

**THERE IS  
NO TITLE—  
JUST READ  
THE BOOK**



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JUST READ  
THE BOOK**

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

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EDITED BY

Daniel Fisher  
Barb Babich

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# CONTENTS

## The Fight of Our Lives

BEN LIEGL	<i>Alone</i> .....	15
JOSHUA OLMSTEAD	<i>The Army</i> .....	17
GEORGE GOOGASIAN	<i>The Decision</i> .....	18
BRAM ROWINSKI	<i>Desert</i> .....	19
ANDREW DAGENAIS	<i>The Destruction</i> .....	21
PATRICK CONCANNON	<i>Different Worlds</i> .....	24
KATIE JELINEK	<i>The Last Ones Standing</i> .....	4, 26
IAN RICE	<i>Lost</i> .....	28
KATHERINE STEWART	<i>Movies and Popcorn, Oh My!</i> .....	30
CLAIRE WESTERLUND	<i>Trapped on the Ski Slope</i> .....	32
SETH LOCHER	<i>The Trip to Another Land</i> .....	34
C. DYLAN COMSA	<i>Under A Bloody Winter Sky</i> .....	35
DANIEL SOARES	<i>World War 3...</i> .....	40

## Foiled Again

MÉGANE HERMÈS	<i>Amber Petle</i> .....	47
ROMAIN COSTE	<i>The Bloody Knife</i> .....	49
ALYSSA BEDELL	<i>Julian Powers and the Red-Eyed Snakes</i> .....	53
DEMARCO OLIVER	<i>The Justice-for-All League</i> .....	56
NICHOLAS MOORE	<i>The Missing Diamond</i> .....	57
ETHAN ANDERSON	<i>The Mystery of the Blown-Up Float</i> .....	59
ZOÉ HUNTER	<i>One Strange Mystery...</i> .....	63
LOUISE ASSELIN	<i>Watch!</i> .....	65

## Friends and Enemies

LAVENDER BOUIE	<i>Adopted</i> .....	69
LAUREN GUTMAN	<i>Bully</i> .....	71
CHARLOTTE DANIELS	<i>The Chanel Bag</i> .....	73
KARA WALLACE	<i>Charlotta and "Dork"</i> .....	77
CIARA JOHNSON	<i>The Fight</i> .....	80
KRISTEN SCHMIDT	<i>The Great Depression</i> .....	81
LOÏC ROUAUD	<i>Locked In</i> .....	84
NATHAN MOORE	<i>The Missing Pizza</i> .....	87
ZENA KASHAT	<i>My New Life</i> .....	88
THOMAS JAMES	<i>The Old House</i> .....	91
S.R.L.	<i>The Surprise</i> .....	93
EMERSON VOGEL	<i>Trouble</i> .....	96
SYDNEY LOUIS-FERDINAND	<i>The Weirdest Thing Happened to Me</i> .....	99
CAITLIN C.	<i>We're Moving</i> .....	102
KRISTIN DALEY	<i>The Worst Day</i> .....	106

## A Good Score

DYLAN LANDGRAF	<i>The Doll</i> .....	113
ASHLEY MOORE	<i>The Haunted</i> .....	115
KELLI CASSIDY	<i>The Hayloft</i> .....	118
ARTEMIS THOMOPOULOS	<i>The House on Willow Creek</i> .....	121
JARET J. ALLRED	<i>Merry Christmas</i> .....	124
HADRIEN OVIZE	<i>The Notes</i> .....	127
SEAN KING	<i>Robotic Vampires</i> .....	130
MADI WEST	<i>Secrets</i> .....	133
CLAIRE MAZIUS	<i>Singing with the Wind</i> .....	135
MEREDITH MADISON	<i>The Unknown</i> .....	137
DAVID GLOVER	<i>Watch It You Die</i> .....	140

## The Outer Limits

ABBY DILAURA	<i>Abducted</i> .....	145
ARI GOLDBERG	<i>The Alien Takes a Stand</i> .....	147
MATHIAS CORNET	<i>Aliens Kidnap My Teacher</i> .....	149
TAL	<i>The Future As We Don't Know It</i> .....	151
SARAH QUASARANO	<i>Leo's</i> .....	153
ETHAN BODWIN	<i>The Men in White</i> .....	157
DUMINIE ALLEN II	<i>Metropolis 220X</i> .....	159
ANDREW TCHIBLAKIAN	<i>Robo Chickens Take Over Mars</i> .....	161
TONY FABBRI	<i>Space Monkeys V.s. Aliens: Battle for Science!</i> .....	164
NATALIE COOPER	<i>The Time Machine</i> .....	168
ALEX ZUFELT	<i>A Toast to the Alien Nations</i> .....	172
NICK MAGNAN	<i>Uprise in Evil</i> .....	176
SLIM SHADY	<i>When Fat Aliens Attack</i> .....	178

## The Scales of Justice

BRALEN DENNIS	<i>Agent 006</i> .....	183
CAM BEHNAM	<i>Christian and the Ring</i> .....	184
ISABELLA SHAMOUN	<i>The Escaped Murderer</i> .....	186
JOSHUA GOLDFADEN	<i>Gold</i> .....	4, 187
MICHAEL BACCANARI	<i>Home Alone</i> .....	188
MAXWELL ERNST	<i>Lily to the Rescue</i> .....	190
NAS SORRELL	<i>Unveiled Mask</i> .....	192

## Special Occasions

RYAN SCOTT	<i>Bad Day</i> .....	197
NICOLE BLACKWOOD	<i>Dreams and Disappointments</i> .....	200
CARA J. YOUNG	<i>Just Me</i> .....	204
ROBERT HATCHETT	<i>My Family and Me in Nevada</i> .....	206
KOREH CLAYBROOKS	<i>The True Meaning of Christmas</i> .....	207
JEANNE LAMPERTIUS	<i>The Unexpected Snow Day</i> .....	210

## This Can't Be Happening

LUC BLONDET	<i>Atheres and the Greeks</i> .....	215
CHRISTINE A. MESTDAGH	<i>Candy City</i> .....	216
LILLY FLECHSIG	<i>Caroline</i> .....	222
LEO DUDAS	<i>Chookabookas Invade!</i> .....	4, 224
KYRA ALPNER	<i>The Day I Went to the Carnival</i> .....	227
JOHANNA HOPKINS	<i>The Day Plastic Trucks Saved the Day</i> .....	229
ROBIN THIERRY	<i>The Discovery of Magic</i> .....	232
ANYA LEV	<i>Dragon Queen</i> .....	235
AMANDA BONILLA TAYLOR	<i>Fairy Gardens</i> .....	240
PIERCE B.	<i>From a Squirrel's Point of View</i> .....	244
SEBASTIEN JONES	<i>From the U.S. to France on a Skateboard</i> .....	246
JAZMYN RIVERA	<i>From Your Friends, Katie and Keke</i> .....	248
ALEX STRAITH	<i>Frozen Global Territory</i> .....	252
LEADER BARNETT	<i>King of the Ocean</i> .....	254
KARA KENNEDY	<i>Lily in Wonderland</i> .....	258
COCO LURZ	<i>Madeline's Present</i> .....	262
KATIE LU	<i>The Magic Easel</i> .....	268
RAIN LYBBERT	<i>The Magic Vase</i> .....	270
DAVID PIROG	<i>A Magical Tour of Ancient Greece</i> .....	274
JONAH GOLDBERG	<i>Monster Hockey!!!!!!!!!!</i> .....	277
GISELLE ULEP	<i>The Morph Club</i> .....	279
JUSTIN MOORE	<i>Mutants</i> .....	286
ELIZABETH AUSTIN	<i>The Mystery of Rain</i> .....	290
CAMERON PANLEY	<i>The Neon Blue Pencil</i> .....	294
JONATHON GREEN	<i>One Crazy Day</i> .....	297
ALICE PARFENOV	<i>Past, Present, and a Genie?</i> .....	300
CAMERON B. LEVY	<i>Power of the Buckeye</i> .....	4, 302
LEXIE MARKOWITZ	<i>Santa's Workshop</i> .....	304
BRENDEN FRENCH	<i>The School Day of the Living Food</i> .....	306
PAULINE PORTES	<i>Shrunk</i> .....	309
LUKE MAN	<i>Snow Day Misadventures</i> .....	313
SARAH M.	<i>Snowball</i> .....	316
SCOTT SCHAEFER	<i>Sparks and Lightning</i> .....	319
LIAM CALLAHAN	<i>The Tale with a Very Difficult-to-Pronounce Name</i> .....	323
LIZZY CROREY	<i>The Talking Pens</i> .....	325
LOGAN HARVILL	<i>Temo McStone and the Wish!</i> .....	328
JACK DOLAN	<i>Ties</i> .....	331



## This Can't Be Happening (continued)

OWEN MILLER	<i>The Tragic Story of Chocolate and Lollipop</i> .....	335
ADAM MARZALEK	<i>A Typical Day in Fantasy Land</i> .....	338
ASHLEY LENINGTON	<i>Visiting La-La Land</i> .....	340
SETH ALLEN	<i>The Weirdest Day Ever</i> .....	342
KAYLA KATHAWA	<i>What Happened Before</i> .....	4, 344
DAVID SHERWOOD	<i>The Whisperers</i> .....	348
STEVEN BROUSSARD	<i>White Monster</i> .....	350
AMY KLEZEK	<i>Who Said Anything About Being Ugly?</i> .....	4, 352
HARMONIE WILLIS	<i>The Wizards' Quest</i> .....	356
ABDUR-SAAMAD ALI	<i>The Yell</i> .....	362
JAKE G.	<i>Zombie Mountain</i> .....	363

## Up for the Challenge

BRANDON BRADSHAW	<i>The Cave of No Return</i> .....	367
REBEKAH HAFEN	<i>Daddy?</i> .....	369
DELPHINE MADDOX	<i>Dance Tournament</i> .....	373
ZAC ZIEGLER	<i>Deer Hunting</i> .....	376
NICK HORNBURG	<i>Flight to Freedom</i> .....	377
DORIAN MADDEN	<i>The Great Transfer?</i> .....	380
CAMERON PATRICK	<i>The Hollywood Scare</i> .....	382
BIJON CATCHINGS	<i>Journey to Nigeria</i> .....	384
ATHENA GUTIERREZ	<i>Julie Runs Away</i> .....	386
GABRIEL ZEIDNER	<i>Money Madness – A Survival Story</i> .....	389
SHELBY PITTS	<i>Nightmare</i> .....	391
ALEXANDRA BASTIAN	<i>The Past Button</i> .....	394
JASMINE JORDAN	<i>Problems</i> .....	395
OLIVIA KELLY	<i>Snickers the Spectacular</i> .....	398
MARVIN E. COOKE	<i>Snow Day!</i> .....	401
JADYN	<i>The Struggle</i> .....	403

## You Win Some, You Lose Some

BEN LEVIN	<i>Amber's Revenge</i> .....	407
BRODY LIEBLER	<i>The Avalanche</i> .....	409
JOSEPH G. RUBIN	<i>Basketball Dream</i> .....	411
DANIEL C. WILLIAMS	<i>The Best Hit Ever</i> .....	415
MYLES GLOVER	<i>The Big Election</i> .....	417
MARK EMILIO SURIS	<i>The Big Game</i> .....	421
REYN EICHENLAUB	<i>The Game</i> .....	423
DEVIN MCINTYRE	<i>Men in Tights</i> .....	426
CHARLES BROWN	<i>My Saturday Night</i> .....	428
WILL LOCKWOOD	<i>Rocky Mountains</i> .....	429
BLAKE BURRESS	<i>Semi Race</i> .....	430
JOSH GORODINSKY	<i>The Team</i> .....	432

<b>Index of Authors and Titles</b> .....	435
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## To the Authors

Your editors tip their hats to you!  
This volume brims with imagination and determination.  
What a way to cap the year!



# THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES



# Alone

---

*Alone in the wild, Jim and Drew don't know if they'll ever crawl out of the unforgiving wilderness in **ALONE**, by **Ben Liegl**.*

The ice was cracking beneath their feet as Jim and Drew tried to sprint toward the shore as fast as their legs could carry them. They had no idea what kind of trouble they were getting into.

It all started out as a backwoods campout with Troop 782. Jim and Drew were put together in a tent for four days and three nights with all of their survival equipment and food. The air was as cold as an icicle. While out on a hike in the blistering cold, Jim and Drew were separated from their troop at the rundown old campsite on the east side of Kewanaw Lake. When the two of them realized that they were stuck in the middle of the snowy woods alone, it was too late.

They decided to go out on the lake to see if they could spot anybody. They were suddenly surrounded by the noise of what seemed like a thousand trees snapping at once. The lake top started splitting into huge chunks of tilting ice. Jim and Drew knew that the only thing they could do was run for their lives. That's when the two boys were suddenly plunged into almost three feet of bone-chilling water as the ice continued to break all around them. Neither of the boys knew if they were going to survive this freezing nightmare.

Jim found a chunk of ice floating

near them and thrust his torso onto it. Jim reached back and yelled to Drew, "Grab my arm!" Drew couldn't speak as the cold crushed his lungs. Jim found Drew's arm in the icy water and hauled him onto the makeshift raft. Using all of the energy and will to survive, they started to kick in the water, and propelled themselves toward the shore.

After they finally dragged themselves onto the shore, the two of them were soaking wet, freezing, and exhausted. Jim and Drew used the last bit of their energy to find shelter. After finding a small cave, they peeled off their ice-cold clothes and started a small fire. "Hey, Drew, we should hang up our clothes near the fire so they can dry out," said Jim. Drew quietly set up a clothesline using the twine he had in his back pocket. After splitting a soggy, frozen granola bar that Jim had in his coat pocket, they got into their below-zero sleeping bags. They were not sure if they would ever feel warmth again. That whole night, neither of the boys slept because they were chilled to the bone, and every waking moment they heard the eerie groaning of the ice cracking outside.

The next day they started hiking through the bitter cold woods with no idea where they were. After hours of hiking, they found an unmarked trail and started to follow it. After about five

miles of brutal hiking, through slush, snow, and below-zero wind chills, the boys found the old campsite where they had been separated from their troop. Not knowing if they were going to be found, they decided to stay there for the next two days. Those two days were the longest two days of their lives.

They found a pop can and used it to collect snow, which they eventually melted and boiled to get water. During the first day, they hollowed out a snowdrift and used it that night as shelter. The second day, they followed some animal tracks and found a rabbit hole. They set a trap using some branches, a rock, and some bits of beef jerky for bait. They spent the rest of the day back at the camp trying to stay warm. At dusk, they returned to their

trap to find a plump rabbit. That night they feasted on what seemed like the greatest meal of their lives.

They were found asleep by their troop the next morning. The troop leader took the boys to the nearest hospital.

Both boys were treated for frostbite and dehydration. They had survived one of the scariest experiences of their young lives. One thing is for sure: Jim and Drew will never forget what an amazing journey they had together. The two boys were bonded for life. Neither one would forget what they had done for each other.

“Hey, Drew, when are we going winter camping again?” asked Jim.

Drew replied, “When hell freezes over, Jim; when hell freezes over!”



# The Army

---

*In the story **THE ARMY** by Joshua Olmstead, a kid's life changes in a second. Even he doesn't know how, but it has something to do with the army, guns, and bodies on the battlefield.*

“Pvt. Denny, Pvt. Denny!” is all I can hear when I wake up in a slow, groggy way. But when I wake up I’m not in my peaceful bedroom or in the city of Birmingham. I’m in a terrible war scene with craters in the ground, blood everywhere, and bodies lying motionless on the ground.

As I got up, I looked to my left and saw a guy I had never seen before. He had soot on his face and blood on his camouflage vest. (He really looked concerned about me.) When I finally got up from the ground I had to duck every five seconds to not get shot in the head.

“Where am I, and who are y-you?” I finally ask in my scared, quaking voice.

“Well, don’t you remember? I’m Sgt. Sullivan, and we’re in Japan saving Pvt. Miller, fighting the Japanese, of course,” he said in his manly and not scared voice.

“B-but I was just in my bed in the quiet city of Birmingham,” I said (once again in my babyish unmanly voice).

“Well, now you’re in Japan, and maybe if we save Pvt. Miller, you can go back home,” he answered in his little sarcastic voice. *Maybe*, I said to myself, *just maybe*.

Finally the gunshots stopped, but we looked around just in case for a little surprise. We had to go up a very steep

hill with a little surprise for them.

When we got to the top (finally), I heard this huge *bang!* and I was thrown as hard as possible against a rock-hard tree.

When I woke up in the slow, groggy way like before, I discovered my whole entire squad was gone. But I saw a lot of footprints leading the way that they went.

As I reached the hilltop I saw what was left of my squad being shoved into a very tiny shack made of dirty straw. When the guards left, confident nobody was going to rescue them, I made my way down the hill unseen. When I got to the hut, I saw that the five left of the original 15 soldiers were blindfolded, and their hands and feet were tied together. I got them untied.

We went to the hut where Pvt. Miller was being held. When we were so close to the door, I heard this huge *bang!* and my whole vision went white. And the pain...the pain was like a million hornets stinging me at once.

I looked at my stomach. All I saw was blood pouring out. The last thing I heard was Sgt. Sullivan being shot, too....

I woke up in my own bed with my old self. When I think about what happened, I realize I have new respect for people in the army.

# The Decision

---

*THE DECISION, by George Googasian, is the story of one Army general's fateful decision that could cause his troops and him to be changed forever.*

This was definitely not the time nor the place to be making any movements. The army general was face-to-face with the most horrid of creatures: a White-tailed Hawk. It was the end of them all.

Everything that had happened earlier that day was a blur. It was October 31, and the army general had seen a vampire carrying a jack-o-lantern and a pillowcase. They toy soldiers were so scared that each of them jumped out the open bedroom window and fell two stories. Everything went black!

When the army general and his troops woke up, they heard a yell. It was coming from across the field. A White-tailed Hawk was flying away with his best trooper. But the army men weren't going down without a fight. They quickly made a catapult out of a leaf and a twig. They fired their man-made catapult. But it only went about five feet.

The general was sad. He had just lost his best man, so all of them would be next to die. But then, someone came up with an idea.

"Remember that movie we saw where the army men climbed up on top of each other and made a twenty foot ladder?" one soldier said.

It worked. They were now in Timmy's room.

They heard someone yell down on the ground. They had forgotten the general. It sounded like the general. It was. The hawk popped out of nowhere, and the general ran for the bushes. This was definitely not the time nor the place to move, or for that matter think.

The army men dropped a piece of thread. In one swift movement the general had rolled between the hawk's legs, and the race was on. The general got to the thread a little sooner than the hawk.

Unfortunately, the general could not come out of the battle without losing the stand that his feet were connected to. While the general jumped for the piece of thread, the hawk started flying and grabbed hold of the general's feet with his beak. The general was squirming, not knowing what to do, when out of nowhere a plastic fork shot down and hit the bird in the chest. The bird's beak was so sharp that it managed to snap off the little stand that you find on toy soldiers so that you can make them stand up.

Everyone made it back safely. (Well, besides the warrior that the hawk thought was food.)

# Desert

---

*In DESERT by Bram Rowinski, two survivors of a tragic plane crash are stranded in a desert. Will they make it out of the wasteland alive?*

“This is your pilot speaking. We have a situation with the left turbine. Just in case, please put on your seatbelts,” the speaker said in a shaky voice. There was a loud *boom* on the left side. “Stay calm,” the captain said, this time in a voice engulfed in fear. “We’re going down. BRACE YOURSELVES!”

Ron could feel the drop in elevation by the air being easier to breathe. The pressure was easing out of Ron’s body as the plane spiraled toward the ground. The entire planeload of passengers panicked as the craft hurtled toward the desert wasteland below. Then the plane smashed into the ground with a long screech and the sound of clanking metal.

\* \* \*

“Uuuuh.” Ron let out a moan. “Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuhhhh.UUUUUHH HHHHHHHHHH, MY LEG!” He quickly rolled up his pants and found a cut as long as a DVD case. “OWWWW!” he yelled.

*Okay, just stay clam and put pressure on it,* he thought to himself. So he ripped a piece off of his pants and put it on his wound and applied pressure. “Am I the only one left?” said Ron.

He heard a moan from the first class section of the plane. He quickly turned in that direction. He heard the moan again and climbed over the

wreckage of bodies and luggage to see who was still alive.

“Over here.”

Ron found the source of the voice. A man in his 30s wearing a white shirt and blue jeans stained with blood was lying there. “Help me up,” the man said. Ron helped the man up.

“You okay?” said Ron.

“Dandy,” the man said sarcastically. “Now get me up.”

\* \* \*

“Now what we have here is a situation, my friend,” said the man.

“Sure looks like it to me,” said Ron.

“So we have two choices: stay here and hope someone will find us, or go looking for people,” said the man.

“I say we go,” said Ron.

The man gave him a menacing look, but then said, “Okay.” They started walking.

\* \* \*

“So what’s your name?”

“Jim.”

“So, Jim, why were you on that plane?”

“Business.”

“What business?”

“T-shirt business.”

“Wait—oasis!”

“Where!”

“Over there.”

“Where?”

“THERE!” Ron turned Jim’s head toward the oasis.

“Ohhhh.”

“Well, let’s get some water!”

“Okay.”

\* \* \*

“OUCH!”

“What now?”

“Tarantula!”

“What!”

“BIG SPIDER!”

“ I KNOW!”

“How do you treat a tarantula bite?” said Jim.

“DOES IT LOOK LIKE I KNOW HOW TO TREAT A TRANTULA BITE?” screamed Ron.

“Uh, no...”

“CORRECT!”

“Okay, okay. Sorry.”

“WELL, DON’T BE SORRY—HELP ME!”

“What am I supposed to do?”

“First, KILL THE SPIDER!”

“Okay.” Jim approached the spider and stepped on it.

“Then wrap it in something.”

“What?”

“Fabric or something.”

\* \* \*

“So thirsty,” Ron said.

“Me, too, but we have to keep going.”

“I have a family.”

“How’s your foot?”

“Hurts like a cinderblock fell on my foot, but good.”

\* \* \*

“Sir, we believe that they have captured a man involved in the attack. They are sending a plane to engage us.”

“Humph. Kill them.”

\* \* \*

“We got shot in the left turbine.”

“By who?”

“We don’t know.”

“Why?”

The pilot’s assistant shrugged.

“We have people on this plane,” said the pilot in a shaky voice. “What are we gonna do?”

There was no response.

“This is your pilot speaking. We have a situation with the left turbine. Just in case, please put on your seatbelts,” the speaker said in a shaky voice. There was a loud *boom* on the left side. “Stay calm,” the captain said, this time in a voice engulfed in fear. “We’re going down. BRACE YOURSELVES!”

# The Destruction

---

*In **THE DESTRUCTION** by **Andrew Dagenais**, it is Hiuno's birthday in the year 2003. He lives with his family in a city, Al-Dor, Iraq. Suddenly, bombs are being dropped from the sky by their enemies. They were in the middle of a war. Will they be able to escape alive?*

I woke up to the smell of sweet honey. I stood up, looking outside, and the sight was magnificent. There were beautiful huge mountains and amazing waterfalls. I saw all sorts of colors shining at the water. On the other side, there were huge deserts and sand dunes covering the rest of the view.

My name is Hiuno Wintapor. Today is my eleventh birthday. It was the year of 2003. I lived my whole life in Al-Dor, Iraq. It was a pretty place to live because we lived beside a river giving us fresh water, and we lived on land full of trees and animals. I just wished I could live here forever and never go anywhere else. I was five-foot three, which was pretty tall at my school. I had black, dusty hair and a scar on my face since I was a kid. I had fallen down the stairs, and that's how I got the scar.

My family and I went to my favorite restaurant, The Pinitanaso. We were having a good time until I fell off my chair. The room was shaking. We all ran outside, confused and scared of the rumbling. We were looking at every direction, and then at last, a flash of light made us close our eyes, and then we heard a loud noise of thunder. I looked up, and I saw a huge explosion from the sky. Planes were dropping

bombs! We had to get out of here! We ran to an old house where we knew had a basement. Suddenly, I heard something drop. We ran even faster and right after we closed the door of the basement, the ceiling exploded and flew high in the air. We were all hoping everything would be okay, but we were wrong. The room became all foggy. I asked my dad, "Dad, what is going on here!?!?"

"I don't know son," he said trembling.

My dad is kind of a wimp because he gets scared the easiest. He was biting his fingers, scared something was going to happen. Then, we saw ropes going down. We thought maybe it was the good people. The marines slid down the ropes with their guns.

"Come on, we don't have all day. Hop on!" they shouted.

We didn't respond for sure because we didn't even know them! But on one of the suits of an army guy, it said "Marine." So, I just hopped on like the others did.

We were sitting there, worried, until we saw a missile out of nowhere hitting us. The helicopter was turning in circles and rapidly everything turned black. I opened my eyes and noticed my family still here. I tried to wake up my dad, but

he wasn't waking up. He was lying down on the floor, dead. My brother was moving, and I tried to pick him up.

He told me with a crackly voice, "I will make you go slower, so leave me here. I would rather have you alive than us three dead. Take good care of your sister." After these words, he fell down, lying there with no movements. My mom wasn't even here anymore. She died a year ago. Now, two of her family are in heaven with her. My sister was already with me, and I saw other people walking toward us. I grabbed my little's sister's arm, and we ran. We saw another helicopter from here. They were getting closer. They landed and we were about a couple of dozen meters away from the enemies. We were finally safe.

"Julia, go to sleep," I told her. "We will be able to have more energy later." After these words, we both blinked our eyes, slowly, until our eyes were shut.

When I woke up, I could hear a heart monitor doing that "beep" sound. I looked on the other side, and there was my sister. I knew we would be okay. She looked back and whispered something to me that sounded like *Thank you for saving me*. Then, a doctor came and told us to rest. He whispered, "Hiuno, you are now in America. Go back to sleep. Tomorrow, you can leave the hospital and go to a service for people who lost their parents." I listened to him, at my little sister once more, and fell asleep.

I woke up by my alarm on my watch. I was in an orphanage, with all

these other kids running all over the place.

I asked with curiosity, "Where is my sister?"

The little kid who was playing with a toy told me she was at the chapel. I sat up, walked without knowing where I was going, and finally found the chapel. I found my sister, praying.

I told her "Good morning, Julia."

She replied, "Um... it's three o'clock in the afternoon. You slept all day."

"Oh," I said.

"I miss Mom and Dad and Nick." She told me with those sad eyes when she really wants something. She wanted them back for sure.

To make her feel better, I told her, "Everything dies Julia. Nothing can always stay alive. It's nature."

"So you call this nature! YOU CALL A BOMB KILLING OUR FAMILY NATURAL?!" She ran out the room with such frustration that even I started crying. I couldn't believe what she just said.

### Three months later...

I was watching TV with my sister in my room until we heard a knock on the door. I opened the door and here was good news.

"Good morning, Mr. Wintapor. We have good news. You should go call your sister," said the manager of the building.

I called my sister, and she came.

The manager told us, "Pack up. You are being adopted!"

I looked at my sister. She looked at

me. We both screamed with excitement.

\* \* \*

We met our new parents. They are nice, like our old ones. I wish my real

parents could come back, but I know where they belong. I have a nice life. My old parents loved me as much as my new parents. And I know for sure that my family is watching over me in heaven.

# Different Worlds

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*There are powerful forces at work in the government. There are equally powerful forces in the human heart. A man with strong ideals fights to do what he feels is right in **DIFFERENT WORLDS**, by **Patrick Concannon**.*

Two worlds that were never meant to meet are a world of war and a world of peace. “This war is pointless; you are just fighting over oil,” said the peace activist. “Here I am standing in Saudi Arabia where the problem started because Iran invaded you for your oil. Of course, you are well aware of this, but I ask of you to be the bigger nation.”

As the peace activist said these words a man wearing a fancy suit, obviously high up in the Saudi Arabian government, said, “But Mr. Alex Peace, you must understand that they attacked us, innocent people, and you cannot expect our allies to not get mad!”

“You are right, Abdulla Faweel, but if you let your allies get involved you could start a major world war!” said Alex.

“If you are just going to blame us for everything, then you can leave the country. If you ever come back, I will personally guarantee that you will go to jail!” Abdulla replied. Men dressed in black tackled Alex and threw him in a helicopter. Then they flew off as Alex lay there unconscious.

The next thing Alex knew, he was in America. He was in a place with psychedelic peace signs and lava lamps. Then it hit him: It was his office. His boss walked in and said,

“There is a riot in Iran. Here is a bulletproof vest in case stuff gets out of hand.” Then Alex got in a helicopter and took off.

The first thing he sees is a man being beaten. The man that was the attacker turned and attacked Alex and knocked him out. The next thing he knew, he was in an FBI training facility. He did not know who he was. He had amnesia.

“Son! Why aren’t you training?” said an FBI agent.

Alex replied, “I don’t know. Where am I? Who am I? How did I get here?”

The FBI agent had a mischievous smile and said, “Oh, don’t you know? Your name is Alex Peace, and you work for us, the FBI. You are one of our top agents. You volunteered to go on a top secret, very difficult mission in Saudi Arabia.”

“Okay,” said Alex, still not remembering anything.

In Saudi Arabia, in a missile chamber, their goal was to relocate missiles back to Saudi Arabia. Or at least that was their plan.

Outside of the missile facility, Alex arrives with his team. He sees a man that seems familiar to him. All of a sudden, Alex regains his memories. He pretends he still doesn’t have his memories.



As they enter the missile chamber, the top FBI agent tells Alex to relocate the missiles. But Alex deactivates them without anyone knowing. Then Alex and the team leave the chamber, and once again Alex sees the man. Alex goes up onto the stage the man is standing on and says to him, "Hi." Then Alex turns to the crowd of Saudi Arabians and says, "Do not be alarmed. For the missiles will not hurt anybody—not you, not Iran, not a single person on this planet."

The FBI agent looks at Alex and says, "What did you do?"

Alex replies, "I deactivated the missiles. This way nobody will get hurt."

The FBI agent says, "That was the whole entire plan, that people would get hurt."

Alex says, "That plan was evil. You could have killed millions of people. Don't you understand that peace is the only way to go?"

The FBI agent looks at him for a while and finally says, "You are a traitor to your country and if—" He

was cut off.

"You can't deport me. I am an American."

"But this is treason, and you can get a life in jail for that! So if I were you I would stay off American soil," said the FBI agent.

Then the agent left. Alex was acutely scared and alone for one of the first times in his life. He did not know what to do.

Matters only got worse for Alex as Abdulla Faweel walked toward him. Abdulla said, "Well, well, well, how the mighty have fallen. I warned you about coming back here." As he said these words, Alex saw the two men dressed in black walk up behind Abdulla.

The men dragged Alex off into a police car. They drove to a jail and left Alex there. At that moment Alex knew he could only think of one thing: escaping.

Alex soon met just the men who could help him escape from jail, and they did just that. Alex moved far away to Greenland where he could live in as much peace as possible.

# The Last Ones Standing

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*Survival is a basic human instinct, even in the most trying of circumstances. A tragic accident is only the first challenge in* **THE LAST ONES STANDING**, *by* **Katherine Jelinek**.

## *Day 1*

“Lilly, Lilly, wake up. The pilot said we are almost there, but we have to buckle up our seat belts. We are going into a heavy storm.”

### Ten minutes later...

I felt a huge drop in my stomach. It felt like I was on a roller coaster. I heard someone talking to me. “Wake up, we are crashing!” It was all so fast for me; I didn’t know what to do. So I stayed put. I heard a lot of noises. I was wondering when it would stop until everything was quiet.

“You and I are the last ones standing. The rest are dead. We have to get off the plane now.” I was so scared, but everything felt okay when Tommy started talking to me. Tommy has been my crush since last year when he moved here. It was great to see him talking to me.

Suddenly everything was bad again; we were on a deserted island. “We have to do this fast because we only have one chance of getting out of the plane. We have to go out the top and slide down on the emergency slide. With teamwork we can do this.” Going down the slide was fun, but I thought to

myself *How could I be having fun when we were on a deserted island?*

There are not a lot of supplies; there are only water bottles and extra clothes. We need shelter, and we have to know it can go through stormy weather, and, of course, Tommy found the plane, so we are set. All we need is food. That is going to be hard to get. We have been walking along the beaches, and we have not seen any fish. There have been clams, but we are struggling to open them and see if there is anything inside!

There is a reef close to the shore, but we aren’t sure if we can stand. We can only see it, but if we can stand we might see some good fish.

## Day 2

I am freaking out right now because Tommy has eaten a fish and we found out that he is allergic to that type of fish. I didn’t know what to do, so I went to the plane and I found a doctor’s kit and I found an EpiPen.

