, and that I was home alone.

"Oh," he said. "Well, where's your dog?"

I looked around. "She's probably under the bed hiding," I said, knowing my dog. She's afraid of almost everything. She thinks she's a tough dog and all, but she's a little whiny creature.

The police officer gave me a brief but stern warning about the noise level. I told him it wouldn't happen again.

"Thanks for your time and consideration," he said.

"WAIT!"

He stumbled over his large feet. I giggled just a little, then stopped.

"What?" he said irritably.

“While you’re here...will you o-open my s-soup c-can?” I thought, why not use this guy while he’s here? I mean, who else will open it?

He burst into laughter! How is this funny? I could starve to death! And nobody would want that to happen! Psh! How rude! Then he suddenly stopped giggling and demanded I show him the soup. I pointed and stammered, “It’s on the.. um, counter.” He strutted toward the kitchen with dignity. Oh yeah, he sure is dignified, opening soup, I thought. The officer stared at the soup like it was his archenemy or something. Then he just opened it! As simply as that! How come I couldn’t do that?

My parents finally got home. They asked how my day went. I said one word. “Interesting.”

You’re probably wondering what is the point of this story. The lesson in this story is...always buy the normal soup can, keep your dog quiet, and don’t play your music too loud.

The Three Best Friends

*Three girls have to face being apart for the first time in **THE THREE BEST FRIENDS**, by **Veronica P. Gordon**. Will they have the maturity to maintain their friendship across distance and time?*

One bright and shiny morning in California, there lived three girls. Their names were Samantha, Paige, and Danielle.

The three girls were always getting in fights because Samantha always had the better clothes, since she was rich. For examples, she wore Abercrombie, Hollister, Lacoste, Polo, and Juicy. Did you ever feel jealous because of somebody's clothes? Paige and Danielle did. The girls got so mad at Samantha that they said they would never talk again.

Samantha was feeling really bad. She thought she caused the fight over her clothes. This was the first fight that had been longer than two hours. The girls were freaking out.

A couple of days later all the girls saw each other at school. Samantha told Paige and Danielle that she was moving to Chicago in five days because of her dad's job. All his life her dad had wanted to be an engineer. He finally got the job in Chicago. It was his dream come true.

Since the three girls were in a fight, they really didn't even care that Samantha was moving.

When it was the big day to move, Danielle and Paige were getting a little more sad that their best friend since the first grade was moving. The girls waved goodbye even though they were still a little bit upset with each other.

About six more hours went by and the two girls got a phone call. It was Samantha! They were excited. The three girls were

having so much fun talking on the phone about boys, makeup, and even clothes that they all totally forgot about the fight.

A couple of months went by and the girls got another phone call. It was Samantha again. Samantha told them that she was moving back. Her dad wanted to transfer back because he disliked his boss. The girls were all excited. Samantha and her family packed their bags and two months later, Samantha was back in California, at the same house: 48309 Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, California. She even had the same phone number.

As soon as Samantha got home, she saw that the girls had put up a big sign saying “Welcome Home Samantha.”

Samantha was so excited she was home. That same night the three girls had a sleepover in Samantha’s new but very old house.

REAL

Allergies

Pets aren't always easy to take care of. Ashlyn Polk tells about the extra care her dog needed in ALLERGIES.

My dog Fuzzy was very hyper and started to bleed on his tail because of his allergies. Whenever he would scratch his tail, it would start to bleed more. But my mom said that it was ok since it was just allergies. They *were* his allergies, but they were worse than we knew.

My mom gave him his medicine and watched him for a few days. That was a very big mistake. He did not really sleep, and he was not very playful. So my mom took him to the veterinarian.

The veterinarian shaved Fuzzy's tail, and gave him a shot on his tail. Then he put a cone on his head so he could not bite his tail.

When he got home, guess how happy he was? Not very. When he ran, he would flip over and fall on his head so the cone held him up. He could not even fit through his doggy door. My mom said it would be a good thing since he could not rip open bags.

He is now very hyper again and gets a lot of sleep.

The Bad Experience

It is a bitter reality that some people are faced with adult-sized trials while still very young. Alex Grigorian relates just such a personal story in THE BAD EXPERIENCE.

“I wish I were dead!” Those were the words that I said for a long time. Why, you might ask? Let me tell you.

When my family and I were living in South Africa, I went to the hospital, Pretoria Urology Clinic, for a simple medical procedure called a cystoscope. That’s where they took a little camera attached to a tube and went inside me to look around. The procedure lasted for about 15 minutes. As sometimes happens during this procedure, the doctor nicked one of my kidneys. My kidney bled slightly, which is something that is normal with this type of procedure. The doctor had no idea that what was normal for others would not be so normal for me.

I went home a couple of hours after the procedure. Later that night, I felt a sharp pain in my back around my kidneys. The pain got worse and worse. I tried to rest, but it took me a while to actually fall asleep because the pain was keeping me awake. Around 12:00 A.M., my dad took me back to the hospital. When the doctor came, he talked quietly to my dad for a few minutes. Although I tried to listen, I couldn’t stay awake. After they finished talking, the doctor examined me but could not find or see anything wrong, so we went home.

The next day the pain was gone, so my dad and I went to the store. At the store the pain came back. This time it was ten times worse than the night before. When my dad and I got home, my mom said she was going to take me into the hospital again.

The doctor saw me at the hospital and decided to do a procedure called an IVP. During the IVP they put a chemical dye into my body and took pictures to see if they could find what was wrong. They couldn't see anything. The pain got even worse and it didn't go away. I couldn't sleep. I tried, but all I could sleep was maybe 20 minutes or so at a time. I wished I were dead. Thankfully, my dad stayed by my side all night.

The next day, the doctor came in and said that I was going to have another cystoscopy. I was so scared. This time it took half an hour. Afterwards I got taken back to my hospital room, and the doctor said he thought the tubes between my bladder and kidneys, the ureters, were clogged. They tested how fast my blood clotted and decided that it clotted too quickly. I had a blood clotting disorder. When the doctor nicked my kidneys during the first procedure, the blood passing down clotted and got stuck in the ureters instead of passing through to the bladder. I was in deep trouble.

The doctor decided I had to go into an intensive care unit (ICU). We went downstairs in the hospital and into the ICU, where the doctors took a picture of my kidneys to see what size they were. If they got larger by morning, it meant I was going into kidney failure and they would have to do something extremely drastic to make me better.

The nurses gave me a lot of drugs to stop the pain. I remember it was getting late at night, and everything was like a dream. Because of the drugs, I felt light-headed and didn't really understand what was going on, or why this was happening to me. They let my dad spend the night in the hospital again; he slept in an empty bed in the next room. Although there were no other patients where he stayed, I don't think he slept that well during that night. I slept better than I had in a few days because of all the drugs they had given me.

I woke up the next morning and I saw my dad. He looked exhausted. We talked for a while, then the doctor came in. My heart started pounding, and I felt like I started sweating when I saw the look on his face. He told my dad that they took another picture of my kidneys and they had gotten much larger. I was

going into kidney failure. Within a matter of hours, unless something was done, I could die. That's what I was really worried about.

The doctor told us that I should be transferred to another hospital, Unitas, where they could possibly do a procedure that could make me better. The procedure was to put in j-stents, or plastic tubes, through my back, into my kidneys, and down the ureters to unclog them and keep them open. The hospital had an ambulance come pick me up and take me from Pretoria Urology Clinic to Unitas Hospital.

When we got to Unitas Hospital, they put me in a room and we had to wait a while before I went into surgery. They kept giving me drugs to keep the pain down. Remembering it now, it seems like I was in that room for about a half hour before they came and took me into the operating room. My mom and dad told me it was closer to two hours because they had to do the same procedure for another child before they did mine.

Before I knew it, I was on my way to the operating room with my parents at the side of my bed. When my parents had to say goodbye and I went on toward the operating room, I started to cry. I didn't understand why they left my side. Again, my heart was pounding. I was so dizzy from the drugs and I just wished it were over.

They wheeled me into the operating room and gave me some more drugs to fall asleep. In what seemed like a split second, the nurses were waking me up. I asked my parents how long I was in the operating room and they said three hours. My dad said that normally the procedure took about an hour to complete, but my case must have been really difficult.

I was tired, confused, and felt much less pain than before, but this pain was different. I fell asleep for a while. When I woke up, I found that I had an IV in my neck to give me fluids and a clip on one of my fingers to tell my heart rate and if I was getting enough oxygen in my blood. I had a blood pressure cuff on one arm and heart monitor wires and sticky pads on my chest. I also felt two sores on my back with tubes coming out. The doctor had put these tubes in my back so that my kidneys could drain

from them together with the stents they put down my ureters. The last thing I had connected to me was something I don't want to talk about.... The good news was it was working. That meant that my kidneys were going to be okay.

A couple of days went by in the hospital. I started to eat and feel better. I was still very sore from all the tubes and wires hanging off me and I was itching to get home. My parents and the doctors decided it was time for me to finally go home.

The next thing I knew, the nurse started to remove the wires and tubes that I thought were going to be part of my body forever. She had me turn on my side, and she slowly pulled out one of the two draining tubes from my back. It was so painful, I screamed very loud and quite often. It hurt so much I was crying again. The worst part was, there was one more tube to come out, and that one was almost as bad as the first. The nurse used the "Band-Aid" trick this time. She pulled it out quickly instead of slowly. It still hurt a lot more, but it happened much quicker!

My parents carefully took me home. I was so happy to be out of the hospital, in the fresh air, and not connected to tubes and wires. When I got home I took a nice warm bath and lay down on the sofa and watched TV with my dog, Sam. Later in the evening, my parents put a mattress on the floor in their bedroom for me to sleep on. They didn't want me too far away in case I got up and collapsed during the night. I wish I could say this story ended here, but it didn't.

I got a pounding headache. It started before I went to bed and was bad all night long. In the morning my dad was dressing to go to work and I was lying in his bed wishing for the pain to go away. It didn't. My mom was so exhausted that she called a neighbor, Tilly, to take the two of us back to the doctor.

I started to lose my eyesight and hearing. When we got to the doctor's office my mother was panicking. She and Tilly rushed me in to see the doctor who found that my blood pressure had gone up to 180 over 130; this was while my heart rate was very low. By this point I was completely blind and deaf. I remember feeling my mom carrying me but I didn't know where we were going. I knew we were in the car.

My mom and Tilly took me to a hospital, Medforum, which was near the doctor's office. I was so mad to have to go back to the hospital. My mom called my dad from the car and he was sitting in the parking lot when we arrived. I remember going into my dad's arms and him walking until he laid me down in a hospital bed. My dad said I called out for him like I had heard him through the quiet that was all around me.

A nurse took my blood pressure and then gave me some medicine to lower it. Everything started to come back. My mom was there together with my dad; Tilly had tears in her eyes. Within ten minutes I was a "normal" boy again.

Just to be safe, my parents took me back to Untias Hospital. I was feeling much better. I felt so good that I was eating and watching TV. The doctor said my body had been through so much in such a short period of time that it needed some help to find balance again. My blood pressure and heart rate got checked often, but it stayed pretty much okay.

My dad was going to spend the night with me in my room on a chair that folded out flat like a bed at night. Around 11:00 P.M. I rolled over, looked at him, and said, "Dad, go home. You look really uncomfortable. I'm fine; go home." He did. I slept well that night.

The next day I went home. When I got there I saw our housekeeper, Alice, and it felt good to be home again. I ate real food, not hospital stuff, and rested a lot. I stayed home from school for a very long time. When I went back it was for half days at first, and then I worked up to staying there all day.

A month went by and I went back into the hospital to get the stents removed. After they took them out, I told myself, "I'm back to normal." After that I lived a fairly normal life; well, as normal as it gets in Africa. About three months after my recovery, I was playing in the cement fountain in our front yard and it crashed down on top of me. I broke my leg and had another operation to reset the bones. That was an easy operation compared to the one I had just completed recovering from, although I was in a full leg cast for six weeks.

It's now three years later and I am back in America. My parents worried that something else would happen to me if my body were damaged through all that happened before. We went to a urologist to see if everything was okay. He said we would have to do four tests to be positive everything was ok. In the end, all four tests came out just fine. There was no damage to my kidneys, ureters or bladder from my "bad experience" in Africa. The biggest damage now is in my head. I still feel sad, my heart pounds, and I get sweaty thinking about what happened. The good thing is that the more I think and write my about experience, the less worried I've become. As I talk about what happened with my parents, sister, brother and friends, I learn new things about what happened to me and what they were feeling that I didn't remember or realize when it happened.

In the three years that have passed I have met new friends and have done a lot of new things: I've parachuted out of an airplane, and learned to wakeboard, water-ski, snowboard and snowmobile. I've had lots of great experiences and memories from the rest of the time we lived in Africa and since we've come home.

I'm really glad I'm not dead.

The Black Dog!

*The term “just looking” doesn’t mean much at the pet store. In **THE BLACK DOG!** by **Kathryne Gaskins**, a family likes what it sees.*

“No! We are not adopting any pets today!” my dad said as we walked into the pet store.

My sister and I were really upset. What we did was just look around with my mom and say, “You are so cute!”

My dad was looking at another puppy and having such a great time. All of a sudden my dad changed his mind and said, “Let’s adopt.” My sister and I were just... we could not put it in words, we were so happy!

We were not sure which puppy we were going to pick. What we did was go with the dog that my dad wanted since he was going to be training the dog. It was his decision to get the dog, and he went for the all-black dog all by himself.

We all decided that we needed to name the dog, so what we did was just stand there a minute or two and think. While in my mom’s hands, the puppy just wanted to wiggle out and go play with the other animals that he saw.

I said, “Wait. Baxter would be a really cute name, and it would fit the dog. I mean, he is playful and he is really loving and everyone enjoyed him.” My mom and dad thought for a minute or two, and then what they said was, “A really great name!” and that it was a perfect thing that I said that! I was really happy and so was my sister Beth.

“That was such a good name,” she said. “How did you come up with it?”

I just said, “I do not know!”

As my mom and dad signed the papers saying we could take Baxter home, it felt really weird. The responsibility was really hard. I mean, we had to housetrain him, and we also had to teach him how to sit and to stay, and more.

Then we all lived happily ever after. We played and we talked to him, and then he started to grow more. We all loved him so much that we decided to keep him forever, even though we had to train him a little bit more!

A Close Call

A trip to the doctor for a cold ends up being much more serious in the true story **A CLOSE CALL**, by **Eric Pace**.

The doctor told my mom and me, “You have to get to the hematologist right away. I think he might have leukemia.” Leukemia! I wasn’t even sure what leukemia was. I knew it wasn’t anything good by the look on my mom’s face.

It all started when I was eight. I had a cold and wasn’t feeling well. I fell asleep in a restaurant, which I never do. The next day my mom took me to the doctor.

Soon my parents and I were all in the hematologist’s private office. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Cancer! I wasn’t sure what cancer was, either. All I knew is that it couldn’t be good.

I was very scared and worried. I had a million thoughts going through my mind, like what will I have to do? Will I still be able to play with my friends? Will I die?

I had to be admitted to the hospital to have a blood transfusion. I was so scared I did not say much. I wanted to go home. I didn’t know how sick I really was. I felt better knowing that the nurses were really nice when they prepared me for the blood transfusion. But I had never felt so terrified as when they put the needle in my arm. I started to cry.

After a second transfusion, my blood levels were still dropping. All the people that came into my room had worried looks on their faces. That brought my spirits down even more. Now they really thought I had leukemia.

My parents cheered me up by bringing me cards that my classmates had made for me. My mom said that they were getting a lot of phone calls. I missed my cat and my friends at school and

in my neighborhood. I really wanted to go home. I hoped that I could go home soon.

The doctor said that they were going to have to do a bone marrow biopsy. I had no clue what a bone marrow biopsy was. My parents were crying. I thought the bone marrow biopsy was going to hurt, but it didn't. They put me to sleep so I didn't feel anything.

The next thing I knew I was looking at the ceiling in my room. In a few hours the doctor came in and took off the bandage. The test results had come in. He told us that I didn't have leukemia. I was so relieved and happy that I did not have leukemia. My mom and dad started to cry.

I was born with a blood disorder called hereditary spherocytosis. My red blood cells are shaped differently than everyone else's. I had gotten a virus that acted like leukemia because of my blood disorder.

I still visit the doctor every six months to have my blood checked. Considering that it could have been worse, I don't mind at all.

Dancing @ the Pistons Game

*Can you say that you have performed in front of 20,000 people? A girl named Patty (if that is her real name) certainly can. Read her true story in **DANCING @ THE PISTONS GAME**, by **Rikki Shapiro**.*

One amazingly wonderful day, there was a very young girl who loved to dance more than anything. Her name was Patty. Patty loved dance like it was her own flesh and blood. Actually, she took dance lessons at one of the best dance studios in the world! The studio was called Studio A.

At Studio A, there was a dance team that went to competitions and got to do great things for its dance studio. Patty was in the competition group. The girls on the dance team loved dance as much as Patty.

One day in 2004, the owner of the studio said to them, “Girls, I have great news for you! You girls are going to be dancing at the Pistons game on December 10 at halftime!” Patty was so excited, as was the rest of her dance team. They were going to dance in a giant place that they had always dreamed of dancing at. This news was the best thing that ever happened to the girls.

The day finally came, December 10. All of the girls were in a panic for the entire day. They had to be at the Pistons game at 7:00, or their teacher would not let them dance in the game. They were going crazy with excitement.

Patty got to the game and couldn’t find her group. She was very nervous and needed support from her friends from the dance studio. Finally, she found where her studio was sitting in section 211 and she went there. Right after they were all settled in at their seats, they had to get up and go practice the dance.

She was practicing by the car that they were auctioning off and that was in the middle of the hallways. All kinds of people were staring at her and her classmates. They were staring because the girls were wearing costumes that were shinier than the moon and the stars put together. They were also wearing so much makeup that they looked like aliens! After they did the practice, they had to go right to the lineup to go on the court to dance. Patty had a huge pit in her stomach. She was not feeling well at all.