About two hours later Tommy was just waking up. He was so out of it. I asked how he was feeling, but I got no answer. I asked again, louder, just to make sure he could hear me. In a whisper he said, “All right.” With great relief I gave him some water. I just

wonder what it would be like if Tommy hadn't made it. What would I do?

Day 3

I was out just walking with Tommy

and we saw a boat! We actually saw a boat out in the ocean, and it saw us! It is coming our way!

We are saved finally. It seemed like forever, but I don't care. We are saved!

# Lost

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*Fifteen-year-old Brian O'Conner takes a trip to Cairo, Egypt to visit his aunt. He doesn't know that the exciting part of the trip will happen long before the plane arrives in Cairo, in **LOST**, by Ian Rice.*

**B**rian O'Conner was 15 and living in Miami, Florida with his mom and dad. His parents put Brian on a plane to visit his aunt who worked as an archeologist in Egypt. His parents couldn't come because they had jam-packed schedules. What happened next—Brian never saw coming...

During the flight the pilot spoke on the speakers and said, "We will be landing in Cairo shortly." While this happened Brian was in the bathroom. Then all of a sudden, one of the plane's fuel canisters caught on fire and the plane took a nosedive straight toward the ground. Before the pilot could send out a distress signal, they crashed into the desert!

As Brian came out of the bathroom with only a few cuts and bruises, he saw bodies of the passengers scattered among the remains of the plane. Brian heard nothing and saw no one moving. Brian was the only survivor. Brian found anything he could use to stay alive: He found several bottles of water, two chocolate bars, and four little Cheez-It bags. Brian set out hoping to find civilization and to survive.

Brian had been walking for about ten miles when it reached about nine P.M. Brian put his head on his backpack and fell asleep. The next morning Brian ate half of a chocolate bar and started

walking again. About five hours later, the wind started to pick up and sand was flying everywhere. Brian knew what this was; it was a sandstorm!

He took out an extra t-shirt and wrapped it around his head to protect him from the sand. Sand was pelting his entire body. While Brian was trying to dig in the sand to make a shelter, sand was pelting him like bullets hitting his face, legs, arms, and eyes. Brian had to press his mouth shut in order to keep himself from swallowing sand. Finally, Brian had made a decent shelter and had to wait it out. While Brian was in his makeshift shelter, he thought, *Why me? Why did my plane have to crash?*

Five hours later, Brian didn't hear the wind howling, so he dug himself out of the sand and saw little red spots all over his body. He was down to two bottles of water and he had no idea where he was, but he kept walking anyway.

Two hours later Brian grew weaker and weaker. He could barely walk. Then Brian heard a rattling sound coming from maybe 30 feet away near an area of rocks. He heard it again, and this time the sound was only five feet away. Out of nowhere, a snake attacked Brian! Before the snake could sink its fangs into his leg, Brian kicked the snake. Next, Brian started pounding the snake

with his boot until it lay still. Brian spoke to himself, *If I can start a fire, I can eat this snake for dinner.* Brian found a few pieces of dry wood. He rubbed the two pieces of wood until it started a fire, and then he put the bigger logs on. Brian knew soon he would be well fed, but he didn't have enough water to last him the next two days.

At night, Brian had a dream of a lesson in social studies that said in the desert a great source of water is in cacti. The next morning Brian set out to find some cacti somewhere in this entire desert. About two hours later, Brian saw a group of cacti. Brian grabbed a sharp stick and started jabbing a gap through the cactus holding a plastic bag in his other hand. Suddenly water poured out a hole that he had punched through the cactus and instantly filled his first and second plastic bag. Soon after he finished filling up all eight of his bags, he started walking again.

Two days later Brian was down to two plastic bags and he felt like he was going in wrong direction, but he kept going anyway. He felt like every time he took a step he was holding the sky on his back. Four hours later, Brian couldn't carry on and collapsed next to a cactus. Brian woke up in a small hut, but he felt a little better. A man walked in and he looked like he was from Egypt, but could tell he didn't speak English. The man gave Brian a small bowl of food and a glass of water. All the man said was, "Me Ahmose," and walked out of the room leaving two canteens of water and a small pack of food. Brian picked it up and scampered out of the small hut back into the blazing sun.

A few hours later, Brian saw a small patch of green far off in the distance but he didn't know what it was. Brian started off in that direction wondering if he was going to make it before he collapsed of dehydration again. Now the patch of green was only about four hundred yards away. When Brian stepped off the fertile grass, he saw a jeep. *Natives don't have cars,* he thought.

He saw a man in what looked like to be a Panama hat.

"Hello, young fellow," the mysterious man said. "What would a boy from America be doing in the middle of the deserts of Egypt?"

Brian just managed to speak and say, "Plane crashed; I'm the only survivor."

The next day after Brian was well rested, the man drove Brian on a two-hour drive to Cairo, Brian's original destination. When they finally reached Cairo, Brian was rushed to the emergency room to be treated for extreme dehydration. When Brian woke up he felt a little better after getting fluids into his body. All of a sudden, three people walked into the room. They were his mom, dad, and his aunt. "You are going to be here for a few days to recover," whispered Brian's dad.

"Okay," replied Brian. "Am I still going to stay here to visit my aunt?" pleaded Brian.

"Fine, we'll meet you at home in two weeks," sighed his dad.

Four days later, Brian was released from the hospital to visit his aunt. After a week in the middle of the desert, Brian finally arrived back at his home in Miami, safe and sound.

# Movies and Popcorn, Oh My!

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*When a girl invites her friends to the movies, the fate of everyone revolves around a simple decision in* **MOVIES AND POPCORN, OH MY!** *by* **Katherine Stewart.**

It was a rainy day. “It’s a perfect day to go to the movie theater,” thought Lilly as she flew down the stairs. She asked her mom if she had any plans for the day, and if not, could she go to the movie theater to go see *2012*? Her mom said she didn’t have anything planned so she could go and see the movie. Lilly asked if her mom would drop by and pick up her friends. Her mom said, “Sure.”

After breakfast Lilly called Abby and Justin to see if they could come. They said yeah, they could come. “Ok, I’ll call Ethan and Jennifer. The movie starts at 2:45. Bye.”

They all got to the movie theater at 2:30. Lilly told her mom to come pick them all up at 5:05.

They went inside and saw advertisements for other movies. They got their tickets and went to get popcorn, drinks, and snacks. Lilly and Justin had to wait for their popcorn while they put more butter into the butter dispenser, and they all got their seats just as the movie was about to start.

About three-quarters of the movie was done when Ethan felt very sick to his stomach and felt like throwing up. He said, “I’ll see you guys at school tomorrow.”

About five minutes later Jennifer

didn’t feel very well and said, “I will see you guys tomorrow.”

Lilly, Abby, and Justin all wondered if it was something they ate, so they stopped eating their food.

At the end of the movie Lilly’s mom came to pick them up. Lilly, Justin, and Abby each took turns telling about the movie and about how Ethan and Jennifer had felt. Lilly’s mom dropped off Abby and Justin.

On Monday, Jennifer texted Abby, Lilly, and Justin that she and Ethan would be back at school tomorrow. On Tuesday, Jennifer texted Lilly that she and Ethan would not be able to come to school that week because they were very badly sick, and were in the hospital. She also said that they could have no visitors because the doctor didn’t want other people to get sick.

On Wednesday, Jennifer texted “hi,” then later that day, “bye.” Lilly was confused why she had said good-bye.

Then on Friday, Jennifer and Ethan’s mom called Abby, Lilly, and Justin to tell them that Jennifer had died on Thursday morning and Ethan died later on around dinner time on Thursday, and both because of food poisoning! Lilly and Abby cried for hours together while Justin tried to make sense of why they didn’t get food

poisoning too. They had all gotten popcorn and soda.

Just then the newspaper happened to be delivered, and you wouldn't believe what it said: "Local Theater popcorn butter past its expiration date"! And under that it said a worker looked for the expiration date on the carton

but couldn't find it, so he smelled it. The worker thought that it smelled ok, but forgot that he had a stuffy nose. A few people got the expired butter on their popcorn. The article warned, "It could be deadly."

The theater's concession stand is now closed for food inspection.

# Trapped on the Ski Slope

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*The predicament of two friends on a fun ski vacation inspires the title of **TRAPPED ON THE SKI SLOPE**, by **Claire Westerlund**. Will they be able to get out?*

“See you girls in forty-five minutes!” Abigail yelled across the no-longer-crowded school hallway.

“I’ll be there!” Claire hollered back.

“I’m already packed!” screamed Jo. (Her real name was Josephine, but all of her friends called her Jo.) The three best friends were running down the high school hallway on the last day before Christmas break.

About an hour later all three girls were packed into Jo’s pickup truck with Lola, their trusty goldendoodle. They were traveling four hours north to Nub’s Nob in Harbor Springs, Michigan. After about fifteen rounds of “Jingle Bells” and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” the girls were beat, all except for Jo, because she never gets tired.

By the time they got to Claire’s cottage it was 8:45 P.M. All three girls quickly unpacked their gear. Then Jo, Abigail, and Claire played a few rounds of Uno and Yahtzee.

“I’m all ready for bed,” Claire said.

“I am ready for bed, too,” Abigail added.

“I’ll stay down here,” Jo said.

In minutes both Claire and Abigail were asleep. Jo, though, stayed up until midnight reading her style magazines. Out of the three girls, Jo was concerned the most about her fashion. She had

even bought a new purple ski jacket for the trip.

Abby was the first to wake up the next morning, and soon after Claire was up and about. Both tried to rouse Jo with pokes and loud music. Jo wouldn’t wake up.

“I think she stayed up too late last night,” Claire said.

“You think?” Abigail replied. Then Abby and Claire wolfed down a quick breakfast and skied over to Nub’s Nob without Jo.

The girls went up the chairlift and skied down a slope to get to the far side of the mountain, Pintail Peak. When they got there they did some great runs with massive amounts of powder. After a while they noticed that most people were toward the front side of the mountain.

Abigail and Claire still kept going on runs until they finally heard an announcement: “Will anyone in Pintail Peak come over to Nub’s North, because many people have seen bears running loose out there today.”

“Yikes, Claire!” exclaimed Abigail. “We better head to the green lift.”

“Sure,” said Claire.

The girls headed up the chairlift one last time. When they got off the lift they saw a big black bear right where they were getting off the chairlift! They tried



to keep good thoughts on how to get out of the situation. “Claire,” called Abigail, “let’s slowly go back to the cottage.” Then the bear grunted.

“Why is she grunting at us?” Claire whispered to Abby.

“She thinks you are going to hurt her,” Abby whispered back. “I watched a documentary about bears on National Geographic once.” Claire immediately started digging through her pockets to find something to throw to at the bear. She found a tube of cherry lip gloss. She threw it toward the forest away from the bear.

“What is that?” Abigail asked.

“My cherry lip gloss,” replied Claire.

“So it’s not strawberry?” Abigail asked.

“No. Why?” Claire wondered.

“Bears are very fond of strawberries,” replied Abigail.

Abigail searched her pockets, too. All she found was her iPhone, though. Then she remembered the app she bought after watching the documentary *Scare Bear Travel Companion*. It made sounds to replicate exactly what bears didn’t like. Abby pushed the clapping button in the app, thinking it would work the best. Then she threw it at the bear. The bear obviously heard it and grunted louder at the girls. The girls were back to brainstorming.

“Let’s run,” Claire said.

“If we run the bear will chase us thinking it is a game,” Abby whispered another National Geographic fact to Claire.

“Let’s scream then,” shouted Claire. Then they saw something come up one

of the runs. It was white and yellow, and the girls thought it was another bear. The girls held hands and prayed that it wasn’t another bear. Then the girls watched the first bear run away.

“Oh, no, I think that’s the Alpha bear,” Abigail whispered fearfully. Then the animal ran all the way up to Abigail and Claire.

“Ah! It’s scary ‘little’ Lola without a leash,” Claire joked. Then Abby, Lola, and Claire decided they had better get out of there, in case the bear came back. So they all went down the hill back to Claire’s cottage as fast as they could. They guessed that Jo would be looking for them.

When they got back to Claire’s cottage, Jo was crying on the phone with the Harbor Springs police department. “Yeah, they left and never came back, a-a-and the dog is gone too,” said Jo. She looked extremely worried.

“Jo, we’re back!” yelled Abby.

“I knew you would come back!” yelled Jo.

“We didn’t,” Claire said. “We ran into a bear.”

“Are you kidding, Claire?” Jo said.

“No joke,” exclaimed Abby. “I thought I was going to die, by that bear eating me!”

“Next time you go skiing, remember to invite me,” Jo said jokingly. “Just don’t forget me.”

For the rest of vacation they stayed in a group all together and made a plan for if they came across another bear because, as Abigail explained, when bears come they are not leaving.

# The Trip to Another Land

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*How far will John go in the search for his mother? He seems determined to do whatever it takes to find her in **THE TRIP TO ANOTHER LAND**, by **Seth Locher**.*

**W**back! John hit the ninja straight in the face and then ran away. The ninja was thinking “What a little baby. He hits me then runs away so I won’t hit back.” John was a 13-year-old boy who had been on a search for his real mother for three years.

John had heard that his mom was in Russia. So when he was ten, he asked his grandma for one hundred fifty dollars for a flight to Russia. John brought a lot of things to Russia with him. He brought a big box of trail mix, some milk, a canteen, water, a rifle, and a backpack full of clothes and blankets. John’s mother was a really valuable scientist to the Chinese military. In order for John to get to his mom he would have to fight a couple of ninjas and the whole Chinese military.

John was walking in the woods. It started to get dark out, so he set up camp. After the long and cold night John got up and continued his journey. The farther he walked the more

Chinese militias and troops he saw.

John was walking when he noticed a sign that said “Welcome To Germany.” In Munich, Germany John saw a Chinese fugitive named Qin (pronounced Chi’n) Wong. Qin Wong was tired of being chased by police because he was spreading information about them killing innocent people for no good reason.

John went to talk to Qin Wong and found out that he used to work for John’s mom. So they traveled to Russia and found out later that week that John’s true mother had died in a plane crash on her way to North America to see her son. John was really sad when he found out that had happened.

John and Qin Wong found a flight back to North America that was really cheap. It was only fifty dollars for both. A couple of years later Qin Wong got a job and got married. John grew up to be a car salesman because his mother wanted him to have that job.

# Under a Bloody Winter Sky

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*During the madness of World War II, the men of Easy Company face a frozen reality when they are ordered to take the German-held town of Foy in*  
**UNDER A BLOODY WINTER SKY**, by *C. Dylan Comsa*.

The Men of Easy Company had been together since jump school. They were some of the first men on the ground at D-Day, and they had fought their way through Europe. Now they were here, near Foy, Belgium, in a freezing forest. The men were cut off from the Allied lines, and ordered to hold their position.

“Guarnere, what do ya think yer doin’?” screamed Malarkey.

Bill replied in a heavy Brooklyn accent, “I’m goin’ to talk to Winters.”

Suddenly artillery shells exploded overhead. Bill ran toward Winters as trees crashed down all around him.

Someone yelled, “Get back in your fox hole!” Bill looked over; it was Buck. “Bill, I said to get back in your fox hole!” he screamed again.

“Shut up, Buck, I have to go talk to Winters.”

“It’s your funeral.”

“Whateva.”

He continued to run toward Winters’ cinderblock and canvas hut. When he reached it he dove into the shelter as fast as he could.

Lieutenant Winters was the commander of Easy Company, and well-respected by his men. Winters looked up from some papers he was reading and asked calmly, “Bill, are you trying to kill yourself?”

He replied by saying, “No, sir, I just needed to talk to you about our situation.”

“Well, go on.”

“Sir, I believe that we have lost ten men, and I also think that we have at least four wounded. Sir, can I have permission to get these badly wounded men back to safer ground?”

“Go ahead, Bill.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Bill sighed as he walked out into the cold air again. The shelling had stopped. There were moans in the distance.

Bill saw the two medics, Frank and Joe. He called over to them and said, “I need some help with the wounded.”

“We had better hurry. This break in the shelling won’t last long,” said Frank.

The three men took off running. After just a few strides Joe stepped on an unexploded shell. *BAM!* Everything within a ten-foot radius from the explosion flew backward.

Bill was dazed for a few seconds, but immediately jumped up from the snow and realized that Frank was right next to him with a three-inch piece of the shell stuck into his lower abdomen. Bill immediately started dragging Frank toward the safety of Winters’ hut, but by the time he arrived Frank was dead.

Bill looked down into the dead man’s face. After a minute he looked up

and saw a private passing by. He ordered the man to bury Frank in the remote spot in the woods that the Company used as a temporary cemetery until the bodies could be transferred to the U.S. cemetery in the rear area. The private carried the dead man off to the woods.

There was no sign of Joe. He had been completely disintegrated by the explosion. There was nothing left to bury.

Bill turned around and quietly walked back to the fox hole that Frank and Joe called home during their stay in this deadly forest. He bent over and slowly collected all of Frank's and Joe's personal belongings to be mailed home to their families.

Bill turned around and walked into Winters' hut and said, "Frank and Joe are dead."

Winters looked up solemnly and asked, "How?"

"Joe stepped on a shell and set it off," Bill replied.

Winters muttered something under his breath. After a short silence he added, "They were good men."

"Sir, when will the replacements arrive? They were due on Monday, and they promised us ten men."

"Bill, times are tough, and two men are all they could spare."

Bill was used to being given bad news. He responded quickly. "Ranks, sir?"

"Excuse me?"

"Ranks, sir. What are their ranks?"

"Oh, both sergeants."

"Are they new guys, sir?"

"Yes."

Bill headed toward the hut's entrance. "I hope to see you tomorrow, sir," said Bill.

"The feeling is mutual, Bill," Winters said with a slight smile.

"Oh, by the way, sir, when do they come?" asked Bill on his way out.

"Tomorrow," answered Winters.

Bill put the men's belonging into a package with the War Department's address on it and handed it off to a jeep driver that was heading into town. "Take good care of this, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the driver.

"Be on yer way then," said Bill, and with that the driver rode off into town.

The next day was much colder than before, and the new boys came late. Their names were Jake Mueller and Charlie Comsa.

Captain Nixon had the job of escorting them to Winters. Winters was pleased to see that they had arrived safely to Easy Company. Winters told Buck to take them to the area where they would dig their fox hole, but just before they left, General McColon arrived. He asked Winters about any problems that he was having. Winters replied "We're taking a lot of hits, General, and we have no aid station, we have little food, no winter clothes and we are nearly out of ammunition. The line is spread so thin that the enemy wanders into our CP using our slit trenches, sir."

Then the general saw Captain Nixon and asked him if he wanted to add anything. Nixon answered, "General, sir, I took a walk on the line at about 0300 hours and I couldn't find

the 501st on our right flank. Sir, we really have some considerable gaps in our line.”

The general said, “All right” and started to walk back to his jeep. He hopped into it and said, “Hold the line and close the gaps. This fog won’t lift anytime soon, so you can forget about air cover. The First Battalion just pulled out of Foy with krauts on their tail. They had no tanks, no artillery, and no backup. There is a lot of crap headed this way.”

And the general was right. The next day the Germans shelled them from 0600 hours to 1800 hours, with 20 minute intervals to let the gun cool down. At 1900 hours Easy Company moved toward town.

The next day was freezing. There was extremely heavy cloud cover. The 101st had dug in at the edge of the woods and was now getting ready to advance into town. “It’s about an eighth of a mile till you reach town, so move quickly, do you understand?” said Winters.

“Yes, sir,” replied 1st Sergeant Carwood Lipton.

“Good,” answered Winters, and he walked away. Lipton yawned and thought, “It’s going to be a long day.”

“Hey, Lip, how ya doin?”

“I’m doin fine, Malarkey,” he replied.

“Hey, why da long face?”

“Around seven we’re advancing into Foy.”

“Wait, wait, wait. You mean to tell me that we’re advancing into town, us alone?”

“Heck no, Don, use yer head. I

mean come on, you’re really going to ask me that!”

“Sorry, Mr. Sunshine, it was just a question.”

“Ah, go back to yer sorry hole and get some rest.”

“All right, all right, I’m goin’ Mr. Sunshine.”

With that Malarkey headed back to his fox hole. “Hey, Luz, how ya doin?” asked Malarkey.

“Good, good. Hey, guess what?” said Luz.

“What?”

“Charlie is reading an article, says the Germans are bad.”

“Ah, come on, George, leave the kid alone.”

“All right, Malark. It’s no fun sittin’ in these freaken fox holes, I’m just tryin to get a laugh.”

“Well, get ya laughs out now, because we’re heading into town soon.”

“Oh, well, that’s just great. Ah, well, I better get back to my hole.”

“See ya.”

“Hey, Malark, if I don’t make it, tell Buck I love him.”

“Ah, shut up for once.”

“All right, all right, see ya later.”

At 0630 the order was sent down the ranks to check all weapons and gear. Then at 0645 the order was sent to prepare for the advance. Finally at 0700 when the first light appeared, the order was sent to advance into the small town of Foy.

They were halfway across the field when the sniper fire started. Bullets whizzed past, and a few men went down. “SUPPORTING FIRE!” someone yelled. As soon as they made

it to the hay bales and carts on the edge of town they all hit the ground. The few men with bazookas took out the machine gun posts on the ground. Then everything was silent.

"I don't like this," said Charlie to Jacob.

"Neither do I," said Jacob.

"Comsal!" said Captain Nixon.

"Yes, sir."

"Can you run?"

"Yes!"

"Then I need you to run a zigzag pattern to draw out the krauts' fire, but our main objective is the one in the steeple. So try to draw his attention."

"Okay."

"Oh, and one more thing."

"Yes."

"Watch out for snipers."

"Yes, sir."

"Wait for it, wait for it... GO!"

There was a small grenade explosion, and Charlie bolted. Bullets riddled the ground for ten everlasting seconds. Suddenly there was a loud CRACK! Charlie stumbled behind a cart and hit the ground. "CRAP!" screamed Jacob.

"Mueller, you stay here, understand!" yelled Captain Nixon.

"Sorry, sir, but I got to help him. Hang on, Charlie, I'm comin'!" Jacob replied.

"Mueller, get back here now! Aaahhh, forget it; it's his own fault if he gets killed," Nixon muttered to himself.

Jacob reached Charlie and asked, "Where ya hit?"

"The leg," Charlie moaned.

"If we try to make it back we'll both die. Can you hold out?"

"Do you have morphine?"

"No."

"Then, no, I probably won't hold out."

"Then hang on. Medic! Medic! We need a medic!"

"Why would they come out here?"

"Because it's their job."

"Ha, they're not that stupid."

"Hang on, I'm coming!" yelled the medic. He was just a few feet from them when machine gun fire opened up on the medic, tearing him to shreds. Jacob stared at him, horrified as the medic bellowed a bloodcurdling scream and fell to the ground. Jacob grabbed the back of the medic's shirt and pulled the medic behind the cart. His wounds were mortal. He gave the medic three morphines to put him out of pain. Jacob pulled out another morphine and stuck it in Charlie's leg. Then he bandaged the wound the best he could.

There was a loud explosion, and parts of the church steeple flew in every direction, followed by a mix of cheers and the sound of approaching Sherman tank engines. More roofs exploded, and the Germans were silenced. Tanks and men made their way across the 660-foot field that was littered with small holes and ripped-up bodies. Jacob's momentary happiness soon subsided when he saw the dead medic's condition. When Jacob looked over he saw something rounded in shape in the snow. Jacob hadn't noticed it when it happened, but the storm of heavy machine gun fire had blown most of the medic's head away. He turned white, bent over, and puked.

The fight was over, and the

Americans had lost a lot of men. Easy Company pulled out of Foy weary and tired. They were moving on toward Germany, toward victory, and toward

going home. But for now they were trudging off to another town in need of liberation, an unknown town in this cold country called Belgium.

# World War 3...

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*In WORLD WAR 3... by Daniel Soares, a power-hungry Russian leader named Comrate declares war. Daniel and his fellow soldiers face harsh obstacles as they try to bring Comrate's reign to an end.*

“We have got to strike some time, Captain!” shouted Sergeant Downey.

“It’s too dangerous,” Captain Jackson declared. “We’re going to need a few more men and some air force.”

“Then it’s settled. We head out tomorrow,” Sergeant Downey agreed.

“We’ll bring Sergeant Paul, Sergeant Mathew, and Air Force 69C.”

“I think we should bring out Daniel,” Downey suggested.

“Yes, we are going to need some help. We’ll take him,” Jackson approved.

“Yes, indeed, lots of help. Ever since Comrate declared world war from Russia, things there have been quite dangerous.” Downey said. “But how are we going to get into Russia without being seen?” Downey questioned. “We’ll disguise our plane. They won’t know a thing. They will think it is more of their troops,” Captain Jackson answered.

“Good, then. I’ll tell the men, and we’ll head out tomorrow,” Downey agreed.

All the men along with the captain wait anxiously on the jet that was quite small. The plane was like a low, short, and rounded hallway with seats on each side that had secure seatbelts. Each and

every one of them is ready for war.

Captain Jackson stands up, and notes, “Let’s go over the plan one more time.” He looks straight at Sergeant Daniel and asks, “Daniel, where should you be?”

Daniel pauses for a moment, and then responds, “Behind cover, sir, striking with a machine gun, and a shotgun just in case I have a close target, sir!”

“Good.” The captain smiled, in a creepy sort of way. “Paul, where should you be?”

“Behind cover, sir, launching grenades.”

“Yes, yes, yes, very good.” The captain suggests, “I suggest you throw them at open areas. What about you, Sergeant Mathew?”

“Hidden, sir, using a pistol.”

“Now, Sergeant Downey, where should you be?”

“Disguised, sir, sniping people—” Right when Downey was going to finish, the plane landed. It had landed in *Russia*.

The plane could only go until a certain point. It landed right beside a large, grassy area where the grass was tall. There was a path through the area. It wasn’t just all covered with grass. It had weird openings in the grass. There was light to be seen outside of the



grassy area, but it seemed like it was dark in the grassy area.

The men all crept out of the plane. “Sir, wha-wha-what is this?” Sergeant Daniel asked.

“I don’t know,” Captain Jackson replied. “Is this corn?” Jackson picked up what seemed to be yellow corn. He squeezed it tightly in his hand. It cracked and crumbled down to the ground. “It’s—it’s a CORN MAZE!”

“We should call air force to take us to the end,” suggested Sergeant Mathew.

“No, no, no it’s no use; it’ll take them hours to get here,” Captain Jackson replied. “Looks like we’re going to have to go through it ourselves,” Sergeant Daniel pointed out.

“So be it,” Captain Jackson accepted. The captain realized that there was a fence between the paths of the corn that meant they couldn’t walk through the corn, but they were able to shoot through the fence just in case there were enemies on the other side.

They started heading out into the cornfield. “Spread out,” the captain ordered. They all spread out. Some went left, and some went right. Some even went diagonally.

The Russians were already in the corn maze because it was like a defense system to protect the building, and the Russians were guarding the corn maze, or “wall” as it could also be called. The maze was all around the whole building. The Russians saw the American plane but thought it was a Russian plane because it was camouflaged as a normal Russian plane. But the men were not disguised. They were wearing American

army clothing. That was bad for the Americans. The Russian would recognize them as Americans.

Sergeant Downey took a left. He kept going left the whole time. He thought he was going in a circle. But he was going in a square. He was cold, and thought that he had a fever. He would go many ways and find nothing.

He sat down, hoping someone would find him and help him out. It was getting dark, so he kept getting scared. He was thinking twice about working with the army. But he continued just when the left part of his eye caught a glimpse of enemies. He ran to that light corner, but while he was running, the enemy heard his pacing footsteps. The enemy troops started to fire through the metal fence that was in the corn, hoping it would hit Downey.

The enemy troops were using machine guns. They were shooting everywhere. Unluckily for Downey, he got shot right in the heart in the first few shots. He lay down unforgotten, and set off his signal. That made the captain, and the rest of the crew know he had died.

Daniel was stricken by the death of Downey, making him sob with tears. He had been friends with Downey ever since preschool. They both worked together in the army, and now he was gone.

When Mathew found out about Downey’s death, he got frightened and scared. He was a little claustrophobic. In the mid-dark time it made it even worse around all that corn. He could barely hold his rifle.

He heard a faint voice. He walked

to the voice, and it got louder. It was people talking, but not in his language. "They must be Russian," Matthew whispered to himself.

He crouched down to see through the thick corn in front of him. There were two Russians. It was all he could see because of the thick corn. Mathew thought, "I'll throw a grenade. It will take them all out." He took out his grenade, and he threw it. But he had forgotten about the fence inside the corn in front of him. The grenade went through the corn, but not past the fence and bounced right back at him, leaving a few seconds of life. His hand was reaching for the grenade to throw it back, but because his thought of dying made him more scared, in five seconds he was gone. His signal blew up, too, which meant the rest of the gang would know he was dead.

The captain was very smart. He would record on his signal to where the men that had died fell. He would avoid those locations. When he saw the maze exit he carefully took out his silenced weapon that people couldn't hear well, and shot down two guards who were distracted by talking to each other. Therefore he reached the end of the maze.

He was scared that Daniel and Paul hadn't made it to the end of the maze. The captain sent a signal that Paul and Daniel could hear on their special headsets. It showed Daniel and Paul where the end of the maze was. It made them get there as quick as a fox. They both met up with Captain Jackson at the end of the maze

"Looks like it's just me and you two

now," the captain pointed out.

"Should we call back up, sir?" Daniel asked.

"It would take hours. We would be dead by then," Jackson answered.

"Then let's do this!" Paul spoke out. They all head into the building where the satellite had located Comrate.

Outside the building were many guards that were on the lookout for enemies. The captain had an idea he would shoot not bullets, but a small device that explodes when told to. It was like a grenade but smaller, and it was sticky. It would stick to the floor beside the enemies.

The captain silently shot these small, sticky explosives to the guard's clothes. The Russian wouldn't realize the device was there because of how small and silent it was

The captain stuck them to each and every one of the guards. Then he would just say "Boom" on his headset, and they would all explode.

The captain whispered "Boom" on his headset, and *BOOOOOOM* the devices exploded, leaving behind a load of dead Russians outside the building.

When they entered the building, there were guards everywhere. It was heavily guarded on all sides. The building was square. Inside there was one big square room, like a normal living room with a bunch of stuff like a couch and a TV. There was also a food court and a coffee shop. The building used to be a lounge where people relaxed when they reached the end of the corn maze. The corn maze used to be an enjoyment park corn maze. The coffee shop was on the right, the food

court was on the left, and the TV was on the lower left. Between both there was a hallway.

“If we make noise, a guard will sound an alarm, and they will all head for us,” the captain pointed out.

“Then how are we going to get to the meeting room where Comrate was spotted by the satellite?” asked Sergeant Paul.

“Captain, why don’t you get behind there?” Daniel pointed at a large object.

“Good idea. Paul, you should be learning from Daniel,” Jackson joked

“I still don’t get what the advantage is when you hide behind there,” Paul wondered.

“Watch and learn,” the Captain insisted. He ducked behind a large trashcan. The Captain was waiting for the guard to look away so he could make his move. The guard looked away, and turned to the opposite side. Captain Jackson walked slowly up to the guard. He then used his arm to suffocate the guard’s pressure point along his neck.

There were still loads of guards left. If they found the dead body, the other guards would sound the alarm. But the hallway leading to the meeting room where Comrate was spotted by the satellite was clear.

“How did you do that sir?” Sergeant Paul asked.

“I think he went and like pulled the guy’s chest, or like squeezed his neck or something,” Daniel answered. The men were only taught to kill someone with a weapon, not their own hands, because they weren’t as advanced as the Captain himself.

“Pay attention to the mission. Let’s get to the meeting room past that clear hallway,” the Captain ordered.

They all walked slowly, crouching down. They stopped in front of a door that said “*Meeting room—TOP SECRET.*”

Comrate was waiting for the nuclear facility general of Russia to meet with him. Comrate was planning to bomb all of America. The Captain kicked the door open with a bang. Unluckily for the Captain, he was unarmed because; when he kicked the door down, he needed more strength, so he put his gun in his large pocket with a hole that was on his back.

The door flew right out of its place. As soon as Comrate saw them, he knew their unknown faces. He took out his pistol. He aimed at the Captain because Comrate saw the marks on his jacket meaning he was Captain.

Comrate pulled the trigger and shot. The Captain lay on the floor. The bullet had struck him in the head. Daniel knelt down beside the Captain.

“WHYYYYYYYY!” Daniel shouted. The Captain was the person he cared about most in his life, because it was the captain that taught Daniel everything, and it was he that he became friends with at the training camp. The Captain’s last words were, “Finish him. Don’t worry about me.”

Paul ran ahead straight at Comrate with his knife. He threw his knife, aiming to kill Comrate. Comrate stretched out his arm and grabbed the flying knife. He threw it right back at Paul, leaving him dead on the ground.

Daniel stood up and pointed his shotgun at Comrate. "YOU KILLED PAUL, MY OWN BROTHER!" Daniel shouted in anger. Paul was Daniel's brother. They didn't always get along because Paul was the one that got everything and Daniel was always treated the worst. But at this moment Daniel was mad.

"Don't be this way," Comrate

spoke in a nice voice. At that moment Daniel shot Comrate's pistol right out of his hand. Daniel dropped his shotgun that was out of ammo to finish the job. He pulled out a knife from his own sleeve and sliced Comrate in the neck. Comrate fell to the ground and died in a second. Daniel added, "Don't you ever mess with me again...."

That was the end of World War 3.

FOILED AGAIN



# Amber Petle

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*A kidnapper bring terror to the title character and other residents of her town in*  
**AMBER PETLE**, by *Mégane Hermès*.

One day a little girl was home with her family watching TV when all of a sudden a letter came through the mail slot in the door. The mom said that it was a strange time to be getting letters. She picked it up and read who it was addressed to. It read “To Amber Petle.” She gave the letter to her daughter.

As Amber went to her room to read, it she noticed a drop of blood on it. In her room, she jumped on her bed and opened it. She read what it said:

*I'm coming to get you. Watch out!*

There was more blood on the letter.

She let out a bloodcurdling scream. Her parents came running up the stairs as fast as they could. When they opened the door to her room, they saw her curled up in a ball on her bed, petrified. Then they noticed what she was staring at: the bloody letter on the floor.

The blood probably belonged to the person who sent the letter. They gave the letter to the police after having called them. The policemen explained that many kids had gotten the same letter. They said something else that made the parents eyes open wide: Every one of those kids had disappeared.

They heard a yell. The policeman and Amber's parents ran up the stairs only to find Amber missing with her

window wide open and the curtains swaying in the wind. They were too late.

The frightened mother yelled, started to cry, and then fainted. The dad had the exact same reaction.

The entire police force got tired of all these disappearances, so they decided to find the mastermind behind all this and what he did to the kids because they had failed every time. They started out by testing the blood sample to see whose it was. The men had to figure out where the letter could have been written. There was one clue: Coal had been smeared on the back of it.

They decided it was the old coal factory that had been shut down the year before. They gathered up a little squad of ten men who were armed. Within the building they found a little mineshaft and entered it.

There were many dozens of kids chained up digging for something at the bottom of the shaft. They were probably looking for gold or diamonds. They were so far from the exit that it would have taken years for the kids to find a way out.

The men took the stairs and were very silent and cautious. When the kids saw them they gasped. Some were even crying tears of joy, but quietly.

All of the kids looked terrible except for one who was new to the place: Amber. Their clothes were also

all torn and covered in coal, except for Amber. No one was watching them because nine- to13-year-olds could not find a way to break chains.

The police burned the metal and let all the kids free without making any noise. But then one of the men's walkie-talkies turned on, and someone said, "We found a blood match. It belonged to Carter Filds."

Just at that moment a young man appeared from the shadows and began running. They caught him after a while because one of them was a track star. He struggled to get loose, but they wouldn't let go. He stayed pinned to the ground as they handcuffed him.

They asked him who he was, and he said he was Carter Filds, Jr.! He explained that he had forced his dad to write the letter. In the meantime he had threatened him and then killed him, not wanting any trouble or witnesses. They questioned him, and he admitted that he was looking for gold. He said that when he was a boy, he and his dad worked in the mine and they found gold. Since his dad wouldn't give it to him, he killed him.

He went to court four months later and was sentenced to seven years in jail

and then the electric chair or the vaccines. It depended on his behavior in jail.

All of the children were embraced by their families, and from then on their parents opened their mail. The kids who had been there for a while were put in therapy. But those who didn't stay long, like Amber, didn't have to go. But each had to receive counseling depending on the period of time they had been captive.

The man was put on a *Doctor Phil* show and had to explain how to kidnap the kid (he entered through the windows) so that the parents had warnings and could protect their kids in time. This kind of kidnapping never worked again because all of the parents who watched the news (or any other news source) were aware.

As the man was in jail, he went crazy reading the sign that said, "If you can't do the time, don't do the crime!" His cellmates also annoyed him very much with talking about the crimes they committed.

From then on, Amber Petle could tell some pretty scary and realistic kidnapping stories. Her windows, from then on, were nailed shut!



# The Bloody Knife

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*When a seventh-grade bully is assassinated, New York's top inspector is sent to find out what happened in **THE BLOODY KNIFE**, by **Romain Coste**.*

The snow was falling on the beautiful city of New York. My footsteps were leaving holes in the ten inches of snow, which the storm had left when passing through this morning.

Enjoying the view isn't what I came here for. I stepped into the cafeteria where the murder had occurred. There was an ambulance about four yards away from the school's front door, and worried faces were all that we saw. The children were crowded around a table, where I saw a body lying down. Teachers were trying to get the students back inside, except the students were motionless.

The body had a seeping hole in its right arm that could have only been caused by a sharpened steak knife. The cut was a few inches away from the elbow and very close to the subdavian artery. It seemed deep, but not deep enough to kill someone. The boy had a lunchbox next to him, and there was a broken glass on the floor with a red liquid coming out of it. Kool-Aid, I thought. I walked over to the principal, who was standing not very far from the table. Her skin was as white as a ghost's, and her eyes were red, a sign that she had probably cried when finding out the boy was dead.

"Can you tell me anything about the boy?" I asked her.

"Well... his name was Bob Mershey.

And...hhuumm...this girl named Elizabeth Hacs told me that she had several problems with him...and he seemed like a very nice kid."

"Did anything weird happen before the child was killed?"

"Yes, actually, there was. He had been sent to the office to talk with me."

"What was your discussion about?"

"HHHHUUUMMM.... Oh, yes, now I remember! It was about the problems he had with Elizabeth Hacs."

"Is there anyone else here that could help me learn about Bob Mershey?"

"Well... there is his teacher. She must still be in her room. Climb up the stairs, and it will be the third door on your left."

"Thank you, for all of your help," I said as I headed toward the entrance of the school. Once I was in her room, the teacher glared at me with big, bulging black eyes. Her back had a bump on it, and she wore a black dress that sparkled because of the diamonds encrusted in it.

"What do you think you're doing in here?" she asked with a scrappy voice.

"I am Inspector Stevens, and I'm here to ask you questions about Bob Mershey."

"Do you think that is a reason to barge into my classroom like a brainless bull rider? You people disgust me. You think that you have all the rights in the

world just because you work for the police. If you want to know something about Bob Mershey, here it is. He was disgusting, unreliable, and stupid. Now if you don't want to die, like he did, I would suggest you get out of my classroom!"

"Ma'am, are you on medications?" I asked, trying to stay as calm as I could.

"What makes you say that?" she responded.

"Well there is a Zip-Loc bag on your table full of white powder, and it is either medications or drugs."

"I thought I told you to get out of my classroom!"

I left the room, because the drugs weren't what I came here for. I will deal with it once this crime is solved.

I headed toward the lab where I would learn more about the cut on Bob Mershey's elbow. The lab was filled with doctors, all wanting to inspect the body so that they could help solve the crime. My partner, Dr. Locks, had already worked on the body.

"The cut couldn't have killed the boy. I'm sure of it!" I told him.

"Inspector, every doctor is certain that the reason that boy is dead is because a man attacked him with a knife. I know that you're a really smart man, but you are wrong about this. Some people kill just for the fun of it, and that's exactly what happened."

"You might be right, but I will not give in on my theory until someone finds out what really happened!"

"You're right the wound wasn't very bad, but it was a child. Children's bodies are more delicate than the body of a grown man."

"The wound was dried up when we found the dead boy. Wouldn't the teachers have seen that the boy was losing large amounts of blood?"

"Not if he had covered the wound. There had been time between the death and the attack, but his death might have just been caused by the loss of blood. Maybe Bob didn't want people to be worried about him."

Then a squad of police officers came in the room with worried looks on their faces. "Inspector! You need to come with us. A man has checked in Bob Mershey's school, and he has been identified as Mr. Hacs. The man looked very suspicious, and the principal told the police that she thought she had seen a knife in the man's pocket."

Dr. Locks and I hurried into the police car. Sweat was dripping off my face, as I knew I would have to face the criminal or criminals.

At the front door of the school, we found the principal, who told us that the man had gone upstairs to talk to the teacher.

When I was close to Mrs. Pickins's room, I heard people screaming. I crouched behind the door and listened to the discussion at the other side:

"You owe some cash, old hag," I heard a deep, villainous voice say.

"You didn't do the job I asked you," responded the teacher.

"Yeah, but I risked getting caught by the cops, and also, isn't the kid dead? That means I did what you told me to. So, you better pay up if you don't want to be killed and thrown into the garbage truck."

"Yes, but you failed to do the job

yourself. I had to get my hands dirty and kill him myself. I think you know how much I hate getting my hands dirty for such unimportant subjects.”

I chose to interfere before things got ugly. I smashed the door open, and started screaming: “Put your hands up where I can see them! You with the bandana: Drop the knife! Don’t try jumping out the window. We have the place surrounded.”

“Told you the cops would arrest me for this,” said the man.

“Oooh, shut your trap. If you hadn’t tried to sneak in the school you could have stayed home with a bucket of popcorn,” said the teacher.

“Well, I’m not goin’ to the slammer.” The man chucked the knife at me. I dropped to the ground, and the knife bounced off the wall. The policemen put shackles on them, and they were brought to the police station, where they would be asked questions about the crime.

The two criminals were sitting at a table, waiting to be questioned. They were both very serious, and you could see the fear in their eyes. Soon it would be my turn to talk to them. I knew that they wouldn’t talk, but I had a small idea that would make Mr. Hacs talk. When they saw me coming they glared at me, remembering that I was the one who had caught them.

“I want you to tell me how, why, and what happened during the day of the crime,” I asked. No response.

“Very well, then. If you don’t talk, I must assume that Elizabeth has something to do with it.” Suddenly the expression on Mr. Hacs’s face changed.

“Please don’t arrest my daughter. I’ll tell the whole darn story, if you don’t lock her up. It started out like this. My daughter told me that the boy had bullied her around, so I visited the teacher. She told me that she hated that boy as well, and would pay me the big bucks if I killed him.

“Then the next day, I went after the boy before school started. When I tried to stab the boy, he ducked, and I only injured his arm. I think that when the teacher saw he was alive, she tried to take care of the matter alone. She bought a lot of medications from the drug store. After that she put a lot of the medications in one Kool-Aid pack. She put that pack aside, so that she could give that special pack to Bob Mershey, and not any kid eating their lunch. He drank it and died.”

“Didn’t your parents teach you that you’re not supposed to talk when being asked questions by the police?” screeched Mrs. Pickins. “They’re just idiots with the government on their side.” She started muttering words under her breath.

“Shut up!” I screamed. “I’m tired of hearing you complain about everything!”

“No one talks to me like that!” she responded.

I tried to channel my anger, and I turned to face Mr. Hacs.

“Since you talked, Mr. Hacs, your punishment will be less awful than the person sitting next to you.”

Two weeks after they had been arrested, they faced the judge. Mr. Hacs’s punishment was only twenty years in prison because he had talked,

while Mrs. Pickins was sentenced to stay in prison for the rest of her life. For me, I was happy that my theory had been correct. The knife attack hadn't killed Bob Mershey.

Then there was a knock on my door. "A man just killed the mayor," said a policeman.

An inspector really never has the time to rest, I thought

# Julian Powers and the Red-Eyed Snakes

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*In JULIAN POWERS AND THE RED-EYED SNAKES by Alyssa Bedell, Julian discovers that her favorite high school teacher, Professor Frog, is not who he is thought to be. Julian is very disappointed to find out his secret. Will Julian discover why her teacher lied?*

*This story is dedicated to DIZZLE Productions. Without them there would not be a Julian Powers.*

It was a cool summer night. The moon was at its highest. It was a month before the Fourth of July and I sensed something was wrong, but what? I decided to try and get a good night's rest. Two days later something hit me. It was the answer to my question. I will tell you how it happened. This is the story of "Julian Powers and the Red-Eyed Snakes."

I came down the stairs and to my surprise; there was a letter on the dining table addressed to me. I thought it was important, so I opened it right away. It was from Professor Frog (one of my old high school teachers). He had finally gotten a laboratory and something had been stolen. He said he couldn't tell me what until later on. I wanted to go and investigate, so I called Bella and Zack. Zack could come, but Bella didn't answer her phone so I picked up Zack and went to Bella's house. Bella's mom answered the door saying Bella was ill. We said bye and got back to work. It took us a long time because Zack was messing around (like always). It soon

got dark so we headed home. *What a waste of time*, I thought.

The next day I tried again, but this time with my dog, Penny (Zack loves Penny), and my clue book. It took us around an hour and a half to reach Professor Frog's laboratory, but it seemed longer with Zack screaming at the top of his lungs in the front seat, "Barney time, Barney time" over and over again.

"JUST BE SERIOUS FOR ONCE, ZACK!" I screamed. *I wish Zack would act just a little older.* When we got into the lab, it was a wreck. Something or someone had broken in again. Professor Frog would be heartbroken. In a few minutes I heard screaming. It was Zack. I realized he wasn't next to me anymore. I guess I was so busy looking around I didn't notice. I let go of Penny's leash, and told her to find Zack. Soon Penny found Zack and snakes with red eyes. Suddenly I heard a high pitch whistle and the snakes were gone like magic. I looked around and saw a light green glow. I wrote that in my clue book just in case.

When we got home, I took the liberty of calling Professor Frog and told him what happened. He thanked

me and also said he was fine in a very unbelievable tone. I later told Zack that he must be really upset. Zack agreed, even though he was playing with his iPod touch and wasn't really listening to me. I called my dad and said I was going to the doctor for Zack and that I would be back by curfew. When the doctor examined the snake bites, he said Zack would be okay and that he just needed some rest, so I took him home and left.

On my way home, I decided to stop by Bella's house and say hi. I soon learned that Bella felt better so she came back to my house with me. We got back to my house to find the door wide open. We ran in and saw the same glow that we did at the laboratory after the snakes disappeared. I told Bella this and she screamed. I told her it wasn't that scary when I noticed she was pointing to the office; it was trashed. I called for our nanny and no one answered. We just had to investigate. We later found her lying on the floor. I wondered what was happening so I had Bella take nanny to the hospital while I thought of a plan.

It was five o'clock when Bella got back and I had the perfect plan. We would have to wait, but it was worth a try. I told Bella to go get snacks while I got the supplies we would need. The plan was to set up a trap for the snakes and their Master. We found foot prints in the house that didn't match any shoes in the house. Anyway, Bella would head toward the lab so the snakes would come again. I, still being in the house, would try to lure them into the house, therefore trapping them

in the nets that were set up by all the windows and doors that led outside the house.

So I was about to turn on the confuse ball (a flashlight set to go on and off a lot), when suddenly I hit my head. The next thing I knew I was back in the lab, but how? Shortly I saw Bella, and was that Zack? (I know what you're thinking; why in the world was Zack there? I mean he always causes destruction.) Well, apparently Zack followed Bella to the lab and got caught. I noticed the door was open so I told Zack, being the only one free, to go get Penny and to tell her to find me. Zack came back shortly, and Penny freed us. (I knew the police dog day camp would come in handy!)

On the way out, I told Bella to call the cops when she got outside. I looked around the lab and saw the snakes, only it was light day and I could tell that they were ROBOTS! I also discovered the snakes had teeth, and that their red eyes were just lights to scare people.

I was heading for the door when I noticed a newspaper article and a whistle. I blew the whistle and it sounded like the noise we heard before. I started to read the article when I looked at the picture, and there was Professor Frog. The title was, "*Prisoner Escaped!*" I continued reading the news article and learned that Paul Atomies McGrove had been sent to jail for trying to steal from CARSON POWERS!

Finally, the police arrived and greeted Penny warmly. Next, they ran inside and arrested the professor and gave me the lab for finding Paul Atomies McGrove. We thought about

what we would do with the lab. We all knew the first thing we had to do was to clean it up and paint it. We started with that and then we made it a charity

area where people could donate items for the poor, but that is another story.

So now you know the story of "*Julian Powers and the Red-Eyed Snakes.*"

# The Justice-for-All League

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*Wouldn't it be great if there were a league of superheroes working together to fight the biggest villains of all? DeMarco Oliver has been thinking about it, and he calls it **THE JUSTICE-FOR-ALL LEAGUE**. Where does he get his ideas?*

The most trusted Justice-for-All League is where the most powerful humans in the world are saving millions of lives.

When they got back from the planet Mars, they were exhausted from fighting Martians. They wanted to rest, but they heard an alarm on their ship that trouble was coming from Earth.

When they got to Earth, it was chaos—madness! It was Lexx Looter that had a lot of powers. He made copies of the Justice-for-All League. The Justice-for-All League had to fight against copies of themselves.

They fought and fought until Lexx was getting frustrated. So he fought the Justice-for-All League himself. He defeated all the heroes except for Mr. Flash. Still standing, he ran fast, faster, and even faster, so that Lexx did not know where he was. They fought and fought.

Eventually, one of them fell. It was Lexx.

After he was defeated, the team was healing. Mr. Flash took the team to the ship to heal. Then Mr. Flash said, “Victory to all!” except for the villains who were also resting in jail.



# The Missing Diamond

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*When a very valuable diamond gets stolen, it's up to two detectives from Michigan to solve the crime in the story of* **THE MISSING DIAMOND**, *by* **Nicholas Moore**.

One day in Las Vegas, Nevada, there was a convention for diamond jewelers. They came from all over the world for the convention. Everyone loved coming to Las Vegas because they could try to win money in the casinos and see famous singers like the Jonas Brothers.

The convention this year was different from all of the past conventions because there was going to be a very special diamond on display. This diamond was called the "White Angel." The White Angel was the largest diamond in the world and billionaires from all over the world came to the convention to see it and hopefully buy the diamond. This diamond came from a big diamond mine in London. It was in bulletproof glass.

The room was beautifully decorated, and in the center of the room was a clear case with the White Angel locked inside. There were armed guards standing outside of the room so that no one could enter before the convention started.

When the doors opened and the convention began, everyone came inside. The billionaires went to the case to get their first look at the White Angel. When they got to the case, the diamond was gone! It had been stolen.

The Las Vegas police were called, and President Barack Obama sent two of his best Federal detectives to help find the White Angel and catch the thief. The detectives' names were Nicholas and Nathan Moore. They were from the state of Michigan. They were brothers and were trained by the FBI. They interviewed all of the jewelers and the billionaires. They also interviewed the owner of the White Angel and the security guards.

After they interviewed everyone, they had no real leads, so Nicholas and Nathan decided to fly to London, England to work on another important case and hopefully get a solid lead on the diamond while they were in London.

When they arrived at their hotel room in London, Nicholas got on his computer and began reviewing the security tapes from the convention. On the tape, Nicholas saw the guards go in and take it. That's when he remembered in the interview one of them said, "We'll be in London for a job."

As soon as he discovered who had taken the diamond, he told Nathan, and they called the London police and asked them to follow their suspect until they arrived.

Nicholas and Nathan went to the guards' hotel. Using a special listening

device, Nicholas and Nathan heard one guard talking to his partner about how they had just gotten away with the biggest crime of all time. They were looking at the diamond when there was a knock at the door.

When one of the guards opened the door, Nicholas and Nathan, along with the London Police Chief, said, “You are under arrest for stealing the White Angel diamond.”

**CASE CLOSED!**

# The Mystery of the Blown-Up Float

*Clueless Bob, the detective, is notorious for solving crimes with his gang, but one day, a puzzling and important case is thrown at him. Can they catch the criminal? Find out in **THE MYSTERY OF THE BLOWN-UP FLOAT**, by **Ethan Anderson**.*

The crowd went wild. “SANTA CLAUS! SANTA CLAUS!” they cheered. Then the oldest float appeared. The crowd got even louder. Suddenly the crowd stopped and a whistling noise was heard. People were looking around and babbling to each other. Some said, “It’s a bird!” Others said, “It’s a plane!” Some children shouted, “It’s Superman!” The object then veered toward the excited crowd and the float. The crowd then rapidly disappeared. Suddenly, there was a loud *BOOM* and *CRASH*. People gradually appeared out of windows, buildings, manholes, cars, and other such hiding places. They screamed.

Clueless Bob the detective, Officer Jumbo, Officer I-Can’t-Arrest-Anybody, and Weenie William all got out of the car and strolled into the Starbucks across the street.

“It’s nice to be back at headquarters,” sighed Clueless Bob.

“Quit the jibber jabber,” snapped Officer Jumbo. “We have to terminate this project by next month. So our most prized float, our great, awesome, cool, humongous, Santa Claus float, is rambling down the street and then his head is, *BANG*, clouted off by a rocket launcher or something. Now, I have

written down some well-thought over questions for this meeting today.” Officer Jumbo picked up a napkin with some form of writing on it. “Okay, question number one: What dance, uh, evidence, I mean evidence, do we have? Well, we don’t know, so we should scrutinize the scene soon, but I do know that the Santa Claus float has been destroyed. Why the Santa Claus float of all things? Who will be the next victim? And what is this guy’s predicament? Question number two: Humble jiff l hunnuh fargijunish mahoganyforgggggyyyyyyyyyyy?”

“What was that again?” asked Clueless Bob.

“I can’t read this stuff,” replied Jumbo. “Whatever, let’s go to the crime scene.”

Once they reached Blow-Me-Up Street, they realized that many detectives had beaten them to it. Officer Jumbo was tired of getting jostled around, so he shouted, “Everyone outta here! This is our case!” Once they had a pathway cleared, they quickly got to the float. There wasn’t much to inspect.

Clueless Bob said, “I’m hungry.”

“Shut up, you annoying buffoon,” said Jumbo, “We still have to inspect.”

So they walked closer to the float. Clueless Bob touched it. Instantly, the float fell to ashes. "You stupid, bumbling, loser of a detective, fool!" shouted Officer Jumbo.

"Can we go back now?" asked Clueless Bob.

Back in the Starbucks, there was much discussion going on. "Who dunnit? WHO DUNNIT!" screamed Weenie William. Officer I-Can't-Arrest-Anybody covered his ears and went to the window. More arguing started. Suddenly a plunger tip arrow with a note hit the window. Officer I-Can't-Arrest-Anybody screamed and dove to the ground. Weenie William hid under a table, and Clueless Bob stood up and bought another coffee. Officer Jumbo sighed. He got up and went outside and picked up the note. It said:

*If you are trying to get the criminal, try bowling.*

*--The Phantom*

"Try bowling?" shouted Weenie William. "What does that mean?"

"It is quite simple," said Clueless Bob. "You take the hypotenuse of a bowling ball, multiply it by the area of the three holes and..."

"Shut up and give us the answer!" roared Jumbo.

"It gives us the latitude and longitude of the bowling alley!" continued Clueless Bob, unaffected by Jumbo's remark.

"Well then, grab your weapons and let's go!" exclaimed Jumbo.

Weapons really meant whatever you

could get your hands on, so Clueless Bob grabbed a mocha, Officer Jumbo grabbed the napkins and pen, Officer I-Can't-Arrest-Anybody grabbed a coffee mug, and Weenie William grabbed an actual gun, but it was too heavy for him, so he settled for a Nerf gun that he found in some random guy's backpack.

On the journey to the bowling alley, they finally reached their destination. The bowling alley was a smelly, run-down dump. There was so much popcorn lying on the floor you would've thought it was just after New Year's Day. It was very crowded, too. It was so crowded, almost as if there were a concert going on. Of course, there wasn't, but there was a two-for-one seeded grape sale.

The cops all got coffees and investigated. After about two hours, they found nothing but popcorn on the floor. Then they decided to actually bowl. While waiting for his turn, Weenie William tried to impress the girls in the next row.

"Hey ladies!" he said, "Watch this!" As soon as he said it, Officer Jumbo grabbed him, rolled him into a ball and bowled him down the lane.

"Strike!" everyone cheered. While they were waiting for Weenie William to come back up the bowling ball retriever, Clueless Bob found a clue. It read:

*Take some time off, watch something.*

*The Phantom*

"Ooh, I hate that phantom guy," hissed Officer Jumbo. "His riddles are so hard to solve."

"Let's go see a movie instead," said

Clueless Bob.

As soon as he said this, a voice coming from the coffee shop screamed, "Help! There's a rob--" The cops snatched up their "weapons" and were on the scene. A man was on top of the counter about to elbow drop the cashier when a cup of coffee flew toward him. He fell to the ground instantly. Then, ten more men burst through the doors.

"Quick, behind the counter!" shouted Officer Jumbo. They all leapt over the counter and ducked. One of the criminals was about to roundhouse a customer when mocha hit him square between the eyes.

"Nice shot Bob," said Officer I-Can't-Arrest-Anybody. A criminal realized where the coffee was coming from and he started to head over to the counter.

"We're out of ammo!" shouted Clueless Bob.

"Not yet we're not," said Officer Jumbo sternly.

With that being said, Officer Jumbo threw the pen he had in his pocket toward a coffee that a guy was holding, who was next to the criminal. The pen struck the coffee and spilled all over the criminal.

"Now we're out of ammo," said Jumbo.

"I hope I'm not," said Weenie William. Weenie William jumped onto the counter and started firing his Nerf gun at the criminals. It had no effect whatsoever. The criminals just got angry. They picked up Weenie William and stuffed him in the trashcan.

"Quick, grab the coffee pots and

cups over there!" said Officer I-Can't-Arrest-Anybody. They quickly filled up ten coffee cups with coffee and started throwing them, but five missed and they had four criminals more to go.

"There's no more coffee left!" shouted Clueless Bob.

"We need something! Do they have coffee beans or grounds or something?" screamed Officer Jumbo.

Clueless Bob got some coffee beans and brought them back.

"Now grind those up and make some coffee!" yelled Officer Jumbo. It takes at least ten minutes to make coffee so Officer Jumbo and Officer I-Can't-Arrest-Anybody had to throw coffee beans at the criminals to fend them off. Finally, the coffee was done and they loaded some cups up. They kept on throwing until they were out of coffee. When they stopped, they looked at the scene. There were legs sticking out of the trashcan, a bunch of criminals on the floor, the cashier and some customers knocked out, and a guy screaming about how he wanted a refund for his coffee.

"I'm bored; let's go to a movie," said Clueless Bob.

After the movie, they were about to throw the popcorn bowl out when something caught Officer Jumbo's eye. He snatched it up. It was another note. It read:

*Hungry?*

*--The Phantom--*

Officer Jumbo screamed, "I hate The Phantom!"

"I'm bored. Let's go somewhere," said Clueless Bob.

"Yes, let's," said Jumbo.

They were driving to Gangster Town and Clueless Bob spied a restaurant and they were all hungry. They realized that criminals hung out there, so they wondered if anyone knew The Phantom. After a few fights (some of the criminals figured out they were cops), they narrowed it down to three criminals, Madman Max, Pickpocket Jim, and Eht Motnahp.

"Where were you on Saturday morning at nine o' clock?" inquired Officer Jumbo.

"Where were *you* on Saturday morning at nine o' clock?" snapped Madman Max, "You're more suspicious than me. *My* record's clean."

"Just shut up and give the answer!" shouted Officer Jumbo.

"I was in hyperspace, so I do not know where I was," said Madman Max.

"OK," said Officer Jumbo, writing on a napkin, "Anything else?"

"Nope."

"Then you may leave. Officer I-Can't-Arrest-Anybody will escort you to the cop car. Take a candy if you want."

"I was going to take one anyway," mumbled Madman Max.

Next, they questioned Pickpocket Jim. "Where were you on Saturday morning at nine o' clock?" asked Officer Jumbo.

"Buying a lottery ticket," said Pickpocket Jim sleepily.

"That's fine with me," said Jumbo. "You may go to the cop car."

Finally, they questioned Eht Motnahp. "Where were you at nine o' clock on Saturday morning?" asked Officer Jumbo.

"If you must know, I was buying weapons," said Eht Motnahp.

"Fine, now get to the cop car."

"I think it was Eht Motnahp," said Clueless Bob, when they were back at their table. "He was buying weapons, and weapons were needed to blow up the float, but mainly I think it is because he swiped my piece of pizza. Now, let's arrest him!"

When they put Eht Motmahp under pressure, he spilled the beans.

"I led you here, but I thought you were fools enough never to find me. I blew up the float. I always hated it, so I bought a rocket launcher and blasted it," he said.

At the end, Clueless Bob was proud to say, "Case closed!"

# One Strange Mystery...

---

*A missing lunch box leads two best friends on the trail of an unusual thief in*  
**ONE STRANGE MYSTERY...**, by Zoé Hunter.

It was a bright, sunny morning in Manhattan, New York, when...

"Hey, Mom, have you seen my lunchbox?" asked Aimee. "I'm supposed to go to lunch with Grandma later and I wanted to make sure I had my lunchbox."

"Are you sure you looked for it? You usually don't look for things that much," replied Aimee's mom.

"Mom, I'm positive I looked for it really hard!"

"Ok, then, if you can't find it then maybe you should ask your friends Tiffany and Nicole to help you look for it. You always talk about how they help you find your missing things."

"Fine, Mom."

## Meanwhile at Nicole's House...

Tiffany and Nicole were trying to get tans when Nicole's cell phone rung. "Hello?" Nicole asked.

"Hey, Nicole, it's me, Aimee. I wanted to ask you and Tiffany if you guys would help me with another mystery."

"Um... hold on a sec." Nicole turned to Tiffany. "It's Aimee, and she wants us to help her solve a mystery," whispered Nicole.

"Really? We just started to work on our tans!" whined Tiffany.

"Come on, Tiff, you know you love

a good mystery."

"Ok. I'll do it."

Nicole turned back to the phone. "Ok, Aimee, we'll be right over," said Nicole into the phone. Nicole turned to Tiffany. "Let's get dressed."

## At Aimee's house...

When Tiffany and Nicole reached Aimee's house, Tiffany couldn't help notice that Aimee's dog, Peaches, was gone. She usually stood by the door barking when the doorbell rang. Oh, well, maybe she went to look for some food again or play with a toy. Peaches was always looking for food. "Hey, Aimee, where is Peaches?" asked Tiffany.

"I don't know. Earlier this morning she ran off somewhere with a toy or something in her mouth."

"Hmm..." was all Tiffany said.

"Anyway, I've lost my super-extra-special-totally awesome lunchbox."

"Do you have any idea who might have taken it?" asked Tiffany.

"No, but I asked my mom if she saw it, and she said no," answered Aimee.

"Okay. Do you know what was in the lunchbox?" questioned Nicole.

"It contained fries that smelled good, and they were crispy and salty, and some chicken nuggets." Right after Aimee said that something nagged at

Nicole in the back of her head. “So, do you guys want a snack?”

“Sure!” they said together.

*That’s strange,* Tiffany thought, *Peach’s water dish is empty, but her food dish is full.* Tiffany looked at Nicole and looked at her like *Are you thinking what I’m thinking?* She looked back and nodded at the water dish.

“Aimee, what’s Peach’s favorite food?” asked Tiffany.

“Chicken nuggets and fri—wait, you guys think that Peaches stole my lunchbox?” exclaimed Aimee.

“Well, you never know!” said Nicole.

When they called Peach’s name, they heard a small moaning sound from the basement. Sure enough, there was

Peaches lying on the floor surrounded by scattered fries and half-bitten chicken nuggets. Right next to her lay Aimee’s lunchbox, wide open.

“Peaches, you naughty little puppy!” screeched Aimee. “Thank you guys so much for helping me find my lunchbox.” Aimee turned to her friends.

“You’re welcome,” the two best friends said together.

*Back at Nicole’s house...*

“That was a weird case, huh, Tiff?” asked Nicole.

“Yeah, but all in all, it was very fun,” replied Tiffany.

“Yeah,” agreed Nicole. Then the two girls went back to their tans.



# Watch!

---

*A school mystery has caught the attention of two girls. They are willing to break the rules to get to the bottom of things in **WATCH!** by Louise Asselin.*

It was four, but it was only now I was coming out of school. I had to stay in and help Mrs. Starbus, my science teacher. I was walking down the hallway when I saw Mr. Closuit, holding heavy piles of used books.

“May I help you, Mr. Closuit?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, thank you, Zoe,” he said while giving me some worn out dictionaries.

We headed to a door leading to the basement. After going down the steps, I asked politely, “Where should I put those books?”

“Right here, thank you.”

“There isn’t much down here,” I observed.

“Well, things have been missing lately.”

“How?” I was curious.

“The subject isn’t really clear... A thief, probably, but only employees here have the right to access the basement, and I don’t think any of them could do that.”

“Maybe I could help you.” My voice was full of hope. Another case solved by Zoe!