Uh oh! It was time to dance. Patty just seemed to feel better. Patty all of a sudden got that pit back in her stomach when she heard her teacher say, "Time to go and dance. You girls are going to be great!"

They got on the court and had to wait for a long time for the people to turn on the music because there was something wrong with the CD player. As Patty was waiting for the music to turn on, she spotted her dad, her sister, and a few of her friends.

Finally the music turned on. Patty danced her heart out, from leaps in the air to turning on one foot. While she was dancing she saw her dad, her sister, and a few of her friends again. When she saw them she was so happy. She had never been happier. "Dance as if nobody is watching," she kept saying to herself. She danced with flying colors.

After she danced, to her surprise, she got to meet the Automotion dance team (the Pistons cheerleaders). She was so happy. She got to meet some of the people that she had always looked up to! After that, she and her studio teammates had to go back to their seats.

Patty was so happy to see her dad and sister after she danced that she went running to them, jumped on them and almost knocked them down onto the ground. They told her that she had to leave and that she could not stay to see the rest of the game with her studio. She was upset, but she had to leave to go to a Chanukkah party at her aunt and uncle's house. She was disappointed at the moment, just like when you are about to do something fun but your mom or dad ruins it. But she knew the next day she would be with all of her dance friends again, and that they would talk for hours about the wonderful experience they had had the night before!

The Day I Slapped My Mom!

*Eventually, people learn that the world doesn't revolve around them. Before that happens, though, things can get ugly. **Alston Odum** reveals his childhood tantrums in **THE DAY I SLAPPED MY MOM!***

Being the only boy in the house is sometimes fun and sometimes it isn't. It's fun when my sisters get yelled at for bothering me. I'm not supposed to hit them back because I'm a boy. I remember that rule sometimes and other times I forget. I like to wrestle with my sisters, play basketball, and roll down the hill in our backyard. I don't like it when I have to share all the chores in the house that girls do. My mother always says when I'm older I'll be glad I can do all the things that a girl can do. I don't know about all that. I like it much better when they cook for me. They cook a lot better than me. Another good thing is I get to go and do "boy" things with my Dad alone. When they get their nails done, they all go together.

We do a lot of things together as a family. We go to a lot of places where we can go have fun. Sometimes when I was younger that meant we were going to Chuck E Cheese, Jeepers, or Major Magic's, even if it wasn't my birthday! It was always one of those places every weekend, until my sisters grew out of it, but my mom still took me. I even had a birthday party at Ceasarland when I turned two years old. A lot of my family members would come to our little parties that my mom would throw us. They never came when we just went out to play on Family Night. Maybe sometimes one of my aunts or one of my mother's girlfriends would come with their kids and we'd all play together.

My mother took us a lot of places to have fun. I remember going to hotels and swimming all day. My mother used to say we were like little fish swimming all over the place. We've visited Canada

just to swim all day, visit the arcade, shop, and watch the fireworks at night. I like those visits also. I liked all the trips we took together as a family, but I didn't like the trips my mother had to make without us.

Not only had I never been away from my mother for a long time, but I had never been away from my sometime annoying sisters for so long. That is what my story is about. It's about the first time I was actually away from my mother for a long time.

It seemed like forever. I was so so mad! As a matter of fact, I was so mad that when I saw her again I slapped her right in her face! I was only three years old at the time, so I didn't know I wasn't supposed to hit my mother. All I knew was that I was smoking mad. I guess I was scared that I would never see my mom ever again.

When my mother came to pick me up she was crying, but I hadn't noticed that. I remember my mom getting down on her knees and opening her arms to give me this big old hug, but I raised up my arm (which she thought I did to hug her back) and slapped her in the face. I tried to punch her again and again, but she grabbed my arms, hugged and kissed me, and told me she was crying. I was the one who was mad. Finally, I stopped trying to hit her and let her hug and kiss me. My mom said I even cried a little, too.

After that my mom tried not to leave me for so long when I was little. It took me a few more trips to get used to her going away and leaving us.

My mom promised me she wouldn't send us to different places when she traveled anymore. She got us a live-in nanny. The sad thing is I still got mad when she left us.

One time I purposely spilled nail polish all over her Louis Vuitton luggage. I think that time she wanted to be one punching someone! Another time she went to New York with my auntie. I was so mad at my aunt for taking my mommy away from me that I sprayed her fur coat with black spray paint. Boy, was I in trouble for those last two trips.

Well, my mother hardly ever travels now since she works for herself. I guess I miss my mother when she is gone, but I'm much, much better now. As a matter of fact, sometimes I ask her, "Hey, Mom, don't you need to go away on a business trip?"

Ice

Mother Nature makes herself at home in so many ways. ICE, by Sarah Zeiler, tells about a winter wonderland that gets a little mixed up.

Wow, the ice chunks were as big as cars. That was a pretty big accident! But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It was a sunny, unusually warm winter day. My sister Laura and I had been outside on our red swing set. It had been too warm to skate on our skating rink in our backyard. It wasn't that the ice wasn't frozen; it was just a bit slushy. About an hour later my dad called us in for dinner. We came in and ate.

Laura and I had to go back outside to get things that we left outside, when we heard, "THE ICE RINK IS BROKEN!" It was my dad yelling. You couldn't see what the ice looked like because it was too dark out, and the lights were dim. We waited until morning to see the ice.

Well, morning had come and my dad went outside to see the ice. My mom, sister, and I had all been staring at the ice rink. There were ice sheets three inches thick and as big as cars! CARS! Now as you can probably tell, they were HUGE!

When the neighbors found out about this accident, they all came over to see the rink. They came over and found the problem. Since it had been so warm for winter, the ground thawed and the stakes holding up the side pulled out of the ground and the side collapsed. That is why ice sheets were everywhere. Todd thought that this was insane, but it all made sense; Bill thought it was different; and my dad thought it was pure science!

The parents decided to rebuild the ice rink, but there were ice sheets in the way. That wouldn't stop them. They called the kids

over to break the sheets into smaller pieces. The kids began jumping and stomping on the sheets of ice. *BOOM, BOOM, BOOM* was all we could hear; with all our might we were breaking the sheets into small pieces.

“This is fun,” said Travis.

“This is hard,” said Laura.

We all had different thoughts, but we all worked hard.

When we finished, we gathered up all the pieces and put them in a pile for them to melt, away from the ice rink.

Meanwhile, the parents began to nail all the sides together and complete the frame. After that, they put about four hoses in the rink to fill it up.

It took about five days to freeze, but when it froze we knew that we should start to skate because winter would soon be over.

We got to skate only about four weeks before it melted. By that time, our pile of pieces had melted, too. We knew that our skating was done for the year.

That was a year we had many tragedies with our ice rinks, but I can't tell you them all. What a good year.

We have had much better luck with our ice rinks after this incident.

My Cats and Me

MY CATS AND ME, by *Austin Brown*, lets us look in on the family of cats that one boy is fortunate enough to be a part of.

I love cats a lot. I have five cats, except when one of them has kittens. They are Max (he thinks “eat, sleep, get petted”), Angel (she thinks “eat and sleep, eat and sleep”), Butterscotch (he thinks “eat, be lazy, and play—oh, wait, go outside”), Baby (she thinks “beg for food, sleep on Mom’s shoulders”), and Coconut (he thinks “eat, be lazy, pounce on people’s feet”). I used to have another cat named O’Malley, but he drank antifreeze. We took him to the veterinarian, but they couldn’t save him. After that, it took about a week for us to stop being really sad. Fortunately, I have lots of cats to love.

When I move, I want some different animals. I want a dog and a hamster. My reasons are dogs are more playful than cats, and hamsters are just good personal pets. I don’t know what my cats would think about a hamster. Maybe they would think, “Hey...there’s my lunch.” I know what they would think if we got a dog. “Leave, dumb dog, before we attack you. This is OUR house, not yours!”

Although all of my cats have similarities, they still have different personalities. Some are playful, some are lazy, and some are both. Max is both, Angel is lazy, Baby is both, Coconut is playful, and Butterscotch is both. Those are their personalities.

Snowboarding Accident

Wherever there is skiing, there will be accidents. It is anything but routine, however, when it happens to you. Nate tells about his brother's experience in SNOWBOARDING ACCIDENT, by Nate Zakaria.

Giant's Ridge is a ski resort in Minnesota. It's a great place to ski and snowboard. It's always got fresh powder.

My brother and I both snowboard. Ben was doing perfect carves. The board was going through the snow just like a hot knife through butter. Then he glanced over to the right. He saw a perfect jump. It was amazing how it was shaped and built. The jump was about three feet tall and perfectly packed!

He sailed off the jump. He tried to do a 180 spin but didn't turn enough. He took a tumble. His knee landed on his wrist. He was covered in snow. Snow was getting up his jacket. He looked like part of the hill, he was so covered. Then he got up and brushed himself off. He went to go take off his goggles and a stabbing pain shot through his wrist.

He was screaming so much because the bone was popping out of his wrist. You could actually see the blood, bone, and muscle.

Someone on the chair lift called ski patrol. They came soaring up the mountain on their snowmobiles. It looked like they were just skimming the ground. They got up to him and strapped him in the sled that was being towed behind the snowmobile. In all the agony, Ben still said, "Nice goggles," as he complimented his rescuers.

Then my Uncle Lon came and picked me up, and he drove Ben to the hospital. When the doctor called him in, the first thing

Ben saw was a seven-inch needle. The doctor was trying to get Ben's mind off the pain, but it wasn't working.

Ben showed the doctor his wrist, and he put in the numbing medicine. Ben laughed when the needle bent as it hit the bone because he couldn't feel it. The doctor put on the cast.

After that my uncle drove us back to his house. When we got in the house, Ben's arm still throbbing, my uncle said, "What a day!"

ROMP

And This Is How My Squirrel Lost His Nuts and Went Wild

*Before Chelsea knew it, they were inseparable. **AND THIS IS HOW MY SQUIRREL LOST HIS NUTS AND WENT WILD** by **Nathalie Bloch-Baumann** tells the story of a friendship between a girl and her accidental pet.*

My pet's name is Snowy. He's not the ordinary pet, actually. He is a squirrel. Now I know what you're thinking: He's from the wild. But he has a tame heart within.

I love Snowy more than anything in the world. He makes me laugh every time I see him. He lives in my garden. We don't feed him other than the occasional nut. The doctor says he's darn healthy.

My dad and I found him on the street, wounded, so we took him to a vet. Snowy had only broken his foot and was to be taken care of with a lot of love. We didn't know where he came from, so we treated him until he was well, then we let him go free.

A few weeks later he showed up in our garden. Every day he would come, so one day I decided to give a try at petting him. At first he was scared, but as I moved closer he calmed down. I was reaching my hand out to him and he didn't run off! Ever since that day, he was my best friend. I would never have anything happen to him.

Hi, my name is Chelsea. I'm from Grand Rapids, Michigan. That's how things were when I was 12 years old, and my life had been pretty normal. Even after a year I let nothing happen to Snowy, until...

One day he lost his nuts and went wild. This is what

happened. He went looking for new nuts and I was watching him. When he was gone far enough that he couldn't see me anymore, I went into his house and stole all his nuts. Then I hid them inside my house. When he came back, he went ballistic! He jumped around his house looking for the nuts and almost tipped it over.

"What's wrong, Snowy?" I asked.

He started squeaking and I thought it was so funny! But then he looked really depressed, so I went and got his nuts. When he saw me with his nuts, he was so happy I can't even describe it. He jumped on me and scared the heck out of me. As I put the nuts back he did a really funny thing. He just started making really funny noises. I thought it was so funny. That is just one of the best moments I had with him.

The year I turned fourteen was the worst year of my life. The winter season was approaching, snow was falling and water was freezing. It was a really windy day, snow was falling and wind was blowing. I called for Snowy to come in the house. As he came over to the door, a really strong wind blow came and a tree fell on Snowy.

I ran as fast as I could. It was too late. Snowy was dead. The only best friend I had ever known was dead.

I yelled for my dad and mom to come. When they saw what had happened they both started crying. There we were, crying our hearts in the middle of this weather, when all of a sudden a pocket of wind blew by. I swear I heard a voice saying, "Don't worry, I'm gonna be okay and so are you." When I heard those words I knew it was time for me to move on.

So I did. I graduated and grew old. But I never forgot my dear friend Snowy.

One Dog-Gone Good Story!

*Some things turn out right. A lucky dog gets a second chance in **ONE DOG-GONE GOOD STORY!** by **Lauren Nahigian.***

Ouch! Stop hitting me!

Oh, I haven't introduced myself yet. I'm Chewy, but my owner likes to call me "MOVE IT!" or "WATCH IT, YA STUPID ANIMAL!" Why, I don't know. I live in the back of an old run-down apartment. Sure, it's not paradise, but it's home.

It's morning and I'm just watching some crows eat old crumbs. Hey, a strange car pulled up. A weird man came out. He's up the walk; I saw he was in a blue uniform with a shiny gold badge. He rang the bell and my owner came out. Then he started talking about some legal stuff that I don't understand. This can't be good; my owner is going crazy! He's yelling, screaming, and making a fuss!

Wait! That man is coming to me with a rope on a stick. He's trying to put it on my neck! I'm making a fuss! Can you blame me?

But he finally got me. He's pulling me to his car and putting me in a barred metal box. It's uncomfortable and cold. I want out! Where are we going? He doesn't seem to hear me—all he says is, "We'll be there soon." And soon we are.

We go in big metal swing doors and into a big white room. Everything is so clean! The white granite tiles are spotless. There are more strange people. They start saying things like "Aw... poor thing" and "We'll fix you up" and "You look terrible!" Me, look terrible? Have you looked in a mirror, you funny human?

Then a different lady in a white coat comes and takes me to another room. I don't get it. How do they keep this place so clean? She puts me on a cold metal table and leaves.

It's so cold. What do they do, fill it with ice?

Soon she's back, only this time she has a small pointy thing and it's making me jumpy and I want to bark, so I do. That wasn't good. More people in white coats try to hold me down. Get off me! I'd like to leave here in one piece! Thank you!

Yow! She poked me with that sharp thing. They take my blood. Then she leaves. Now she's back and says I have "tapeworms." She gives me a huge blue pill with my food. They must think I can't see it. Oh well, down the hatch! YUCK! That was horrible.

A new person with no white coat takes me to a different room. It's bright red and yellow. I like it better in here. Hey, more dogs! This might be fun! He gives me a bowl of food, and then sticks a rubber hand in my face. What's this for? I don't mind, though. He says some stuff to another person, but all I can pick up is, "He's a very good dog!"

Finally, I get back in the car and go to a new place called the "Humane ... Something." I go in, and once again I'm in a box. Darn boxes!

It's been about a week or two. A little girl and her mom just came in. They have been walking around for a few minutes. She's coming here! And now she's going the other way. Now back over to me. The girl points to me and says, "This one, Mommy, this one!" She picked me? No way! Out of all the other dogs, she picked me! They take me out of the box (what a relief). I'm being loaded into the mom's car.

I'm at their house. It's very classy and I like it. It's much better here. We go inside.

Wow! What a place. We go in the living room. There's a fireplace and a rug and, and, and—another dog. He seems friendly. He says his name is Cocoa.

Now we are taking a tour of the house. First we go to the kitchen, wow! I've never seen so much food! There are treats and candy and loads of dog food. Next we go to Emma's room (she's my new owner). Her room is pink and white. It's so comforting to look at. We're in the playroom, where the dogs are supposed to play. There are balls and bones and food dishes. The luxuries never end!

Now it's time for dinner. I have this new food called "IAMS." It's delicious.

I've been here a month. It is nothing like my old owner's, where they loved me for five minutes and then didn't care. Here it's been nonstop love! I want to stay forever, and I think I can!

Pepper's Lesson Learned

*When a housecat finds herself in the wide world, adventure is bound to follow. Read about her event-filled day in **PEPPER'S LESSON LEARNED**, by **David Brink**.*

Pepper is a black cat with lots of energy. She loves chasing squirrels from *within* her house as she watches them through doors and windows. One day her energy got the best of her, and she found herself out of her house chasing one of them.

It was a crisp and clear morning, and Pepper was lying next to the window taking in the sunshine. She was yawning and stretching like usual when she saw a plump squirrel eating birdseed that had fallen to the ground in her backyard. The squirrel looked at her like it was saying, "You can't get me!"

Pepper had had enough. In one swift move, she sliced the screen apart with her paw and darted through it. The squirrel took off with Pepper behind it looking like a black blur. They ran straight into the woods.

For a few minutes or so, Pepper chased it until she was exhausted. She sat down on some dry leaves to look around, but her surroundings were unfamiliar. Pepper saw the river that was in her backyard. She headed for it even though she wouldn't cross it. Pepper hated water.

She was walking on the shoreline when she saw a huge hawk flying above her. When the hawk spotted her, it started to take a dive toward her. Pepper started to run as fast as she could in search of some cover. She saw an old log across the river. On the other side was a thick thorn bush where she knew the hawk couldn't get her.

As she darted across the log, the log split in two. Pepper and the log fell into the water. Amazingly, Pepper was still on the log as it

floated downstream. Pepper knew that if she didn't find cover soon, the hawk would get her.

The log started drifting toward shore and Pepper jumped off, landing on dry ground. Pepper leaped into a bush and the hawk gave up. She had made it. Happily, she started walking in the direction of home.

Pepper was about a mile away from the river when she heard a distant rumbling. She knew at once what it was – a herd of deer! With no time to lose, Pepper started running in the other direction, but the deer were much faster. Pepper saw a thin pine up ahead about 100 yards away. If only she could reach it, everything would be okay.

When Pepper got there, the herd was closing in on her. Pepper climbed the pine and hung on so hard her paws turned white. One of the deer's antlers hit her leg. Then it was over. The herd ran past her. Pepper climbed down and started limping home.

Poor Pepper's leg was twisted in a weird way, and every time she moved it, she flinched. Even though she was hurting badly, she knew that home was only a short distance away. She had almost forgotten about her leg when, all of a sudden, a huge raccoon came bounding out of a bush with its fangs bared.