“No, thank you, I wouldn’t like any students involved with that. But thanks for asking!”

I looked at the floor. I was really hoping for another answer.

“Well, now I have to go,” I declared. “My mom is probably waiting for me.”

I sprinted up the stairs, through a hall and out the school’s doors. An olive green car was waiting for me at the end of the pickup circle. I hopped in.

The evening went by quickly. It was routine: homework, dinner, homework, shower, bed. As I got under the comfy covers I thought about the school’s basement. “If the principal can’t let me find the thief, I will do it by myself,” I thought. But before I could get that any clearer, I fell in a deep sleep.

As I got to school the next morning, I went to see my best friend, Katie. I told her about my plan after telling her what was going on.

“Katie, I want to find out who did it!” I exclaimed. “I have a plan.” She looked at me impatiently, waiting for more.

“Teachers take attendance only during first hour. So during second hour, we can hide in the basement and catch the thief. We’ll report him to the office and let the grownups take care of the rest. With that, we’ll be popular throughout the school!”

Katie, really excited about that, agreed to meet me tomorrow after first hour in the basement.

\* \* \*

The next morning, I jumped out of bed, put my old blue jeans on, and hurried to school. First hour passed by really slowly, which only got me more excited and impatient. Finally, the bell rang.

I ran to the basement with a flashlight I had taken with me. Katie was already there, waiting for me. We hid behind a big carton box and waited in the dark.

After ten minutes, a person turned the basement light on and went down the stairs. As she took boxes full of things, I recognize Mrs. Starbus, our science teacher. We both kept quiet until she went back upstairs.

After the bell rang we went to the office and ask to see Mr. Closuit. When we told him we suspected Mrs. Starbus to be the thief, we had to explain how we knew that. We both got a lunch detention, but we insisted in asking Mrs. Starbus. Mr. Closuit called her to his office. She came, so he asked us to leave.

Later on he told us what happened: “Mrs. Starbus,” said Mr. Closuit, “as

you know, we have had some problems in the past with our basement, things missing.”

“Yes,” she responded, unsure of where this was going to end up.

“Well, I have been told, in fact by two girls,” Mr. Closuit continued, “that you might be the one behind all that.”

Mrs. Starbus hesitated and announced, “Yes, I am.” He was surprised when she continued. “There were so many useless things in this basement that I was donating things to charity. Of course I should have talked to you about it, but I was afraid you’d say no.”

An embarrassing silence filled the room.

“Well, I guess you were right to do this,” said Mr. Closuit, thinking. “Mrs. Starbus, you will not be punished severely. I will only ask you to form a group of students that will help you in donating those things to charity. It will happen the first Friday of each month.” Mrs. Starbus grinned.

That is exactly what happened. I liked Mr. Closuit’s idea, and guess who was the first to sign up for the charity activity? It was Katie and me!

# FRIENDS AND ENEMIES



# Adopted

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*Sarah is a little girl who is adopted because her mom left her alone. But she is very different from her new family. Will she ever fit in? Find out in **ADOPTED**, by **Lavender Bouie**.*

When Sarah was born, she was a very small baby. Sarah was a happy baby, but her mom was not happy with Sarah. When Sarah was just three months old, her mom left her alone on the streets. Someone saw her alone, and they called the police.

A family adopted her. When Sarah arrived at her new home she was very happy to be there. Sarah finally had a new family, but she was very different from her new family. Sarah was black and her family was white.

Sarah's new mom's name was Maria. She had two kids of her own. She had a boy and a girl. Sarah goes to a new school now. She attends Apple Elementary with her new brother and sister. She is eight years old, and she is in the third grade.

Sometimes her brother and sister make fun of her. That makes her sad because they talk about her and how she is so ugly and black. At school she has no friends. Everyone talks about her. That makes her very sad. Sometimes she cries and they call her a crybaby. Sarah is the kind of girl that cries a lot. When Sarah comes home from school she tells her mom what happened. "No one likes me," Sarah sobbed.

"Well, that's because you're black," said Ben.

"That's not nice," said Maria.

Sarah ran to her room and cried her eyes out. Maria ran after her and knocked on the door. "Go away!" cried Sarah. Maria opened the door Sarah got up and said, "Why does everyone hate me?"

"They don't hate you."

"Yes, they do!" Sarah shouted loudly. "No one likes me."

"Shhh. Well, I like you," said Maria. "Don't matter what color you are, I still love you."

"Thank you," said Sarah, "I love you, too."

What Maria said made Sarah happy. The next day Sarah went to school and met a girl that was in the same way as Sarah. She was adopted as well and her name was also Sarah! They became the best of friends.

"Hello," Sarah said to her new best friend.

"What up?" she said.

"Well, I am on the cheerleading team."

"Why?" Sarah said.

"Because it's fun!"

"Get off the team."

"Why?"

"You know they're going to make fun."

"Well, I am good."

"So?"

“I thought you would be happy that I am on the team.”

“Well, I was until I knew what it was. Well, whatever. When they make fun, don’t come to me.”

“I thought you were my friend.”

“I am, but why do you want to be on the team? We were supposed to do stuff together, not alone,” Sarah said.

“Sarah, just leave me alone!” Sarah said. “I will find a new friend, a true friend that won’t leave my side.”

After that, Sarah made a new, true friend for life. Sarah and her new friend were walking when they ran into the other Sarah. Her old friend stopped.

“That’s your new friend!” shouted

Sarah. “She is so ugly with her short hair, huge eyes and big feet!”

“Don’t talk to my friend like that!”

“Well, I am your friend.”

“Not anymore,” said the other girl.

“I am off the team.”

Sarah said, “What?”

“I am done cheering. So are we still friends?”

“Yes.”

“Are you her friend?”

“Yes, a friend of yours is a friend of mine. Hey, I am sorry about talking about you.”

“Well, I do have short hair!”

“HA, HA, HA,” they all laughed. They all became the best of friends!

# Bully

---

*In BULLY by Lauren Gutman, a boy is constantly bullied by kids at school. He struggles to find the solution to his problem and an end to his misery.*

I never new this would happen to me, but I guess it did. *Boom.*

*Bam, bang.* I just smacked, crashed, and banged right into the water. Do you know what water?

Toilet water.

This happens every day. It won't stop, ever. It's like someone bullying me. I guess it is. I wish this had never happened to me, but I guess not everything is fair.

Well, first, Brittany smashes my head in toilet water. Second, Grace smashes me into lockers, and that gives me enough damage. Then, third, Marie pushes me down the stairs.

*Ding, ding, ding.* That was my alarm clock.

"Are you awake?" my mom yelled.

"Yes, Mom. Didn't you hear my alarm clock?"

"Yes, just making sure."

"Ok."

I got up, got dressed, ate some moldy corn flakes, and brushed my teeth and my hair. I was ready for school. I really didn't want to go to school, but my mom made me. I hopped in the car when my mom was waiting for me.

Once I got to school I jumped out of the car to walk into the school, tiptoeing and shaky, because they were going to hurt me.

My mom asked, "Are you ok? What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. I just have to go to the bathroom."

"Oh, ok, then. Have a good day."

When I walked in, they were all staring at me, waiting for me to walk forward. I was freaked out. I didn't know what to do. I was just standing there.

They bullied me because of what I wear all the time and how I look. They thought I was a nerd. They came up to me and grabbed me.

"Let me go! Let me go!" I screamed, and no teachers heard.

"No way," they all said.

Well, you know what comes first: the dunk in the toilet.

*Blubber, blubber, blubber.* That's my voice when I'm glugging water down my throat. I barely could breathe. I tried to get up, but she was pinning down my neck.

"Want some more?"

"No, please."

She let me go finally. I went out of the girls' bathroom, and people started laughing at me.

I started crying, trying to get to my next class. But Marie smashed me into lockers, and Grace pushed me down the stairs as I was trying to walk up them. I had like a million scratches. I wouldn't stop crying.

I decided to skip school and just walk home. I couldn't take it anymore. My house isn't very far from here, so I think I can make it.

When I got home I just told my mom that I had a half-day. She totally believed me.

I was trying to think of things that I could do to make myself be cool and look good. I couldn't think of anything. I just have to go to school and get hurt every day, I guess. I have to get used to it. That will be kind of hard.

I went downstairs to talk to my mom about it. "Hey, Mom," I said, "could you help me, please?"

"Help you with what?" she said.

"Oh, ok, well, at school things aren't working out very well."

"Like what, honey?"

"Oh, well, it's just...bullying."

"Ok. Well, I'm very sorry."

Later when I was going to bed up in my room, I was thinking that my mom didn't really help me.

The next morning I got up and got ready for school the same way I always do. Once Mom took me to school, I hopped out of the seat and went straight in the school. I tried to run away from them, but it didn't really work out. They did all the same stuff as they usually do. I can't stop it.

I couldn't stop skipping school. I was crying my eyes out. And of course they came up to me and grabbed me

and took me outside and dumped me in the huge trashcan. They all came up at the same time and started punching and scratching me. I couldn't stop crying.

Once the day was over, I went home and decided that going to the mall and buying new clothes would be great so I wouldn't get hurt anymore. I told my mom that I was going to the mall.

I was there for an hour and thirty minutes. Once I got back, I showed all of the stuff I got to my mom, and then I went to my room to try it all on. Most of my shirts were like white and different colored shirts. I also got one plaid shirt and some nice jeans.

I decided to wear my plaid shirt and new jeans tomorrow so I wouldn't get picked on.

Once I woke up in the morning, I was so excited to wear my new stuff. I knew this would work.

When my mom took me to school, I walked in all cool. All of my classmates opened their mouths like I was the coolest person in the world. I said to myself, *I knew this would work!* I was so excited.

Everyone was mean to Marie, Grace, and Brittany because they thought they weren't cool anymore. They bullied them! But they treated me like a king because they only like it if people wear the cool clothes in the school.



# The Chanel Bag

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*Lucy heads to the mall with one clear goal. However, her routine shopping trip turns into an obstacle course in **THE CHANEL BAG**, by **Charlotte Daniels**.*

Lucy goes to the mall on a mission. The mission is called “The Chanel Bag.” This isn’t just any Chanel bag, though. This is the cutest Chanel bag that ever lived.

Lucy walked into the mall and began to walk toward the Chanel store. When Lucy was walking past the Lily Pulitzer store windows, she saw the most adorable blue dress. She stopped and walked in to get a better look at it.

When she walked in she decided that she just had to try it on. When she had it on she decided that she needed to have it. It was dark blue with white palm trees all over it. It had a hot pink sash, was long-sleeved, and fell to about seven inches above the knee.

She decided that it needed some shoes to match. She walked around the store until she saw the most adorable pink sandals. They were hot pink leather with a big flower in each one. The minute she saw them she fell in love with them and decided to get them.

She walked out feeling happy with her purchase.

Lucy was on her way to Chanel once again when she heard her phone ring. Lucy looked at the caller ID and saw the word “daddy” on her screen in the caller ID. Lucy picked it up. “Yes, Daddy.”

“I want you to go into Niemen

Marcus and pick up the cookie cake for your brother’s birthday party. And I don’t want any other stops on the way, so you can go to Chanel after,” he said.

“But, Daddy, what if someone buys my bag and it’s gone when I get there?” Lucy said back in a stressed-out and surly tone.

“I frankly don’t care about your bag at the moment. Just go and get the cake.”

“Fine,” she said. And just to make her daddy mad she said it extra specially annoyed.

When Lucy got there she saw the hugest line in the history of the world, and it was leading to the counter that sold the cookie cakes.

She decided that she would just go to the front of the line and say that she was in a super duper hurry to get the cake because her brother’s party was in ten minutes and she was already late. When she got to the front of the line she calmly explained her problem to the customers in the line and hoped they would understand.

That day she learned something very important: You can’t just cut in front of 50 people in a line, because no matter what your reason they always seem to one up you. For example, if you say, “This is for my dying grandma,” they’ll say, “This is for my

dying great grandma” (because apparently in this world the older you are the more important you are).

Lucy decided after about twelve excuses that she would just go to the back of the line and wait. She needed a plan, and fast. After about five minutes of thinking she decided to call her devious but amazing best friend Ann Marie (“A” for short).

She picked up on the first ring. “Hey, Lucy. What’s up?”

“Hey, A. I need a plan,” she said. “OK, I’m at the mall –”

Ann Marie cut in. “OMG ME TOO! Where are you?” She was talking in between excited giggles.

“Neiman Marcus, second floor. I’m at the counter where they sell the cookie cake.”

“Got it,” she said. “Be there in five.”

Exactly five minutes later Ann Marie rushed into Niemen Marcus. She paused at the door and scoped out where Lucy was. The minute she saw her she walked over. She was walking rather slowly for the emergency this was. But then Lucy realized that she had never explained it to Ann Marie.

A sat down at a table and pulled out her phone. She shot her a text from across the room.

**Ann Marie:** *Whats the prob*

**Lucy:** *I need 2 get little bros cookie cake in the next 5 min*

**Ann Marie:** *y*

**Lucy:** *Need 2 g2 Chanel 2 get the super cute bag*

**Ann Marie:** *wat bag*

**Lucy:** *u no the super cute 1*

**Ann Marie:** *kk got it just wait there ill create a diversion*

**Lucy:** *kk u rock*

The girls both slid their phones into their bags, and Ann Marie got up and began to walk over toward the cookie cake line. As she walked she began to wobble like she was going to faint, and all of a sudden she fell to the ground with a bloodcurdling scream and a crash. All her bags went flying. Every adult in the line rushed over to see the problem.

Lucy thanked God that her bestie was such a good actress as she rushed toward the front of the line to seize the dumb cake. When she got there she told the clerk that she needed to pick up a cake for William Brown. He sensed that she was in a hurry and quickly snatched the cake out of the back and handed it to her swiftly. She told him it was prepaid, took the cake, and rushed away.

She looked back at her friend lying on the floor surrounded by people and laughed. She yelled, “The cookie cake stand is closing in five minutes! Get your cakes fast or not at all!” That did it. The people all ditched Ann and ran to get their cakes before they closed.

She went back to help Ann Marie up and thank her for the rescue. Ann told her that she had to get going, and she thanked her for getting the crazy people off her.

“Thanks a lot, people of the crowd. I am sooo fine,” Ann Marie said sarcastically to the crazy crowd that had run over to the cookie cakes.

“Bye, A!” Lucy yelled. “Are you sure you can’t come with me to Chanel?”

“Nope. My dad’s waiting for me over in Tiffany and Co. We have to pick out a diamond necklace for my mom’s birthday, and he doesn’t want to do it without me.”

“Boo hoo. Well, say happy birthday to your mom for me, and I’ll see you tomorrow at school! Toodles!” Lucy said.

“Toodles!” Ann Marie yelled after her as Lucy made her way to Chanel.

She was finally on her way to Chanel!

When Lucy got there she saw the bag in the window, and it was on sale! This was her lucky day! Chanel is never on sale.

Lucy rushed inside to stare at it. This was the bag, the one thing that Lucy had come to the mall to get. It was the monochrome check fabric bag with black patent leather trim. There were two top handles made from black patent leather attached with large buckled straps. It had an internal zip pocket and closed with a single-press stud that Lucy came here for.

Lucy grabbed the bag and began to walk toward the register until she felt a pull. Lucy turned around and saw a hand on her Chanel bag. Lucy looked up at a 20-year-old girl looking Lucy in the eyes and holding her bag. “Get your hand off my bag,” Lucy said.

That girl was like a snail in molasses. She didn’t move a single inch.

Once again Lucy said, “Get Off!” She was yelling now. She pulled harder and began to yell. “This is my bag and I

want it! A smart person would get her hand off; a dumb person wouldn’t. What’s it going to be? Smart or Dumb?”

The girl looked at Lucy and began to scream and pull. (As you can imagine, a crowd began to form at the sight of this.)

With that, it was all-out war. They were both on the floor pulling each other’s hair and fighting for the bag. By now the whole store had begun to watch the twelve-year-old girl wrestling with a 20-year-old girl over a bag. The sight wasn’t pretty. There was screaming and yelling, pushing and pulling. Not once did Lucy lose her grip on the bag. Lucy kept up the fight until the girl rolled over on her back and dropped the bag. Lucy jumped up as fast as she could and ran to the register in order to ring up the bag.

The crowd began to walk away as the girl got up and watched in horror as Lucy had it rung up. Lucy handed the clerk her credit card, and he swiped it. He handed it back to Lucy, and Lucy snatched her bag before the girl could grasp it.

As Lucy walked out, she lost her footing and slipped on the slippery, shiny floor of the store. All of Lucy’s bags flew as Lucy landed on her butt. She lay there for a moment before she realized that she had to grab her bag before the girl got to it. She sat up and scoped the store for her bag and the girl. She saw her crawling over to the bag it was in.

Lucy crawled with all her might to get to that bag. She just beat the girl.

She snatched it so fast that even she was surprised. She picked up her bag and rushed out of the store and out of

the mall to her mother's waiting car, before she realized she had left her purse in the store.

# Charlotta and “Dork”

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*In CHARLOTTA AND “DORK” by Kara Wallace, Charlotta is in the middle of a vicious rumor. Can she prove the rumor wrong? Or is the rumor actually true?*

I was in the photography room developing pictures for the photography club, and Dorken Schmorken (at least that’s what everybody calls him) walked in. He was in the photography club, too. He said he would help me, and I said thanks. When we finished it was about five o’clock, and he said that he would walk me home and he did.

Some kids from school saw us and started making kissing noises at us. We ignored them, and I didn’t think twice about it until I got home. “I never kissed him. I was just walking with him,” I told my mom. She said it was okay and that people would only make rumors because they’re jealous, liked to start drama, or were just plain mean. I was relieved.

I sat in the school library the next day studying for a test that was coming up. I’m very shy and quiet, so I was by myself. Just as I was about to leave, the mean cheerleaders walked up to me, and the main one named Brigitte said, “You are so stupid to save all that studying for the last minute.” Then she strutted off with all her groupies, or cheerleader friends as she called them. I thought, *Oh my gosh, I didn’t save all my studying for the last minute. I just want to refresh my memory. I actually studied for like*

*two hours last night. She should really think about what she says before she says it; gosh!*

The bell rang, and it was time to go to class, so I picked up my bags and headed to first hour. Brigitte was in my first hour, second, third and sixth hours. *I am the most unlucky person in the whole wide world.* I sighed. I sat down with a loud thump, and began filling out my planner.

My teacher’s name was Mrs. Hail. That was one thing I was happy about; another thing was that Mrs. Hail NEVER gave out homework. Mrs. Hail taught Social Studies. There was only one down side: Mrs. Hail was having her baby and was going to be out for the rest of the month. It was only December 3, and she would be out until January 3. The new teacher would arrive today, but she wasn’t here yet and the bell had already rung, which probably meant she was a weirdo.

Right at that moment she walked through the door and had bright red hair and yellow teeth! *She’s definitely a weirdo,* I thought. She gave a huge speech about herself and then continued with a lecture about herself. Then she took forever to explain our class work, which we didn’t have time to finish, so it was homework. The rest of my classes before lunch were fine,

but lunch was going to be horrible, I just knew it.

I arrived in the cafeteria, sat down by myself, and started eating my lunch. All of a sudden everything stopped. Everybody started whispering. I looked around and everyone was looking at me with their cell phones open. I was wondering what was going on, so I left.

I decided to eat in the library. While I was there Brigitte walked up to me and said, "It looks like someone was kissing MY boyfriend in the photography room yesterday after school! I am going to get you back for this." After that I ran to the office, called my mom, and explained the whole thing to her. She came to pick me up.

I was so embarrassed, and I really didn't want to go to school the next day, but my mom said I had to. At that point I was having a fantasy about tying a black rope around Brigitte's waist and continuously dunking her in colorful juice that dyed her skin.

I took a walk into the woods to let out my anger and embarrassment. I was screaming at the top of my lungs, "I hate Brigitte and I want to hurt her so bad!" It felt good to let it all out. After that, I walked home and did my homework.

The next morning I woke up to discover that I had forgotten to set my alarm, so I was super late. I was so surprised that my mom hadn't woken me up. She said it was because I was up late last night, even though I had gone to bed at ten o'clock. "Mom, will you explain why you didn't wake me up?"

She said, "You won't understand."

I said, "Yes, I will, I'm in the ninth

grade."

I just ignored her the rest of the time I was at home, which wasn't very long. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays my mom works as a counselor at my school so she can drive me those days. Today was Wednesday, so my mom took me to school, and we sat silently the whole ride.

This is how my day started. In first hour I got a ton of homework because someone got caught for throwing a paper airplane. Second hour was a nightmare. I got the most homework in the class because I am such a slowpoke at typing, which made me really mad.

Everything went well until lunch when Brigitte walked up to me and said, "Don't act so innocent! Everybody knows that you kissed my boyfriend in the photography room two days ago."

I said, "I never kissed your boyfriend. We were developing pictures from the secret garden in our school's courtyard."

Brigitte responded, "Then prove it."

I walked over to where Dork was sitting and he said, "We never kissed. I swear we were really only developing pictures. Plus why do you care if we did kiss, Brigitte?"

Brigitte said, "Uh, maybe because you're my boyfriend and not Charlotta's."

Dork shouted out, "Everybody, Brigitte just started a rumor, and we never kissed!" So Brigitte and Dork strolled away looking allcool. I wanted to karate chop Brigitte's head. Everyone just stared in awe including the lunch ladies, which was so embarrassing.

In sixth hour, Brigitte and I sat next

to each other, and Dork sat on the other side of me. He whispered something in my ear that I couldn't make out, but I was too afraid to ask so I just sat quietly while Brigitte gave me the evil eye and Dork looked at me blushing. I was the center of attention, and I didn't like it. I raised my hand and asked if I could go to the bathroom, and my teacher said yes.

I went to the bathroom and splashed cold water on my face and then went into a stall to cry because I didn't know what else to do, and I needed my mom. I know it sounds babyish, but I just needed to see her and hear her voice.

I think I was in the bathroom for thirty minutes. When I got back to class, Ms. Pope, my teacher, took me out in the hallway and asked me what was wrong. I told her I needed to talk to my mom, and she let me go talk to my mom.

Once I got to my mom's office I explained the rest of the stuff that happened and she had a talk with Brigitte, Dork, and me. We talked and talked for three and a half hours, but nothing was sorted out, so that was the end of that.

Thursday, nothing happened. I got a lot of homework and didn't talk to Brigitte or Dork the whole day. Friday started out well because I did not get homework in first hour. I was so happy in second hour because Dork was not in class. I thought he was probably just late, but then at lunch he still wasn't there. I asked Brigitte if she would talk with me in the library and she agreed.

So we talked and I said, "Do you think that Dork isn't at school because of all this drama?"

"Yes," she said.

I said, "Do you think we should call him?"

"Yes," she said. So I called his house and it said that this number was disconnected. So she called him on his cell phone and some guy from Verizon wireless said that he just turned in his phone today. We could not get a hold of him so we had to give up.

Days and weeks passed with no sign of Dork. Brigitte and I finally decided to ride our bikes to his house, and a "For Sale" sign was up. He was moving! Brigitte and I were stunned and she said, "Do you think he moved because of all the drama going around about him?"

I said, "Yes, because if you think about it he could have told his parents and they could've said that they could move if he wanted to."

"And he probably said that he wanted to move," she said.

Months went by, and then one day Brigitte and I got a letter from Dork saying that he moved because his dad got a job transfer and he was too afraid to tell us. So it wasn't because of the drama! He also said that he loved Brigitte and was good friends with me and that he would like it if we became friends. We decided that we could be friends; not best friends, but not enemies.

I think that was a very important lesson. I also think that it will be one of the best things that happened to me in my life as a high school student.

# The Fight

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*Sometimes one small action can make a big difference. An example of this occurs in **THE FIGHT**, a story of two girls, one boy, and a strained friendship, by **Ciara Johnson**.*

I have a friend, and her name is Drew. My name is Ciara. Drew and I are best friends. We do lots of things together: We shop together, we go to the movies together, and we even go to the same school. We are great friends.

But one day while we were in school we were talking, and Drew brought up this boy that goes to our school. His name is Dan. She told me that she really liked him and that she thought he was very cute. I told her that I thought he was pretty cute, too, but didn't like him like that.

The next day, I was in class and Dan walked up to me with a smile. "Hey, Ciara," he said to me with a smile, but little did I know Drew was watching while Dan was making me laugh. When class was over I tried to catch up with Drew, but she didn't wait for me like she usually does. I didn't talk to her for the whole day. She was really mad. This was the biggest fight we had ever had.

The next day I told her I was so sorry, but she just looked at me and told me to shut up. I felt sad. She and I were best friends. She was like a sister to me.

When I was in math class I passed her a note that said, "Please forgive me." When class ended, she came up to me, ripped up the paper in my face, and walked on. I started crying, but I got up and said, *I will be strong and find myself a new BFF.*

We didn't talk for two weeks after the argument. Every day we would glance at each other in class or on the bus, and that Friday she stood up and saw that I was sitting right next to Dan. She thought that I was asking Dan if he would go out with me, so she sat back down with a sad face. I felt so sorry. I said to myself, *I hope we become friends again because she was cool.*

After one month had passed, I walked past her and said, "Like the shoes!"

She turned and said, "Thanks."

We set aside our problems and made a promise to each other that we would never let a boy come between us and ruin our friendship. As I was walking away, I turned to her and said, "Friends?"

She said, "No, friends forever." We have been friends ever since.



# The Great Depression

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**THE GREAT DEPRESSION**, by *Kristen Schmidt*, looks at the experiences of a girl and her family after the crash of the stock market. In the new reality of her daily existence, she begins to question people and circumstances that she once thought she understood.

“Wake up, Evelyn,” Mom said in her soft, warming voice. “It’s your birthday,” she continued harmoniously. “Hurry now; your father has to get to his job, and he’s been waiting for you! And, you have to get yourself to school.” Now Mother’s voice wasn’t so supple and sweet. I thought that it was funny how joyful my mother could be and then be irritated at me so fast. This made me giggle out loud.

My father had a job where he designed planes for the U.S. Air Force. He really liked his job because he enjoyed the work he was assigned, surprisingly. I never liked to do the work I was assigned when I was in school. That thought also made me laugh. He earned a lot of money from it, too. I felt like he was never home, though.

I finally lifted my head off my pillow, and lifted the sheets off my bed, and stood up as slowly as an old man gets off of a rocking chair. I got myself undressed out of my silk nightgown and into my navy and grey school uniform. It didn’t feel like my birthday at all. It felt like nothing but a regular morning.

I washed my pale and freckled face with cool water. I wobbled down the stairs tiredly and was wished a happy

birthday by my father. Mom wished me a happy birthday too, again. But, when she came, she came with a doll in her palms. She handed it to me as a birthday present. I usually didn’t like dolls, but that one was beautiful. She had brown hair and blue eyes, and looked nothing like me. She seemed shy, like me, though, and I loved her.

I skipped to school with a big smile on my face, almost as sweet as the one on the doll’s face.

When I got home that day, my parents let me have my neighbor, Anna Marie, over. She had been my best friend ever since I was a small girl. We played with my doll for hours.

The next day, when I awoke, I had the same routine, just without the birthday extras. I had some additional time, so I played with my doll again.

When I arrived at school, people were whispering to each other during science class. I asked the kid next to me what they were all talking about. He said, “The stock market crashed.”

I thought they were all lying even though the rumor went on for the whole day. I asked Anna Marie if it was true at lunch, but she said that they were lying, too.

I walked home wondering about the rumor at school. My mother welcomed

me back home with a hug and a cheerless, "How was your day?"

I told her about the rumor and how I thought it wasn't true. She replied, "I thought the same, Ev... until I read today's newspaper."

It read, "STOCK MARKET CRASHES."

"I read the article, sweetie. I just don't know about your father's job." Mother answered my exact thoughts.

A week later, my father was laid off. No more paychecks came in the mail. We had to use my mother and father's savings.

Another week passed by, and Father miraculously found a job as a handyman. He could support our family with this money that he was earning. Even so, I couldn't attend private school anymore because it cost too much money. I moved to a public junior high school, and the hours were much shorter. With the spare time, I had to help Mother around the house with chores, like sweeping, dusting, and washing. I soon realized how much was done for me. I never thought that it was that much work until then.

One day, after attending church, we took a long walk home, just to talk. When we got home, I noticed that all my jewelry was gone, and so was my doll! Mother frantically jogged into my room asking me if I knew where her jewelry was. Her face looked anxious for my answer. It was too bad that my answer was no. When I said, "No," I told her what I had also lost. She became suspicious like I was. We went to see Father, and he was walking around the room trying to find his

pocket watch. By then, we all knew that we had been robbed.

I was so sad that I began bawling. *Why would anyone take a doll? That is just pitiful.*

We walked to the police and told them about what happened. They said that they would immediately start investigating.

I decided that I would help find them also. I asked all the neighbors if they saw anyone mysterious that morning. Most of them said that they were also at church. When I asked Anna Marie and her family, they just looked down most of the time and wandered their eyes around. Anna Marie was playing with her church dress and curling her hair around her finger. Mr. Smith started to say, "When..." and Mrs. Smith gave him a look that said *Sbbbb...*

By the time I was done talking to them, I was convinced that they were the thieves. It was hard for me to believe this, though, because Anna Marie was my best friend.

I didn't play with Anna Marie that night after school.

I thought to myself, *How could they do this to me? What did we do to them?*

I purposely ignored Anna Marie for days and days until she didn't even try to talk to me. I thought that ignoring her would teach her a lesson, but it just didn't feel right. I felt dishonest myself.

I slowly made my way home. Mother was waiting for me on the front porch. She seemed unusually joyful. I speedily walked up the taupe painted porch steps to see why my mother was so happy. "Evelyn!" she exclaimed,

“The police have found all my jewelry and your doll and Father’s pocket watch, and isn’t it splendid! The police said that they have been looking for these thieves for a long while! They are putting them in jail right at this moment. Why aren’t you thrilled, Ev?” Mother finished.

*What? What is my Mother talking about? Are the Smiths in jail? I don’t understand.*

“It wasn’t the Smiths?” I said as I ran out the door to talk to the Smiths.

My mother followed me to their house, asking many questions that I could not listen or pay attention to right then. I really needed to talk to the Smiths. This conversation was even more awkward than the conversation I had with them last.

Mrs. Smith explained to us that they were robbed many years ago, and that their oldest son, Kenneth, was killed

when they were gone. I could see tears building up in her eyes. They said that the reason that they didn’t talk much was because they didn’t want to have to tell us. Now, Mr. and Mrs. Smith were both weeping. Anna Marie wasn’t old enough to ever know Kenneth, so she wasn’t crying very much.

“I apologize for being so rude to you for such a long time. Please don’t take this in the wrong way, but I thought that you were the thieves from the conversation that we had. I didn’t know why you weren’t fully answering my questions and concerns. But, now I completely understand why,” I replied to the tragic news.

Anna Marie and I went back to my house. I walked up the front porch step feeling a lot different than I had ten minutes before when I walked up that step. Maybe I was more like my mother than I thought I was.

# Locked In

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*When a sixth-grader gets locked in a custodial closet, he ends up trapped in his school after hours. What trouble will he get into? Find out in **LOCKED IN**, by **Loïc Rouaud**.*

I sat in fifth hour, waiting anxiously for those four rings over the loudspeaker. It was thirty minutes, twenty minutes, ten, and finally, the bell.

I ran out of the room as fast as I could, pushed open the double doors to the staircase, and then slid down the railing on my butt. I was excited because at the end of the day, I was going to take the bus to a friend's house for a sleepover.

The hall was nearly empty, and I saw a figure run into hiding behind a wall. I ran on, trying to get to class before mobs of middle-schoolers crowded the halls.

Suddenly a figure lunged at me, probably the same one I had seen hiding. He was tall and strong. He must have been an eighth-grader. He grabbed me by a leg and an arm and dragged me into an open custodial closet. "Let me go!" I screamed, "Let me go!"

"That's for stealing my iTouch."

"I didn't know it was yours when I found it in the locker rooms!" I staggered out, "I-I'm sorry!" He grasped my arm tighter and tighter. "Help!" I was screaming. "I'll give you five bucks!!"

He kicked me, hard. I fell onto the ground. I screamed. He shoved me. "Shut up, loser, 'cause I don't want your

money," he replied.

He closed the door and I heard a click. I blacked out.

I opened my eyes at about five o'clock in the afternoon. The door was locked. "Help!" I yelled. I heard nothing. *Dang*, I thought, *I could be stuck here for a while*.

After about an hour, I realized that I was in a custodial closet and that they kept all sorts of wacky gadgets and chemicals. I looked through the drawers and cabinets. The only things that I paid attention to were some firecrackers that were used to eliminate moles and other invasive species, a lighter, and some small, multi-purpose string.

I had seen multiple ways to open locked doors in action films, but I had never tried any, so I was kind of clueless about what my trick might do to the door. I cut open the firecrackers, and black powder spilled onto the floor. I scooped some into my hand and poured it into the keyhole and around the lock area. I then inserted the string into the keyhole as well, took the lighter, lit the string, and then ran to the end of the room and dropped onto my stomach for cover.

*POW!* I smelled smoke. I looked up at the door. The lock mechanism was black and charred. I messed with the

door for a minute, and it flew open.

I ran out of the closet and looked at the clock. It was six twenty. I went to the office, only to find it deserted. I looked outside and saw there was thick snow everywhere.

I picked up the phone. I tried entering the digits of my house phone, when I realized the winter storm had caused the phone lines to go in the area. I was trapped at school at night, but worse, I couldn't call the cops or anyone!

I tried the doors that led outside, but everything was locked. Even if they were open it would be too dark, cold, and far for me to walk. I started swearing over the loudspeaker. I suppose if any sane person had heard what I said, they would come running and expel me or something. But there was no one around to answer.

Now that I thought of it, would I go hungry? I mean, there was no food just sitting around. Wait... the cafeteria was my answer!

I ran through the double doors and into the kitchen. Then, I saw the refrigerator, unbolted the latch, and slipped inside. It was huge. Here was food to feed eight hundred hungry students. I faked a conversation with a fake lunch lady.

"Will that be credit or debit, Kid?"

"Neither!" I said as I shoved my face with free cookies and cream.

I found the burgers. I threw one in the microwave. It was delicious. At the concession booth I tried to limit myself to one ice cream. I didn't think the cafeteria staff would notice if I took another.

I wandered around, starting to get bored. I was walking down next to the band room, when I had an idea: I'll write a song!

I went into the band room and picked up a guitar. I didn't play guitar. I could lay down some basic chords, though. Then, I went to the drums, which I was pretty good at. When I came to the vocals I gave up. By now it was ten o'clock. I had another idea.

I ran into the gym closet. There, I found a pair of roller blades. You can probably guess what I did from there.

The classes went by in a bluish blur. If only they allowed skates to get from class to class.

It was eleven thirty. I was starting to get tired, so I went to my locker and got a jacket. I laid it on a bench so I could sleep if I got too tired.

I tried the phone again. There was nothing. Well, I guess it wasn't so bad here. I mean, I had food, shelter, and entertainment. What could be better?

\* \* \*

I woke up to the sounds of a screaming lady. I looked at her. It was six thirty A.M. The screaming lady was a teacher. "Who are you, and what are you doing here!"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

I trudged to the office. The secretary was sitting behind her desk. She looked surprised. I explained to her the big mix-up. She was skeptical at first, but after I explained my story in detail, she called my parents

I smiled.

## EPILOGUE

I got the day off. I relaxed at home. **The bully** got suspended for six weeks and had to pay for all the

damage. **My friend** was bummed I didn't make the party. **My parents** thought I was at my friend's house and were completely clueless about the situation.

# The Missing Pizza

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*Who doesn't like pizza? Who doesn't like a good laugh? Put them together, and you get **THE MISSING PIZZA**, by **Nathan Moore**.*

**M**y name is Nathan Moore, and I like pizza. My favorite kind of pizza is meat lover's pizza. It's the best! I would eat it all the time if my mom let me, but she won't. When I eat pizza, I don't like to share it, but I always want the last slice. If there is pizza left over, my mom will save it so we can have it the next day. That's where my story begins.

One time not too long ago, I had the last slice of pizza. It was Little Caesars pizza. I ate half the slice, but I had to use the bathroom, and I did. But the problem was that I left my chair open, so my dog, Hershey, jumped on my chair and then jumped on the table and ate all the cheese and pepperoni off

the pizza.

When I got out of the bathroom, my sister Ashley said, "Nathan! Hershey just was eating your pizza!"

I didn't believe her. I made her prove it to me. She put him near the chair to prove it to me. I saw him jump on the chair and the table and eat my pizza again.

I figured out that this was just a trick, so I chased Ashley around. My brother Nick called my mom and told her everything, and she told me to stop. And I did. I put Hershey in his cage until Mom came home to settle things out.

(P.S. I was eating a pizza while I typed this story.)

# My New Life

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*In the story MY NEW LIFE by Zena Kashat, a girl named Allie has to switch schools as a result of her parents' divorce. When Allie starts her new school, three girls start to bully Allie and her new friend. Will things ever get better?*

I was looking out the window to see when my mom would come to pick me up. I was waiting, and I was so depressed, because my dad and my mom were divorced. She wanted to have custody of me. I really didn't want to go live with my mom because I liked my dad way better. I would have to start a new life with my mom.

I saw the U-Haul men pull up in the driveway, so I yelled, "DAD! They're here!" and he came running toward me. We helped them carry stuff out of our house into the U-Haul truck.

I was getting really anxious, waiting and waiting for my mom. Before she came, I wanted to say goodbye to my dad. I walked up to him when he was coming into the house. I gave him a big bear hug and said, "Dad, I love you so much. Before I go, I want to tell you I am your daughter, and you should never forget me because I will never forget you. I will always love you, and I will always be thinking about you."

He replied, "You know that I would never forget about you, Allie. I love you, honey. I know that we are going to be apart soon, but you know you will always be in my heart."

We both sat down on the ground and sat there for a long time until my mom came. When she came I gave my

dad another big hug. He kissed me on the forehead. I walked slowly to my mom's car. She smiled when she saw me, so I smiled back (fakely).

The U-Haul men were going to follow us to our new house. I went in the backseat and cried for the whole car ride. I would never see my dad again. The ride was supposed to be around twenty to thirty minutes. It felt like it took forever.

When I got to my new house, I explored it. It was really big and beautiful. I picked a room that I thought was suitable for me. The U-Haul men put some furniture in my room and other rooms, too. I tried to make myself comfortable, but my mind just kept going to my dad. Having my parents divorced and my mom having custody of me is hard enough. But my going to a new school in the middle of the year is horrifying.

The first day of school came. It was really terrifying. I woke up and acted like I was sick. My mom said she wouldn't fall for that, so I had to go to school. I got dressed and got on the bus.

When I saw the bus driver, she introduced me to everyone on the bus. I saw a guy who looked like he wouldn't



talk to me, so I sat next to him. It turns out that guy said hi to me so I said hi back. We got to know each other, and we became friends. His name was Brett. I told him my name was Allie. We had things in common because his parents were divorced, too. He offered to walk me to my first class since I didn't know my way around the school yet.

It turns out that Brett was in my first-hour class, so we sat next to each other. I happened to glance over to a girl who was staring at me, evilly. I acted like I didn't notice, and I just looked down.

My first hour was science. My science teacher, Mr. Peterson, introduced me to the class. My face turned red because I wasn't good in front of a lot of people. I sat back down and did my work.

The hour went by very quickly. I learned all of the names of my classmates by heart because I have a good memory. I know the name of that girl that had been staring at me. Her name is Ellen.

After the bell had rung and when I was by my locker, Ellen came up to me and knocked my books down. She pushed me up against my locker and said, "Listen, no one besides ME rules this school, you got that? I own everything. You better not get in my way, or else you will be sorry." I was really scared, so I just nodded my head. She looked like the person people shouldn't mess with. If you did I didn't want to know what would happen.

I went to second hour and Ellen was in it. I thought sarcastically, *Oh*

*great! This is going to be fun!* I caught her staring at me again, so I just stared back at her this time. She looked away and I just kept staring—I was observing her.

She had long, black hair, green eyes, and a lot of eyeliner on, so she looked hideous. I looked away before she caught me staring at her again.

The day went by so fast. When it came to lunchtime, Ellen and her group sat at my table. I was also sitting next to Brett and his friends. I didn't mind sitting by his friends since Brett was my only friend. When Ellen sat next to me, she "accidentally" knocked my lunch over. I didn't want to start a fight, so I said it was ok. She didn't do anything else to me for the rest of the day even though we had a lot of other classes together.

The day just sped by, and I was already on the bus going home. Brett sat next to me, so we talked. He had said that Ellen was a really mean person and that I shouldn't get to know her. We talked about other things, too, like who to hang out with and whatnot. I had gotten his number so I could call him.

The next few months were sort of rough on me. I got to know my mom better, and I had gotten to like my new house. I had only made a couple of friends since I first started, but that was okay

Ellen had kept teasing me, though. She had made fun of me for a shirt I was wearing once, and people kept teasing me about it the rest of that day. Another time I forgot to wear my contacts, so I had to wear my glasses, and Ellen called me "Four-eyes" or

“Geek.” People started catching on, and they still call me those names today. Brett had also been made fun of since I hung out with him most of the time. People had called him “Freckle-face” or “Dork.”

One time when I was walking in the hallway, Ellen and her group, Sophia and Lucene, came up to Brett and me. Ellen pushed me on the ground and put her foot on my back. I couldn't get up because I was on the ground with her pushing me down. Brett was being punched and kicked, and he looked so helpless.

Ellen pushed me into an empty locker and locked me in it. I kept banging and banging on it so someone could get me out. Sooner or later Brett got me out. We both went to the office

so we could get an appointment with the counselor to sort things out.

Two weeks later, we all went to an appointment with the counselor. The meeting went well because she made Ellen and her group stop bullying us. Ellen, Lucene, and Sophia all got suspended for three weeks. Those three weeks were like paradise to Brett and me.

After those three weeks, they acted like Brett and I were just normal kids, and like nothing ever happened, as if there were never a war between us. Sometimes Ellen will make a rude remark to me, but it's better than having her harass me all the time. After a while, I finally just let it all be in my past. I finally started my new life how it should've started.

# The Old House

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*An old abandoned house sits in the city of Detroit. It is about to be destroyed by the mayor. Little does the mayor know that there is a mysterious story about the house. Will the mayor destroy the house? Read **THE OLD HOUSE**, by **Thomas James**.*

There once was an old house near the city of Detroit. People thought nobody lived there, and if somebody did live there, they never paid any taxes. Nobody took care of the house. The grass was overgrown. There were weeds all over the lawn, the gutters on the roof were blocked, and a rusty black gate in the front that was always closed.

It was believed that the house belonged to a famous baseball player named Jack Lennon who used to play on the Detroit Tigers team in the 1940's and 1950's. Jack abandoned his house and left all his belongings behind. Nobody knew where he went or what happened to him. Later, a poor lady secretly moved in. She had absolutely no money and she needed a house desperately. Soon after, the mayor of Detroit found out about the abandoned house. A local tax official told the mayor about the home. The mayor thought nobody resided in there and nobody there paid taxes, hence he wanted to demolish the house. He tried to call the house using his phone. He looked up the phone number, but he could not find one. He wanted to see if there was proof that someone lived in the home. The mayor was concerned about the house.

The city government suggested

destroying the home. The mayor sent police to investigate the house. The mayor also came along. When he and the police arrived at the house, he saw an old dirty sign that said "HOUSE FORECLOSED." The mayor said he wanted to go inside. The police tried to break open the door.

The door broke open and there was a loud thud as the door hit the ground. The mayor stepped into the house. He saw a bunch of old things like old furniture, old gigantic paintings, huge filthy carpets, and a dirty old chandelier that was caked in dust. Police went about investigating the house. They turned on the faucets, and they discovered they didn't work. They turned on lights and only a few of them worked. They found some valuable things like old artifacts, such as autographed baseball gloves and a lot of baseball memorabilia and Jack Lennon's baseball uniforms. They found a door that led to the garage, and when they entered, they found old, rusty parts and one old car in there. There was nothing useful in the garage. They went upstairs; the stairs were made of wood with an old carpet on top. When they went upstairs there were some bedrooms and bathrooms, but nobody was in them. But one person was in the master

bedroom. She was an old lady who was completely broke.

The old lady's name was Jill Rosa. She was 75 years old. Jill was wearing a fabric skirt, red sweater and she had grey hair, and she looked sad. Her husband had died of cancer, her kids were grown up and moved out somewhere, and she was now alone. Her old home was taken away along with her belongs. The woman begged, "Please don't demolish my house." The mayor and the police felt sorry for her and so they did not tear the house

down after all.

They cleaned and fixed up the house in order to preserve it. They turned it into a museum in honor of Jack Lennon. There were lots of people at the grand opening; there were even people from out of state. She earned lots of money and her museum became a grand success. The museum was quite busy on most days. Jill now had money to pay the taxes and bills. This was how an old house that was almost about to be destroyed survived and flourished in Detroit.

# The Surprise

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*Sydney and Cate got lucky when they won a raffle that their teacher entered them into. They have adventures galore, but will all that stop when they get framed for stealing? Find out in **THE SURPRISE**, by **S.R.L.***

**D**ear Diary,  
I am about to tell you about my most amazing weekend ever! Let's start from the beginning...

"I would do anything to get out of school," I was telling Caitlin.

*Beeeeep.* "Sydney L. and Caitlin C. please come to the front office." The school speaker announced.

"Caitlin and Sydney," Mrs. Babich said. "You're excused. Have fun, girls."

*I wonder what this is for,* I thought, and I bet Caitlin was thinking the exact same thing. *Are we in trouble, no what could we have possibly done? Are we just going home for no reason, no, wouldn't my Mom have told me?* All these thoughts were rushing through my head. When Cate and I finally reached the office we were astonished by who was standing right there! OMG! It was Zac Efron, Miley Cyrus, Justin Bieber, Taylor Lautner, and our parents? I was screaming in my head. I would have screamed out loud, but class was going on so I didn't want to disturb anyone. I ran into the office with Cate following after me.

"Hey, guys," said Miley Cyrus. "Let's go to the mall!"

Cate whispered to me, "Am I dreaming?"

"Not unless we're having the same dream," I answered, "but let's go!"

Our parents had to sign us out to

go with the celebrities and sign papers for us to be excused for the day.

We walked outside and right there was a huge white Hummer limo waiting for Caitlin and I to get inside with Zac Efron, Miley Cyrus, Justin Bieber, and Taylor Lautner! I was still trying to process this through my brain!

So there we were at the Somerset Mall with everyone staring at us. Caitlin and Taylor went off to get some ice cream at the food court and Zac and I went to get a slushie at Mrs. Fields Cookies. I think Miley and Justin went shopping or to Starbucks to get a drink since everyone else was. Then we all met up at China Town in the food court to have some dinner. Miley, Caitlin, and I shopped at some girl stores, while Zac, Justin and Taylor shopped as well but at the guy stores.

Then, all of a sudden, I got a call from American Express. I answered the phone and they said they thought that Caitlin and I took our parents' credit cards! We didn't know what they were talking about! Our parents came to the mall and we sorted this whole thing out. Turns out that a mean bully in our grade took our parents' credit cards while they were signing us out and they tried to frame us so we would have to leave and go home from the mall! We knew it was her because she was

following us the whole time. We just didn't see her, and also I know that she loves all the stars we did. The American Express people took her back to her house so we didn't have to worry about her anymore.

Miley, Caitlin and I met up with the boys at the limo. It was very late so we slept at the Marriot. Caitlin and I called our parents to make sure we were allowed. Caitlin's mom said that would be groovy and my mom said that would be fabul! So we were in for the night! Miley, Cate and I shared one room and Zac, Justin and Taylor shared a different room! Before we went to bed Caitlin and I looked at each other and said, "That was the best surprise ever!"

"Goodnight, guys," Miley whispered. And we were all fast asleep.

In the morning, I woke up to the sound of birds chirping right outside the window. Then I got a call from my mom, asking when I was going to be home and all that stuff. I told her that I would call her when everyone got up, and I did. First, Caitlin got up and then Miley, so I asked what the plans were going to be. She said that we could go into Birmingham and walk around and maybe see a movie. I called my mom back and Caitlin called her mom and we told them the plans. They said that would be fine! We had to be back by 4:00 P.M., though, because I had plans for dinner, and my mom wanted me to get freshened up and take a shower. Caitlin needed to be back by 4:00 P.M. because she and her family had to go to Grosse Pointe to visit her dad and her other family members that lived there. We called the boys' room and they were

up, so we headed off. Caitlin and I just wore the clothes we bought at the mall; they were so cute! We walked around for about an hour and then went to see the movie *The Blind Side*. It was really good and I cried.

After that we walked to Cold Stone Creamery and had the limo pick us up there. We drove back to the hotel room to get ready for lunch. Miley said we had to wear something nice, because we were going somewhere special, but she wouldn't tell us. "What time is it?" Cate asked me.

"It's only 12:30 P.M., though, so we had some time to eat lunch and then they would drop us off at our houses," I said.

I slowly got into the limo with all of the cool things inside of it like the pink lights, the mini hot tub and the whole floor made out of TVs with glass over them. Once I got in I noticed that it smelled like leather from the seats and then I grabbed an icy drink from the cooler and sipped it slowly. Soon enough we pulled up at a restaurant called Ocean Prime (it's kind of new). It opened about a year ago. I was so excited. I heard that the food there was great, and I love seafood! Zac and I shared a meal. Then we had to get dropped off at home, but we did stop at Dairy Queen for dessert; it was yummy! When I got home my mom asked me if I had a good time. I told her all the details. I was so happy! So anyway it was Saturday and I wanted to finish my homework and get ready for dinner.

On Sunday I couldn't sleep in because I had to go to Sunday school from 9:30 A.M. until 12:10 P.M. After

that I had my best friend Coco over. We played for a while and made a stop motion video on her laptop. We had lunch. After we were done eating she left, and I had to go read. I am reading a book called *Miles to Go*. I am only reading it because it is by Miley Cyrus and I just spent two days with her!

*Ding dong.*

“The doorbell,” I shouted “I’ll get it!”

There was a CD sitting at my door right on the welcome mat, but it didn’t say who it was from. I went to my room and played it on my laptop. It was Miley Cyrus’s new CD that hadn’t even been released yet. I was the luckiest person ever! I finished listening to all the songs and then at the end, it was Miley talking to me, personally! She said, “Hi, Sydney, I just wanted to let you know

that I had an amazing time with you and Caitlin!” OMG! I am so going to tell Cate at school tomorrow!

School the next day was a bore: first Spanish, then social studies, and then Engineering Tech. But then finally it was time for language arts, the best part of the day! Mrs. Babich asked Caitlin and I if we had fun. I was wondering how she knew about what we did. She explained that she entered Caitlin and me into a contest because she knew we love all of those people, and we won! Caitlin and I were so thankful to Mrs. Babich! Then in Mrs. Babich’s class, Caitlin told me some big news...

Well, that’s my diary entry for today! I hope you enjoyed all the adventures we experienced. I’ll tune you in next time for another amazing ride!

# Trouble

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*John is a boy who has to deal with a group of bullies. He is desperate for help and a way out of the situation. John will need guts and maybe a little luck to turn his situation around in **TROUBLE**, by **Emerson Vogel**.*

I lay there on the ground crying to myself. My shoulder felt as if it has just been shot, my legs were completely bruised, and my head felt like I just stepped off the Dragster roller coaster. “I’m going to tell the teacher on you!” I screamed at them. As soon as I got up to go tell a teacher, Don came up from behind me and shoved me head first in the mud. “Stop!” I yelled. “Stop doing this to me!”

“If you tell a teacher on us, we will literally turn you inside out,” Jack sneered. Then they took off, sprinting home. I got up and walked home.

I had been the target of their bullying for about one month now. It all started when I had stuck up for their last target, my best friend Jared. I had found them on the playground kicking his folder around and pinning him down on the ground. I yelled at them to stop and ran and got a teacher. My punishment turned out to be much worse than what they got, since now I was their constant target.

“John! What happened to you?” my mom asked.

“Well, these three kids,” then I stopped myself. I remembered the threat and thought quickly. “I mean, we were playing soccer and it got a little messy.” My mom seemed to accept that and was preoccupied with getting

dinner ready, so she sent me upstairs to take a shower.

The night flew by, and before I knew it I was back at school, and my teacher was taking attendance. “All right, students, I have to take the attendance sheet to the office. While I’m gone, take out a book and read.”

Right as the door shut, Don, Jack, and Todd got right up and surrounded my desk. “Listen,” I told them, “I don’t want to do this anymore. How about we make up and be friends?” I asked. Well, that was about the stupidest sentence I ever said. Right when I said that Todd took my math homework right out of the binder and ripped it to shreds.

Right as I was about to give them a piece of my mind the teacher walked in. “Class, I want each of you to come up to my desk and show me your math homework.” Great, I thought, just great. “John, where is your homework?”

“Todd ripped it up,” I stated.

“Todd, is this true?”

“Of course not; why would I ever do something like that!”

The teacher said, “Well, John, I’m afraid you get a zero on the homework.”

That was pretty much what happened every day for the next eight days, and let me tell you those eight



days were the worst days of my life. I would do my homework, bring it to school, get it ripped up, and get a zero. I was a math wizard, and was flunking in math.

Then my teacher announced, "We have our sixth-grade trip to the great outdoors coming up." (Every year, sixth-graders go to camp and do the usual camp stuff like make bonfires, roast marshmallows and camp outdoors and learn about the environment). *Yes*, I thought, *finally something good happened*. "Here are the groups; Bob, Jared, Philip, and Derek. Group two: Don, Todd, Jack, and John." *Perfect*, I thought, *just perfect*. She went on announcing the other groups, but I did not hear a thing after the announcement of my name with the three kids who lived for torturing me. I tried to convince my teacher to change my group, but she just said, "No, this looks like a great opportunity to get to know each other better."

Well, we were ready to go on the trip. The bus drive was about three hours, so I had plenty of time to think about what I was going to do about my group. I figured I could try again to convince my teacher to switch me out of my group, or I could take it like a man. I decided I would have to deal with them and hope for the best. The bus drive was actually pretty fun; we watched a movie, then played truth or dare, and I had time to chat with Jared.

Jared and I had been talking about the bully situation for weeks trying to figure a way out of it. He was pretty worried that this whole group situation

on the camping trip was going to go really bad for me. If he was worried for me, then I was terrified! If anyone could understand what I was going through, Jared could. "I really think you should try and switch out of the group," Jared said.

"That might stop them from harassing me this time," I answered, "but they will just catch up with me another time." We decided I would just have to try and live through it and hope for the best. Of course, Jared promised he would have my back if he were around when anything happened.

When we got there we were assigned beds. I was on the bottom bunk with my friend Jared on the top.

When I woke up we had to go straight to the breakfast room, and then go outside and line up in our groups. "Group Two's project is to go down to the river and collect as many specimens as you can find. Next you will record them and identify what they are," the teacher announced. "Here is your list. Well, what are we waiting for? Go find everything on your list!" She then continued on with each group's project. Don, Jack, and Todd sprinted to the river, while I took my time and walked.

When I got there I did not see them and started shouting, "Hey, guys? Come on! Where are you?" They came out of nowhere and started to charge right at me. I dove out of the way and landed head first into the grass, but I was all right. But they slid on the muddy slope and fell right into the river.

At first I thought it was pretty funny. Then I remembered that the

river had a really strong current and saw that it was pulling them away. They all started yelling, "John, help us!"

I did not know what to do and started to panic. I thought about jumping in, but the current would suck me in, too. I decided to go get some help.

I came back two minutes later with my teacher and one of the camp workers. We could see that they were being pulled further down the river by the current. My teacher and the worker ran to the side and pulled out a little paddleboat and started paddling out in the river. A few minutes later they came back with all three boys. By this time all the other students and adults had gathered by the river to see the rescue.

The three boys were wet, shaken up, but all ok. Everyone started clapping and cheering. My teacher said, "Thank goodness John acted quickly

and did the right thing by going to get help. A few minutes longer and I don't know if we would have been able to catch up to them. That's how fast this current moves."

After they had changed clothes and calmed down a little, I saw Don, Jack and Todd coming up to me. "Hey, John," Don said, "um, we just wanted to say thanks for saving our lives. Especially after how mean we have been to you. We promise we won't bother you anymore."

"Well, that would be really great," I answered. "I would love not to be in pain or fear anymore! But I think it would also be great if you don't bully ANYONE anymore. You never know who you might need to stick up for you or save your life. Next time, someone might not be as forgiving as I was!"

"Deal," they all answered at the same time.

# The Weirdest Thing Happened to Me

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*The story* **THE WEIRDEST THING HAPPENED TO ME** *by*  
**Sydney Louis-Ferdinand** *is about a girl who finds a penny. She thinks it*  
*will be luck for her, but as it turns out, it is anything but lucky!*

One day I was walking to the park when I saw a penny stuck in the concrete so I pulled as hard as I could. It finally came undone. I thought that it wouldn't come out because it was in the concrete. But it did. I was just about to go to the park, but I started to look at the penny when I noticed there wasn't a year or date on it. I didn't think anything of it, so I hopped on the swing and it broke. At first I thought that it was old, but that's the thing: It wasn't old! It was brand new; they put it in this morning.

I went home and as soon as I put my key in the door. It broke. Next, it started to rain. So I had to wait for my mom to get home. I had to sit outside until 8:00 P.M. and it was only 8:00 in the morning. What was I going to do? My dad was in Kentucky and my siblings were with him. So I huddled under the tiny awning. I hoped I could stay dry.

"Where's my mom?" I muttered just as she pulled up the driveway. She was home. It turned out I was the one who got grounded for a little bit more time than I expected. It was two days for sitting in the dark and not going to the neighbor's house on a school night,

two for not asking to go to the park in the first place, and five for breaking a key. So I ended having nine days for being grounded.

The next morning, I missed the bus. Wow! I sure was having really bad luck. I began walking to school when my shoe started to stick to the ground. I looked down and saw pink coming from beneath my shoe. I took my shoe off and looked under it. Oh my gosh! I saw the biggest piece of gum in the world. I mean how could a person even fit that in her mouth? I know how. They must be super human. So I walked to school shoeless because the gum wouldn't come unstuck from my shoe. I got yelled at for not having a shoe.

After school, I was walking home and a dog started to follow me so I walked faster, but then the dog started chasing me. Then it attacked me. I pushed the dog off and ran. I was sprinting home and the dog almost got me, but I jumped inside my house and slammed the door. I went to my room. At that moment, I realized that I couldn't do anything without messing up.

I can't even walk home without something going wrong. It was so

frustrating. I noticed the coin on my dresser and realized that I was waiting to have good luck, but it seemed only bad stuff was happening. Why was this happening to me? I mean, this started when I picked up the coin at the park. So I decided to return to the park to investigate.

I found that the people that put up the swing didn't tighten the bolt tightly enough. Then, before I washed my clothes I noticed there was a food stain from lunch on my pant leg. So that explained the dog attack. Bad stuff wasn't just happening to me because it was bad luck. It was just a bunch of coincidences that seemed like bad luck. So I called to complain to the maintenance people who put up the swing at the park.

"Hello, Park Services," said the operator.

"Hi," I said. "I would like to file a complaint."

"What is your complaint?"

"I was on a swing and it broke."

"Okay, I will send someone over to fix it. Thanks for letting us know."

"Thank you," I replied.

"You're welcome," she answered.

The next day at the bus stop I saw my friends waiting and talking quietly.

"Hey guys, how are you?" I asked.

"Good, how are you?" said Ashley.

"I have been having this bad luck lately—" I started.

"You have? That stinks!" interrupted Ashley. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Well, I know it isn't bad luck," I continued.

"Really? How do you know for sure?" Ashley questioned me.

"Well, first I saw a dog and it was very hungry. It started chasing me but it was because I had a food stain on my pants. That's when I realized it wasn't bad luck." I finished but turned my head because of a loud rumbling noise. The rickety school bus squealed down our street to pick us up.

"That is very strange," she hesitated. "Sydney, I have to tell you something." Just then the bus came to a screeching halt in front of us.

"Can it wait?" I didn't want the whole bus to hear about the embarrassing story about my "bad luck".

"No, it is about your bad luck"

"What is it?" I sighed impatiently.

"Someone is doing it."

"Can't you tell me about it later?" I said exasperated. Everyone was staring at us.

"Yes, I guess so," Ashley replied.

"Ok, great," I replied finding a seat and settling in for the ride to school.

The school day flew by and Ashley saved a seat for me on the bus ride home. I talked about the gossip of the day trying to prevent Ashley from bringing up the "bad luck" story again. As we stepped off the bus, though, I felt safe to bring it up again. "So who is doing this?" I asked her casually.

"Me and Danielle," she answered guiltily.

"Why?" I demanded.

"Well, I just loosened the swing's bolt, but Danielle spilled the gravy on you and dropped the gum you stepped

in. I told her to stop but she wouldn't," Ashley continued.

"I have to talk to her. She can't be so rude and not tell me."

"She said she was going to do something else, but I forgot what it was," Ashley said.

"Okay Ashley. Thank you for telling me the truth. I'll talk to Danielle."

I got home and trudged up the stairs to my bedroom. I quickly pulled out my cell phone to call Danielle. "Hi Danielle," I said.

"Hi Sydney," she said sweetly.

"Why did you make all of those

pranks on me?" I accused.

She hesitated at first. "Because I thought it would be funny," she replied laughing.

"Well, it wasn't," I answered annoyed.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to make you mad. I just thought it'd be funny. I guess it was a bad joke," Danielle really sounded like she felt bad.

"It's okay," I sighed. "No big deal." I hung up and just then noticed the penny on the dresser again. "I guess I know for sure now this penny isn't so bad after all."

# We're Moving

---

*In WE'RE MOVING by Caitlin C., a girl named Cate loves to play soccer. Cate cares about her friends and loves her life and doesn't think it could get any better—until one night she finds out some huge news*

**F**ive more minutes until soccer practice is over, I thought. We had a water break and a group discussion.

“Cate!” my mom shouted from the car.

I hurried over and hopped in the front seat of the car. My mom told me that she and my stepdad had some big news to tell us when we got home. I thought about what they were going to tell us when we got home. *Could it be we were getting a new dog? No, my sister is too young. Could it be that I was possibly getting a phone? Nope, their minds are set for twelve.* The whole car ride home, all these possibilities ran through my head.

We pulled into our driveway and walked into the house. Tim, my brother Liam, and my sister Caroline were sitting at the table. I pulled up a chair and took a seat and my Mom followed. Then as we were all sitting there, I gave my brother a look that said, “Do you know anything about this?”

Tim and Mom both said, “There is a possibility we will be moving in a couple of months to Florida for Tim’s business.”

My mouth dropped wide open as tears immediately began. I replied with one loud “NO!”

I quickly ran over to my room and jumped straight onto my bed with all of

my sweaty, soccer clothes on. I decided I should take a shower to think this through.

I got into my cozy pajamas and was brushing my wet hair. My mom came in and said that it would be okay and I shouldn’t worry about it too much. They next day at school I mentioned it to my friends and we were all extremely sad.

A month had passed with lots of homework, presentations, projects, and soccer. Then when I hopped off the bus one day, I saw something in front of our yard. There was a sign, but not just any sign. It was a “For Sale” sign! I rushed inside knowing this day would come, but inside I still wasn’t ready to move.

“It’s final, we will be moving in another month!” my mom told me.

“Oh.” That was the only word that came to my head.

I walked into my room and got started with my homework. My mom brought in some cookies for me to eat for a snack. She helped me with some of my homework for social studies and we talked after I was all done.

“You should probably get some packing done, a month will be here before you know it,” my mom told me.

“Can you help me, while Caroline’s taking her nap? I could use some help...a lot of help!” I asked my mom.

“Of course, just let me take some of these cookies for your brother, he’s probably starving,” my mom replied.

My mom came back and we started packing away my little items first until they were all squished together in a package. Every week we would start packing away some of the big furniture. It was still sad to see all of our bits and pieces carefully move away from our house. The house was sold and this was our last week of school.

My mom dropped me off at school because she still had to fill out all of the paper work. She handed something to me before I walked to class. It was a small package with blue wrapping paper and a bow. I tore it open and it was a cell phone!

“I know you were originally going to get one when you were twelve, but I figured you could use it now,” Mom said.

I gave her a hug and said a huge thank you and hurried off to my class. Everyone was giving me their phone numbers and the teacher gave me permission to take my phone out in class for 30 minutes and we had a break! The week passed by and as soon as I knew it, our whole house was packed up and we were on a plane to Florida. I sat next to my mom and we talked.

“What if I get bullied, Mom, or people make fun of me because I am new?” I asked.

“I am sure that will not happen but if it does there is no reason to,” mom replied.

I talked to her about how I was going to miss my friends and how this was really hard for me. *Why did we have to move?* I thought. *I guess I should be happy for Tim, but inside I wonder why they would do this to me.*

We landed as the pilot predicted at 2:24 P.M. and we walked off the plane to find our taxi to our new house. The moving van was at our house. They had left a day earlier because there would be no way my sister could drive for 19 hours. We had a pretty nice house, but it just wasn’t home. We unloaded our belongings and paid the movers. We went to the grocery store that evening to get some food for packing lunches at our new school. We unpacked more and more until we had everything in its place.