Pepper was so surprised she had no time to think. The animal was almost on top of her when Pepper again spotted a tree. This time it was a scrawny sapling with no branches. She started climbing it.

The raccoon started climbing as well. Pepper was amazed how good of a climber it was. The sapling started to bend. It was almost touching the ground when Pepper jumped off. The sapling snapped back and hit the raccoon right in the face. It was knocked unconscious. Pepper bounded away to her home.

It was getting dark, and David, her owner, was in the backyard looking for Pepper when she burst out of the woods and into his arms. She felt safe, and David was so happy to hold her again.

David brought Pepper inside and gave some food and warm milk to her. Pepper was very tired after her adventures. She curled up on her favorite sofa and fell asleep.

Chasing a squirrel outside was more than she bargained for. Pepper had learned her lesson about running away.

Sade's Saga

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes. That is what Jamie finds out when a black dog saves her life in SADE'S SAGA, by Gretchen Geist.

"Today, I found a jeweled dog collar!" a girl named Jamie exclaimed to her mother, Mia.

Jamie was an average 11-year-old girl. She lived in New York City and liked to explore alleys and find treasures, meaning good things that could still be used that people threw away. Jamie also liked animals, music, video games, and drawing. But she mostly liked animals.

She had loved animals ever since she was two years old. At five, she begged for a dog. Her wish was granted when she got Roxy, a sleek, smooth German shepherd. But four and a half years later, Roxy was hit by a car and died within the hour at the vet's office.

After work, Jamie's mother would go and look for a dog in the pound. Speaking of work, Mia was the host on the show *Mission Organization* on HGTV. She went on TV almost every day to organize a messy house. She earned a good salary to support Jamie. Jamie was her only family member since Mia divorced Jamie's father, Frank. Frank was a criminal, not that his family knew about it. He would carry a gun, shoplift, and drink. When he drank and drove, he was deadly. He would often hit things. But he stopped when he got married.

Today, Jamie was telling Mia about her discoveries in the alleys. "Mom, this strange, pitch-black dog was following me. I couldn't imagine why. He kept following me back to the house. I looked back before going inside and he bowed. He *bowed*, Mom! I am serious! I mean, he can't be a *total* stray. Someone would have had to train him. His bow...it seemed unreal! It wasn't a stretching-bow. It was a bow of humbleness and respect. I named him Sade. I would have named

him Spade, but I took out the ‘p’ for papa. I think he is the best dog!” Jamie explained to her mother.

Mia pondered this for a minute, then said, “We have to make sure he isn’t aggressive toward us or other people, or food aggressive.” She paused and looked around the room. After a moment, she said, “Good night.”

The next morning, Jamie was reading a book called *Puppies: Natural Rascals!* in her clean, spotless room. Her dresser had nothing on it except a picture of Roxy.

She thought about the awful, terrible night Roxy died. She could still picture herself in the vet’s waiting room, praying that Roxy would live, with Mia’s arm wrapped around her. When the vet came out, she pushed the idea out of her mind. But she couldn’t stop thinking about Roxy, or the person who killed her.

Frank, crazed and furious that Mia divorced him, decided that he would become a criminal once again. *I will take back what is mine! What else matters? They loved that...that...DOG more than me! And they hate me for killing her. I don’t care if I drop dead right here!* he thought to himself. He headed for the town market.

Jamie had been feeding Sade. After Roxy died, Mia had saved the food and bowls and all of Roxy’s old toys. Jamie was feeding him three times a day. He put on a lot of weight, which was *very* good.

Jamie once put a stick in his food bowl and pulled the bowl away. Jamie had seen people do this at the Humane Society to see if dogs were food aggressive. Sade kept following the bowl and eating. Jamie trusted him so much that one scorching-hot day, Jamie gave him a bath. She did it outside with the hose and Roxy’s old shampoo. Sade kept still, but Jamie could tell he hated it. He just stood there, looking insulted.

After his bath, Jamie groomed his thick, glossy fur. Jamie attacked the mats in his fur fiercely but carefully. During all of this, Jamie was talking to him. “You know what?” she said to him. “I think you are a Newfoundland. Your fur is pitch-black and you have the ‘New’ face and coat. I also think you had an owner. You are *too* well trained! And *where* did you learn that bow?” Sade just cocked his head.

Next, Jamie clipped Sade's nails. Sade was looking at his nails while Jamie was clipping them as if to say, *Wow! How do you make them disappear like that?* Jamie was planning to explore the alleys tomorrow with her dog.

Jamie got up early to feed Sade. She got out of bed at 7:57 and pulled on her orange fluffy jacket. Jamie glanced at the picture of Roxy, and then hurried downstairs. She wrote a note:

Mom,

I am going treasure hunting. I am bringing Sade. I will be back at 8:30.

*Love,
Jamie*

She fed Sade, and then hurried away to the alleys. Something was following them, but its footsteps were too soft to be heard.

After 15 minutes, Jamie had found a collection of things, like a ripped dog bootie*, a red dog bowl, and half of a leather leash. Sade would find things, too, like the remains of someone's lunch or a soft spot to lie down for the time being.

Jamie was walking along a particularly dirty alley when she spotted something shiny. She bent down to look at it, when Sade barked. The thing about Sade is that he didn't bark for just any reason. This bark was a bark not to say, *Jamie! You forgot to feed me!* It was a bark as if to say, *I don't know what is coming, but be ready.*

"Who's there?" Jamie called. Sade was growling now. A dark, shadowy figure came in view. Jamie saw him and recognized him immediately. She began to run.

Jamie ran with all the speed she could muster. The figure was following her every turn. Sade was trailing slightly, barking to warn the figure. Fear, sadness, and rage were bouncing around in Jamie's head.

* Booties are the things that dog sled racers put on their dogs' feet to protect them from the snow.

She closed her eyes and thought, *I will lose him eventually...* But when she opened her eyes, a brick wall seemed to be looming over her. She had reached a dead end.

“Get away from me!” Jamie yelled to the figure.

“Jamie...honey...” he started. *Frank.*

“NO! I hate you! You’re a madman! A drunken madman! You killed Roxy and I will never forgive you! It’s no wonder that I loved my dog Roxy more than YOU!” Jamie shouted at him. Sade continued to growl fiercely.

Suddenly, an enraged Frank charged at Jamie. Jamie thought, *Oh no...This is the end...Goodbye, Mom, goodbye...*

Jamie heard a bark, a leap, and “Git this mutt off me!” from a shouting Frank.

Sade? Jamie opened her eyes and saw that Sade was on top of her father and biting his arm. “Feel her pain!” Jamie shouted when she realized Sade was trying to protect her. “Feel Roxy’s pain!”

Frank was batting and hitting Sade to get him off. *Oh, Jamie thought, this is cruel and unjust.*

“Sade, come!” Jamie called to him. Sade came trotting over, tail wagging slowly. He sat in a heel position and waited.

Frank got the message. He ran away, clasp his bad arm.

Sade barked to make sure the coast was clear. Nothing answered except the sound of birds singing and busy cars. Jamie headed home with Sade by her side.

Jamie was walking along when she looked up and there was a misty figure of a dog. Jamie couldn’t believe her eyes. It was like a **ghost!** She stared at it, unblinking, for a moment. Then she closed her eyes and thought, *I must be dreaming.* When she opened her eyes, the figure was gone.

She stood there for a moment in case it came back. It didn’t, so she started walking again. She thought about this mysterious figure. *Was it, in fact, a German shepherd? Roxy?* she thought. She looked down at Sade and said in a sweet voice, “Who was that?” He cocked his head in that cute, loving way.

The sun was setting in a pink and orange sky. *If that was a dream,* Jamie thought, *that was the best dream of my life!* But she was still being watched by the spirit of Roxy, who still lives. She couldn’t wait to tell Mia about her discoveries in the alleys.

Sneaky Puppy

In SNEAKY PUPPY by Alana Renee Walker, two girls come to the rescue of a lost dog. Little do they know how personal this rescue will become for one of them.

I woke up hearing cries coming from my open window. It was a warm summer day, and my best friend Loren and I were going to spend the whole day at the park. I heard the cries again. They sounded like animal cries, not people cries. I walked to my window to see where the cries were coming from. When I looked outside I could only see sparkling green grass. So I walked to the kitchen to pack my lunch for our day at the park.

At the park while I was playing basketball with Loren, I heard the cries again. I dropped the ball and followed the cries. I could hear the bushes rattling. The cries came from the bushes. Then I saw it. It was a puppy! He looked like he belonged to someone. He had a beautiful red collar, but no tag. His fur was shiny and tamed like it was just washed.

Loren and I played with him the whole day. As I was walking home with the puppy in my arms I stopped dead in my tracks, and said, "I can't take the dog home."

"Neither can I," said Loren.

So I just slipped the dog in my bag and walked the rest of the way home. Before I walked inside, I reminded Loren to make some "found dog" posters so we could find the puppy's owners.

As I walked into the house my mother didn't notice the squirming little puppy in my bag. I set my bag upstairs in my room, and put the puppy in my closet.

The next day Loren and I put the posters on the trees in our neighborhood that said “Found: Puppy. To claim the puppy, meet us at Beverly Park.”

Loren and I were getting bored, so we decided to name the puppy while we were at the park. We thought of Scooter. We left the bench to play soccer with some other kids.

When we came back, the puppy was gone. In place of the puppy was a note written on green paper. I read it aloud to Loren.

Thank you for finding and taking care of this dog. I saw your poster and realized that this was the puppy that I had bought as a present for a very special little girl. It ran away four days ago before I could give it to her. Please take this envelope with \$5.00 as a reward.

*Thanks again,
Anonymous*

It was from an anonymous person, so we thought we might never see Scooter again.

Loren and I were worried that the person who took Scooter might abuse him, and that’s why he ran away in the first place. We decided to go home early.

I walked home wondering if Scooter was okay. When I stepped into my room, I noticed a familiar basket on my bed. I opened the basket, and Scooter’s little head popped out.

I picked him up and ran downstairs to give my dad a kiss. My dad said, “I almost lost him, but he was found by some children in the park. I left them a note and a reward.”

I smiled to myself. Then he said, “What are you going to name him?”

I immediately said, “Scooter.”

So far I don’t think my dad found out about Scooter. This will be our little secret.

Two Cats

*Life is easy for Jamal, until someone new joins the household. In **TWO CATS** by **Katie Robinson**, will he choose harmony or misery?*

Jamal purred as he sat on Lizzy's lap. He loved his home. Everyone was so nice to him there. He couldn't wish for more.

But that was before Tiger came.

"Hello? Anyone home?"

"Oh, sorry!" Lizzy exclaimed as she put her cat down.

"Well, I found this little thing half-starved out in the cold, I did, and I know that you already have a cat. I can't keep her because I already have a large dog of my own, so...."

"We'd love to keep her."

Lizzy's neighbor was holding a small, frozen cat about the size of a pop can out in front of her in one of her fuzzy blankets.

"Oh my goodness!" said Lizzy when the skinny cat jumped to the floor. "She's adorable!" And it was true. The cat was *adorable!*

With all the excitement, Jamal had jumped out of the couch, but was now clawing out of his new lair, with his white hair standing up on his back. Suddenly, he jumped at this scrawny stranger and started to hiss and claw like crazy! "Jamal!" Lizzy said in a sharp voice. "Be nice to our visitor!"

"Well, I have to go now," said the neighbor.

"Okay, I'll see you around!"

"Buh-bye!"

"Mom, Mom, come quick!" screeched Lizzy.

"What is it?" said Mom, bolting down the stairs.

"Look," is all Lizzy said, holding up a cat that looked more like a shaved baby tiger.

“Lizzy, this is worse than when you brought home that puppy from the mall. That cat looks diseased!”

“No, Mom. Mrs. Melon just found this outside!”

“Well, it looks like Jamal doesn’t approve!” She was right. Jamal was *still* hissing and clawing like crazy.

“Oops!” said Lizzy as she pushed Jamal softly into the basement. “He can stay there while we feed and name her.” They decided on the name Tiger because that’s what she looked like: a little baby tiger!

Meanwhile, Jamal, sitting in the cold wet basement, wasn’t too happy. *How could they dump me for a scrawny little kitten? I’ll show them. I’ll show them all!*

That’s when the basement door opened and little Tiger came in. “Isn’t this just a swell place?”

“Well, it’s mine, so leave me alone!”

“No, I like it here. I’m staying!”

Jamal said nothing. He just reached out and hit Tiger as hard as he could with one of his paws. Tiger cried and ran away.

Later, Jamal was very hungry. So Mother decided to give both the cats their own bowls of food right next to each other. Jamal was so starved, it looked like he ate all his food in one bite! But he was still hungry.

“You can have some of my food,” said Tiger.

Jamal was surprised. “How come you are being so nice?”

“Because cats have to be nice to one another. That’s how we get along!”

Later, Jamal was feeling regretful. *I guess I could have been nicer to the little guy. She does have nowhere to go, and I have this big house. I know! I can ask her to be my friend! No, my best friend!*

Jamal was so excited, he forgot all about being angry and rushed downstairs to tell Tiger. “Tiger, guess what?”

“You’re going to stop hurting me?”

“Better! We’re going to be best friends!”

“Oh, boy, I never had one of those!”

“Well, now you do!”

And they were best friends forever!

Where Are You, Mr. Smith?

Charlie's owner, Mr. Smith, is missing. With the help of Shine, Charlie might have a chance of finding him in **WHERE ARE YOU, MR. SMITH?**, *by EmiLuz Fuenticilla.*

Ring, ring! Ring, ring! It was time to go home at Berkshire High School. Shine decided to walk home with her friend Shannan. As usual, they would walk past the Dogs for the Blind Center at Lemony drive. After the center it would be Shannan's house, then Shine would walk home by herself. At Franken Street, at exactly 3:30, Mr. Smith and Charlie would come out of their house and take a little jog around town. Mr. Smith is blind. He was born that way, and Charlie is his guide dog.

"Hi, Mr. Smith," said Shine.

"Well, hello, Shine," replied Mr. Smith.

Bark, bark!

"Hi, Charlie. Well, nice seeing you again, Mr. Smith. Bye," said Shine.

"Well, nice seeing you, too, honey."

Bark, bark! Bark, bark! Shine woke up from Charlie's barking. She got up and went outside to go see Mr. Smith and Charlie. When Shine was outside she didn't see them. She didn't see anybody, but there was an old dog pound truck parked in the street. She heard Charlie again, but he was crying this time. She went to see if Charlie was in the truck.

"Charlie boy, are you there?" said Shine.

She went to check if anybody was in the front seat of the truck. Shine could hear Charlie scratching on the door, waiting impatiently to come out. She saw that nobody was in the front. All

that she could see in the truck was a key in the ignition. She took the keys and went to open the back of the truck.

There were about ten keys on the key chain. She wanted to save Charlie, but she didn't want to go through all those keys. She first tried the one that was in the keyhole, but it didn't work. She tried a second, third, fourth, and fifth key, but none of them worked. She thought she had gone through the chain at least three times, but she didn't want to give up. She tried one more key and she was lucky. She unlocked and opened the door. Charlie was lying down in the truck, very tired.

"Hey, boy, are you okay?" said Shine. "Come on, boy, let's go find Mr. Smith."

They went running all through town but they couldn't find Mr. Smith. She stopped and thought.

"How did you get in that truck, boy?" asked Shine.

She gave up on finding Mr. Smith and headed to the police to report what she saw. On the way to the police station she saw this man in the corner of Stone Street. He was very, very dirty. Shine was afraid to go near him. She tiptoed slowly past the man, but Charlie barked loudly enough to wake the man up.

The man shouted, "Charlie, Charlie, is that you, boy?"

Charlie jumped at the man and started licking him.

"Mr. Smith, is that you?"

Shine hugged Mr. Smith and told him that she was so very, very glad that he was all right, and sorry that she had given up looking for him.

PLAY

The Ballers

*It's an old joke that a family with five children could start its own basketball team. In this story, it's true! Five talented boys show they've got game in **THE BALLERS**, by **Olivier Urban**.*

Frank, Jak, Bobby, Billy, and Dan were quintuplets who lived in an apartment. Their last name was Cheese. They all had cornrows in their hair and were dark skinned. They each also had a goatee.

Every day they would go behind their apartment and play some basketball. They were really talented because they had been playing since they were three years old. Their dream was to play in the NBA together on the same team.

One day they were playing b-ball when a wise-looking man came and knew that what he was seeing with his very own eyes was even better than any other player in the NBA. He asked them if they wanted to play in the NBA. They guys knew that this was an opportunity to earn money for a better life and to show their skills as quintuplets. The man left and said, "By the way, my name is Larry. One of you will probably see me while you play in the NBA."

A few days before their new career, they were all interviewed to show how they felt. All five ballers said, "We know this is our only chance that can help us earn money for a better life and to show our skills to millions of people."

They accepted their one problem: They were each on a different team. Frank was the lucky dog to be on the Detroit Pistons. He saw what the Larry dude meant by "One of you will probably see me while you play in the NBA," because the Larry dude was Larry Brown, his coach. Dan was on the Toronto

Raptors. Bobby was on the New Jersey Nets. Billy was on the Chicago Bulls. Finally, Jak was on the Los Angeles Lakers.

It was all up to Frank. He convinced the team to buy his brothers, but there wasn't have enough money. Each bro was \$50,000,000, and they only bought three bros. The price for Frank, the last of the ballers, rose to \$80,000,000. The bros on the Pistons and all of the starters decided to give up an equal amount from each of their salaries to buy Frank. They got him a day before their last game of the finals.

It was the last five seconds of the game and Dan gave the ball to Frank. Frank was at the line all the way on the other side. He couldn't pass it because all the other players were really well guarded except for him. He had one choice: to take a full-court shot. He went for it. People were praying; some were shouting; even the popcorn guy tripped because he was watching the shot. The announcer fell off his chair and knocked over the microphone. The coach fell, tripped a player from the other team, and another person tripped on him. It created a pile of b-ball players on the coach. By then the timer said 3...2...1...*BEEP!*

The rest of the people who didn't trip thought it was over until they heard *SWISH!* The crowd went crazy, from taking off their shirts to shaking beer cans and squirting beer at the players. Everyone dashed to the court and picked up Frank while the news reporters interviewed him. They asked, "How do you feel about making that shot?"