I started school today, so did my brother except we didn’t go to the same school. I packed lunches for me and my brother, and Liam got the backpacks ready to go even though my school started before his, we both woke up at the same time to get ready.

As I got on the bus I had a huge butterfly in my stomach. I met a girl named Lindsay; she had brown hair up to her shoulders, with a few freckles on her face. We both had the same hobbies, we loved soccer and the beach, and we even had the same teacher! I was glad I knew someone.

I walked into my class. My teacher’s name was Mrs. Summer. Mrs. Summer introduced me to the whole class and she gave us 20 minutes for me to meet some people. Lindsay introduced me to some of her friends named Anna, Megan, and Courtney. It turns out that

we all love soccer! My assigned seat was next to Lindsay and a boy named Charlie.

At lunch I sat at a table with Lindsay, Anna, Courtney, and Megan. Then it was time for recess. I followed my new friends out to the soccer field, but it made me sad because that was something I used to do with my friends in Michigan. I met another girl from a different class whose name was Aanika and we all paired up on teams for a quick game of soccer.

“Wow this is so much different from Michigan, we don’t play soccer in January in Michigan, and we have to play indoor soccer!” I said

“Oh, well here we play soccer around the whole year,” Anna said.

“Awesome!” I replied

I was on a team with Megan, Aanika, and Courtney. I played forward while Megan was goalie and defense and Aanika was midfield. We scored three times and the other team scored two times. Then the whistle blew to go inside.

“That was really fun!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, you are pretty good,” Megan said.

“Thanks! All of you guys are really good!”

“Thanks!” Lindsay, Aanika, and Anna all said.

We all walked in together getting ready for math. We learned about algebra and it turns out this is where I started but never finished in Michigan. Then Lindsay and I walked onto our bus which was bus number 28. She got off right before me.

“Bye, I will see you tomorrow!” I

said.

“Yes, I will be on the bus in the morning,” Lindsay said.

“Good! Me too! Bye,” I replied

“Bye,” Lindsay said as she walked off the bus.

I got off right after and I walked inside. *Wow, this is our new home I thought to myself.* I walked inside and I sat down at the kitchen table and said hello to my Mom.

“How was school Cate?” mom asked.

“Good, I met some new friends that all like soccer. I met Aanika, Lindsay, who is on the same bus as me, plus Anna, Megan, and Courtney,” I said.

“They sound nice,” mom said.

“They are very nice, I am going to use the computer to video chat,” I said.

I walked up to the computer and logged on my AIM on Ichat and my friends from Michigan were on! I quickly sent them an invitation to video chat. I was so happy to see them and I told them I missed them so much and they felt the same way! We talked about school, my new house, how everything was different and how I missed all my friends. We all had to go do our homework so we said our goodbyes.

Then mid winter break came and my mom had a surprise for me. She and Tim had bought plane tickets for us to go and visit. Soon as you know it we were on the plane to Michigan.

“Mom, thank you so much for taking us to Michigan! I am so excited to see my friends!” I exclaimed.

“You’re welcome, I knew you would be excited to see your friends,”



mom said.

When we landed in Michigan, we went to find our luggage and Tim rented a car. We parked at our hotel and unloaded. Then we hopped in the car and visited all of my friends, Tim pulled up into Sydney's driveway and I got out of the car with my mom. I stepped in the slushy, white beautiful, snow. The snow smelled fresh and the trees had a scent of pine to them. Even a little cold snow got in my boot as I walked up to the door.

I rang the doorbell and knocked on the door. Sydney answered the door. "Caitlin!" Sydney screamed.

"Sydney!" I yelled.

We ran to each other and hugged! I was so excited to see her and I think she felt the same way! My mom ended up letting us have a sleepover that night

at her house. We talked all night and I even saw some kids that used to go to my school.

"Sydney, I have missed you so much!" I said.

"I feel the same way. It feels like it has been years," Sydney replied.

"I know what you mean!" I said

Then my mom came the next day to pick me up. I realized something when I reached the hotel. At first when my Mom and Tim were making us move I couldn't possibly believe that my parents were doing this to me, but finally realized that it wasn't all about me, Tim's job got moved and my parents weren't trying to torture me at all. I made some new friends and I still kept the old and I would get used to the fact that I need to move on, but I won't move on from my friends.

# The Worst Day

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In **THE WORST DAY** by *Kristin Daley*, a girl named Kristin and her two best friends named Oso and Olivia were on a bus that crashed. She and her friends returned to school that Monday to learn that a bunch of rumors had started. Will the rumors ever end?

I will never forget the day my bus got into an accident. It was the worst day of my life. I thought I was going to die. It all started after I was driven to my bus stop. My mom was the one who took me there. My friends and I were in my car waiting for the bus to come because it was freezing outside! From that day on, my friends and I have said that we should never have gotten on that bus.

The whole bus was screaming and talking to their friends. The bus driver was yelling at the top of his lungs for us to stop yelling, but a lot of kids did not listen to him. He got angry at us. Some kids stopped because he said he was going to pull the bus over. That's when he was paying more attention to the kids in the back when suddenly the bus slid on ice. We almost fell off the edge of the road but a rail saved us. Everyone started to scream, some kids were crying. All that ran through our minds was *what just happened here?* We all were so scared that my friend called the school.

The receptionist answered, "This is Berkshire Middle School. May I ask who is calling?"

"This is a student on the bus route 25."

"What do you need?" the

receptionist asked.

"Our bus just slid on ice and some kids are hurt. The bus driver is too. A bunch of kids are screaming and are all so scared. What should we do?"

"Where are you guys?"

"We are on Evergreen between 13 Mile and 14 Mile Road."

"Ok, someone will be there soon. Put me on speaker phone so the kids can listen to me."

I shouted out, "Everyone on this bus needs to be quiet. There is someone on the phone to talk to us and if we are not quiet, you will not hear what she is saying."

My friend put the receptionist on speakerphone. She said that we need to stay calm and help was on the way. This kid in the back yelled out, "How are we supposed to stay calm when there are kids on the bus that are hurt badly?"

"Help will be there soon, I promise you," the secretary answered.

Another kid on our bus cried, "Do I have to go to school today? I do not feel well and my arm feels like it is off my shoulder."

"I will not answer that, but when help comes tell them you are hurt."

Mr. Tom, Mrs. Lea, and the police arrived. All the kids who were hurt called their parents and went home.

Some could not call parents because they were hurt badly so Mr. Tom did and they were put in an ambulance. All the rest went home, too, after calling their parents. None of us went to school until the following week, because all of us were still scared. A lot of us got together and hung out after it had happened on Friday and over the weekend. Most of the kids that got hurt did not go back to school the following week when we went back. Most of my friends and I were not hurt. All we had were sprained fingers and ankles from getting stepped on. None of us wanted to go back to school that Monday because everyone would be asking questions all day and we didn't want to relive that day.

Everyone was fine getting asked questions until one kid spread a rumor and gossip before we got to explain what happened the day. I said that whoever started that rumor is wrong. We are the only ones who know exactly what happened that day.

He said, "No, this kid has it taped even though they do not ride your bus. They are lying to you and you believed them and told the school things that are not true. Why should I listen to you? Maybe you fainted and do not remember what happened?"

"Never mind," I said and I just walked away. Then he had the same argument with my friend Oso. Oso got so angry that he stood up and told the kid to go away and walked away. The kid accused us of not telling the truth! He told the school that my friends and I faked the story so we did not have to go to school. The rumor got to Mr.

Tom, and he was not happy thinking that we did that. Mr. Tom didn't say anything for a couple days to see if anything else was going to be said before he said anything to us. There was a lot more. One is that everyone started to call the people on our bus "The Purposely Hurt Kids". That is what they called us for a while until a new name was made.

We did not like it, so we told them, "No! We are not!" and we walked away. We got tired of trying to set the story straight or when people asked us questions, so we just said nothing which seemed to make it worse. Mr. Tom came and talked to Oso, Olivia, and me.

He asked, "What are they saying? Does that hurt your feelings?"

Oso said, "I'm upset. I have been just holding it in. I could explode. I do not like what they are saying about us and everything that is going on. I feel like I am about to scream. I want to scream."

"How about you, Olivia?" Mr. Tom turned to Olivia.

"I dislike this very much. I dislike that we are getting a lot said about us that is not true. I feel like saying, 'What did I do?' to the other kids for saying this about me."

"How do you feel, Kristin?"

"I feel very angry that they are making up rumors that are not true. I do not like this. I have stressed out on this more than I have in a long time. I wish this would just end so I can live my life."

All of us at once said, "ME TOO!"

"Okay, everyone, calm down," Mr. Tom tried to comfort us.

“How can we calm down, Mr. Tom, when there is all this negative school stuff?” Oso said.

“Well, let’s get this all figured out tomorrow because the bell is going to ring in fifteen minutes. So go to your lockers and get your stuff and come back here tomorrow morning, please.”

“Okay, Mr. Tom,” we all said. All our lockers are near each other. So we talked on the way there. We all were unhappy. As we were walking to our bus three minutes early, we agreed that this was not fair. We got on the bus two minutes before everyone else. We all sat next to each other in one seat because there are always ten seats with three people in them. We all went to Oso’s house after school to talk about what was going on and to do homework together. Oso’s mom made some nachos for us to eat while we were worked on homework and talked.

The next day, we were called down to the office five minutes after the bell rang. Mr. Tom said that if anyone who says something to anyone that rides our bus will get in trouble or if we say anything we will get in trouble, too. We talked about how we felt some more and told Mr. Tom that most of the stuff they were saying was not true; like we were the ones who caused the accident.

“I know, who would say that?” Oso said.

“I know someone who would do it that really does not like us. I know someone else who would do it, someone who was not on our bus that day. There were six kids not on our bus the day it happened. They could have done it

because they were jealous because we did not have to go to school.

“Well, I will talk to the kids that were not on your bus that day. Who are they?”

“We do not know all of them, but my friend does who is not down here.” I replied. We talked for a long time before calling anyone down to see what they thought. The first kid we called down was someone who was not on our bus that day, Billy-Bob.

“Do you have any clue what happened the day the bus got in the accident? Did you hear any rumors going on?” Mr. Tom questioned him.

“Well, I heard about this one girl who is the one who started it. I heard this from my friends who were talking about what happened on Thursday, except this started on the Friday when they were not here.”

“Do you know who said that?”

“No, I don’t. Sorry Mr. Tom,” Billy Bob replied.

“No, don’t be sorry you didn’t do anything to be sorry for.” Mr. Tom patted him on the back. “Well, I guess you can go back to class. Who else should we call down to talk to see?”

“There’s a girl named Violet who was not on your bus that day, Billy Bob answered.

A few minutes later, Violet entered the room. “Violet do you know anything that happened the day of the accident or if any rumors were said?” Mr. Tom began.

“Yes, I do and I heard it directly from the kid who started it,” Violet answered.

“Who was it Violet?” Mr. Tom

looked at Violet with a stern expression.

“I was told not to tell anyone,” Violet whispered, dropping her head.

“Well Violet, I am the principal here, so you can tell me and I will never tell the student that you told me. This student told other members of your class too, correct?”

“Yes, she told other kids and other things too.” Violet hesitated for a moment. “The person was...Valentina. She said that Kristin and the others did it purposely. But there were more kids doing it too, besides Valentina. I just do not know who.” Violet sighed with relief.

“Is that all you know,” Oso asked?

“Yes,” Violet replied. “And I’m sorry.”

The principal told us to go sit in

the main part of the office while he talked to Valentina. They talked for about 15 minutes while we waited quietly in the main office. Mr. Tom came out and invited us back in the room together so we could talk and find a way to make this end. We were still angry and hurt but decided it would be ok because Valentina had apologized for blaming us and spreading the rumors. Valentina said she was sorry again and we told her that it was fine and that we were glad it was finally over.

So, it all went well, but we try not to talk much about it anymore. We will probably remember the day our bus got into an accident for a long time and even today, shivers still go up my spine when I do.



# A GOOD SCARE





# The Doll

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*The right toy can make a child very happy. The wrong toy can make a child very frightened. **THE DOLL**, by **Dylan Landgraf**, tells about one of these....*

Once there was a really creepy house with creepy kids and their parents. They had an old, worn-down house with a graveyard that people say is haunted. Everyone was afraid to go into their yard.

The daughter was lonely and tried to talk to people through the fence. They just ignored her because they were so afraid of the old house. So the daughter did not have any friends. She always stayed home and never went outside. She only played with her doll.

Sadly, the creepy girl died, and the doll was left all alone in the basement. The doll felt sad and angry at the same time. Eventually, the parents gave all of her toys away, including the doll to the doll store.

The doll was mad that her owner had died and left her alone. She vowed to kill any new owner who left her in the basement alone again.

One day at the store, the cashier left the doll in the storage room. The next day when she returned she saw the doll with what looked like tears going down her face. After this, the cashier noticed that the doll only did this when she left in her in the back storage room alone. So the cashier stopped putting her there at night.

There was a girl named Sally. She wanted the only doll left. When she brought it up to the cashier, the cashier

said, "Play with the doll every day, and don't leave it in the basement." But one day the mom brought home a puppy. Sally left the doll alone in the basement.

The doll got mad. The doll began talking in Sally's head. The doll quietly went after the parents, and then she came for Sally. The doll said in her mind in a devious voice, "Sally, I'm out of the basement. Sally, I'm coming up the stairs. Sally, I'm in the hallway. Sally, I'm in the kitchen. Sally, I have a knife.

"Sally, I'm in the hallway. Sally, I'm coming up the stairs. Sally, I'm in the hallway. Sally, I'm your parents' room.

"Sally, I'm on your dad's head. Sally, your daddy is dead. Sally, I'm on your mom's head." And the mom was such a heavy sleeper she didn't feel the doll or hear the doll. "Sally, your mom is dead.

"Sally, I'm in the hallway. Sally, I'm in your room. Sally, I am on your head! Sally, you're dead!"

There was a scream, and the neighbors called the cops. The cops only saw three dead bodies and a doll that had one finger up as if waving its hand. They put the doll back where it came from at the doll store.

Then there was a girl named Dolly who had an older brother named Dylan. She wanted the doll at the toy store that waved its hand with one finger. Her mom bought it. The cashier said, "Play with the doll every

day, and don't leave it in the basement.”

One day, it was her mom's birthday, and they were out the whole day at a park to celebrate her birthday. They left the doll in the basement. The doll became angrier and angrier.

They came home and went to sleep. Dolly woke up and heard the doll say, “Dolly, I am out of the

basement. Dolly, I am coming up the stairs.”

Dylan heard the doll coming up the stairs. Dylan saw the doll coming near his room. Then it was on his bed. Then Dylan threw the doll at the wall. He took a knife and stabbed the doll multiple times. He ripped her arms off and legs. He finally killed the doll.

# The Haunted

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*In THE HAUNTED, by Ashley Moore, two sisters go into a haunted house because of a dare. What starts perhaps in foolishness tests the girls' bravery in the end.*

Angel and Mandy are sisters who love adventures and having fun. Angel is 13 years old, and Mandy is eight. The girls' mom and dad pay Angel an allowance to baby-sit Mandy until they come home from work.

Most days they walk home from their school, which has third grade through eighth grade. Angel will fix a snack for the two of them. Then they will get their homework done. After the homework is completed, they are allowed to go out and play in their yard. Their favorite game is Truth or Dare. They would take a truth question or take a dare. Angel liked to take the dare, and Mandy liked truth.

One day, after they had finished their homework, Angel and Mandy went out to play. Their classmate and neighbor, Nathan, came over to play with them. He liked to play Truth or Dare, too. It was Nathan's turn to pick a person and say, "Truth or Dare." Nathan said to Angel, "Truth or Dare?"

Angel very excitedly said, "Dare!" Nathan then looked up in the air, thought for a minute, and then started to laugh. Angel and Mandy looked at Nathan and said at the same time, "What's so funny?"

Then they said, "Jinx, you owe me a

soda!"

Mandy won because she said it first. They all laughed. Then Angel asked, "What is my dare?"

Nathan slowly told Angel what her dare was. "I dare you to go to the spooky abandoned house down the street and stay in there for ten minutes."

"The haunted house?" Mandy asked.

"Yes," said Nathan, who thought that Angel would be too afraid to take the dare. He was afraid of the abandoned house, too. People in the neighborhood had said the house was haunted and full of cobwebs. The ghost of Mrs. Winfrey was still there. She died in the house a few years ago. Everyone said that she didn't want anyone else to live there.

Angel looked at Mandy, and then at Nathan, and then back at Mandy. She said, "I'll do it!" Mandy stood there with her mouth wide open. She couldn't believe her sister had taken the dare. If their parents found out, Angel would be in serious trouble.

Angel said, "Let's go." She told Mandy that since their parents were not home yet, she would have to go, too. Mandy was nervous but knew that she had to go with her sister.

Angel, Mandy, and Nathan walked

down the street and stopped in front of the old, spooky, abandoned house. Nathan said, "The back door is unlocked. You can get in from there."

Angel said, "How do you know that the door is unlocked?"

Nathan said, "Because I've been in there before."

All three of the children ran into the backyard and stopped at the back door. Angel looked at Nathan and said, "We will see you in ten minutes!"

Angel and Mandy walked inside the spooky house and closed the door. They walked into the kitchen and heard a creepy noise.

Mandy got scared and wanted to leave. She ran to the back door and tried to open it, but it was locked. Angel ran to her sister and tried to open the door, but it wouldn't budge. "We're trapped in this house with nowhere to go," she said to Mandy.

"Maybe if we go to the front of the house, we can find a way out." Angel wanted to win the dare, but did not want to frighten her sister. She told Mandy, "Stay with me, and I will protect you."

Mandy was nervous and scared about what would happen in the house. So she stayed close to Angel. They began to walk through the house, one room at a time. First, they went back to the kitchen where they heard the creepy noise. This time when they heard the creepy noise, Angel said, "It's just a squeaky floor."

That made Mandy feel a little better, but she still wanted to leave. "Angel, I want to go home," Mandy said with fear in her voice.

Angel said, "Just stay with me, and I will get us out of here."

They went to Mrs. Winfrey's bedroom. Mrs. Winfrey had died peacefully in her sleep. All of her furniture and clothing were still in the house the way she had left them. She had no family, and no one had come to take her belongings out of the house.

Angel and Mandy looked around the dusty room and saw that nobody was there. They heard another creepy noise.

This time it sounded like a woman's voice saying, "Get out!" This time Angel was afraid, but she didn't let Mandy know.

She began to talk to what she thought was the ghost of Mrs. Winfrey. "I love this room. The walls are painted with my favorite color, purple. I wish my mom would decorate my room like this."

Then the girls heard a voice whisper, "Thank you. You can come back any time."

Angel took Mandy by the hand, left the bedroom, and went to the back door. It had been ten minutes since they had gone into the house. Angel said, "Let's see if the door will open." Mandy turned the knob and this time, it opened! The girls went outside and found Nathan standing on the porch with his mouth wide open.

"What happened in the creepy house?" Nathan said. "I heard some creepy noises and I couldn't get in."

Angel said, "We made a new friend. If you want to know more, just go in the house when I dare you!"

“It won’t be today, because we need to get back before our parents get home,” Mandy said.

Nathan said to Angel, “You are the bravest girl that I have ever met.”  
Angel smiled all the way home.

# The Hayloft

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*Four girls in their barn go up in the hayloft and find something that could change their lives forever. To find out what happens, read **THE HAYLOFT**, by **Kelli Cassidy**.*

It was a cold, dark night. four best friends named Bella, Clare, Darby, and Katie had just finished riding their horses. "I want to play a game in the barn!" Clare yelled. "Can we please play hide-and-go-seek? That's my favorite game in the whole world."

"Okay," Bella replied, "I'll put you in teams. Darby and I will be together; then you and Katie. Bella and Darby, why don't you go start hiding? Okay Katie let's start counting: 1...2...3..."

"Bella, let's hide in the hayloft."

"We don't have much time to hide. They're already on 22."

"Okay, fine," Bella cheeped.

*Tap, tap, tap.* Up the stairs they went to the hayloft. When they got there the lights were going on and off. They got amazingly scared. They thought it was all in their heads that the lights were really going on and off. They ran right back down stairs yelling, "Katie, Clare, are you there?" Bella and Darby went into the office to ask the groomer. "Jen have you seen Clare and Katie?"

She said, "The last time I saw them was with you."

Their eyes widened. "Where are they?" asked Darby. "Clare, stop. We know it's you."

"I know where they are," called Bella. "They're in the tack room. Come on, Let's go!" There they go in the tack

room looking for Katie and Clare. "Hello, is anyone in here?"

"Of course not, It's 10:30 at night anyone is here. I got idea maybe they went into the club house, maybe they thought we were in there hiding. Let's go hurry up."

"Jen, do you know where they are?"

"Know where who are?" said Jen

"Bella and Darby," said Clare.

"Oh they just went into the club house to look for you."

"Okay thank you. Let's go find them in the club house. Bella, Darby there you are!

"Clare, you guys scared us to death I thought you were dead."

"Well now we know where everyone is I want to go back to the barn so where were you when we were counting?"

"We were in the hayloft then we got scared because the lights were going on and off."

"Really? Do you want to?" asked Jen. "About the hayloft?"

"Sure," they all said with fear.

"Jen, why are the lights in the hayloft going on and off?"

"Well, I shouldn't tell you guys you might get scared."

"No tell us please!"

"Okay," cried Jen nervously. "Okay, it was a long time along on a cold, dark

night all the people that worked here had left to go home. Four best friends went to go on a trail ride and one of the girls had a really bad horse named Tucker. He always bucked her off but she never got really hurt to the point where she needed to go to the hospital.

“This one night she was coming in from the trail ride and she wanted to ride in the barn so she was jumping over the jump and her horse bucked her off so bad this time she died they can’t find out way he bucked her off.”

“Oh my goodness that is so sad!” cried Darby.

Jen said, “She lived up in the hayloft. There was more to the story. Her dad was trying to get her horse Tucker to calm down but the horse Tucker just kicked him right in the head and he also died too. He is just too powerful.”

“That is so said!” cried Bella and Darby.

Jen miffed. “She didn’t know much but all she knows is what happened to them.”

Clare yelled, “Can I go up into the hayloft I have to meet this ghost?”

“Fine,” Jen said, “just turn the lights off when you get down here.”

“Ok,” they all said. “Hello is anyone up here?”

“Yes,” someone said with a really quiet voice.

“Who is that?” Katie said.

“It is Bridget.”

“Who is Bridget?”

“You know, Jen just told you. I’m the girl that got hurt and died.”

“It is you!” said Katie in an eager way.

“Yes, it is. I am not here to hurt anyone if you are trying to get rid of me.”

“No, we are not!” they all yelled. “All want to do is be friends with you.”

“Are you sure?” asked Bridget.

“Yes, it is me,” yelled the Ghost of the B.O.H barn.

“Okay,” replied Clare.

“OMG,” screamed Bella. “There is another one.”

“That isn’t another one. That is my dad. He also died too.”

“Oh, I am so sorry for that,” sobbed Bella.

“It is okay. My name is Rick. I am her father.”

“Nice to meet you! We are really happy to finally meet you guys. I was trying to figure out who you and I are just found out.”

“Ha, Ha, Ha,” they all laughed with happiness.

“What a relief we find you guys because if people saw you up here they would call Ghost Hunters!”

“I heard of them. No, this can’t be happening,” cried Bridget.

“Oh that is foolish,” miffed Rick.

“I’m sorry, but we might have to tell Ghost Hunters you are here because if people find that you live up here, they will not come back and we will lose our business,” yelled Jen the groomer.

“No, please don’t do that. I know you. You are too nice to do that to my family.”

“We all had a plan we could build a house for you guys next door at the empty lot.”

“That’s a great idea guys!” yelled Bridget.

A year went by quickly. Everyone was happy. The girls' ghost friends were happy and they couldn't have wished for anything better. No one had found out that there were ghost living in the back yard of the B.O.H. The business had been doing well and Jen the groomer is now the manager. All the girls are going to the Summer Olympics for horseback riding. They are sad because Katie is moving away

to Wellington, Florida so this is her last day here and she will say her goodbyes and move on in her life. They all know it will be okay, so they said good bye. On her flight she went, waving their hands goodbye with tears running down their faces. They know that they will be okay and she will be okay. They will all see each other at the Olympics in the summer time and they all can't wait.



# The House on Willow Creek

*In THE HOUSE ON WILLOW CREEK by Artemis Thomopoulos, an innocent girl goes to ride her bike down the street when she sees a mysterious house that she had never seen before. When she stops to greet the new neighbors, she gets trapped in the house. Will Jamie ever escape the dreaded house alive?*

Once upon a time, there was a house that was on Willow Creek, but that house was no ordinary house, and that street was no ordinary street.

Jamie was a fun, happy, and energetic girl until something scared her to death. She lived with her mom and dad. One day Jamie went bike riding down the street until she came to a road. Jamie looked at the eerie, warning sign that said “Willow Creek St.”

She then started biking down that street until she came to a house. The house was light brown, black and grey, and it looked weathered, like it had been there forever. It almost looked like those creepy haunted houses you’d see in movies. Jamie got scared so she biked back to her house as fast as she could.

The next day Jamie’s mom decided to greet the new neighbors, so she asked Jamie to go and greet them. Perhaps no one has greeted them since they’ve moved in. Jamie grabbed a warm, cherry pie her mom baked and started to bike down the street with the pie in her hand.

Finally, she got to the house. She saw that the number of the house was “2100”. She rang the doorbell and waited. She rang it once again not

trying to be impolite. Still no answer. Suddenly the door started to creak open slowly. She peeked in the strange house and started to walk inside. She shouted “Hello? Hello?” but there was no answer. Suddenly, the door slammed shut and everything went pitch black. “Help!” she screamed. Suddenly, freezing hands covered her mouth.

She tried to scream, but it came out muffled. “Shh!” a voice whispered sounding somewhat like a boy’s. He let go and flicked the lights on. Jamie jumped in shock and the pie flew right in her face leaving it all cherry red. The boy had scratches all over his face and his clothes were all ragged and torn.

She tried to wipe most of it off as the boy said, “Who are you?” he asked, puzzled.

“I should be asking you that!” she remarked.

“My name is Cam, and yours?” he asked.

“Jamie,” she replied. “How long have you been here?”

“Four hours, you?” Cam said.

“I don’t really know maybe an hour.” Jamie replied, shocked. She ran to the door and pulled on it as hard as she could but it wouldn’t even budge. They both turned around slowly when

she heard a strange meowing sound.

On the stairs was a black cat and its eyes were red and yellow. Jamie screamed at the top of her lungs. "Calm down!" Cam shouted. The cat stood on the stairs meowing. Jamie ran into a room that looked somewhat like a kitchen as Cam followed. The cat followed her into the room, as still as can be. She turned around to see the cat purring by another door. Jamie ran over to it and tugged once more. It opened, but to her surprise it was another room. It was a room full of doors! Jamie looked behind her to see that Cam was following behind.

*You're kidding me*, she thought to herself. *Why is this happening to me?* She couldn't take this any longer. Jamie ran to a door and flung it open. She walked into it and everything was white. It was just a blank, white room. She quickly ran out of the room and tried a couple other doors. One of them was blue, one orange, and the other red. Jamie was getting very tired of this ongoing terror. Jamie ran to many doors, but all of them were different colors. So busy and focused, Jamie never noticed that Cam was missing. Then she came upon another door. She swung open the door with all of her might and saw another blank white room, but this time it had another door. Jamie slowly opened the door and walked inside. The door closed on her and everything went black. "Where is Cam?" she told herself. "If I wouldn't have gone bike riding that day!" she accused herself. Jamie pounded on the door and screamed for help but nobody came.

She sat against the wall in the pitch

black room with nothing to do. Suddenly, the door slowly creaked open, and to her surprise she saw that it led outside! She ran as fast as she could out of the dark room.

She had escaped the house! She turned around and saw that she was right outside of the front of the house she was trapped in. Jamie stood there, but the only thing bothering her most was why the house had trapped her in the first place.

The door of the haunted house creaked open once more, and somebody familiar stepped out. It was the same black cat! The cat just stood there, silent. Jamie was unable to move, wondering what the cat was doing. The cat turned his head to the side and meowed. Suddenly, the whole house started to shake. For a moment it almost looked as though the cat was smiling, but creepily. It looked as though Cam was watching her through the window. The house stopped shaking and into thin air, it disappeared.

Jamie stood there with her legs shaking, almost about to fall. Unable to move, she stood still. Jamie finally ran to her bike and rode home as fast as she could. Nobody ever quite knew what happened on that day. Since that day, Jamie has never seen or heard of the house she encountered.

### One Year Later

Since that day, Jamie wondered if she should ever go near the place where the house had once been. One day, she decided to ride past where the house was. *It wasn't like anything bad would*

*happen!* she thought to herself over and over. Jamie was dead wrong. When she rode past it she saw that there was another house where the haunted house had once been. The number of the house was 2100 - the same number of the house that once trapped her. The

house looked a lot like the one she had encountered just a little less worn and old. The door creaked open very slowly and the same black cat walked ever so slowly out of it, "Meow". *The house had returned.* "Oh no!" she cried. A whole new adventure had just begun.

# Merry Christmas

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*This story contains both a holiday and a spirit, but don't let the ironic title fool you: **MERRY CHRISTMAS**, by **Jaret J. Allred**, is a creepy story that has nothing to do with the traditional holiday spirit of the Christmas season.*

Christmas break is always supposed to be fun. You get to relax, hang out with your family, and have a good time. But when my family and I got to California to visit our family friends, the Jenkinses, completely the opposite happened—unless you think it's relaxing to go to a house filled with ghosts.

"No way," I said loudly to James. He had just told me, the biggest ghost skeptic in the world, that he knew about a haunted house.

"I swear, it's true!" he replied, looking sincere. "There really is a haunted house filled with ghosts down the street. My friend Robert went in and said that he saw this old guy wearing a suit and hat and playing the piano. Come on, Michael, you have to believe me." We were sitting at the table, playing a long game of War. I had most of the cards, but James had an ace and was winning them all back.

"The only way you can get me to believe you is if you show me an actual ghost in that house," I said sternly.

"Man, I got to tell you, if you're implying you want to go into that house, I'm out." Obviously James was afraid of that house. His friends had scared him really well. "And besides, Christmas was just this morning. Do you really want to throw away all those

good feelings you have?" he asked.

"James. I'm leaving in two days. You want to waste that time playing card games? Now that sounds just awesome, but I really would rather do something that might give me an adrenaline rush." Ha-ha! I had just found a great point. I could probably work up from here. I kept pushing. "We don't have to go tonight if you don't want to. How about we go tomorrow night? We'll say we're going to watch a movie or something and go check that place out." After a couple of more minutes of persuading, James reluctantly agreed. I pulled out an ace, had a couple battles, and took all his cards. "I win."

I wasn't just talking about the game.

"Hurry up!" I yelled. James and I were walking carefully on the broken-up brick sidewalk that led to the house.

"I'm going as fast as I can. I'm not in the mood to get scared out of my mind," James angrily whispered.

"Calm down," I said. "We'll be fine." We quietly walked up the stairs that led to the front door. With our flashlights in hand, James and I entered the eerie and very creaky home.

I looked around. I could see rotting wood sticking out of walls, as if trying to grab one of us. Pictures had fallen to

the ground, leaving shattered glass. A large, tattered rug with an intricate design was laid out at the front entrance. I noticed a staircase leading up to the second floor of the house. "Follow me closely. Even though I'm sure nothing is here, I'm not about to take any chances." James nodded.

Trying not to think about anything terrifying that might happen, I crept into the kitchen with James right on my tail. It looked pretty much like any ordinary kitchen if you didn't count the fact that it had a broken doll just sitting on the table. I looked closely at the creepy little toy. I saw a string with a ring attached. Carefully, I pulled it. "Play with me!" it said loudly in the quiet room.

"That was really creepy." I looked at James. He was staring at something with a terrified look in his eyes. I looked where he was staring and saw a black and white picture on the wall of an old man with a bowler hat! A jolt of fear struck me like getting punched in the stomach. This was exactly the same man both James and Robert had described earlier.

That's when we heard it. Coming from the living room, "The Entertainer" had suddenly started playing on the piano.

As soon as the tune began to play, James bolted to the front door. "It's locked!" he screamed to me, shaking the doorknob furiously. Then he turned and scurried up the stairs.

I assumed that he was trying to get out by the window. He could go home if he wanted. But I nervously stood my ground. This was obviously some kind

of trick that James had designed to scare the heck out of me. Why else would he have run away so quickly?

I tiptoed into the room. And there, at the piano, was the man in the picture. The sheer shock of a ghost ACTUALLY being in the house really rocked me. I became paralyzed with fear. He turned his head slowly, grinning maniacally. It seemed like forever that I stood there, staring into his jet black eyes. Then a scream exploded from upstairs.