Frank answered, "Well, I know that my brothers are really proud of me, and so am I. I just thought of what this shot was for, and it was to win the finals."

The five ballers stayed in the NBA and never lost a game.

The Champions

There is no "I" in "team." **Carly Wolpin** reminds us why in **THE CHAMPIONS**.

Did you ever see *The Bad News Bears*? It's about a kids' baseball team that was so bad, and filled with so many wacky kids, that they always found a way to lose by making goofy mistakes. But somehow they came together as a team, and started to win games. Last year I had the misfortune of being on a team just like that. But don't feel bad for me, because just like *The Bad News Bears*, the end was a lot better than the beginning. If you don't quite understand what I mean, just keep on reading.

When I went to the first practice, it was easy to see that we didn't have the greatest team. I could see this because some players couldn't even throw or catch the ball. We had a few good players, but we also had a few kids who had never played before. After a few practices, it was time to start playing games that counted.

I didn't think my team was ready, because we always made a lot of errors in practice. Our first game was against the Dodgers, and some of us played well. However, there were some kids who just didn't know what to do.

The next few games went the same way. Balls were getting hit in the outfield over the fence. People were striking out all the time. It just wasn't good. We even lost to the other team in the league who had never won, either. But somehow after losing that game, things started to change. It was as though losing to the last place team was as bad as it could get, and I had a feeling things were about to change.

At that point in the season, our team had not won a game. We had been close to winning, but just couldn't win because we always found a way to lose. Our record was zero wins and seven losses. That night's game against the Royals was the second to last game of the season. It started out just like most other games: We were losing. But in each inning we kept getting a little closer and the other team was having trouble scoring more runs. Our fielding was awesome.

In the last inning we came up to bat. The score was 8-6 and we were behind. But on this night there was something in the air. Our team knew that we had a chance to win.

The first two batters both hit singles. The next batter was our best hitter. I thought for sure she would get a hit. And just as that thought went through my mind, I heard the crack of the bat and there went the ball, right into the first baseman's glove. She was out.

It was my turn to bat. I was so nervous I could barely hold the bat. The pitcher wound up and I just closed my eyes and swung away.

It was the hit heard around the field. Over the leftfielder's head it went. One run scored, the second runner scored, and all I could do was to keep on running. I was halfway home when I saw the pitcher catch the ball and she was about to throw it home for the catcher to tag me out. But she dropped it and I scored the winning run. Finally we had won our first game, by a score of 9-6. Everyone was hugging me. It was the best feeling ever.

It was time for the playoffs, and I didn't hold out much hope for my team. After all, we had only won two games all season, and four of our players had already left for camp. We had to replace them with a bunch of third-graders. They were so small the bats were almost bigger than them.

The first and second games of the playoffs were the most exciting games ever. In the first game our team led 6 to 5 in the bottom of the last inning. The other team loaded the bases with none out. The next batter hit a line drive to the pitcher. She caught it and threw it to the third basemen, who stepped on the base for a double play. The last batter hit a high fly ball toward the

third-grader who was playing left field. She closed her eyes and stuck out her mitt. The ball fell right into her mitt for the third out. It was unbelievable. Everyone went crazy.

The second game was a repeat of the first playoff game. We were winning 10-8 going into the last inning. We were the team of destiny, playing on the edge. It was my inning to pitch, and I was facing the best hitters in their line up. I was able to strike out the first two hitters on six straight pitches. With two outs, we were just one out away from making it to the championship game. I knew this hitter would swing at the first pitch so I threw it right down the middle. She hit the ball right to the second baseman, who picked it up and rifled it to first base for the final out. The “Bad News Bears” Athletics were going to the finals, third-graders and all.

The championship game was so exciting. We were only down by one run. Once again it came down to the last inning, and we were up to bat first.

The first batter struck out. The next batter hit a blooper that was chased down by the third basemen, but she couldn’t get it to first in time for that out. Next up to bat was me.

I hit the first pitch into left field, and the two runners on base both scored. I was left stranded, but we had tied the game.

It was the bottom of the sixth and we were ahead by four runs. It was their turn to bat. They put two runners on base with only one out. The next batter hit the ball right to the centerfielder for the second out. I just had a feeling that we were going to win. But next up on their team was their best player. She could hit the ball so far. It was amazing. When she hit the ball, it went over the head of our centerfielder. The batter was trying for home. But the centerfielder made the throw of her life to the pitcher, and the pitcher relayed to the catcher, who tagged the sliding batter, and she was out. We were the champions. We won. I knew we could do it. I was excited.

Just like the Bad News Bears in the movie, our team never gave up. Even though we were not very good during the regular season, we somehow found a way to win the championship, even with a bunch of third-graders. I don’t know whether we got better

as a team or if it was just our destiny to win. But I remember how great it felt when we made the last out, and all the parents and coaches came running out onto the field to hug us. I really felt like I was in the movie. When it finally hit us that we were the champions, I held my championship trophy up with the biggest smile on my face. There's no better feeling than being the champions.

Professional Freshman

Stand by for hockey! Jerry Fischer chases his dream of playing in the National Hockey League in **PROFESSIONAL FRESHMAN**, *by* **Chris Donnellon**.

“Hey, Jerry, time to wake up,” shouts Jerry’s mom as she wakes him up for practice. “Hurry up, we’re running late. It’s 6:00 and the coach called me and said that he wants you there at 6:45 at the latest.”

SLAM! Jerry slammed the door as he jumped into his mom’s red Envoy.

The crisp, cold air of Negawnee, Michigan stung Jerry Fischer’s face as he walked into the All-Star Ice Arena home of the U of UP (University of Upper Peninsula) Porcupines for a 7:15 a.m. practice. When Jerry walked into the locker room, he heard a voice yell, “Hey, Jerry.” It happened to be his best pal, Chris Donnellon. Chris saved a spot for him to sit down and get his equipment on. On Jerry’s right sat Chris and on Jerry’s left sat Chris’s cousin, Shawn Ross.

“Okay, guys, let’s hustle up. Practice will begin in five minutes,” said Coach Chris Greenburg. “I want everyone stretched out so we can begin practice right away because we have a lot to work on.”

“Have you seen Coach Greenburg skate as fast as he can?” asked Chris.

“No, why?” said Jerry.

“Because he is so fast you wouldn’t believe it if I told you.”

Beep, beep goes the zamboni as it gets off the ice. “Okay, just skate around for a few minutes,” said Coach Greenburg. Five minutes later, he said, “Okay, give me three lines, one behind Jerry,

Chris, and how about Shawn. We will start out with a drill called a Herbie. This drill is named after the famous hockey coach named Herb Brooks. Here is what you do. You skate out to the blue line and back and then to the red line and back. After that, to the far blue line, and finally to the other end and back. Any questions?"

"Yes, um, is this timed or anything?" asked Jerry.

"Nah, I just want to see how well you can run this drill," answered Coach Greenburg.

"Man, I wonder how long it is going to be before I get the feeling back in my legs after that drill," Jerry stated to his buddies. Chris and Shawn nodded in agreement. They were too winded to even answer Jerry.

"Hey, what do you say about putting our feet up and enjoying some pizza at my house?" asked Jerry.

"Sure, why not?" replied Chris and Shawn at the same time. The three hockey players dragged their tired, sore bodies out into the cold with thoughts of Jerry's warm house and piping hot pizza.

"So, you guys ready for tomorrow's big game?" Jerry's mother asked as she served the hungry boys pizza.

"Yeah, or at least I think we are," Jerry replied with a nervous look on his face. The three young men continued to eat their pizza in silence, each of them deep in thought about tomorrow's big game.

Slap! Ping! Those were the sounds of the hard rubber puck gliding across the smooth sheet of ice as the players warmed up. The buzzer sounded and the referee dropped the puck to begin the game. Both teams skated quickly across the ice, every player wanting his team to claim the win.

"Jerry, Jerry, Jerry!" chanted the crowd after he scored his third goal of the game for a hat trick in overtime. "The Porcupines win it five to four!" exclaimed the announcer.

"Okay, our next playoff game is Wednesday against the Hawks, so be prepared," said Coach Greenburg.

Chris, Shawn and Jerry were sitting in the locker room after their unbelievable win over the Rink Rats. All of them were replaying every moment they were on the ice in their minds.

“Have you ever wished to leave college hockey your freshman year to play in the NHL?” asked Chris.

“Oh yeah, I sure did about two years ago,” said Jerry.

As the Porcupines were lacing their skates, each of them deep in thought about the upcoming game, Coach Greenburg broke the silence when he replied, “The scouts are coming tonight, so play hard. One of them is the head coach of the Red Wings. Seniors, this is your chance to go pro,” said Coach Greenburg. He looked at eager players and added with a grin, “Let’s show them what the Porcupines are made of.”

The team was on the ice, warming up before the game began, when out of the corner of Jerry’s eye, he saw three men in business suits carrying black briefcases walk into the rink. They had no expressions on their faces as they made their way up to the top row of the stands. Jerry tried to remain calm but he couldn’t help notice the feeling of butterflies in his stomach.

The Porcupines dominated the game and won six to one. The other team was tough, but the Porcupines kept their composure and showed the crowd just how talented their team was.

“Did you see that Fischer kid, number 17?” asked the coach of the Red Wings.

“Yeah, is he a senior?” asked the scout.

“I don’t know. I’ll just write him down on my list anyway.”

At the next practice, the coach came into the locker room with a list. “Ok, I’ve got a list of kids who will try out for the Red Wings, and they’re only picking two. Here they are: William, Tom, Larry, Ben, Jerry, Greg, Matt, Patrick and Corey,” said Coach Greenburg.

“Um, excuse me, did you say Jerry?” Jerry asked.

“Yes.”

“Do you know the last name?”

“Yeah, it is Fischer.”

“Dude, that’s you!” said Chris.

“I know,” he replied.

“Okay, okay, yeah, congrats. Let’s go home. We’ve got school tomorrow,” said Shawn.

“Yeah, little guys, right,” said Jerry.

All the kids whose names were announced at the practice that night got together for a meeting at Coach Greenburg’s house. He told them that they would leave the college hockey team and try out for the Red Wings, and that two would make it, as they already knew. He wished them all good luck and the boys left, each thinking how badly he wanted to be the one the scouts picked.

“Let’s go! Move it! You want to play for Detroit, you gotta pick it up a notch,” yelled Detroit’s head coach, Dave Lewis. The players skated hard and quick. Sweat covered their faces, but they were determined not to slow down.

“We have about five more days of tryouts, so you guys don’t need to get all tired and not do well the rest of the time,” Coach Lewis told the players in the locker room. As he was leaving the locker room, he caught Jerry’s eye and told him, “Tryouts are tomorrow at 3:15. Better be there.”

“You got it, Coach,” Jerry answered, his voice shaky.

The next day, Jerry, along with all the other players, skated with everything they had, trying to impress the head coach. As they left the ice, they removed their helmets, their hair soaking wet with sweat, with beet red faces and determination in their eyes.

Five days later, Jerry and the rest of the guys were crammed around the tryout list, hoping their names were there. “Yes!” exclaimed Patrick Tomsin.

“Aww, man,” said the disappointed players as they moped away.

Jerry walked up to the list, his heart beating so hard he thought it was going to jump out of his chest. He kept telling himself, “No matter what, I’m still proud of myself that I made it this far.” He slowly let his eyes wander up the list and he saw his name, Jerry Fischer, in black, bold letters. His heart stopped as he looked again, making sure he wasn’t seeing things. “My wish came true!” he screamed to himself.

The Story of Jay and Billy

*Basketball is supposed to be fun. But envy and misunderstanding on the court come between two friends in **THE STORY OF JAY AND BILLY**, by **Jonathon M. L. Staten**.*

“I don’t like you!”

“I don’t like you either!”

“You’re ugly!”

“You’re smelly!”

“So? You have a raggedy one-wheeler bike, so I don’t know why you talking!”

“You can’t even get down the street with those wheels.”

Two friends split apart over an argument.

Once upon a time, there was a kid named Jay. He had a best friend named Billy. They meet at the G.G.T. Montessori Center. They were only four when they met. Later, they went to the David Ellis Academy. They lived on the corner of 7 Mile and Curtis Street. Both families were very close and decided that Michigan winters were just too cold and they had enough of all the snow. So that summer of 1995, both families moved to Palm Dale, California.

A few years passed and the boys got older. One day the boys were playing basketball outside. Billy had always dreamed of being a basketball player for the Detroit Pistons. Jay had dreamed of becoming a world famous drum player for the group Ramiyah. Jay was also very good at basketball, too.

They decided to have a contest to see who could make the most baskets. Jay had won the contest and Billy got jealous because he was also good at basketball. Jay said, "How can you play for the Pistons if you can't make a shot?" And that is what started the argument.

A few months went by and they didn't speak to each other.

Jay and Billy had made new friends and they played with new basketball teams in the neighborhood. Jay's team was undefeated, but Billy's team had lost three games. Then one day Jay's and Billy's teams played against each other. Jay's team won. Billy got mad and said, "You're the worst person ever on the face of the Earth."

The school basketball team tryouts came around and both boys tried out. First they had to run suicides. Then they had had to do pushups. After their workout, they did five on five.

Two days later, the results were in and they had both made the team. Jay had made first string and Billy made second string.

In the beginning of the season, Jay was taking a three-point shot and got fouled and fell on the floor. He landed on his thumb and broke it. Billy got to take Jay's spot and play first string.

The season went by quickly and Jay's thumb healed. They made it to the playoffs. Billy realized that he and Jay were true teammates, playing together during the season and making it to the playoffs. So after the playoffs, Billy apologized for getting mad over a little contest. And Jay apologized for what he said.

WORK

Jack Toise Case File #1

Academy Incident: Accident or Not?

A secret law enforcement training academy might seem the safest place on Earth. Think again, and follow the investigation of an instructor's death in
ACADEMY INCIDENT: ACCIDENT OR NOT?, by *Marie Lhota*.

It was a quiet, almost silent morning at S.P.L.I.T. Academy. Only security should have been about. It was as if nothing could go wrong...but it did. Hidden behind the bushes, something or someone was soon found....

Jack Toise woke up that morning to the upset voice of Mr. Sazmez, the headmaster of the academy, as he yelled into his room, "Important emergency meeting. There's been a death!"

S.P.L.I.T. Academy is an academy for spies, police, and lawyers in training. It is underground beneath a large "abandoned" building. With large rooms both above and below ground, it would be the largest known school in the United States if it were not a secret.

All the students sat down in the meeting hall just before the meeting started. This would not be an unusual occurrence except for the fact that the room was silent. It was so silent that you could hear the generator on the other side of the school humming softly. No one spoke as Mr. Sazmez walked up to the platform. Grim-faced, he took his place next to the podium, straightened his jacket nervously, and started to speak.

"I'm sorry to say, but Mr. Naught, one of the police instructors, fell off the roof to his death early this morning." Mr. Sazmez sighed and looked mournful, but quickly covered it up by coughing and screwing up his face. "A sad incident though it may be, it makes for a perfect practice case for a young cadet. So, the

Academy is challenging the cadets to figure out if it was an accident or murder. You don't have to participate if you don't want to. The body is available to be examined."

Jack immediately teamed up with his friend, excited at the prospect of a case. At the crime scene, M.F. Tiger, lab specialist, spy in training and Jack's friend, examined the body, while Jack searched the area around the body and around the spot Mr. Naught fell from.

The scene was covered in blood. Mr. Naught had been impaled on a tree branch. Since the watch on his left arm was broken when he fell, Tiger was able to estimate time of death. Every night security locks the roof. Yet strangely enough, the door to the roof was unlocked, not busted down as expected. A helpful clue, or at least it would be if the roof key had not been stolen.

"A bloody nose and multiple cuts and bruises on the victim's chest in the shape of a fist as if there was a struggle then he was pushed off. Left side of the body is covered in bruises and scrapes where it hit the ground," said Tiger into the tape recorder, "Attack and time of death, 6:00-6:30 A.M. this morning. Body discovered at 6:30, students woken up for meeting at 6:40. Dirty, black- and red-checked piece of fabric found in victim's hand. The piece has a small line of stitches covering up a hole and is covered in mud. It has a very jagged, rough edge where Mr. Naught could have ripped the killer's clothing as he tried to grab hold as he was falling."

Tiger spoke with confidence, a young girl ready to face the challenges of the world. Her red hair stood out against the deep green of the trees. Her eyes were cold and calculating as she was planning mysteriously.

"Tiger, I found two sets of bloody footprints on the roof, one of bare feet. Both sets are from running away from the scene, then the shoe set runs back. The shoe set dumped his or her shoes off the roof to avoid being caught with shoes matching these unique footprints. There are socked footprints almost the same sizes as the shoe prints. Then I searched the surrounding brush near the body and found brown, scruffy, size 8 men's shoes matching the other set of the footprints," said Jack, "But the person with the

shoes stubbed a toe and broke a toenail, so there's blood for DNA comparison. The barefoot footprints were size 7."

Jack spoke seriously with a grave tone, but it was easy to tell he was excited. He finally had a real case of his own. And he wasn't going to let Mr. Sazmez down. His eyes had a light in them that wasn't there before.

After examining the crime scene, they searched for the clothing that matched the ripped piece. They came upon a shirt that matched the ripped piece in an Area 1 trashcan.

"I'm crosschecking Mr. Naught's reports of who got in trouble in his classes with the list of people who live in the Area 1 rooms. One match was found so far: Gary Blocken. He is suspected of stealing the roof key," mumbled Tiger to Jack as she typed.

"We'd better check him out. You look for more matches and I'll take Gary," whispered Jack (as they were in the library).

Later, in the Area 1 lobby, Jack found Gary Blocken sitting and looking bored. As Jack walked up, Gary looked surprised.

"Hello, I'm investigating the death of Mr. Naught, and your name came up. I need to ask you a couple of questions. Where were you at 6:00 to 6:30 this morning?" Jack asked Gary.

Gary started to speak, showing no emotion and acting as if he were a butler for royalty who never smiled.

He replied, "In my bed sleeping."

"Is there anyone who can vouch for you?"

"No."

"Do you have access to the roof?"

"No."

"Please make yourself available for further questions. Oh, and by the way, what size shoe do you wear?"

"Size 7."

While Jack worked to solve the case, Mr. Sazmez sat quietly at his desk and thought, "What a day! The first bunch of new 11- and 12-year-olds ready to be trained, and my good friend and colleague has been murdered, sent flying, falling to his death."

After making a chart for suspects and evidence, Jack went to the class of his friend and advisor, Mr. Sauren, and did what he and Mr. Sauren did every day: discuss the advice of the day.

“Mr. Sauren, what’s your advice of the day?” asked Jack.

“Don’t always believe what people say,” Mr. Sauren advised.

A tall, pale man, Mr. Sauren didn’t look like a man who had traveled through the Amazon, Africa, and other exotic places. But he had, as a spy for Interpol. Known as the Green Dragon, he caught dozens of rings of drug dealers, murderers, and that sort of people. Semi-retired now, he works as an instructor at S.P.L.I.T.

Yesterday’s advice was “Trust no one.” It was not the best advice for building relationships with other people, but it works for the cadets here.

Tiger and Dan Vanzardian, Jack and Tiger’s friend who’s a lawyer in training, soon caught up with Jack.

“Hey, how’s the case, Jack? The sneaky spy here won’t tell me anything,” shouted Dan.

Dan, a do-it-all, push-it-to-the-limit kind of kid, spoke with enthusiasm with a hint of sarcasm that always was just there in his voice, not always recognizable, but there.

“Danzard, stop calling me that. You know I wouldn’t tell you because it’s really Jack’s case,” whined Tiger.

“Oh bother, please just give me all the details, Jack, please!”

“Calm down and lower your voice, Mr. Vanzardian, or I’ll have to report it,” said Mr. Sauren jokingly.

“Ask me after we finish the case, Mr. Vanzardian,” teased Jack. “We can’t comment because we’re in the middle of an important investigation. We haven’t even finished our suspect list yet.”

And so class went on, with Jack thinking about Mr. Sauren’s advice and what the suspect had said. “Something about what he said and how he said it didn’t ring true. Wait, it was, “In my bed sleeping.” He said it a little too quietly, and as he said it he looked above my head. No, that must have been just my imagination. Oops, I’d better pay attention to my class.” After class, Jack and Tiger went back to the computer to look for more suspects.

“Look, there’s someone who got in trouble with Mr. Naught and was caught somewhere between 6:00 and 7:00 this morning putting glue on Mr. Naught’s chair.”

“We should talk to the teacher who caught her to see if the student’s a possible suspect or not. If this student, Elisana Brount, still is a possible suspect, then we can talk to her.”

They found Mrs. Dire, the teacher who caught Elisana, on her prep hour copying notes for her next class.

“Hello, Mrs. D. Sorry to bother you, but we’re investigating the death of Mr. Naught and we have a few questions about a student, Elisana Brount. Did you catch her before or after 6:30? If you caught her after 6:30, she’s still a possible suspect. If you caught her before 6:30, she’s cleared,” Jack queried.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t know what time I caught her. It was dark and I wanted to get ahead on lesson plans. I looked in his classroom because the door was open, and I caught her,” replied Mrs. D. with that big, booming, disarming voice (both scary and sweet at the same time) that she has.

“Was she doing anything unusual besides pouring glue on his chair? For example, was she breathing hard or unevenly, or was she red in the face? And, what was she wearing?” inquired Jack.

“She was her everyday self except for pouring glue on his chair. She was wearing a navy blue T-shirt with flowers, and ripped blue jeans.”

“Thank you for your time. You’ve been helpful.”

On the roof, cleaning the side opposite the crime scene, Jack and Tiger found Elisana.

“Hello, Elisana. We’re here to ask about when Mr. Naught died. You had access to the roof then?” inquired Jack.

“Yes, I did, though before now I hadn’t been on the roof for weeks,” responded Elisana. “I’m a part of the cleaning crew and this is the end of my 5-week rotation between the places. It’s almost my break time.”

Her bright, blond hair rippled as a light breeze blew through it. Her voice was light and amused. Jack found himself admiring her for her calmness and her relaxation as she was interrogated.

“Do you know what time you were caught?”

“That would be convenient. No, I don’t.”

“What were you wearing?”

“Blue jeans and a navy blue ‘Flower Power’ T-shirt.”

"I'm afraid you'll have to give us that shirt and your jeans ASAP because it could be possible evidence."

"I'll go get them. I don't need them back. I got glue on them anyway."

"Is there anyone you know who has access to the roof besides yourself who got in trouble with Mr. Naught?"

"Tarra Term was really mad at Mr. Naught for falsely blaming her for disrupting the class."

(Jack thought, "Hmm, good idea. Bring more suspects into play to lessen the pressure on you and reduce the likeliness of your getting blamed.")

"Oh, and one more thing. What shoe size do you wear? And can we see the shoes you wore last night?"

"I wear size 9, and yes, you can see the shoes, too."

After getting the gluey, sticky clothes from Elisana, Tiger went searching for Tarra, and Jack went back to the computer to search for any other suspects. Tiger found Tarra eating a late lunch with her best friend, Catty Carmic. Both had brown, short hair that framed their tanned faces as they sat eating on the scratched wooden bench.

"Hello. My guess is that you're investigating Mr. Naught's death. Am I right? I do hope you catch who did it. Tarra and I were working on a project in the basement when Mr. Sazmez called an emergency meeting. It was so startling. The project took so long. We started at 5:00 and worked 'til the meeting, and then for another hour afterwards," babbled Catty.

"Yes, you're right. Were you both down in the basement together the whole time?" asked Tiger.

"Yes, we were," said Tarra.

"Yep, it took forever," agreed Catty.

"Catty, if Tarra asked you to cover for her while she snuck home, would you do it?" queried Tiger.

"Why, yes, I would. What good friend wouldn't?" replied Catty, placing Tarra's whole alibi in question.

"Tarra, what size shoe do you wear?"

"Size 7."

Meanwhile, Jack again crosschecked the reports with who lived in Area 1. He found another suspect, Rod Hoarsen. He, too, was suspected of stealing the roof key and was good friends with Gary Blocken. He went to go find

Rod. Jack located Rod Hoarsen playing one of those violent war games in the Area 1 computer lab.

“Hello, you must be Rod. While investigating Mr. Naught’s death, you came up as one of the people Mr. Naught reported, so I need to ask a few questions. Where were you this morning during the time period of 6:00 to 6:30?” asked Jack.

“The headmaster would be mad. Do I have to tell you?” he asked timidly.

“Yes, you have to tell me. Otherwise, I would have to think you were hiding something and you would then be a prime suspect.”

Rod had this manner about him that made you want to laugh, but just under the surface he was irritating to the extreme. Annoyingly and snottily he replied with a tone that was disrespectful to even the instructors and the headmaster.

“I was finding a good spot to set up a prank for the headmaster,” he said hurriedly.

“Do you know if anyone saw you?”

“Not that I know of. I didn’t see anyone out and about.”

“Do you have access to the roof?”

“No.”

“What size shoe do you wear?”

“Size 8.”

Later on in the lab, Tiger finished testing the shoes and shirt for DNA and other trace particles.

“Jack, I got DNA off both things, and the DNA doesn’t match. That means we definitely have two killers!” shouted Tiger.

“Time to get DNA from the suspects,” said Jack confidently.

After collecting all of the suspects’ DNA, Tiger tested the DNA collected from the evidence against the suspects’ DNA. She found a match. The shirt matched one suspect and the shoes matched another. Tiger gave a copy of the case file to Jack to give to the headmaster.

“Mr. Sazmez, Tiger and I have found the killers!” shouted Jack as soon as Mr. Sazmez was in hearing distance.

“Killers, plural? Good work! I’ll test the evidence. If it’s convincing evidence, I’ll have security pick them up, then you’ll announce it to the whole school.”

“Here, have the case file. It contains the names of the two killers and the evidence needed to convict them.”

After testing the evidence and finding it convincing enough, Mr. Sazmez let Jack announce it to the whole school. In the meeting hall, it was silent. The whole school minus the killers (who were detained and apprehended outside) waited patiently for Mr. Sazmez to speak.

“Cadets, I have the honor to introduce the cadet, Jack Toise, who caught the killers,” announced Mr. Sazmez.

Jack came up with his evidence and suspect charts. “Thank you, Mr. Sazmez. My partner in solving this was M.F. Tiger and she deserves a lot of the credit. The killers were...” said Jack, pausing to build suspense.

Here, he spoke with amazing confidence. He had everything figured out and had evidence to prove it.

Someone in the crowd yelled, “Just tell us!”

Got the answer yet? Here’s a review of the non-DNA evidence and suspects. These are straight from Jack’s charts.

Evidence Chart

<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Description</i>
Piece of shirt found in Mr. Naught’s hand	Black- and red-checked, muddy and dirty, small stitches covering small hole
Shirt found in Area 1 garbage can	Black- and red-checked, muddy and dirty
Footprints found on roof	Barefoot, size 7
Footprints found on roof	Shoe prints and stocking feet prints size 8 men’s
Shoes found in bushes	Brown, scruffy size 8

Suspect Chart

<i>Suspect Name</i>	<i>Shoe size (in men's)</i>	<i>Alibi</i>	<i>Access to roof</i>
Gary Blocken	7	Unconfirmed	No (suspected of stealing roof key)
Elisana Brout	8	Unconfirmed	Yes
Tarra Term	6	Confirmed (doubtable)	Yes
Rod Hoarsen	8	Unconfirmed	No (suspected of stealing roof key)

“...Gary Blocken and Rod Hoarsen,” Jack finished, “They did it because Mr. Naught was going to have them charged and possibly expelled for stealing important documents from his desk. They lured Mr. Naught onto the roof by giving him a note saying, ‘Chief Offi (the local police chief) wishes to meet you on the roof.’ Why they killed to try to stay in this school we may never know. Even faced with the evidence, they haven’t confessed. Thank you and goodnight. It’s been a long day and we all need some sleep.”

The Case of the Missing Diamonds

*Police detective Danny Short needs to go undercover to solve a puzzling case. But he gets a surprising new partner in **THE CASE OF THE MISSING DIAMONDS**, by **Mimi Marcus**.*

She was born with the name Rosita Pelo. But undercover they called her “Red.” With a 1989 Volkswagen Beetle, a one-bedroom flat, and a new job, she felt like a woman of the world! The truth was, all she was doing was answering phones and making dental appointments for a bunch of old people in downtown Miami.

“Hey, Rosie, did you check my messages?” That’s her boss, Dr. Horatio Rens. Something was going on. The office never had a full schedule on Fridays.

“Yes, you have Mrs. Fine at 9:00 for two crowns on her upper left. You have the Jacob Family for x-rays and cleanings. Lunch with your old friend Dr. Marly. You’ll finish your day with bridgework for Mr. Harden.”

“Good,” he said greedily. . . .

Danny Short, a new police detective, sat in the middle of rising smoke. Ashes from his cheap cigar sprinkled the reports covering his desk. Diamonds were missing all over town. Somehow the rich and famous were being robbed right under their noses. Danny took a short walk to Captain Tinkerton’s office in the middle of the police station. He was about to get his first real assignment!

As he pushed open the door, he had to hold back a sneeze. A circle of perfume surrounded him as he sat down. There sat Miami’s top model, Slone Mackenzie. Captain T. and Mackenzie were trying to

find the connection between her dental work and her missing diamonds. Slone Mackenzie was the third person to report jewels missing following dental work. Danny was desperate to prove to the Captain that he could crack a case on his own. Danny's first stop would be the dentist's office.

Rosie was tapping her toes to the Muzak with the phone tucked into her shoulder while filing her nails. "Uh-oh, gotta go; looks like a patient under a hundred years old is walking in... Oh, and he is cute!" *CLICK*. "What can I do for you, sir?"

Danny, trying to be professional, pulled out his badge to ask some questions. He could not help looking at the crazy reddish hair stacked up on Rosie's head. "Do you know who Slone Mackenzie is?"

"Like, ya, she's here every month for her check-up," Rosie replied.

After many questions, Danny was convinced that Rosie was innocent of any wrongdoing, but the crime definitely was connected to Dr. Horatio Rens by all the diamonds missing right after visits to his office.

How will I ever prove that? thought Danny Short. He looked at Rosie and started to whisper. "Would you like to be my partner to solve the crime?" And that's how it all started.

"Rosie, you need a code name, like me. How about 'Red'?" Short suggested.

"Ok."

"Let's start," he said.

Red pointed to the check-in list on the counter. "Well, we saw Mrs. Fine, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob with their children, Jessica and Tony. And right now he's in there with Mr. Harden."

Ring, ring. "Dan Short here..."

Hanging up the phone and looking up at Red, Dan whispered, "Beatrice Fine just filed a report for missing diamonds!"

"Oh, my gosh, she was just here this morning. I'll be right back."

Danny grabbed one of Red's magazines from her desk as Red made her way forward to the examining room.

As Red approached the room, a high-pitched drill got louder. Red peeked around the corner just in time to see Dr. Rens placing something that caught the sunlight in his patient's mouth for some

reason. Something that clearly sparkled went into Mr. Harden's lower right molar. Red almost fainted when she realized what was going on right under her nose. *He's opening the molars and sticking the diamonds into them*, she thought, but it seemed unclear.

She ran to Dr. Rens's office, knowing that nobody was watching her. She flipped through a bunch of papers. There it was, his plan! The plan stated that Dr. Rens, while his patients were under anesthesia, removed their jewels and later placed them inside other unsuspecting patients' teeth. He then would get them back when those patients returned for their six month check-ups. Dr. Rens thought he would never get caught because the evidence was walking around the city, not hiding in his office.

She scurried back to her area. As she grabbed Danny's necktie and told him the whole story, he gasped! Danny quickly stepped out into the hallway. "BREATHE, DANNY, BREATHE," he whispered to himself. This was it. He was going to make his first arrest!

Calling for backup, he slipped into the waiting room. Looking around the room, he noticed an older woman reading a magazine while Red looked at him with a panic-stricken face. He entered the hallway almost silently, putting his finger to his lips so she would not speak.

As he approached the third room on the left, the drill almost vibrated through his chest. It was almost hard to breathe. Just then the door behind him opened and two armed police officers gave him the thumbs-up signal. Drawing his gun and counting "1-2-3," he ripped open the door.

Dr. Rens screamed and by accident pushed a button that sprang the seat upright. The surprised patient slid onto the floor while Dr. Rens screeched, "Uhh, who are you? What are you doing here? I'm with a patient right now."

Danny slapped handcuffs on Dr. Rens.

Danny Short and Red Pelo became known as "the dangerous duo." Red was on her way to a new and exciting adventure. She planned to become a famous detective.

Six months later, Red graduated from the police academy, ready for another case to "CRACK."

Catnapping

*Tigris is gone. Will Jill know what to do to get her back? In **CATNAPPING**, by **Sophie Frank**, each must do her part if there is going to be a happy ending.*

I took the stairs at neck-breaking pace. How was I supposed to know that they were marble? I kept sliding and sliding down that grand stairway. Next time, I will do that on the carpeted stairs. And anyway, since when was marble so slippery? Jill, my owner, came running over just as I reached the bottom. She picked me up and nuzzled into my gray fur.

I had only been living here for a week, but already I had gotten into a lot of things that got me hurt. Jill is so rich, and has a huge mansion. Everything is all proper. She needs to start working on catproofing the house. I mean, cats always run down stairs. How am I going to do that with marble stairways? And her floors are so slippery. I go sliding across the room when I run on them.

As Jill cuddled me from my fall, I started to purr. I have this deep, loud purr, a purr that Jill loves.

“Oh, Tigris, what did you get into now?” Jill laughed.

I looked at her with big brown eyes. She looked back at me. We stared at each other for a while, then she started laughing.

I like Jill. She’s nice, and funny, and she has the best laugh. She laughs a lot. When she laughs, it feels like the whole house is relaxing.

* * *

A week ago, both my sister Pumpkin and I were sold from the pet store. Luckily, Jill’s a lot nicer than the woman who took Pumpkin. The lady held Pumpkin the wrong way. She talked too

loud, too. I was so scared when she took Pumpkin away. I was nervous that I would get an owner like her, too.

Then Jill walked into the pet shop. I started to purr, my best purr, and looked up at her with my eyes. She looked at me, and I knew that I liked her right away. Her cell phone rang, and the ringer was a deep cat purr. I knew that she loved cats. And a good owner loves cats. She answered. Then she laughed. It was her great laugh. I loved her right from the start. Then, she walked away.

She walked into the cat section. She emerged with a bag of cat treats, a collar, a toy, and lots of cat food. My heart sank to my paw. *She already has a cat*, I thought. But then, she went over and spoke to a man who works at the pet store. She looked over at me. They spoke for a while, then disappeared into the cat section again.

They emerged with a beautiful cat carrier. I was so jealous of her cat. I wanted to live with that laugh, play with that toy, and sit in the comfy cat carrier. Then, the two of them walked over to the tag maker, and spent a few minutes over there. They were working at a computer type thing. She stood back for a minute, then bent down and picked something up from the machine. She put it on the collar. Then she went and paid at the register.

I was angry at myself for getting my hopes up that she would be my owner. It was then, just as I thought that I would never be happy again, that she walked over with the man. She pointed straight at me. I still can't believe her words. "That one."

The man lifted me out. I again started to purr, and looked straight into her blue eyes.

"This one?" the man asked. Jill nodded. "Okay, then, you'd better put the collar on her." Jill took me from the man, and slid the collar on me. She then put two fingers in to check the tightness. I knew that Jill would be a great owner. She put me in the comfy case.

"Thank you," she told the man.

"Not at all," the man replied. "I hope you enjoy Tigris."