I suddenly was kicked back into action, realizing that my friend was upstairs trying to leave this cursed house. I had seen a ghost. Now my goal was to leave alive.

Hoping I wasn't being followed, I sprinted up the stairs. I walked into the bathroom, crying now. James stood staring into the mirror. Where his reflection was supposed to be was the face of a young woman. Her pasty skin was pale. Her eyes were bloodshot and filled with hatred. Cuts and a bullet wound were on her sinister face.

I grabbed James and hauled him out of the bathroom. "I told you this was a terrible idea!" James cried. And then we heard laughing. All sorts of laughing seemed to be coming out of the walls. But all of the laughs were evil, mocking laughs.

We both sprinted to the door. But when James tried to get out, I saw him abruptly stop. Then a dark shadow started to drag him into the kitchen. "HELP ME MICHAEL! PLEASE HELP ME! DON'T LET ME DIE HERE!" he screamed, as he started disappearing out of sight. I started to

see bloody hands grabbing at me.

Thoughts were rushing through me. I needed to go rescue my doomed friend. If I went to save James, chances were we were both dead. Time was running out. My legs were starting to get tripped up.

I realized that two lives being lost were worse than one. With an intense feeling of selfishness, I kicked the door with all I had in me. It swung open and I ran out. Engraved on the sidewalk it said: YOU'LL NEVER FIND HIM.

And that's when I realized it. I had killed my best friend. He was the one who told me it was a bad idea to go to the house. He had said that we could be hurt. He had warned me. And now, James had paid the price for my extreme stupidity.

For months the search for James

Jenkins went on. I would break down when I listened every day to the search parties and detectives go on about no clues or no trace of my friend. I knew that trying to convince government officials that ghosts were the reason James was missing was pointless. Who would believe that he had been murdered by ghosts? And I had enough guilt anyway. More would drive me insane.

Never again have I done a dare that could involve ghosts. I have been scarred for life. And every Christmas for me isn't filled with joy. I spend my break with the worst feeling of guilt and sadness, like carrying a boulder on my back. Would I ever have a merry Christmas again? No. Every Christmas would be one where I would think about the day James Jenkins was killed by ghosts.

# The Notes

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*It was on December 15 that Nick's life became a waking nightmare. With his parents and his best friend kidnapped, what will Nick Madbon do in **THE NOTES**, by **HadrienOvize**?*

I found a box on the road while I was playing in the snow on December 15, 2001. The box was made out of cardboard; a purple ribbon was the only decoration on it. The mysterious object weighted barely anything. Was it empty?

As I was flipping it around, hoping to find something special, I discovered a little caption under a cardboard flap:

*If you have found this box, then you should not open it before the same date as today, next year. Do not try to open it, or else you, your family, and your friends will be in danger.*

My hands automatically dropped the box, and I screeched for my sister, for she was the only guardian around.

Six minutes went by before she came outside. Briefly I explained the situation and presented the box to her. “We should bring it in and...never mind. Let’s open it carefully.”

We slowly popped open the box and stared inside. There was only a letter with this inscription on it:

*You silly boy, I thought, I’d*

*frightened you. You’ve proved me wrong. Anyway, beware of the cars. I might be in one, or one of my agents. Do not even bother calling the police. We will know; you are being followed at this instant.*

An awkward silence had settled between my sister and me. She lowered the card and asked me to go back in my room. I could tell that she was very frightened. “No, not my room; I’m going to see Andrew across the street—to talk about our grades,” I added, trying to make it sound realistic. She bought it easily, though. For some reason, I felt safer with Andrew. I spent the rest of the night with him.

The next day was my 12th birthday, and I decided to walk to school with Andrew. Once at school he told me he had dropped a glove near the road and he had to go get it. I told him I would meet him inside.

In my class, my teacher started attendance. As the name of Andrew was said, no one replied. At that second, my anxiety reappeared, stronger than ever. My throat tightened and a need to quench my thirst arose.

After exiting the room I dashed outside and saw exactly what I thought I would: a note on the side of the road. This one said,

*Round one goes to me. I suggest you don't call the police or tell anyone about me because if so, bye-bye parents, and round two goes to me.*

As I got back to class, I grabbed my diary and wrote about my situation. Sadly I hadn't noticed that Tom Berspo, the class geek, was creeping on my diary.

At 4:30 P.M., I got back home and looked everywhere for my parents, but no one was to be seen. I then found a note saying,

*My agent told me you looked scared when you were writing. Now it is over. You are next in line. The only way to save yourself and the rest of the people after and before you is to come to the theater and go watch the I'm Watching You movie at six today. I'll be waiting for you there with Andrew and your parents. As for your sister, your parents told me to tell you she's gone to Julia's house.*

I waited patiently till six. I wanted to find out who he or she was, but the person would probably have a mask on or something like that. As I waited, the clock's *tick tock* got on my nerves, but I stayed and waited patiently.

Finally the time came to leave. As I headed to the movies, I got a sudden thought: Today is my birthday, or, more likely, the worst birthday of my life.

When I entered the room, I got really scared. What if this is a trap and I was just running into it?

As I walked slowly toward the screen I heard a dark, hollow voice saying, "Don't be scared." After that the lights went off. I heard footsteps coming down the aisle, and then I felt someone but a bag on my head. I was so scared that I fainted.

When I woke up I could smell fish, so I could tell we were at a port. The only port around my city was not far from my house and my school. I tried to get up, but I could not because I had handcuffs around my hands and feet. I heard gunfire. I ducked, and then the door in front of me collapsed, and I saw my teacher, Mrs. Berspo!

She told me that my sister had gone back home and did not notice anyone home, so she had immediately called the police department. "They looked everywhere for you, your parents, and Andrew. Your sister was with them, and they found part of your shirt ripped off on the door and started looking around. That's when they found me hiding in the dark."

I was in such shock that I didn't even see her put more handcuffs on



me. She dragged me into another room, where I saw my parents and Andrew tied up with rope. In their mouths was some kind of paper that made talking difficult for them. I saw their scared look as if they knew what my teacher was going to do.

As I examined the room I saw that my parents and Andrew were sitting on a trapdoor, and there was one more, probably for me. I also saw a lever near the back of the room.

I was right. She dragged me to the trapdoor and tied me the same way as the others. I was so scared that I couldn't think anymore. As if it were a

miracle, I heard police sirens, but it was too late. Mrs. Berspo pulled the lever, and we all fell in the water. We were finished, for we couldn't move at all.

The police acted fast and saved us from drowning, and then tried to catch my kidnapper.

*Seven years later on the news*

“We have found the kidnapper that has kidnapped many kids on their birthdays and sent some threatening notes all along to the police as well as the birthday kids.”

# Robotic Vampires

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*Sean King has this to say about the story that follows: "Warning: **ROBOTIC VAMPIRES** is a true story. Beware, and do not let this happen to you." You decide.*

On Halloween Night kids go out to trick-or-treat and dress up in costumes having fun. But for me it was the worst holiday a six-year-old boy could have.

I was getting ready for Halloween, so I dressed up as a red Power Ranger with my trick-or-treat bag (a pillow sack). My dad walked me out of the house to get started on trick-or-treating. I was so excited for trick-or-treating I wanted to yell!

After a few hours my father and I decided to head home. As we were walking home my father and I heard a strange noise that sounded like a racecar coming down the street. We turned and saw the car coming toward us!

My dad didn't waste a second in trying to save both of us. He pushed me away so I could avoid the impact of the car.

When the car hit my father, blood spurted everywhere, and the sound of the car hitting him sounded like a twig snapping. As the car drove off all I could see was a pool of blood around my father and his dead face.

I ran home to tell my mother what had happened, and when I got there the first question she asked me was "Where is your father?" I broke into tears when she mentioned my father. Then she asked me, "What's wrong?" but I didn't

want to tell her. Eventually, I told her what had happened. My mom broke into tears.

As months passed I tried to forget about the death of my father, but it would never go away. I tried to think of happy moments with my father, which made me feel a little better. I relived that fateful day of the accident quite often.

Once I turned 13 years old, I decided to enjoy Halloween again. I asked my mom, "Can I go out for Halloween this year?"

"As long as you are back by 9:00 P.M.," she stated. I left at 8:00 P.M. and headed out the doors to see the costumes of little kids. When I saw kids having fun I had to smile. Then I saw a kid that reminded me of myself. The kid was around seven years of age and was dressed as a red Power Ranger with his father. The reminder gave me a sad chill down my back, so I decided that I should probably go home since it was getting late.

As I was walking home, I felt as if there were someone following me. I turned around to see if there was anyone behind me and saw a bat flying in the air. Then the bat disappeared in a blink of an eye! I was starting to get a little creeped out but kept on my

journey home.

When I was about to open the door of my house, something came from behind and bit me in the neck! I screamed so loud that the whole neighborhood should have heard me! The bite felt like venom draining into my body, and the worst part was that I could feel my body changing into something that was not normal, something supernatural. I hoped that my mom had heard me and called 911!

I blacked out from the venom in the bite and woke up a few hours later on a table. I tried to get up but realized that I was strapped to the table. I felt a strong thirst for blood, which I thought was really strange. I was in what looked like a pitch-black basement. As I yelled for help, a dark figure came from the shadows, which made me scream like a girl!

I asked, "Who are you?" Once the figure appeared, I knew exactly who this person was. He was pale with long black hair. He was very tall and had long sharp teeth. It was the one and only DRACULA!

I asked, "What do you want with me?" but all he did was give me a strange stare. The next thing I know, I was passed out. When I awoke again, I noticed that my arms and legs were different. I wanted to cry because my legs and arms were fake. They were robotic.

I couldn't wait to see Dracula again so that I could make him pay for what he had done to me. My anger was so intense that I was able to break the restraints on the table. I charged at Dracula and we began to fight. Dracula

was a lot stronger and his speed and strength were incredible. I saw a hammer on the floor that Dracula must have not noticed. I leaped over Dracula and grabbed the sharp piece of wood. I was not sure if it was sharp enough to kill Dracula, but I had to try. He was overpowering me with his strength.

I fell down onto the floor so Dracula would think that he had defeated me. "You are no match for the mighty Dracula," he stated. While Dracula had his back turned, I stood up and jabbed him straight into his heart. He was so shocked that he couldn't say a word. He fell to his knees and eventually died.

I could not believe that I had murdered Dracula. I saw him dead on the ground and felt that I was in some sort of nightmare. I didn't think that Dracula even existed until now. I wanted to go back to my mother, but I couldn't go back looking the way that I did with robotic arms and legs.

I decided that it was best if I ran away until I could figure out how to become a normal person again. I walked in the night so no one could see me. I decided I to live in the cemetery since no one would bother to look for me there.

A few days passed and I was still thirsty for blood. I didn't want to drink human blood, so I drank from birds and forest animals in the cemetery. I felt like I was becoming a vampire. I was so distraught about how I would survive.

Just as I was getting ready to kill another bird for blood, I noticed a shadow lurking around me. I felt a

strange chill down my spine again, but this time I felt more calm. I looked up and out of nowhere, my dad appeared. He was wearing the same clothes that he had on that dreadful Halloween.

He said, "I have come, my son, to help you."

I was so relieved to see him but didn't understand where he had come from. "Thank you, Dad. I am so glad that you are here. I have missed you so much," I said.

My dad stated, "I have missed you, too, my son. We have a lot of catching up to do, but for now let's focus on getting you back home."

My dad helped me find shelter out of the cold night air. I felt so at peace with my dad by my side. I had forgotten what having my dad in my life felt like.

The next day, my dad and I had a long talk. "Son, it's important that you go home and explain things to your mom." He continued, "She is worried sick over you and is all alone without

you." I agreed with my dad, and he and I headed toward home.

"Thanks for helping me, Dad. I have missed you for so long," I said. When I didn't hear a response, I looked around and realized that my dad had disappeared. "Dad? Dad? Where are you?" I continued, "Please don't leave me again!" I was so sad. Just as I thought that he had returned to my life, he was gone again.

I walked the rest of the way home. My mom was overjoyed to see me. "Oh, my son! I have been looking everywhere for you!" she cried. "I called the police and looked through the entire neighborhood for you," my mom said. "What happened?" she asked.

I was going to explain everything to her about the bite that turned me into a vampire and the murder of Dracula. I began to try to explain, when I noticed that my arms and legs were no longer robotic. I was back to my normal human self.

Was it all a dream?

# Secrets

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*Attack of the evil...dolls? A girl's sister buys a doll that seems to have a mind of its own. Can it really be evil? Read **SECRETS**, by **Madi West**, to find out.*

“I’m gonna get you. You know my secret,” whispered a creepy, faraway voice. I woke up.

The only sound was the quiet ticking of my clock. As I reassured myself that I was only imagining the voice, I drifted back to sleep. “I’M GONNA GET YOU. YOU KNOW MY SECRET!” screamed the now close voice.

*Wait, wait, wait. That is not the beginning. The beginning went more like this:*

My little sister screeched, “Mom that’s the doll I need!” I groaned because I’m twelve and NOT into dolls. It was a sweet, little, baby-faced curly blond-haired doll with pale skin and rosy cheeks. Her eyes were bright blue. The eyes seemed to watch me, making the doll seem lifelike. The reason my sister loved her so much was that the doll looked *exactly* like her. My mom bought it for her.

That night I discovered the secret. The secret was that the doll could move, talk, walk, and do anything a human can do. That was the night was when I heard that voice. Now back to where I was...

I woke with a start at the screaming voice. I felt so dizzy. I looked up to see the most terrifying sight of my life. It was the doll. She was sitting on my pink and blue polka-dotted comforter grinning at me. Everything was getting

fuzzy, but it cleared up almost immediately because that’s not the worst part. In her upraised hand was clenched a silver knife!

Quickly I rolled over, toppling the doll to the ground. Everything felt like it was in slow motion. Alyssa, as my sister had named her, stood up grinning evilly.

“Can I hear the story of how you came to be?” I asked stalling for time.

She giggled. Then she spoke to me in her sweet, tinkling little voice. “Well, you see, there are lots of dolls like me around the world. Our purpose was to take over the world for our creator. Only that went *terribly* wrong. We were supposed to come out from the machine he used to create us as real babies and children. Then we were to be switched with the real-life versions. As you can see, I was meant to be switched with your sister.” I gasped. My little sister was meant to be switched with an evil creature!

She sighed. “But now here I am, a mutant doll. I really do wish that I were a real child. I hope that you realize that the only reason that I’m telling you this is because you are going to die, right?”

I swear I almost fainted. I was going to die?

“The only way we can be defeated is to kill the leader. I happen to be the leader, too. So if you were able to kill

me, which you won't be able to, the plan would be stopped." She said the part about me not being able to kill her proudly and stuck her nose in the air.

She was still talking! Yes! I had more time to get a plan together.

I decided that since this could very well be my last, I could at least TRY to

kill the doll. After all, it could save the government a lot of time and money and stuff. So I used the last of my energy, and of that there wasn't much, and as quickly as I could, I grabbed the knife out of the doll's hand and cut her head off. She stopped moving. The dolls were now lifeless, wherever they were. I then drifted to sleep.

# Singing with the Wind

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*A boy named Jack is excited to go on his first cruise. There are horrors in the Bermuda Triangle, though, as told by **Claire Mazius** in **SINGING WITH THE WIND**.*

“Come on, Jack, hurry up, or we’ll miss the cruise!” Oh, great. Now my dad is calling me by my real name. My real name is Jack, but I wish people would call me Rick.

I picked up my suitcase and went to the doorway. I looked around my dust-covered room. It felt uncomfortable not being able to sleep in my own room for two weeks. It is my first time going on a cruise ship.

The ship is going through the Bermuda Triangle. Some people think it’s filled with monsters, but I don’t believe it, and neither do my parents. I’m nervous and excited to be going on the ship. All the other times my parents went on a cruise I was either sick or grounded and had to stay with my grandparents.

“Jack, do I have to start counting!” called my mom.

“No, I’ll be right down!”

The drive to the ship was about an hour and a half. When we got there I went to take a look at the ship. It was huge; it was like eight elephants staked on top of each other. It was like I was standing in front of a giant. I think it was like 150 feet high. On the sides, the front, and the back, it was all white.

When we got on the boat, it started moving. I got seasick, and I really don’t want to describe that. After we got our

room I felt better. I put on my swimsuit and went to the pool.

I must have gotten a misfortune cookie because that is when things went wrong and the pool water got sucked down the drain. So I went to the waterslide, and that broke down. Then there were only old magazines to read. Old magazines are what they are; you can only read what happened in the past. Boring! As for baseball, below the deck is a real baseball game. Let’s just say I’ve had a bad history in baseball.

While I was walking around the ship looking for something to do, I bumped into a boy about the age of seven. His hair was dirty blond, and his clothes were like a sailor’s costume. He told me, “You don’t know how much danger you’re in. Tonight we are going past Siren’s Rock. I know because I’ve been on this boat many times.” That’s all the boy could say before he disappeared into thin air. Then just as he disappeared, cold air wafted by me. *Spooky*, I thought. I told my parents what happened, but they just laughed in my face.

That night I heard some weird singing. I went on the deck and saw a beautiful girl singing on a rock. She had raven hair, and her teeth were pearly white. Her dress was made of the greenest seaweed.

I heard a splash. I looked down at

the water and saw someone swimming out to the rock. When I looked closer I saw it was the co-captain.

He looked like he was in a trance. His uniform glowed in the darkness. He made his way to the rock. When the co-captain got there, the once-beautiful girl turned into a creature. Her eyes were like burning coals, her hair had turned to green seaweed snakes, and her teeth became fangs. She scratched the person in the neck and drowned him..

I couldn't believe what I had just seen! I told myself I was just sleepwalking, so I went back to my room.

When I got up the next day, I looked at the other beds and saw my parents were gone. I thought that they had gone to get some food, so I went to see if they were in the cafeteria

Instead I saw that everybody had been affected by the singing except me. I heard the weird singing and saw people jumping overboard, all under the spell of the siren. I tried to stop them by pushing them into the armchair and tying them up. Sadly the song was too powerful, and their heads ripped off of their bodies.

Since I had failed to stop the people from jumping overboard, I went to the library to look for a book on sirens.

When I found it, the first page said to stop a siren from singing you must kiss her. I was so grossed out, but it was for the best. I got a rowboat, and while I was rowing out to the rock I almost fell off the boat!

As soon as I got there she became beautiful again. Not knowing what would happen, I kissed her rose red lips and got a feeling of grief and horror all at the same time. Then slowly my legs turned into a tail. Then my arms disappeared, and I realized what was happening: I WAS TURNING INTO A FISH!

She ate me. *CHOMP!*

Now that I'm a ghost and a slave to the siren, let me tell you what would have happened if I had looked at the second page of that book. I would have learned that when you kiss a siren you turn into a fish, she eats you, and you become her slave. Even now when the moon is full on the Bermuda Triangle the siren makes me row out to ships passing by and kill the captains of the ships. The good thing is that the passengers aren't harmed.

Perhaps you are wondering what happened to my parents. Remember when I was talking about the people in the armchairs who lost their heads? Those were my parents.

I wish I had read the book sooner.



# The Unknown

---

*A last-minute party at an abandoned house sure sounds like fun. Unfortunately for Crystal and Elizabeth, an uninvited guest isn't in a festive mood in **THE UNKNOWN**, by **Madison Meredith**.*

“Hey, do you want to have a party?”

“Sure, let's go to that old house to have the party and fix it up a little bit.”

“Great idea, Elizabeth.”

“Ok, let's meet at the house at 11:30, because my parent are going out to eat for their anniversary.”

“Ok, see you there. Bye.”

“Bye.”

*Click.*

I hung up the phone and went upstairs to get ready to go over to the house. I chose something to wear, and then went and sat on my bed. I saw a note my parents had left on my bed. It read:

*Crystal, we have a change of plans. We're going out to eat at 9:30, because your dad and I have to go to the hospital. Your grandmother is very ill. Your aunt is staying with you for the rest of the night until we get back. I will be home in a couple of minutes.*

*-Love Mom.*

“Oh, no! I have to call Elizabeth right away. Shoo! She didn't answer her phone.”

As I left a voice message, I heard a car coming in the garage. I looked at myself. I have my miniskirt on from

Forever 21 and a baby blue tank top on. I ran upstairs to go put my robe on.

My mom walks through the door, and the phone rings. I tried to beat my mom to the phone, but she was already there. IT WAS ELIZABETH. Oh my gosh, Elizabeth always thinks that I am my mom and my mom is me. If Elizabeth tells my mom about the party, I am going to be in huge trouble. So just to be safe, I snatched the phone away from my mom.

I quickly ran upstairs and locked myself inside the bathroom. I was out of breath. “Crystal, get yourself out of this bathroom right now,” my mom said. I did not reply, and she left.

“Hey, Elizabeth, this is Crystal.”

“Oh, hey, you left me a voice message. What did you need?”

“My aunt is staying with me for the rest of the night. What should I do? We have a party tonight.”

“I don't know. You could try and sneak out, but don't get caught.”

“Ok, I will try, but I may be a little late.”

“All right. See you later.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.”

I unlocked the bathroom door and ran to my room to quickly change my clothes. As I changed my clothes I thought that my room had changed,

and I realized that I was in my parents' room. I heard a noise in their bathroom, and I ran out as fast as I could. Before I could get out my mom caught me. I stopped and turned around.

My mom saw my miniskirt and my baby blue tank top from Forever 21. She fainted.

Instead of helping her, I ran, because I would rather stay alive than die, and my mom might kill me just because I was wearing a miniskirt and a tank top. I called the ambulance to come and help her to the hospital.

I looked at the time. It was 11:59. I had told Elizabeth that I would be just a couple of minutes late, but my aunt had not arrived yet. So I just had to wait for the ambulance myself.

At 12:13 Elizabeth texted me asking where I was. The ambulance had not arrived yet, and I just had to wait until they came.

Five minutes later I heard the ambulance coming, and then a knock on the door from downstairs. I rushed downstairs and opened the door. I went to put my clothes on as they took my mom. Then I told a guy named Bill to call when she woke up.

I rushed out of the door and ran all the way to the old house. All I could see was darkness. So I texted Elizabeth to find out where she was.

Ten minutes later I received a text asking who this was. I say that it is Crystal, and I am at the house. She texts me back saying that she would meet me in the front of the house. I said ok and went inside.

We met up in the front, and I saw that it was not Elizabeth, it was...well, I really didn't know who it was. That is how I came up with the name "The Unknown," because I didn't know who it was.

He starts to walk up, and I start to walk back. I see that there is a body behind me. I could tell because there was blood coming out of the ankle. And it kind of looked like ELIZABETH.

I started to run, and he said, "I am coming to get you, Crystal." I had confidence that I was going to make it to the other end of the house without him trying to kill me. But I just went in a circle and went and got Elizabeth.

I know that I could get hurt, but I still had confidence in myself. I picked up Elizabeth and ran around the back of the house. I went to my house. I came back with a scratch on the top of my head and blood dripping from my arm. I got a couple of towels so I could soak up the blood. I also got a couple more for Elizabeth.

I laid her down on the couch while trying not to get any blood on the couch or the floor. I call the police, and they went to the old house. They looked around and found two clues: one was a gray and black glove, and the second was a picture of the guy. Well, that is what we thought of it.

The police found the guy. He was in the backyard of my house. They chased him. And after a few minutes they caught him. Then Elizabeth's mom came and picked her up from my house.

*The next day*

“Hey, do you want to have another party?”

“Sure. Let’s have it at the old house and fix it up a little bit.”

“Great idea, Elizabeth”

“Ok, let’s meet at the house at 9:30 because my parents are going out to eat.”

“Ok, see you there. Bye.”

“Bye.”

# Watch It You Die

---

*Keep telling yourself, "It's only a movie. It's only a movie." And while you're at it, it might help to remind yourself that **WATCH IT YOU DIE**, by **David Glover**, is only a story.*

The new movie was coming out on Saturday called *Watch It You Die*. Everyone at Berkshire Middle School was talking about this movie. Jim and Jake were excited about going to see the new movie. The movie was opening on Saturday, and Jim and Jake were counting the days down. They had just one more day to wait until the big movie release.

It's Friday morning, and Jake jumps out of bed and shouts, "It's Friday! One more day, Jim. I can't wait!" Jim had stayed the night over at Jake's house.

*Watch It You Die* promised to scare you. The news reporter said, "A forty-seven-year-old man died from a heart attack after viewing this movie."

"How can somebody have a heart attack from watching a movie?" Jim asked Jake.

"The movie can't be that scary," said Jake.

Finally Saturday is here. Jim calls Jake. "Are you ready?" Jim asked.

"What time should we meet?" asked Jake.

"At eight, because the movie starts at ten and we need to get our snacks, so let's meet at the candy store," said Jim.

Jim hangs the phone up and tries to get ready. Jim begins to think, *What if they're right? I could die if I go to see this movie. I could have a heart attack, I could slip*

*and break my neck as I enter the movie, and someone could be in the movie with a gun and shoot the place up.* Jim's mind begins to play tricks on him. What if someone follows him to the movies? Jim thought he heard someone in the house. "Hello, who's there?"

Jim runs downstairs to find the front door opened. He looks around and does not see anyone in the house. *OK, Jim, get it together. There's no one here. Go put your shoes on, and get going.* Jim goes back to his room. *I thought I left the light on in here. Maybe not.*

Jim turns the lights back on, and the lights don't work. He checked the other rooms in the house: no lights. "Don't panic. Go check the breaker box in the basement," Jim says to himself out loud. "Stay calm."

Once Jim reached the basement he hears, "Watch it—you die."

"Who's there?" Jim shouts.

Once more he hears, "Watch it—you die."

Jim makes a run for the stairs to find the stairs gone, and no way out of the basement. Jim runs for the cellar door to find the doors are gone, too.

Jim hears someone calling him. "JIM. JIM."

"Who's calling me?" Jim shouts.

Someone grabs Jim's arm. Jim begins to fight, but he can still hear,

“JIM...JIM...watch it—you die.”

Jim shouts, “Stop! Let me go, let me go!”

Jim jumps to be awakened by Jake, saying, “We are going to be late. Wake up.”

Jim looks at Jake and tells him, “I went to the basement because the lights went out. When I got down there the

breaker switch was off. I went to turn the breaker back on, and I heard this voice saying ‘Watch it—you die.’ I ran for the steps and they were gone; I went for the cellar doors and they were gone. This hand grabbed my arm. I started fighting for my life. I knew I was going to die.

“I’m glad that was a dream.”



# THE OUTER LIMITS





# Abducted

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*In **ABDUCTED** by Abby DiLaura, a group of college students—John, Tommy, and Jack—have to figure out how to escape the aliens that try to abduct them.*

“Ah!” said John when he stepped out of the shower. He paused to look in the steam-covered mirror, and then walked out. He tiptoed down the hall so he didn’t wake the dogs, Chabby, a golden retriever, and Colton, a black lab. He lived with two roommates Tommy and Jack. Jack was the smart one, Tommy was the buff one and John loved hockey. They were all students at State College. John had just returned home from a hockey game. His team was the Royal Warriors and they were one of the best teams in the state. His team was going up against the Warriors Star which was their biggest rivals in the whole country. The game had gone into overtime, but they won the shoot out and got the last point. They celebrated until 2 pm and John had only arrived back 20 minutes ago and jumped in the shower.

John made it to his room without disturbing his friends in the apartment they shared. It was a kind of loft, but bigger and there were four rooms and two bathrooms, one room for everyone including the dogs. John’s room was small. It had a bed in one corner, a closet in another and a dresser on the right hand wall. The walls were green and the floor was carpeted a dark blue color. His hockey bag was in the middle

with his gear all over the floor. He stepped over it, went to his dresser, and pulled the top drawer. He pulled out his boxers and a green and white t-shirt that clashed with his orange shorts. He put it all on then jumped into his bed and fell fast asleep.

John awoke to a light in his window. He peered over at his clock and saw that it was 4:30. Tommy must have been up too because he heard him thump across the hall to his room and slam the door open.

Tommy roared, “What the heck are you doing?”

He stood up and walked calmly over to the window. “Why don’t you look out my window and see that it’s not me. I have been sleeping.”

So Tommy walked to the window, opened it and yelled, “Hey!” He stopped in utter horror. He stepped back from the window and looked with terror at John and said, “Wh... What was that?”

John shook his head, “I think we are in grave danger. Something is going to happen.”

“Let’s wake up Jack. He’ll know what...”

“NO we can’t wake him up, he is already stressed out because of the test on Wednesday,” John said cutting into Tommy’s words. So they just sat there

until they heard the weirdest popping noise.

They couldn't figure it out but then it hit them, "JACK!" they said together and raced to his room. He wasn't there, but they saw a purple light in the window and they ran to it. They saw him floating to a huge glowing UFO, but they couldn't grab him because he was just out of reach. John ran back to his room and grabbed his hockey stick, then ran back to give it to Tommy. When he got there, Tommy was already out the window. John did not know what to do. He thought and thought and thought. He ran back to his room, put on his hockey gear, grabbed his stick, then ran back to the window and waited until they sucked him up. He waited 15 minutes. Nothing happened. Just as he thought he couldn't do anything, he was in the ship.

He blinked and looked around and he saw a huge blank screen. Right under the screen there was a huge control panel covered with blinking lights. He looked around and saw that the spaceship was green and purple. He walked around for a while, looked in every room, but saw no one. When he was about to give up, he heard a noise and searched until he found where it was coming from. He kicked the door open and saw his friends with cold expressions over their face.

He yelled, "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY FRIENDS?" He thought he was too late. He was pulled back from his thoughts when he heard a buzzing noise.

One of the creatures in the corner said, "We did nothing; we only put

them to bed!" It was an orange slimy, creature but with a huge head, slim body, and round finger tips.

Then it hit him, *I'm on a space ship and these are aliens.* So he took his hockey stick and swung it, hitting the biggest alien in the head and with a sickening thump, he fell to the floor. John got ready for the next blow, but realized they all had fallen. He was so confused, but tried to get his head on straight. He pulled one of the belts holding Tommy off but it was too strong. John ran to the control room and to his utter surprise there were more, about ten or fifteen this time, as opposed to three, so he ran making slashing motions to protect himself. When he reached the panel he looked frantically for the release button. He finally found it and slammed it down. He then heard the smallest click and yells. When he turned around, he was hit by all the weird aliens. He fell to the floor, and the last thing he saw was a hand, not an orange slimy one, but a human hand, but as quickly as it appeared he passed out.

He awoke the next morning in his own bed. He sat up with a jolt and ran to Tommy who was in the living room with Jack playing blackjack. They smiled and seemed to read his mind when Jack said, "I took out their main power system and we crashed in the neighbor's pool. They got mad, but the police took care of it!"

John looked confused, "Weren't they upset enough to kill you? Or were they mad but in a good way?"

"No, they were fine with it. They just said not to do it again." John thought it was over, and it was for a few weeks, until they had a test coming up and their teacher was abducted.

# The Alien Takes a Stand

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*Mr. Bubblebutt just got fired by the FBI. An alien has just landed, and Mr. Bubblebutt realizes that this was the perfect chance to get back to saving the world. Will Mr. Bubblebutt win his job back? Find out in **THE ALIEN TAKES A STAND**, by *Ari Goldberg*.*

It was a warm night, the trees were still, the lake was warm, and the sand tickled Mr. Bubblebutt. Mr. Bubblebutt had been part of the FBI for 23 years. He was the Commander of the Troops until the “stupid move”. He accidentally blew up the Empire State Building and killed innocent civilians, so he got fired.

Then he saw it, a sudden weather change. It started snowing and didn't stop until it reached twenty -four inches. Then he saw a glimpse of something he couldn't picture. It was a UFO. Then the UFO landed and changed into a car. Then Mr. Bubblebutt knew what to do. He went to the UFO and inspected it and found nothing. He had to call the FBI, but they would think he was crazy. “I have to do it,” said Mr. Bubblebutt. He called the FBI and they came right away. They brought machetes, machine guns, tanks and the fighter jets. The FBI took it from there.

Mr. Bubblebutt felt lonely that night so, he decided to go to the MEC Mount Everest Casino. While he was driving, he felt a blast of wind whipping past him. He knew it could only be an alien at least that is what he predicted. When he got to the casino he saw this weird looking car. It was a car that was not out in any dealerships over the world.

No one had even heard of a Fartwagon. He walked inside as a tingle moved down his spine. He first went to the blackjack table. There was this person that bet four billion and it was a perfect blackjack. Then that guy won again and again. That's when he knew that something was getting fishy.