Jill walked toward the door, carrying me and the bag. "Tigris. What do you think of that name?" It took a few seconds for me to

realize that she was talking to me. I looked up at her, with my big eyes, and started to purr. “Then Tigris it is,” she said.

We walked though the parking lot to her car. It was a white Suburban. She looked over at me. “You must be hungry,” she said. She reached into the bag, and pulled up a kitty treat. “Here, munch on this. I’m afraid that this is going to be a long car ride. It always seems longer the first time you’re in a car, doesn’t it, Tigris? Well, it’s really only a few minutes. Don’t worry; we’ll be home soon, safe and sound. Jim, the man from the pet store, said that you might want something to do while we’re in the car.”

She opened the carrier and placed a feather toy in it. She placed me on the front seat. Then she closed the door. I felt trapped. The comfy carrier didn’t feel so comfy anymore. Then, after what seemed like hours, Jill opened the door across from me. When she got in and closed her door, I didn’t feel so lonely anymore. Jill was with me. She talked to me the rest of the way.

“We’re going home now, Tigris. I’m Jill. I live alone. I have always loved cats. My sister is allergic, so I have never had one before. Now that I’m living alone, I can have them. I hope I do everything right. Like I said, I’ve never had a cat before. But Tigris,” she waited for me to look at her, “you and I will have a grand time.”

Jill was right. After what seemed like five nervous hours, she pulled into a steep driveway. Soon, she came to a complete stop.

“We’re home, Tigris. Didn’t it seem like hours?” Yes, it did seem like hours. “Well, it’s only been five minutes.” Really?

When we got inside, Jill set me on the ground and let me out. I was anxious to explore. But, it turned out Jill had other plans for me. She scooped me up. “Jim said to keep you in a room with your food and litter box for about a week. I was going to have you sleep in the mudroom, but that’s so dark and lonely. Instead, you can sleep in my room. I got you a bed the other day. I can return it if you don’t like it. Of course, you can always sleep with me,” she added. I think that I will always sleep with her.

* * *

That was a week ago. Now, as Jill held me in her arms, I thought about that day. So much had happened. And it all led to a great beginning.

Jill started to walk towards the family room. "Tigris, this is going to be your first winter." She walked into the family room, where the fire in the fireplace was crackling. She sat down in the comfiest armchair, right by the fire. I curled up into a ball and started to purr. I love just relaxing and being warm. I felt like all of the mad in the world just turned into peace. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

* * *

"Tigris, do you think the blue jeans or the black jeans?" I sat on Jill's bed, staring at her. Jill was packed for her trip to Alaska. I walked over and nuzzled my food dish. I didn't care what color jeans she wore. I cared about who was going to feed me while Jill was gone. I got the hint that Jill was not taking me. Jill looked up, and laughed. Jill always knows what I mean.

"Jim is going to come over and feed you when I'm gone." Great, just what I need. Jim hates cats. He always rubs cats the wrong way, and doesn't care about our feelings.

"Here, little cat. Do you want food?" Jim was easily showing me that the last place he wanted to be was here, and here he was. He had been feeding me for a week now. I couldn't wait till the next day, when Jill would come home. I walked towards him. Suddenly, he pulled out a bag. He put the food inside, along with the bag of kitty treats.

"Come on, kitty, eat." I could kill my stupid self. I went in. As soon as I went in, he closed the bag.

"Kitty, I'll poke a few air holes so you can breathe. Wouldn't want you to die before Tim meets you, now would we?"

I was so scared. All of a sudden a knife poked in. It came about an inch from my body. I let out an angry yowl.

"Ah, be quiet you silly cat."

When he pulled the knife out, I could see a blade of sunlight coming through.

Jill walked into an empty house the next day. Jim had taken me away. Jill called to me, and when I didn't come, she grew worried. She ran to her bedroom, and saw that my food dishes were gone. She pulled open the cabinet that she keeps my food in. Instead of my food, she found a note in a very untidy scrawl.

I have your cat. You will only get her back when you quit your job and give your house to me. I will contact you when I find out you have officially quit your job. If you have not quit in two days, I will kill your cat.

Jill froze. She had a very good job that she didn't want to quit. But she also wanted me back. Who would do something like this? Even more, who would know how to get into the house? Jim. The word popped into Jill's head. Jill decided that she was going to come after me. As she walked out of her house, she found another note, on the front porch of her house, in the same untidy scrawl.

Tim-
I have the cat. We're on our way to Port Huron. I have the forged pet papers with me. We'll be in Ontario by the time Jill gets back. I also took food for the cat. Stay in touch and I'll write more updates later.

-Jim

That answered a lot of Jill's questions. She now knew that Jim had taken me for sure, and that we were traveling to Canada. Now, she didn't know who Tim was. "What do Tim and Jim want with Tigris?" Jill asked herself. As Jill walked out of her house, she saw muddy truck marks.

“A great advantage to living where there’s only dirt roads: I can follow Jim’s trail,” Jill said to herself. She hopped into her car and backed out, following the truck marks.

* * *

I was scared. Jim had thrown me in the trunk after he had written a note to Jill, then one to Tim to mail. He stuck the letter to Tim in his back pocket, the one with the hidden hole in it. I was the one who saw it drop out in front of our door. I wasn’t about to tell Jim. It is a good clue for Jill.

I knew something they didn’t know, which was better for me. Jill called the night before. She left a message saying that she was coming home the next day. Jim didn’t hear that part.

We were driving down to someone named Tim. Why did they want me, anyway? I had this itch that kept bothering me. I started to scratch it. Something sharp poked me where my paw was. I pulled my paw away and examined it. I couldn’t find anything pokey. I started to scratch with my other paw. Something sharp poked me again. I pulled my other paw back. I sat for a few minutes, stunned. Then it dawned on me. Jill had never clipped my claws. I stretched out my paws, separating my toes apart so I could see my claws. I was shocked. I had long claws! I sat stunned for a couple minutes, before an idea abruptly popped into my head. I got to work, sawing at the bag with my claws. I rapidly stopped, as the trunk door swung open. Jim poked his head in.

“Oh, boy, does it smell in here.” He closed the door, but didn’t latch it tight, and walked into the store. I started busily cutting at the bag. Once I had cut the bag open, I jumped out.

I was shocked when I found out that Jim had closed the door. I figured that since I had nothing to lose, I would try and open the door.

I went back as far as I could and started running—not jogging, but sprinting. I charged towards the door. My head stung with pain when I hit it with full speed. The door stayed closed. I decided to try again. The pain started throbbing, but I figured that avoiding Tim was probably worth it. It popped open on the third time.

I hopped out, and started running back on the muddy truck marks that Jim's truck left. Jim noticed that I was gone. He started running after me. He was a foot away when I veered left, under a car in a parking lot. He stopped, surprised at where I went. He looked around for a minute, and during that minute, I took a chance and started to run for it. The driver's door opened and a person stepped out. Jim looked over at the noise and saw me. He silently scooped me up and started to run. But a voice filled the parking lot, a voice of anger and power. "PUT HER DOWN AND FREEZE!"

Jim whipped around and I saw Jill standing there. So she had followed the trail. Jim looked at her.

"No way, you idiot." He started to run. Jill was faster. She charged and tackled him down to the ground. Someone who had seen the commotion had called 911. The police came and quickly knew what was happening. They pried Jill off Jim and pulled me out of Jim's arms.

"You both are going to have to come in with me," that big, bald police officer spoke, in a strong, deep voice. He carried me, and Jill and Jim walked ahead of us.

We followed the policeman into his car. He took out a phone. "Jim, what is Tim's number?"

"Like I would tell you Richman's number."

"Oh, so Tim Richman, is it?" He picked up the radio. "Conduct search all over for a man named Tim Richman." Jim looked down, furious with himself.

"Tim, Tim," Jill muttered to herself, looking down. "TIM!" she suddenly exclaimed, and jumped up. "Tim Richman. He works with me."

Jim looked up. "That's him."

The policeman turned. "You know him?"

"Yes, sir. He works a level below me at Xtra.net."

"What's this Tim Richman look like?"

"He has long, black hair that's always slicked back. And brown eyes. He's short and very beefy."

Jim was looking down at the hard, cold seat.

The policeman picked up the radio. "Tim Richman, suspect. Long, black hair; slicked back. Brown eyes. Short. Beefy. Over and out."

Static started coming out through the radio. A man's voice sounded. "The search will go 10 miles west, 10 miles east, 10 miles south, and 10 miles north. Search for Mr. Tim Richman. Station 221667 Beaconsfield Township when found. Over and out."

"Okay, here's the deal. They are going to conduct a search. When and if they find him, they will bring him to the station. We're going there now to wait."

The rest of the journey was uneventful. We all squeezed into the car and made the long trip down to the station. We sat in front of the chief police, Bob, and the deputy who had taken us there, Will. I sat in Jill's lap, and next to them sat Jim.

Soon, static started coming from a radio behind the desk. "Tim Richman is found. We're bringing him to station 221667 Beaconsfield Township. Over and out."

Everyone looked relieved. Even Jim looked happy. That was because Will had explained that if Tim were found, the punishment on Jim would be smaller. Soon a short, beefy man walked in. Tim had arrived.

Tim sat down next to Jim. "Nice one," he whispered.

"So, tell us your side of the story, Jim," Chief Bob said.

"Well, one day Jill came into the pet store and bought Tigris. I got her number because we needed that for the store registration. Jill left. Tim had followed her in. He looked at the cat stuff, and after Jill had gone, he picked up the same cat treats that Jill had bought. He then came to me." Jim paused. Tim had been looking down at his feet. "He came to me, and asked what Jill wanted. So I told him. He pulled me closer. 'Want to earn some extra money?' he asked me. I was scared so I said no. Tim paid for his treats and left. When my shift was over, I left. Tim jumped on me and showed me his gun. 'Come with me.' Now, since I had a gun at my face, I did."

Tim suddenly looked up. "I deny everything Jim says."

“Oh, really? You deny that Jill bought her cat? I do believe we have proof that she did, since her cat is right here.” Chief Bob had outsmarted Tim. “Please continue, Jim.”

“Tim took me to his car. He told me, with the gun pointed at me, that I must get him Tigris, and leave the note for Jill in the food cabinet. So I became friends with Jill, by her phone number. I slipped a travel guide to Alaska in her mailbox. The next day, I told her how I loved taking care of cats. Tim’s plan worked--” He was cut off.

“You mean YOUR plan,” Tim said angrily.

“No, you were making the plan. So anyway, the next day, Jill asked me to take care of her cat. I accepted. The day before she returned, I took Tigris, and started heading for Tim in Canada. But Jill caught up with me.”

“Do you agree with what Jim said?” Chief Bob directed the question to Tim.

“Yes,” Tim said, his face looking down. “I did all that. But you don’t know why. Jill has always been higher up than me. I needed her job for a good reference to go on my record. But Jill loved her job. So when Jim mentioned that she loved her cat more, I knew what I had to do.”

“Well, since you both admitted to the truth, we will keep you until your trial, which will be set later. Jill and Tigris, you’re free to go.”

* * *

“I’m sorry, Tigris.” We were sitting in Jill’s family room in front of the warm fire. I was curled up in a ball, purring. Jill got a phone call from the police. The trial was done. Jill had gone as a witness. Tim and Jim admitted that they were guilty. The police fined Tim, and when the company found out, they fired him. Jim was also fired from his job at the pet place.

Jill and I had a great time together after that. I also finally learned all the tricks to living in a huge, expensive mansion. I slid down the marble stairway easily. Whee! I nicely made the turn, and turned to face Jill, who was laughing.

The Mystery Murder

*A heartless criminal is on the loose who will stop at nothing to get what he wants. In **THE MYSTERY MURDER** by **Tyler Dewald**, a horrible murder is just one part of a ruthless crime spree.*

On a very dark night, someone broke into a house on Main Street and Inkster Road. Tiki was murdered. No one knows how he got murdered. In a very small white house, the Crime Scene Investigation unit (CSI) found him very bloody and dead. The CSI knew it was gruesome. There was blood on the walls with finger streaks through it. They looked there to find who did it, but almost nothing was found. It looked like Tiki was trying to get to the phone to call for help.

The murderer never wanted to be found out, so he bugged Tiki's phones and computer and hid a tiny camera in Tiki's house. That way he could watch Tiki. The CSI cannot figure out how he broke in, because there was very little evidence or fingerprints except for Tiki's. There were no guns or other types of weapons found. A person called Gibbs who works for CSI was at the scene first, and he just knew it was a gruesome murder.

The CSI searched the house thoroughly. They found one different fingerprint on the door handle. They gave it to the lab to find a match.

The CSI was looking outside of the house. One CSI agent found a small hole in the middle of the yard. He went over very slowly and called for more agents. He put a flashlight in it both ways to see, and there was a huge tunnel. They looked inside again, looking for the hidden door. The door was in a bedroom under the bed. Five CSI agents went down in the hidden pathway.

At the end of it they found three kids. The agents asked, “Are you ok?”

One of the kids had been missing for two years. CSI gave them food. One of them weighed only 54 pounds and he was 15 years old. They looked sick. They had gray skin and you could see their bones. One of the kids’ fathers was a CSI agent and he was at the scene. His name is Tony. Tony asked, “Who put you in the tunnel?”

The kid said, “A very tall man about six feet five, with blond hair and green eyes.” The agents gave it to the lab. No other family members of the kids were home at the numbers that they remembered. CSI agents put the kids in a foster home, but Tony’s son went home.

The CSI headquarters got a ransom phone call. The man said, “Give me 50 million dollars or I will kill the kids.” He must have thought the kids got left behind. “Meet me at the old boatyard at 12:00 P.M.”

Gibbs said, “We will question this man for murder.” At 12:00 P.M. there were 58 agents at the boatyard. There were only two men in the open, waiting. There were four snipers. The person came in a dark green colored van. He got out of the van. He looked like he had been an agent before. He asked for the money. Gibbs put in fake money and he slid it over to him. Gibbs pulled out his gun and said, “We’ve got you surrounded. Put your hands on the car!”

CSI charged the man, Roald, with murder and kidnapping. Gibbs asked Roald, “Where were you at 12:00 P.M. four weeks ago?”

Roald said, “I was sleeping.”

The fingerprints were not his. Gibbs said, “We’ve got the wrong person.”

CSI headquarters got a phone call. A person said, “You thought I would fall for that? I hired him to drive through there.” Before he or she hung up, CSI traced the phone call. It was from the airport. Gibbs said, “Let’s go.”

Gibbs called Tony. He was at the airport waiting for a plane ride. He got the phone call. When he got off the phone, he went

to the manager to say, "GROUND ALL PLANES!" Tony pulled out his CSI badge. The manager said, "I will do it very quickly."

Gibbs and the FBI finally got to the airport. They locked down every door, putting six men on each. The FBI and CSI searched everybody.

They got down to four people. The last one had blond hair, green eyes, and he was about six feet, five inches tall.

He was being questioned, and he asked, "Before I answer, can I have something to drink, like pop?"

Gibbs said, "Ok. So, while we are waiting, can we have your DNA?"

He said, "No, and why do you need it?"

"Right now, you are under suspicion of murder and kidnapping."

He said, "Oh."

He finished his pop, and Gibbs asked him, "Can I have that?"

"Ok."

"Also, thanks for your DNA." Gibbs gave it to the lab.

Two days later, he was charged with murder and kidnapping. He was found guilty and went to prison for life. Gibbs said, "We'd better have the murderer and kidnapper. I'm bored of this case."

A Strange Glow in the Woods

*In the dark of night, something eerie is on the move. A boy and his friends look for the truth in **A STRANGE GLOW IN THE WOODS**, by **Peter Nguyen**.*

During a dark Halloween night, Peter was trick-or-treating with his friends named Nate, Seth, and Albert. Peter and his friends went trick-or-treating around the whole block. It was getting late, so Peter, Nate, Seth and Albert went home together. Peter lives close to Nate, Seth and Albert. There is also a kid that lives across from Peter.

Peter was in his room looking out the window. The kid across the street kept staring at him from his window. Peter was thinking, “Do I know him?”

In the morning, Peter was playing wall ball. Nate, Seth and Albert joined in. They played so long that they didn’t realize how late it was.

In the woods, they saw a strange green glow moving around. Peter and his friends were scared, so they went screaming and running into their houses.

The next morning, Peter and his friends were talking about the green glow from the day before. Nate was saying, “What was that?” Peter saw the kid across the street keep staring at him from his window.

It was almost nighttime. When it was nighttime, the green glow appeared again from the woods. The boys were about to take a picture, but the green glow faded away. Peter and his friends were talking about how to investigate this green glow.

They said that they would be ready for the next night.

In the morning, Peter, Nate, Seth and Albert set traps in the woods so they could catch it. It was getting dark. They hoped that their traps would work.

Finally, the green glow appeared. Nate was getting ready to pull the string so the net could trap whatever it was. When the green glow was at the target, Nate pulled the string and the net went up. They caught him! It was someone wearing a mask. So Peter took his mask off.

It was the kid across the street from Peter. He said his name was Steven. Peter asked why he did it. All Steven wanted was to have the coolest costume in the neighborhood. He was glowing by using glow sticks.

Steven was sorry for what he did. Peter, Nate, Seth and Albert said it was ok. That night, Peter became friends with Steven.

The next day, Steven stopped staring at Peter, and Peter, Nate, Seth, Albert and Steven were playing wall ball.

Toast: The Deep Fried Story

*An egg disappears. Is he a victim of fowl play? Detective Toast must get to the bottom of things in **TOAST: THE DEEP FRIED STORY**, by **Chris Tellis**.*

There was an old piece of toast in his office. Toast was his name: Detective Toast. He was slightly burnt but buttery, and had all the details in the food group. He had an assistant. She was old and wrinkly, and was his wife, too. Her name was Eggma Toast. They both were a good team, although some thought of them as a horrible couple.

Ring, Ring, Ring. “Hello, Detective Inc.”

“Hello hello hello! Anybody, pick up the phone, for crying out loud!”

“Calm down, sir; let’s take a deep breath on the count of three. 1...2...3. Breathe in.”

“Wait, I can’t breath in. I’m an egg.”

“Just tell me what happened, okay? Start.”

“My twin brother got egg-napped out of our coop house that my mom owns. Now he is in the hospital, unconscious.”

“We’ll be on our way there.”

The scent of the farm greeted Toast and Eggma: the fresh grass, the smelly animals, and the cheap shampoo.

“Show us what happened to the egg.”

“Okay. He was in the coop with my mom and her friends.”

“Okay, let’s take a stop over there at your mom’s house.”

When they arrived, Toast said, “Sorry to butt in, ma’am, but can I just ask some questions?”

“Sure, but make it snappy. I’m playing cards with my friends.”

“Where were your friends before this happened?”

“Well, Bacon was downstairs playing cards, I was in the kitchen getting a snack, and Sausage was upstairs washing his hands. My son was going upstairs also.... You don’t think...!”

“There’s only one way to find out. Sausage, did you hurt the egg?”

“No! I didn’t.”

“Did you hurt him?”

“Okay, yes, I did. But it was only because of Bacon. Egg always plays with Bacon now; he never plays with me. So I hurt him and I’m glad about it, too.”

“Put him in jail until my twin brother is well.”

“Okay, we’ll do it.”

Until this day he is still in jail. Some say they forgot about him. Some others say the case is closed.

What Happened to Liz Townsville

A research project turns into a quest to preserve the historical record in
WHAT HAPPENED TO LIZ TOWNSVILLE, by **Kasey Power**.

I've been doing a lot of research about Townsville High School. It turns out that it is named after Liz Townsville. But who in the world is she? My name is Kasey Power, and I wanted to find out.

Ever since I was in preschool, I knew that I was going to Townsville. I guess I just never took the time to think about it. But that is all in the past now. I felt like I was on a search, just trying to find out as much as I could about this 'Liz' person.

I started by searching on the Internet for 20 minutes. I didn't know much, but I knew this was going to be harder than I thought. I searched on Ask Jeeves, Google, and even MSN. I found nothing, zilch and nada.

I asked 16 people in my family, 13 of my friends, and 15 of my, well, more 'dusty' teachers. The meanest and oldest of all was Mrs. Riddlestein. She must be at least a million years old. She would also be my last hope.

I touched her cold doorknob, and slowly opened her creaky door. I can swear that room was as old as she was. It is cold, dark, and has a stench of rotten cheese (phew!). I slowly approached her dusty desk. Nervously, I asked her, "D-do you know-w-w who Liz Townsville is?"

Suddenly, I felt a mix of fright and relief when a smile ran across her wrinkly face. "So," she said, "you are trying to find out

who Liz is?" I found myself blurting out yes before I could think about it. "You know, Kasey, have you even tried to use the resources around you, resources you already have? I will tell you one thing: Liz is a legacy in this town."

As I slowly walked out the door, Mrs. Riddlestein suddenly said to tell her what I came up with. I agreed and quickly slipped out of the door. Little did I know that she just gave the biggest clue that anyone could ever give to me.

I took Mrs. Riddlestein's advice, and my first search went something like this:

Why not start in the library?

This library had nothing in it about Liz; let's move somewhere else.

Look! Townsville Lane, up there, on that street sign. Maybe there is a clue there. Ahh! Nothing here but an old cemetery. Oh! A cemetery. Let's go check it out. Townsville, Townsville... a-ha! Here is a Townsville. The stone says "Harley Townsville, beloved husband of the legendary Liz Townsville." So, Liz's husband died in November of last year. I bet she's bummed! I think this is enough for today. Let's take a rest.

Shh! It's 5:00 A.M. I wanted a head start on today's search. Wow! How time flies when you are finding nothing. Well, I better go tell Mrs. Riddlestein what I've found.

As I approached Mrs. Riddlestein's door once more, I felt an emotion of trust and relief squashed together. I told her what I found and the same grin ran across her face. After a moment or two, Mrs. Riddlestein finally said, "You have done well, my child. I trust that you want me to pull all of this together for you."

Joyfully, I answered yes.

"Well," she said. "Liz and I have been friends since we were about your age. But since Harley died, she refuses to leave her house."

I answered, "Oh, that is awful."

Mrs. Riddlestein replied, "Yes, I know. So here I am now, a teacher. You know what, Kasey? I'll give you the address to her house."

"Oh, that would be wonderful!"

Mrs. Riddlestein said, "Her address is 30458 Herman Road."

"Thank you, Mrs. Riddlestein, thank you," and I ran out the door to start the next part of the search, which went this way:

Here I am now, looking for her house. Wow, this is one of the most exciting moments of my life! Now, let's see, 30456, 30457, 30458. Well here I go. Wish me luck!

As I approached her mansion, I noticed the uncut grass, and the moss growing on the house. I rang her off-tune doorbell and none other than Liz Townsville came to the door. Liz said, "Come in, my child, come in," so I went in. Liz said "Now, what brings you here today?"

I answered, "Yes, I wanted to ask you some questions."

She answered, "So, go on."

I decided to ask, "Why don't you ever go outside of your house anymore?"

Liz answered, "Well, I just see no reason to anymore."

Well, I said, "That's your choice, but if I were you I would keep up my family legacy and make myself well-known again. Just something to think about. Goodbye." So I left.

I guess that I influenced her to go outside, because I have been seeing her almost every day now. Happy endings always last.

RISK

The Chase

*The world's worst nightmare threatens to come true when terrorists steal nuclear weapons. International intrigue is the topic of **THE CHASE**, by **Andrew J. Sadler**.*

“This is Monica Lerow reporting for Channel 9 News at a nuclear missile plant, where a couple of terrorists have just stolen ten nuclear bombs. The terrorists escaped in a green truck. The license plate number is XCV46Y. If you see this license number, notify the police immediately.

“Over here is the wall that set the alarms off. The terrorists blew up a fragment of the wall to escape. The police have been investigating the area for any clues of who did this and for what purpose. Here is FBI agent Tom Wrapper.”

“We still need more time and clues to have a suspect yet,” said Agent Wrapper. “This is going to be hard, whoever is in charge of this.”

“Hi, this is Monica again, saying bye.”

“We need to find those bombs and get them in safe hands,” said Tom. “We need to get them as quickly as possible without the terrorists knowing,” said Tom to his FBI sector. “We should send in spies to look around for clues of who did this and where they are. Five groups of three should do. Send them to the southern tip of Ukraine,” he said, referring to a wrapper one of them dropped. “Get a few of your best men and bring them here tomorrow at noon.”

“Hurry up, we’ve got to leave soon,” said Tom. “You guys will probably land there tomorrow around ten. Good luck.”

“We’re going to need it,” said the fifteen spies.

When the spies arrived there, they went to their hotel to assess the situation. They planned to take the city in sections. Each group would get one section of the city. Each group would eat lunch whenever and be back at the hotel at nine. They then locked the door and left.

When the groups got back, the door was unlocked! They pulled out their guns, kicked open the door and yelled, “Hands up!” There was no one in the room and nothing was different except for a note in the middle of the room. It read, “If you continue your search, we will bomb you.” The spies were freaked and contacted headquarters to let them know what had happened.

“What!” yelled Tom. “How did they find out we were on to them? You need to lie low and stay in the hotel. You should ask the Ukraine forces for help. Tell them to use a nuclear radar. Good luck.”

“Sir, come in. We have found the bombs. They’re in the basement of a brown parking garage by the freeway.

“Use the elevator to get down there. Don’t cause commotion.”

“You guys ready? The next stop is when we get off.”

Bing.

“Hands up!”

The terrorists were very surprised to see the Ukraine forces. The bombs were then returned into safe hands.

Pirate Island

*When two friends go to an island looking for treasure, they find more than they bargained for. Share the surprises in **PIRATE ISLAND**, by **Jake Timmis**.*

Sally and Bill are best friends. They do everything together. One day they were looking through an old book in the library when a map fell out of the book. The map looked like a treasure map. It also showed an island called Pirate Island. Sally said, “Hey, I know where that is. It’s very close to here.”

“Do you want to go look for the treasure, Sally?” Bill said.

“Yes. That would be really fun.”

Sally and Bill decided to go down to the docks and rent a sailing boat and go look for the island. On the way to the island a storm hit them. It took them about two hours to get there.

When they arrived, they were both amazed. The island had tons of hills, and trees were everywhere. There was one hill that stood out, though. It was gigantic. It must have been about twice as big as any of the other hills.

It was around 10:00 when they found somewhere to sleep. It was in a little cave right by their boat. In the cave, Sally and Bill heard two people talking to each other. They were talking about someone that was a captain. They walked by the cave opening, then they saw Sally and Bill.

These people were wearing nasty ripped clothes, and each had a sword in a case. Also, their hair looked like it hadn’t been cut in years. These people looked like pirates.

The first pirate said, “Hey! What are you doing here?”

The other one said, “Maybe they are trying to get the treasure before us!”

“Yeah. Let’s get them.”

The pirates grabbed Sally and Bill by the arms and dragged them on the ground. They took them down into a gloomy cave. Then the pirates opened a door and shoved Sally and Bill into it.

This room looked like the pirates’ jail. It was dark and wet, and the bars of the door were very rusty. It looked like this cave went on forever because it was nearly pitch black down there.

“We have to escape,” Sally said.

“Maybe we could go farther into the cave. There might be something down there,” Bill said. “Let’s go see.”

Eventually they ran into a dripping wet wall. “Look for something on the wall. Maybe there is a tunnel or some passage out,” Bill said.

Sally yelled, “I think I found a way out.”

Sally and Bill went through a little tunnel for what seemed like an hour. Then they saw a light. When they got out, Sally said, “We have to watch out for those pirates.”

“OK. Let’s get back to finding the treasure,” Bill said.

The map said to go up the biggest hill and look on the hill. On the hill there was a little flat part, and on the floor was a treasure box just sitting on the ground. “It’s the treasure!” Sally shouted. Bill started opening the top slowly, and then he saw all the piles of gold and other valuable things.

“We’re rich!” Bill screamed while he was tossing the coins into the air. Sally started to join in, but then the hill started to rumble. Sally and Bill walked over to the edge of the hill with only a few coins in their hands, and they saw lava moving down the hill. “AH!” they both screamed.

They started speeding down the hill, dodging all the trees. They both jumped in the boat and sailed away.

The Switch

*We may dream of living someone else's life, but what would happen if such a dream came true? Two girls find out when they trade places in **THE SWITCH**, by **Ashley Nichols**.*

Some people say that everybody has a twin in the world and that, if you're lucky, you could just find her or him. Well, this is Andrea's and Rachel's story and I believe that they are the lucky ones.

It all started at the Simple Plan concert. Rachel, one of the girls, was going to be famous in two more months. She auditioned for a part in the *That's So Raven* show, and she made it. She is only 15 years old. Rachel really wanted to go to the Simple Plan concert to get her one last chance at being normal. Her mom said, "Sure, you can go, honey. If it makes you happy, it makes me happy."

Andrea, a normal high school student, got four tickets to go to the concert for her birthday. That means she got to bring two friends and her very old crippled mom.

"The Simple Plan concert is starting in five minutes," said the girl in the announcement room. Everybody was quiet for about two seconds, and then Andrea saw some people come onto the stage. All of a sudden, the fans were screaming their hearts out.

The singing went for hours and hours, and then it was time to go home. Rachel really had to go to the bathroom. I mean, who wouldn't? When Rachel went to the bathroom, she saw a familiar face. But it was Andrea's face.

Rachel and Andrea stretched out both hands toward what seemed a perfect image of the other. As their palms matched up, the unexpected feeling of warm skin made each girl jerk her hands back in surprise, then stare in wonder.

“Wow, you look a lot like me,” said Rachel. She and Andrea talked about this strange coincidence, and then talked some more. It became clear that although they looked alike, they led very different lives.

“I want to tell you a secret, but you can’t tell anybody,” said Rachel.

“I won’t tell anybody,” said Andrea.

“I wish I had never had taken the audition,” said Rachel. “I don’t get to do anything for myself. I mean, my mom signed me up for the audition, and I did it because I didn’t want to make my mom sad.”

“I think I know what you mean,” said Andrea. “There was this talent show at my old school and my mom signed me up for it, but I didn’t want to do it. Then I saw my mom standing out there, so I felt guilty. I had to do it even though I didn’t want to do it.”

“Well, I’ve got to go,” said Rachel.

“Yeah, me, too,” said Andrea.

As Rachel was walking out, Andrea’s mom came and took Rachel because the crowd was getting bigger and Rachel looked a lot like Andrea. Andrea’s mom didn’t know what Rachel was saying because she was trying to get out of crowd. Rachel was really saying, “No, no, no, you have the wrong girl. I’m Rachel, not Andrea!” She was saying that over and over again, but the mom did not listen.

When Andrea came out of the bathroom, she started to look for her mother, and then Rachel’s mom grabbed her from behind and took Andrea away. Rachel’s mother didn’t even bother to hear what she was saying. It was so early in the morning you couldn’t even see the person standing next to you.

Andrea arrived at the big mansion. Thank God there were lights. Andrea wanted to speak to Rachel’s parents, but they wouldn’t listen. “Those stubborn mules,” said Andrea. Nobody would listen to her. The only thing she could do was run away back to her house and meet Rachel so she could have her life back. Until then, she would just have to play it cool.

When Rachel arrived at what she thought could be a dump, she tried to tell Andrea’s friends and family that they had the wrong girl, but nobody would listen. Just about when she was going to call the cops, she thought she could stay a normal person just like she wanted. So she did what she thought Andrea would do for the time being.

When Andrea woke up, she thought the best time to escape would be at 7:00 that night. When it was 7:00 P.M., Andrea saw her chance to run. She ran as fast as she could and made it out of the mansion. Andrea calculated that it would take two hours to get from Rachel's house to her house.

At 8:00 P.M., Andrea heard on the news that Rachel Tuff had run away from home. She heard it again at 8:30. She heard it again at 8:45. She thought to herself, "When will they ever stop?" It was 9:15 when she made it to her own house. She wondered what her mom would expect, or better yet, what her dad would expect.

When Rachel woke up that morning, she went to school. She realized that she really didn't miss school that much. She hated all the grumpy teachers, but other people think differently. At home, Rachel spent about two hours doing Andrea's homework. She made sure that Andrea got an A on it. She really didn't like to do it, but it was in the job description.

When Andrea's mom was making dinner, Rachel went to go have a snowball fight with Andrea's dad and brother. She felt better. Anybody would after all the homework she had to do, and it wasn't even her homework.

It was dinnertime. Everybody was so happy when Andrea's mom said, "It's dinnertime." They all struggled to get to the door with all the snow in their way, but they made it just in time. They all sat down in their seats and started munching down all of their food. There would be a lot of dishes for the mom to do.

When the mom was just starting to do the dishes, the doorbell rang. Andrea's mom opened the door and she was out of breath. Don't get me wrong. She didn't lose her voice or anything like that. She just got to the hospital really fast. No, I'm just kidding. Who do you think was at the door? Yeah, that's right: Andrea.

When Andrea's mom finally got her breath back, there was only one girl in the house. Then Andrea's dad told her mom the whole thing. He also told her that they would see more of Andrea because she just wanted to stay a normal girl. Rachel didn't mind that because she thought it was cool to hang out with a TV star.

From then on, Rachel and Andrea always knew that everybody in the world has a twin, no matter how lucky you are.

The Thief King

A thief thinks he is something special when it comes to breaking the law in
THE THIEF KING, by *Julian Jackson*.

The year is 2984. Technology has advanced incredibly. Police methods have grown tighter, but so have those of the criminals.

Meanwhile, in Paris, France...

Police: "Stop, thief! Put your hands up and freeze!"

Thief: "Why don't *you* freeze?"

Police: "What?"

Thief: "Catch you later. Ha, Ha!"

Later on, the thief goes to sell his goods to a merchant. "How much is it worth?" asked the merchant.

"A couple trillion," said the thief.

"Actually, it's worth only two million."

"What? Only two million!"

(Can I cut in? In the future, two million is like our two hundred. That's not a lot. Ok, back to the story.)

He ends up just taking the money.

Later on, the thief ends up taking another job. He is ordered to rob the British. His job is to take the crown jewels from the queen. But it doesn't go as planned.

Thief: "Ha, ha! I finally got into the castle and got these dumb jewels." But as soon as the thief finishes his sentence, an alarm goes off.

As the royal guards approach, he has to think quickly. He pulls out a smoke bomb and creates a smoke screen, then leaves as fast as he can. Little does he know he is being tracked by the world's best detective, Sherlock Home Starr.

Sherlock jumps in front of the thief, ties him up with rope, and leaves him hanging in the hall. Sherlock says to the thief, "Ha! There's no way that you can get out of here."

Thief: "Forget you, Sherlock. I would have gotten out of here if it wasn't for you!"

Sherlock walks away. As he leaves, the thief pulls a knife out of his sleeve with his mouth and cuts the rope.

Thief: "Ha, Ha, Ha! Peace out, people! Ha! Too easy." He looks at the jewels he stole and runs away.

Trapped

*When terrorists threaten, Bob and Juliana don't give up easily. They're on the case despite some major setbacks in **TRAPPED**, by **Miles Gordon**.*

Have you ever been asked to go on a mission or a journey? In Texas lived two explorers by the names of Juliana and Bob. They were not professionals, but they had a great reputation, and this was the important mission to see if they had reached the potential to be professional explorers. They have been all around the world. They owned one boat that they would adventure on to different places and had also been asked by different explorers to go on adventures.

It was a dark night in Texas and the cicadas outside were chirping. The phone rang. Juliana answered. "Hello, this is Juliana speaking."

"Hello, this is the secretary of state; the government needs your help! We need you and Bob to go to South Africa to find the uranium that the terrorists brought over. They are planning to kill George W. Bush because we captured their leader. We thought you would be perfect for this affair. You must be at Joe's dock at four o'clock sharp to receive a wooden boat. It will be equipped with one rescue boat, life jackets, food and water, a map, and a compass."

They arrived at Florida and got their boat at Joe's dock and they set sail. After 18 days they have passed the Caribbean and the upper portion of Africa. It had been scorching hot with little winds. As they approached a small dock on the coast of Angola, Bob and Juliana decided to take a rest since they have been sailing for 19 days.

The next morning Bob's phone rang, and a voice said, "A European explorer has stolen all the uranium. We need you to go to Tokyo to take what's left of the terrorist uranium."

About two days later they passed Madagascar, continuing far away from it with no land in site. Later that day the wind was roaring and the water was raging. The boat's wood panels and food were flying everywhere. Bob grabbed the rescue boat and hollered to Juliana, "Grab on!"

After paddling for a long distance, they arrived at land safely. Struggling for breath, they were extremely happy to see land.

On land Bob and Juliana were struggling to build a shelter out of their surroundings. After about 11 hours they had found sticks for shelter and some firewood.

That night as they were about to go to sleep, they heard queer noises coming from the south end of the island, so they decided to take a peak. There, right in front of their eyes, were natives doing some sort of ceremony. A native spotted them and signaled his clan. They started to chase Bob and Juliana through trees, bushes, and all around the island. They would not give up.

Finally, the natives trapped them and were about to kill Bob and Juliana and eat them. Just when Bob thought all hope was gone, he heard Usher's top song, "Yeah," and he remembered that he had his cell phone in his pocket. The natives were amazed by this noise and wanted to know more. Bob showed them all the great things a cell phone can do. The natives untied Bob and Juliana to let them show the cell phone. Just as he was about to use it, he threw it at the natives and Bob and Juliana escaped and hid in their shelter and never went to sleep that night.

As they worked their way to the water to set sail, they saw a government speedboat with tons of food and equipment for gathering uranium. They got in their speedboat and cruised to a dock in Tokyo.

They scavenged around Tokyo for one day and had no luck. As they were walking back to their hotel, they saw a suspicious looking bonsai garden. They smelled an intense odor. They decided to look in the garden and, sure enough, there was the uranium under the bonsai tree. That night at about 12:30 they

snuck into the garden and soundlessly put the uranium into a large paper bag. They sprinted to the dock, filled up the boat with gas, and smuggled the uranium back to America.

They went to Florida and dropped the boat off at Joe's dock. They rented a car and took a road trip across the southern part of the U.S. until they reached Texas.

The government called and congratulated them on completing the mission, and they got one million dollars each. Bob spent some of his money on a top-of-the-line Master Craft speedboat and a new house. Juliana spent 5000 dollars on a trip to Paris and spent another 5000 on clothes and accessories. She also bought a house in Tokyo because she liked it there so much.

The next time the government talked to Bob and Juliana, they told them they had installed tracking devices into the rafts, their clothes, the boat, and life jackets.

Underground Gang

In the near future, a sophisticated gang terrorizes New York City with a wave of kidnappings. Two boys become entangled in the gang's plot in UNDERGROUND GANG, by Matt Meranda.

“Run! Get out of the way!” Too late. *BAM!* I was thrown as if a massive hand was trying to crush me against the wall!

I had better start at the beginning. My name is James Virgle. It all started when I got home from school.

When I first got home, everything was going as normal. I did my homework and continued my smoke bomb project. (Mom thinks I'm a little genius, but what do you expect from a kid with scientists for parents?) I turned on the news. “And now back to our story. The events of last night have taken their toll on the day. There have been several more strange kidnap—”

I turned it off. I knew what she was talking about. You see, I live in N.Y.C., and we have a gang called Red Phantom. Every night they kidnap people and hold them for ransom. Everybody fears a red card on the door. I called my best friend Tim Hawkins to see if he was watching. “Yeah, it's terrible. We should do something. We're the best students in judo.”

“No, it's too dangerous. Let's see Katy and see what she thinks.”

Katy Miles is also one of my best friends. I've known her since kindergarten. When we got to her house, we found a red note on her door, and when I picked it up my face turned cold! “The Red Phantom,” Tim said.

Now it's personal! I said to myself as I walked the long way home. Katy has been my friend for five years, and now she's missing. That's crazy!

I didn't realize I was at my house, so I tripped on the front step. Ouch! I cut my leg, so I went inside for a Band-Aid. "Mom! Where are the Band-Aids? Mom?" Ok, so they're not here. They're usually late anyway. And that's when the terror started!

I went outside to look for their car. No car, but I did find something that made my blood turn icy! A note from the Red Phantom was dangling from a piece of string from the roof of my porch! I never felt anything like it: a mix of fear and anger coursed through my body. So I wasted no time calling Tim. "Tim, I think I'll take you up on your word!"

"Hey Tim, over here!" I yelled across the park. "Look up at the subway door."

"So, it is boarded up, so what?"

"A strange guy lives down there. The people on the street say he can help us."

"Ok. So, two questions before we rip the boards off this entrance. How do you know this stuff, and how can we trust him?"

"Well, one, I got curious and asked around, and two, the people on the street also say he sees and hears everything."

"Ok. You've convinced me. So here we go to wreck someone's house."

"You're really set on making me regret doing this, aren't you?" I plunged the crowbar into the old, dry wood, and with a satisfying crack the boards came apart.

The scene was so strange: shops abandoned, and the tracks filled with stuff, including wedding gowns, pens and pencils, CDs, and more. To top it all off, there was a big gaping hole in the middle of the walkway!

"Hello?" It echoed eerily.

"Hello," said a voice from behind us! We nearly jumped out of our skin!

"Who dares enter my domain?"

Tim was the first to find his voice. "We, we were..."

"...wondering whether you could help us find the Red Phantom. The people on the street say you were the most reliable source," I finished for him.

“Red Phantom, Red Phantom, hmmm. Oh yeah, they went down there a little while ago.”

Right then and there I snapped. “Why didn’t you tell the police?” I shook him by the shoulders like I could get some straight answers!

“Hey, man, I don’t do the topside thing, but if you want to die, that’s fine with me! Just go down there.”

“I can see what you mean by strange, but that was a real hot-headed thing to do,” Tim said.

“I know, but I just snapped. At least he doesn’t see the boards.”

“Hey, kids, you owe me some new boards!”

“Scratch that,” I said.

“I wonder why he told us about the Red Phantom?” Tim said.

“I would guess that they just don’t see him as a threat.”

“Red Phantom, here we come!” we said in unison.

Once again it was a very strange scene. There was a red glow around everything: a fairly large control panel in the middle of the room, about three-fourths as tall as me, and pods, one foot above and below the floor and ceiling. And inside the pods were what looked to be humans floating in a liquid that almost made me see lunch.

“Gross!” Tim said.

“Shhh!” I said. I just noticed the guards standing at the control panel! We held our breath. I opened my eyes just in time to see the guards walk out the door.

“That was lucky!” Tim said.

“Not exactly,” I said, “unless you think walls closing in on us is lucky!” The noise was awful, like metal on metal.

“What are we going to do?” Tim said over the roar.

“Well, we could stay in this cramped space until we run out of oxygen, or we could get crushed by the walls.”

“Thanks, Mr. Positive. That really helps,” Tim said sarcastically.

“Fine. Here, you run and I’ll be right there.”

Then a light bulb went on in my head! I ran up to the control panel, snapped off a lever, and just as the walls were about to crush me, I did the oldest trick in the book. I shoved the lever between the walls, like putting a stick between the jaws of an alligator. I hopped over the

control panel and slid my way to freedom. I wasn't hurt, and that's all that matters!

I turned around to find a knife at my throat!

"These little feisty ones will bring quite nice a ransom," I heard the man with the knife say. I saw that they had Tim in an arm lock.

"Got any smoke bombs?" Tim wheezed.

"Yeah, but only three."

"Well, well, well. Smoke bombs, eh? These little ones want to make it hard on us. Hand over the smoke bombs."

"Oh, these. I think I'll hang on to them, but you can have this one!" With that I hurled the bomb at him! *BAM!* Smoke filled the room. Then the worst thing that could have happened happened!

I felt a wet spot on my left leg. I reached in my pocket and pulled out a bomb. It was leaking fluid—a lot of fluid. The bomb had become unstable. It would soon explode! So the only thing I could do was to throw it, and that's what I did.

I chucked it as far away from me as possible, then *BOOM!* I was thrown into the wall as if a massive hand was trying to crush me against the wall. As fast as I saw the knife come out of the smoke I ducked and ran! Then Tim said, "Throw me a bomb. This time, I have a plan!"

"Go long!" I said.

I saw him attach some wires from the generator to the bomb, and then I had to focus on the men with guns and knives in front of me! And then.... *BOOM!* I saw pieces of concrete fly away like tiny pebbles! I saw the shiny blades of knives fly everywhere!

"Hop on," Tim said. I jumped the ten-foot jump up to the generator and out the hole made by the bomb. Man, judo lessons really pay off!

We called the police on a nearby pay phone, and we told them what happened. They came, went down the hole, and came out with the guy who had had Tim in an arm lock, the man with the knife, and Mom, Dad, and Katy!

"Man, I missed you!"

I got a medal for heroism and became the most popular kid in school...besides Tim! So pretty much everything's back to normal, and that's all that matters!

CONSEQUENCE

Guess Who We're Having for Dinner?

*Maybe you have had a family vacation turn out differently than expected. Let's hope your experience was nothing like the horror of **GUESS WHO WE'RE HAVING FOR DINNER?**, by **Alexandra C. Sewell**.*

"Come on, Lara!" I screamed as we were about to board the plane.

"Okay! Let me just get my candy bar."

Our flight was delayed for an hour, so Lara and I had gone to find something fun to do. We were on our way to Ireland for a visit with our grandparents. We live in Rochester, New York, and have made an annual trip to Ireland since I was four years old.

As we walked through the airport toward the arcade, we bumped into an old, homely man. He smelled like cigarettes, was dirty, and was wearing a talking shoe; this is a shoe with a broken sole. Lara and I both said, "Excuse me," but the man was upset by the bump and started talking in mumbo-jumbo. I mean, we didn't understand a word of what he was saying until we clearly heard him say, "Be scared, be brave, be wise and be prepared."

Lara said, "What a freak!" The dude cackled and gave us a strange look, like an evil eye.

In the distance we heard Da say, "Girls, come on, we're boarding our plane."

"Okay," we yelled back, and started running for the gate. The man was getting farther and farther away, but was still turned towards us. Finally, we boarded the plane. At this point, it was easy to put the unpleasant little man out of my mind, and, I thought, for good.

About two or three hours later, I was relaxed and reading my book, when I suddenly felt a shudder that made my stomach jump into my throat. I asked Ma if she felt it, too. She said, "Yes, probably just a little turbulence," so we both blew it off and settled back down to reading and doing our puzzles. The next time, Da felt the shudder. It disturbed him to the point that he got up from reading his *New York Times*, and went to ask the flight attendant what was going on.

The flight attendant said, "I'll have to go ask the pilot, but I think we're just in a patch of turbulent air. We'll pass through in no time." Reassured, Da returned to his seat, and gave us a half smile and a nod. He picked up his newspaper and fell back into his hypnotic reading trance.

Just then, we all heard the pilot come over the intercom and say, "Everyone, please stay calm. We have lost control of all the planes engines, despite all my efforts to restore them. We will be making a crash landing! Please fasten your seat belts, and remember, don't take anything with you!"

The plane started to shake from side to side. Everyone was freaking out and fainting. The flight attendants were trying to maintain a calm atmosphere, but people were too panicked to listen. Finally, the plane skidded onto the ground and made a crash landing. Part of the plane burst into flames.

There were 125 people on board, and only 75 survived the crash. This is a horrific tragedy. As I woke with a great gash in my head, I start to look around for Ma, Da, and Lara. Where can they be? Did they survive? What will happen to us? Then suddenly, I saw Lara lifting up her head, looking totally disoriented.

I staggered to my feet, and made my way over to her. I asked her, "Are you okay?"

She said, "Yes, but where are Ma and Da? Have you seen them? Are they all right?"

"I don't know. I hope so. I haven't found them yet." As I helped Lara up, we both started looking for Ma and Da.

After about an hour, we found them both lying on the ground, next to a tree, knocked out. Lara and I ran up to them, both yelling, "Are you okay? Ma, Da, wake up, wake up! We couldn't find you. Oh, please be all right. Wake up!"

As they woke up, we dragged them away from the crash sight. When we looked up, we were away from the wreckage, but seemed to be in an odd place. As we looked around us, we seemed to be in some sort of burial ground. There were skulls and bones everywhere. It was kind of scary, and Lara was so scared she started to hurl.

As she heaved—ho over a skull, we began to notice that there was something coming towards us. It was small and was crawling in a creepy kind of way. Suddenly, I realized it was transparent and was a glass scorpion, one of the most deadly creatures in the world. One sting from this creature and you are dead within five minutes! I screamed, “Da, run for a bush!”

We all scattered and ran as fast as we could. In the panic as we scattered for our lives, someone stepped on the scorpion and killed it. But, there were others!

All of the survivors were surrounded by these scorpions. In their dazed and delusional states, they thought the tiny little creatures would make a tasty snack, and began to chow down on the poisonous vermin. Actually, eating the little things was harder to do than they thought. The hard exoskeleton of the scorpions made them impossible to digest. The large content of poison in the stingers made them deadly, which made the tragedy of the crash even worse.

As people began to die from eating the scorpions, someone got the idea that perhaps they needed to find something else to eat. As we gathered up the family, we got Da from under the bush, and went to look for Ma. We were shocked to find her behind the bush with her head severed.

Holding a knife was the pilot. He killed our Ma and was eating her neck.

We couldn’t believe this was happening. It was as if the crash had turned everyone into flesh-eating zombies, and our mother had become a victim of this event.

Wandering around the wreckage was a man who was mumbling, “It was the curse, it was the curse; the curse has killed us all!”

Just then I remembered the old man at the airport and the strange words he said. Could this be the curse that he spoke of? Have we all become victims of this old crazy man’s curse of revenge?

The Murder Island

*A plane crash is just the first in a series of events that have deadly consequences in **THE MURDER ISLAND**, by **Kyle I. Dewald**.*

“I am your captain. You can call me Tiki.” They were flying into some strong wind current. The captain said, “Stay in your seat.” It was so bumpy that they were about to throw up. They finally stopped bouncing around. Then they heard a *BOOM!*

The plane went straight down toward to the sea. It seemed that the sea was sucking them down.

The captain said, “When we crash, take the raft, then go on it to find some land.” When the plane crashed, they lost consciousness.

When they awoke, they found themselves drifting in the sea. In order to survive, they had to do exactly what they were told. They decided to use the seat cushions, too. Tiki was not found, but the co-pilot was there.

Bob said, “Tiki probably drowned in the ocean. Instead of searching, we should build a fire and shelter.” Bob was a famous doctor because he did a very hard surgery. They decided to agree with him.

That night, they decided to tell each other stories so they could keep their minds off the plane crash. They heard noises and they were very scared. Bob was not scared. He went camping a lot, so he was used to the noise.

The sounds came closer and closer. Then they saw what it was. It was a gigantic black bear. Black bears can be very hurtful. They decided to play the silent game. The bear went away. Now they knew there was something on the island.

They went back to the camp. Cookie was setting things so they could sleep on the ground. They went to sleep so late that they could see the sun coming up.

When they awoke, they looked for wood and food. They found a lot of food, but it was mostly berries.

That day, they talked about Tiki's disappearance. They wondered if they did the right thing by not looking for him.

Bob was a doctor, so at least they could have a doctor. The doctor said, "We can not live only on berries. We need protein." They decided Bob and Cookie would go look for animals, and Klee and Sirloc would go fishing.

Klee was a good fisherman, but his job was a scientist. Klee fished with Sirloc for a long time. They caught a lot of fish. They were red snapper. When it was getting dark, they had a hog and a lot of fish.

The next morning, Sirloc disappeared.

Bob said, "He probably wandered off into the woods and got lost." They went to look for Sirloc, but they found Tiki.

Tiki was almost dead; he had a spear through his leg. They wondered, "How did the spear get there?" They decided maybe there was someone else on the island.

Bob and Cookie carried him back. Cookie gave him all the food he could eat. But the very next day, Tiki died from losing too much blood.

They went to get more food. They come back early and found Bob eating all the food. Klee asked, "What are you doing?"

Bob answered, "I need to eat. I am so hungry."

"I am hungry, too, but I am not eating that much because I am sharing the food."

"At least I'm not going to starve."

The next morning Klee went out looking for wood. He found Sirloc. He was dead. Half of his head was gone. There was blood everywhere.

Klee was so mad that he went into the sea. He wanted to die, but the sea was really shallow. He called Bob and Cookie.

They walked for miles. They saw land ahead. Then the killer appeared. It was Bob.

He had a severe head injury when they crashed, but it didn't show on the outside. He went to Klee and tried to kill him. While they were fighting, Bob said, "I killed all of them." Then all of a sudden, Cookie attacked Bob. It was two against one.

When Bob attacked Cookie, Klee pulled his gun out. No one knew he had a gun. He said, "You killed my friends. I will kill you."

Bob said, "Shoot me; I don't care. I did it because I was so angry with everyone. You made me broke. The plane was mine, but Tiki bought it. I wanted it back, so I stole it. Then Tiki sued me. Now I am broke. That's why I killed them."

Klee shot and killed him. Then people of a nearby city heard the shot. They sent out a helicopter to get them.

Cookie told the rescuers, "We were on the island."

One man said, "You have found the lost island of the Antarctic. I am the scientist who studied the island for a long time. I wanted to study the island to see if it was a legend or if it was real. After twenty years I gave up. I figured it was too late.... I looked for a long time, but I never found it, or even a clue where it went. When it drifted, it got chipped off. That is why you could walk on the island. The island was drifting so fast that the chipped-off pieces were gigantic. The water made the rock into bits of sand from hitting the rock so many times. If you went on the opposite side of the island, you would be cold. The sea is shallow because the island's land was being chipped off."

They got medals to show their bravery. They decided to go back to America to tell everyone about the trip. After all, they did not do their mission.

They decided to name the island after Tiki, because he was the pilot of the plane. He was also their best friend.

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