He thought all night about this, afraid and sweating like a pig. Then he knew that he had to take a stand. He walked back to the car to suit up. He reached into his car and grabbed a gun and his old uniform from the FBI that was a bit too small around his butt. He marched right up to the alien. He stood tall and proud, the Alien morphed into a creature with green scaly skin. He ran for his life, going back to his house which was near Mount Everest. Then these green scaly claws came out from under his skin. The creature smelled his ship. *The creature has supersonic smell* thought Mr. Bubblebutt. The creature stopped chasing him and ran to Mount Everest where the ship was taken until something stopped him. An invisible force field was sealed around the whole place. The alien then ran back into town.

Mr. Bubblebutt had to warn the FBI about this, “There in an alien on the loose you have to stop him,” said Mr.

Bubblebutt. He returned to his house to take a rest, but something stopped him. He can't stop thinking of the fact that the alien could morph. It was like a dream, but it wasn't. It was all real live stuff he just saw. He thought it was a nightmare.

The next morning he went to town to investigate. He saw a trail of footprints in Mount Everest town. He wondered if it was the alien or just a human until he saw the weird design on the footprint. It was the alien. He decided to go have breakfast. He saw his best friend Billy from the FBI.

"Did you see the alien yet Billy?" whispered Mr. Bubblebutt.

Billy whispered back, "Do you mean that freakish guy at the casino?"

"Yeah, doesn't he seem like an alien?" replied Mr. Bubblebutt.

"I got to go, see you around," replied Billy.

Right when he was about to pay the bill, a gun fired and knocked down the whole casino killing thousands of innocent civilians. The FBI came right away and thought of a plan, but Mr. Bubblebutt thought that everyone should circle the alien in. The FBI listened to his plan and started thinking about it.

They decided to do the plan

that Mr. Bubblebutt said. They circled the alien until the alien started getting angry and vicious. They requested back up. They brought tanks and fighter jets. But nothing worked! The alien already destroyed millions of dollars spent on those weapons. They tried to circle him in again. Right when the alien was about to attack, Mr. Bubblebutt jumped out from behind and tazered the alien just at the right moment that the alien was lying on the cold, wet ground. They took the alien to the lab for further testing.

Afterward, Mr. Bubblebutt got an award for excellence and dirty work. The FBI decided that Mr. Bubblebutt should be promoted back to the commander of the FBI. The FBI wanted the alien alive for now. Knowing that the alien would soon be awake, they would be ready.

Later, the scientist dissected the alien. That was the end of the alien named Huliorticartosfiancodicastraes they found out later on but now, the alien is finally dead. They won't have to worry about him anymore.

Mr. Bubblebutt had a speech, "Fellow citizens, that was the most deadly, and vicious creature, but we still defeated it, because we are the United States of America!"

# Aliens Kidnap My Teacher

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*In the story ALIENS KIDNAP MY TEACHER by Mathias Cornet, Jack and his friends have to defeat aliens if they are to save their teacher. They have the fearlessness of youth on their side. Will it be enough?*

It was a Tuesday morning at school. My friends and I were playing, jumping around, and messing up the classroom, when suddenly a voice shouted, “Jack, John, and James, three hours of detention after school!” That was the teacher’s voice, the voice of Mrs. Beaven! After class my friends and I walked out with a depressed look.

When school was over we went to Mrs. Beaven’s classroom. She was a very strict teacher. She had black eyes and greasy grey hair, and she was always wearing brown dresses. She gave us mountains of homework.

John and James were my best friends. They were twins, and they both had ginger hair and freckles. I had brown curly hair and dark green eyes. Even if we were very physically different, we got on well.

During detention, we were working hard on our work when suddenly we heard a big noise. *BOOM!* We raced to the window and saw a spaceship in the middle of the playground. We had a shocked look because we couldn’t believe it. It was the first time we had seen a spaceship.

“Do you think it’s a real one?” asked James. John and I were so shocked that we couldn’t respond to his question.

The spaceship was oval and shiny with a metallic color that reflected the sun’s light. We observed it for a while.

Our teacher furiously went outside to see who was playing a trick on us. A few minutes later, we heard screaming, and we soon recognized it was Mrs. Beaven’s voice. We understood that aliens had kidnapped our teacher when the spaceship started to fly away. That was really unbelievable!

Thankfully, the vehicle didn’t go fast. It was broken because it had a hole in it. We rushed out of school, got on our bikes, and followed the UFO. After a while it lowered down. It landed on trees in the middle of the park next to a river.

The spaceship door opened, and a weird, slimy, green, squared-eyed thing with long arms and extremely small legs got out of the vehicle. Also, its head was round like an orange. Our eyes were attached to these things. We couldn’t believe it!

Then four other aliens got out of the spaceship. They were holding our teacher. She couldn’t move because she was tied by a rope, but we could hear her screaming.

An alien came near us and said with a robotic voice, “We are here to collect people for our experiment.

Now we will kidnap you.”

They were approaching us. James declared, “We can’t let them kidnap us. We have to defeat them.”

Then John took up the speech. “Because of their slimy texture, we might be able to push them...” Before John could finish his talk, six aliens grabbed John and James.

My friends tried to escape, but the aliens were too many. They pushed them aggressively on the floor and didn’t let them move. My friends were panicking. I had the whole job left to myself.

They didn’t look very strong. Fortunately the river was just behind them. I decided to push them

violently into the river. One down, two down, three down, four down, five down....

It looked like they couldn’t swim because they were screaming for help. John, James and I were watching and cracking up because their faces became purple

Out of nowhere came the spaceship, and the driver teleported all the aliens into the vehicle. They disappeared as fast as they had come.

After that we helped our teacher untie the rope that was around her body. We shouted, “Mrs. Beaven is saved!” Unfortunately, the only bad thing is that she didn’t forget about our detention....

# The Future As We Don't Know It

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*In THE FUTURE AS WE DON'T KNOW IT by Tal, a young girl named Samantha tries to create a connection with the past. She soon learns that sometimes you have to accept things the way they are.*

“Samantha Rose Hackle! Come down here this instant!” my mom yelled for the fourth time. I shook my head. My mom was all crazy like that, and so pushy and aggressive as well.

I closed the drawer where I kept all my time travel experiments. I wanted to be a scientist, but my mom says scientists are wacky and never successful. I started to run out of my room, but just as I flew out the door, there was a flash of light behind me. I ran back into my room and yanked open my special drawer. My time traveling stuff was all missing.

I was so excited that my glass piece worked! In about a day, it would transport someone to the present. I shut the drawer and ran downstairs before my mom could yell anything else.

## 1 day later

I saw a strong flash of light outside. My smile grew, especially with such perfect timing. Nobody was out on the street to question the strange 1700s girl lying on the sidewalk. I calmly walked to the door so my mother wouldn't ask why I was always running.

“Um, excuse me, but I think I am lost. Could you please help me?” said the sweet girl from the past the second

I approached her. I knew how weird I must have looked. I was ridiculously tall and always wore jeans until summer.

“Sure, I'll help. I love an excuse to meet someone new. What do you need? Directions? Shops? Stores? Schools? What?” I said, acting like I had no idea where she came from.

“I need a place to stay till I find what on Earth is going on.” I almost laughed out loud at her, but I held the stream of giggles.

“Dude, you came to the right place. My mom is a psycho and decided to open a motel with all the guest rooms in our house. But, I can get you in for free, on the condition that you tell me what's going on with you, of course.” The girl nodded and I smiled. If you ever invent a piece of glass that brings back someone from the past the same time your mom opens a motel, you would definitely offer them a free room.

I led her back into the house, up a flight of stairs, down the hall, and then to the left into my bedroom. Letting her investigate, I got out my drawer of time traveling stuff. It was all back inside, except for....

“All right, what's your deal? Oh, and what's your name?” I said, trying to hide the fact that I knew most of the info I wanted. I was a really good actress.

“I’m lost, and according to your newspapers, I’m lost through time.” I opened my mouth to form an “o,” acting very surprised but actually very excited. “My name’s Annabelle. And whatever could have possibly caused this problem broke.” She pulled out the snapped eyeglass from her pocket and set it on the bed.

“Well, um, interesting, very interesting story you got there. The name’s Samantha, by the way. You can call me Sam, if you want.”

I pulled out my tools I had used to fix the eyeglass the last time it broke. After an hour I could hear soft snoring. It made me fall asleep, just as I was finishing putting on the 12-hour glue, which takes 12 hours to dry.

We both woke up to my alarm, though I looked like I hadn’t gone to sleep. Unlike me, Annabelle woke up startled and turned to the alarm with a questioning look on her face. I pretended not to catch it.

Remembering some things suddenly, I yanked out my cell phone from my backpack and quickly dialed my friend’s number. The conversation was short and quick:

“Hey, Francine! Guess what!”

“Did an asteroid crash into your house and destroy the guest room?”

“NO!”

“Then what?”

“I actually made it...”

“OMG seriously?”

“Would I lie about that?”

“Well, there was that one time where...”

“Shut up.”

“Okay, sassy. I’ll call the others. We’ll come to your house and go through the talk.”

“Bye.”

“Later!”

I hung up and stopped. For a long time I sat in my desk chair with Annabelle quietly sitting on my bed and picking nervously at the sheets. I pictured Francine—tall, skinny, with long red hair and freckles—standing next to the couch in her short skirt and tights. Then I imagined Annabelle—short, brunette, in a long, raggedy 1700s dress good for a farm.

I kept wondering and thinking about what I was doing. If Annabelle went back to the past and told everyone about this technology, they would race to create it, which would completely alter the past, present, and future alike! I pulled out my glass time machine. I handed it to Annabelle.

“Here, it should work now. Just do what you did before. But tell no one of this.”

She traced an X over her heart and nodded. “Thank you,” she said, “for this experience.” She smiled, and that was the last thing I saw as a flash of light blinded me. I laughed.

I guess the moral is to accept life and make the best of it.



# Leo's

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*In LEO'S by Sarah Quasarano a girl takes a trip to the future without ever leaving a restaurant. What an adventure!*

I never knew if it was a dream or not. It seemed so real, real enough that I'm afraid of Leo's, afraid of booth three, and afraid of the waitress that never came out of the kitchen. My friends say it was a dream, but every time I go there, I can't stop thinking that something's wrong. I'm never going through that again.

Okay, I'm being very melodramatic, but it was scary. I knew it was all my sister, Ally's, fault. She kept me up all night with the television. When I woke up I could hardly keep my eyes open. Neither could Ally, but that was normal for her; I was the one without an excuse.

I was so tired I was late to all my morning classes, and then lunch. By the time I got there, there was no food left. The lack of energy made me late to all my afternoon classes. I was slow the entire day, not really paying attention to anything, usually falling asleep before the bell rang, and I got a massive headache that made my skull throb from the first bell to the last.

I was still dazed as I went to Leo's with Jeanne and Emma. Jeanne, Emma, and I had gone to Leo's every day after school since we started going to school because we're all best friends. We've been best friends since before I could remember, and we went to Leo's because...

"Why do we always go to Leo's?" I asked. "I mean, it's got good food and all, but, why?"

"Jen, that's where we met," Jeanne said, her voice dripping with sadness. "You don't remember."

"I don't remember anything today. I got a headache when someone tapped me on the shoulder. I'm in a terrible mood, and all I want to do is go to sleep for at least twelve hours," I snapped.

"We're here," Emma said. She obviously wasn't concerned by our argument. "Why argue about good food when we can eat it?"

We walked into the restaurant totally forgetting the argument. Emma was right; we had nothing to worry about. We sat in booth three, like always. I now remembered that we not only met in Leo's, but in the booth that we always sat in, booth three.

We met in booth three when all the other booths were taken. It was each our first time coming there alone. The person up front thought we were together and put us in one booth. We recognized each other from school, and the rest is history!

As we walked in we heard the manager yelling at some waitress, like always. The manager was known for being extremely nasty to all the workers. After she was done firing the employee,

the pudgy redhead led us to our table. Even she knew that we always sat at booth three, always. I felt bad for the ex-waitress leaving the restaurant, though someone left every time we came here.

The waitress came over and we ordered, but a different person brought us our food when it was ready. She was old and wrinkly, like clothes that hadn't been ironed in years. Her black and gray hair was frizzy and styled in a way that made me wonder if she did it on purpose. We all stared at her as she slowly brought us our food. She went back in the kitchen and never came out.

I was too tired to even pretend to be alert, and I rested my head against the seat and closed my eyes. They adjusted to the darkness of my eyelids and slowly, dreamy figures danced into my sight. Though my eyes were still closed, I was alert in this land of dreams. Then, just as I was slipping into a deep sleep...

"WAKE UP!" I recognized the manager's voice. Only she would yell at a customer. "JENNIFER, WAKE UP NOW! AS LONG AS YOU WORK FOR ME, NO MORE SLEEPING OR! YOU'RE! FIRED!"

Wow, did she just say 'as long as you work for me'? I'm twelve; I don't work. My parents don't even let me do chores for cash!

"I don't understand. I'm twelve; I don't work," I repeated. "How could I..."

"I don't know what you're talking about. You're seventeen. Check your driver's license if you don't believe me. But do it quickly. I'm not paying you to

stand there staring at a laminated index card."

I hoped when she said that she meant the index cards that Jeanne, Emma, and I made during noon rec. But when I reached into my pocket there was a real, legal driver's license in my wallet. I stared at it for what had to be ten minutes.

"Okay, clearly you're either having a rough day, or insane. Whichever it is, you're not sticking around so I can find out. You are fired. Leave and don't come back tomorrow." She was surprisingly calm until she said, "DID YOU HEAR ME! YOU ARE FIRED!"

I was still in shock as I walked out of the restaurant and got into the only remaining car. I was lucky it was such a great day that the few customers we had had walked there, and I didn't have to figure out which car was mine. I had a little trouble driving. I tried to do what I saw my dad do, but it was very hard. The police only stopped me a couple of times. It's a good thing I had a clean record before I left, because when I got home I didn't.

It was very late by the time I got home, but my parents still wondered why I was home so early. I told them I was feeling sick and they bought it. I went to bed surprisingly early, realizing that time-travel could really wear you out. I couldn't remember my dream by the time I woke up, and my parents tried to get me to stay home sick. But I couldn't. I had a plan that, unfortunately, involved school.

I'm very lucky that I had no idea what the teachers were talking about. It made it so much easier to zone out and

figure out what was going on. Most of the people in my classes looked the same. But they looked a little older, more mature, and pimplier.

All through my classes I devised my plan. My teachers didn't like that. I kept thinking about it, though. The principal didn't like that either. At the end of the day I skipped the detention I got because I "refused to pay attention," hoping I wouldn't be there tomorrow to get in trouble for it. It was time to put my plan into action.

"Hey, Jeanne," I said in a casual voice. I wondered why she hadn't approached me yet.

"Why are you talking to me? We haven't talked since like the eighth grade, and you choose now? You and Emma have always been weird. I'm so happy I ditched you guys when I had the chance. Unfortunately, my friends just ditched me." Jeanne said it with this "nasty meets *way* too perky" voice that I didn't recognize.

Wow, did she just say "haven't spoken," and "ditched you"? That was so not Jeanne, but apparently it was.

"I was wondering: Do you want to go to Leo's?" I asked in a small voice that I never thought I would use on *Jeanne*.

"Don't you have a job there? That would be awkward."

"Actually, I got fired yesterday," I said, and was surprised how awkward it was.

"Oh, well, as I said before, my friends ditched me. Obviously I'm not spending my night by the phone waiting for them to call back. I'll go with you.

But the second they do call, and they will, I'm leaving. For good."

Wow, had she changed. But she did say Emma and I were friends. This was easier than I thought, kind of.

"Hey, Jen," the voice belonged to Emma, and it hadn't changed and neither had she, thankfully. "What are you doing here, Jeanne?"

Had everything changed? This was so not right!

"I'm going to Leo's with you," she said in an unemotional voice. Emma never really did care what Jeanne said or did. Maybe that's how the argument started between us.

The car ride was very short, but we could've walked there. I was starting to hate future-Jeanne, too. All she did during the short time was talk about herself.

When we walked in our booth was empty, and we sat down and ordered. Soon I rested my head against the seat, and I started seeing the dreamy figures. They were dancing in my head, and just as I was floating into the land of dreams...

"O.M.G. You're falling asleep," I heard Jeanne scream, "I knew this was a bad idea! I'm out of here!"

"Yeah, see you tomorrow, Jen. Nothing personal. I just hate being here with Jeanne."

Emma too? This was too much! I was on my feet, soon to fall down again in a faint. My head fell hard against booth three.

I expected to wake up in the E.R. But I woke up in booth three.

When I opened my eyes, I saw two twelve-year-olds staring at me: Emma

and Jeanne, both twelve years old! I started babbling about everything that had happened. By the time I was done we were at my house, the first stop. Emma and Jeanne were headed home, and I was still dazed by my return.

I don't know if Jeanne and I will be friends years from now. I don't know if I'll be friends with Emma. But who cares about the future? The important thing is that we're friends now, and that's good enough for me.

# The Men in White

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*In **THE MEN IN WHITE** by **Ethan Bodwin**, two boys named Ethan and Leo get kidnapped and are brought to a camp in an unknown area by people who are all in white suits. What do they want? Can Ethan and Leo escape from the camp alive?*

Two best friends named Ethan and Leo went to a fun party for people in middle school. By the way, I'm Ethan. We were having tons of fun and everything seemed normal. We played pool, dodge ball, video games and anything you could think of that is fun for people in middle school.

All of a sudden, everyone heard helicopters thundering in the sky, or at least it sounded like helicopters. A second later, all the doors came crashing down loudly. Men in white suits were swarming into the building.

Everyone was in a panic and was trying to find out what was going on. The room smelled strongly of gasoline from their vehicles. All I saw was the men in white, one after another. They kept coming in. I felt very tense and nervous. I heard yelling all around me. All the men looked identical like they were all clones. The first man that came in snapped his fingers and everyone went silent. It was amazing; not a peep from anyone. They all said in perfect synchronization, "You are all coming with us no matter what!"

The men in white suits started loading people into some kind of hovering vehicle. As they were doing this, Leo and I slowly walked away. As soon as the men in white saw us, we

broke into a strenuous sprint.

This next part made no sense to me. Within the second we were spotted, at least seven of the men surrounded us immediately. We both stopped because there was no other choice but to cooperate with them.

Once everyone was in the vehicle, a green gas came out and we all fell asleep. When we woke up we were not in the vehicle any longer. I was thinking, *What is going on! I have to get out of here.* We were in a room made completely of metal. There were about three other people in the room other than us. We found out their names. They were Will, Brad, and Seth. They seemed pretty nice, but they were very worried, as well as I. We all agreed that we had to get out of this horrible prison. Will suggested that two of us distract the freaky guards and then three of us knock them out with pressure points, and then we have to climb the gate. I asked, "Does everyone agree?" Everyone did.

Brad said, "When should we go through with our plan?"

Leo declared "Tonight!" So, we reviewed the plan again. Brad and I would distract the guards while Will, Leo, and Seth knocked out the guards. Brad and I were in the middle of the

room in clear sight while Will, Leo, and Seth were hidden by the sides of the door.

Brad had to make a distraction so he screamed out, "Ah! My hand is bleeding uncontrollably!" The guards walked in. Will knocked out the smaller guard by himself. Within seconds, Leo and Seth knocked out the larger guard together.

Will whispered, "Come on, you guys, somebody might have heard us." We all looked around for a gate of some sort. I spotted one. We snuck toward the gate. Then we started climbing cautiously over the gate. We made it.

Leo suggested, "My dad is part of the X-files branch of government. I'm not sure but I think he deals with paranormal things so we should go to him first." We were all wondering how to get back home.

I suggested, "We should find a road and follow it to civilization." We

found a road that led to a small town called Potterville. We got a map and directions back to Beverly Hills, Michigan from the friendly locals. It turns out we didn't even need the map. A man named Robert took us home in his pick-up truck. Robert was very nice and had short, unkempt hair. It seemed like hours but we finally arrived in Beverly Hills, Michigan.

When we were at Leo's we told his dad every last detail. Leo's dad got the rest of his section in the government to check out the camp. They found it, but none of the men in white were still there. There was only the people that had been locked up and the remains of the camp. The government examined everything. Then Leo's dad found something that was very unusual. It was a piece of black metal that had inscriptions on it. Leo's dad exclaimed, "Oh no! They're back!"

# Metropolis 220X

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*It's not easy to control the world! However, if you have access to a race of elves who live at the center of the Earth, maybe you have what you need to get the job done. In **METROPOLIS 220X** by **Duminie Allen II**, it looks like one android-building scientist may finally succeed at world domination.*

The year is 220X on planet Earth. People rely entirely on robots and mechanical things to help them with daily life. The humans are happy with robot servants and enjoy their life of comfort. Even the poor have robots because it is a requirement by the government. The robots not only help them, but record their every move. People are okay with this. They are under mind control and never ask questions.

The robots were made by Jackson Smith, a scientist who works for the government. Jackson knows by controlling the robots, he controls the world. He is a madman, mad with power, and not even the government can control him. He has a secret plan to destroy all the people who won't follow him. He wants power over the world and for everyone to worship and obey him. Those who are against him will perish.

Jackson lives in isolation and believes people are idiots. Twenty years ago he discovered an old map in a cave in Africa. It was a map to the center of the Earth. He thought this was a joke, but studied the map and became obsessed with it. He had to know the truth. The map spoke of a superior race of elves that once lived on Earth, but

left thousands of years ago because of man. *How could this be?* he wondered. *An unknown race of elves?* He knew that if the elves could survive in the center of the Earth, they had superior knowledge. This could help him build his master robots.

Well, the map was right! Twenty years later, in every home, in every store, there is a robot. Jackson's plan was coming true. What the world didn't know was his secret weapon. With human and elf DNA, he made a perfect android weapon. 101.6 was his greatest achievement. He was an android with psychic abilities and human emotions. He was like a son to Jackson.

101.6 was designed to serve the scientist, but also to direct all the robots on the planet to control the humans. Jackson taught him cruelty and programmed him to do as commanded. However, 101.6 was more kind than the scientist liked. He was part human and wanted to understand them. He questioned the scientist. This made him angry. 101.6 dreamed of being human. He liked music and dancing. He even had dreams. Most of his dreams were of him as a man, but some were of war, destruction, and pain.

Jackson became more disappointed with 101.6, but he had another secret.

He secretly made a twin android named Count Funkenstein, without human emotions. He loved to dance, too, but he didn't have any rhythm. Jackson knew he could control him more and Funkenstein would do his dirty work without question. He was made to be evil.

Jackson waited a long time to carry out his plan. He felt the time was right. All it took was a press of a button to activate the robots to turn against the humans. 101.6 knew this, too. He saw this in a dream. He also saw his twin brother commanding the robot army to do terrible things. He knew he had to stop this, so he snuck into the lab where Funkenstein was kept and deactivated him. He confronted his master and told him he must stop.

101.6 threatened him and said he would expose him to the world. He had human friends, and proof of the scientist's evil plans. 101.6 was more powerful than his maker.

The scientist said he would return when the time was right. He disappeared right in front of 101.6. With him he took the master plans for the largest robot army the Earth has ever seen. Count Funkenstein also disappeared.

101.6 swore to protect the humans. He released them from their spell. All the robots were then put to sleep. He also believed Jackson Smith would return someday. He knew he had to be ready for him. He needed to travel to the center of the Earth to learn all he could. Mankind depends on his success.



# Robo Chickens Take Over Mars

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*In ROBO CHICKENS TAKE OVER MARS by Andrew Tchiblakian, the Robo Chickens seem perfectly willing to wipe out the Martians in order to settle into a new home. If you think the Martians will put up a fight--you're right. But you will probably be surprised at the shape the final battle takes.*

Somewhere in the distant future  
Robo Chickens take over...Mars.  
It all happens in 3012 at 12:00 p.m.

## Earlier...

The Martian sky is ablaze with thunder and lightning. Rain is soaking the dry, hard Martian soil. All of the Martians are having a pool party in the acid rain. They are eating stohgod and sregubmah. They have all sorts of condiments like dratsum and puhctek.

At 11:00 there are ripples and bubbles from the bottom of the pool. Two Martians notice this, but everyone else is too busy. Then at 11:30 there are strange noises in the distance that sound like machines rumbling. At 11:57 there is a smell of fuel that the Martians are unfamiliar with. They think someone at the pool party belched. With all these signs the Martians still don't know what is going on because they are having such a good time, and they don't see the Robo Chicken armada coming. By the time the party is over the Martians realize the Robo Chickens are invading. At the sight of the advancing armada everyone flees in horror.

## The Invasion

The robo chickens are usually very peaceful, but they have to find a new planet because their planet exploded with an earth-shattering *Ka-Boom!* Mars is the ideal planet for the Robo Chickens to land on because it has food, water, and metal to build a new city. Mars is their only choice because it is the closest planet that their ships can fly to. The ships are not fueled completely. They could not make it any further than Mars. If they did not take over Mars they would just float about in space with no place to live.

The Robo Chicken leader is the scariest and meanest, so the rest of the Robo Chickens listen to him. He has two heads and his name is...Billy Bob Joe. The other Robo Chickens just have one name each—like Carl, Larry, Daniel, and Justin.

They land on planet Mars, and are unloading all of the supplies from their ships.

Next they unload their houses, tanks, and other good stuff. They are ready to set up their city on Mars.

When a Martian sees them he screams, "Ho ym hosg!" and "S'ereht

na noisavni!” All of the Martians are scared of the tanks and Robo Chickens. The elderly Martians alert the ymra, yvan and the ecorf ria.

### The War

The two groups do not think they can live together on Mars. This causes a war between the two nations, which takes place on Mars. The war takes place in the Hobgoblin Canyon, which is on the south side of the Martian planet. The Robo Chickens bring tanks and fighter jets, and the Martians have machine guns and rocket launchers for the battle. The battle lasts four Martian weeks, which on Earth is about three days. Many lives are lost before the leaders decide to call a tiebreaker. They have to decide on the right game to play to end the war.

The two respective leaders, Billy Bob Joe and Frank, decide on a Rock-Paper-Scissors match. The match will take place in Hobgoblin Crater on 2/9/3012, which is a crater created from the war in Hobgoblin Canyon. They set up seating for 300,021 Martians and Chickens. The Martians dress in green and white, while the Chickens dress in gray and purple. The crowd cheers and bangs pots and pans with broomsticks. They scream and yell from the tops of their lungs, sounding like an explosion.

The announcer comes out onto the stage and says, “Let the games begin.” Then he says, “In the green corner we have our Mean Green

Fighting Machine, Frank. In the gray corner we have the Metal Menace, Billy Bob Joe.” The crowd cheers as the leaders take their corners.

The rules: a clean game, no chicken fights, and no Martian Mayhem.

Round One! The crowd goes wild!

The announcer says, “One, Two, Three, rock, paper, scissors.” Billy Bob Joe hits the Mean Green Fighting Machine, Frank, with a rock. “Ouch, that’s gotta hurt!” says the announcer. The Mean Green Fighting Machine, AKA Frank, comes back with scissors. Oh, what a smash for Frank.

Round Two! The Mean Green Fighting Machine slaps down some paper. Will he make Billy Bob Joe write a report?

“Oh, Billy Bob Joe stays true to his rock and throws it down.” Looks like this round goes to Frank. “Here comes the tiebreaker!”

Who will win? The crowd is going crazy. What will happen? Nobody knows!

Round Three! *Ding! Ding!* Billy Bob Joe and Frank both throw down scissors! The crowd is cheering and chanting... it’s a tie! The two contenders shake hands and decide on the planet’s future. The decision is to live on planet Mars in peace, mixing the two nations together.

The years following the war were peaceful between the Robo Chickens and Martians. The two nations developed an army, a navy, and an air

force to protect the planet of Mars. They held practice drills and pool parties to keep the peace. Many years later, the planet of Mars was attacked by cyborg dogs. The Robo

Chicken/Martian planet defended and defeated the hostile enemy with no trouble. The Robo Chickens and Martians still live peacefully on planet Mars.

# Space Monkeys Vs. Aliens: Battle for Science!

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*In the story* **SPACE MONKEYS VS. ALIENS: BATTLE FOR SCIENCE!** *by* **Tony Fabbri**, *NASA encounters aliens. When they prove to be unfriendly, it becomes time to send in the monkeys!*

It is January 4, 2976 on Earth. National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) scientists launched the Mars Rover to Mars 1,000 years ago. They kept it out there so they did not have to send another rover. Just a few days ago, they received a menacing image from Mars. Right before their eyes, they saw an alien destroying the Mars Rover!

How did they know it was an alien? They knew because they had never seen anything like it before. It was red. It had nine arms and seven legs. It jumped to tackle the Mars Rover from a spot seven feet away in one leap. The head had two weird tentacles with pincers coming from inside of the tentacles. This alien had four eyes, no nose, and two circular mouths. Sharp teeth protruded from its mouths. Its teeth spun around fast just like a grinder. This was one very exciting yet scary vision!

Now that the Mars Rover was destroyed, the scientists knew they had to capture these aliens because if they didn't, they would never be able to send any other craft to Mars. To do this, they sent a team of astronauts to take photographs of the aliens from the safety of their ship. Two days later,

NASA scientists got an SOS call from the spaceship: the astronauts had run out of food! They were being abducted by a whole army of aliens!

A few seconds after the distress call came in, the NASA scientists saw the hatch door open. Four aliens boarded the craft and killed the team of astronauts by grinding their heads. UGH!

Now the NASA scientists said, "We can't risk any more human lives! If we send any more astronauts, they will all die!" After much discussion about what to do, they decided that they would send highly trained space monkeys!

The head scientist, Joe, called the Smart Monkey Academy. "Hello, this is Joe from NASA. I'm calling because we need two of the smartest monkeys you have. Can you get them to Florida by tomorrow?" The Smart Monkey Academy trainer promised he would.

The next day, the two smartest monkeys arrived at NASA. They were a new breed of dwarf gorillas. The gorillas were wearing orange, flowered, buttoned tee shirts. Their pants were short blue jeans. They were identical twins.

When the monkeys came inside the

building, the trainer who accompanied them said, "These are the smartest monkeys we have ever had. Their names are Bob and Jim. Take good care of them." The trainer then gave the monkeys bananas and gave them big hugs.

Bob and Jim went to training immediately. They got a tour of the blue and silver spaceship that they were going to fly to Mars.

On the outside of their ship was a large logo. The logo showed a yellow circle with a yellow star in its center. The spaceship was shaped like an arrow tip.

Inside, there were three rooms. One was a small room, which was the cockpit. The second room was medium-sized. This room had two gigantic shelves. The shelves were used to store weapons, food and containers to hold the slime that they had to collect. Finally, the third room was huge. It was one-fourth the size of a football field. It was the engine room.

Bob and Jim went through flight simulation, pressure chambers, and tests on how much G's (gravity) they could handle. They also had to get used to eating space bananas, which were freeze dried and purple.

During the flight simulation, Bob and Jim were floating around in the capsule, screaming! Inside the capsule was a big screen in 3-D. On the screen was the actual image of the last spaceship's route to Mars. As the spaceship seemed to be careening through the galaxy, the monkeys were moving frantically from side to side,

trying to dodge the asteroids that seemed to be coming right at them. Just as they thought they were finished, they were yanked from their seats and thrown into a pressure chamber.

Inside this chamber, there was another screen in 3-D. The flashing images were of the rocket ship taking off. As they were watching this, they were thrust back into their seats. Suddenly they felt as if the world were collapsing on them. Finally, the pressure was released. Bob and Jim squealed in relief. They reached for their purple, freeze-dried bananas and practically inhaled them.

Since they were monkeys, they couldn't speak English. But they could use computers. When humans talked into the computer microphone, the computer translated it into monkey language!

In this way, Bob and Jim learned that their assignment was crucial: They would have to go to Mars, find the spaceship that contained the dead astronauts, and recover some alien slime. This slime would enable the scientists to test it to learn what aliens ate. They would also learn how aliens survive on Mars.

The launch date was set for March 7, 2976. The whole world was watching the launch on their sunglasses, where little screens received satellite signals. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, LIFT OFF! Bob and Jim roared through the skies.

Bob and Jim flew all the way to Mars. They occasionally called back to NASA. One particular day when they called back, NASA scientists could hear

a loud noise coming from the ship. Bob and Jim, through the monkey translating computer (MTC), explained that their engine was dying. "Oooooaaa," said Bob and Jim. (Translated: "Our engine is running out of fuel! Worst of all, we are on the run from the aliens!")

All of a sudden, the monkeys heard a loud crash! A pointy thing came through the hull! It was an escape pod. This escape pod was cone-shaped. The tip of it opened up like a flower. Two aliens dropped out of the pod. They leapt toward the front of the ship. The aliens had two wrist guns that blasted out lasers.

The monkeys had laser guns, too. Their weapons were pocket guns. With their guns ready, the monkeys hid behind the door that led into the cockpit. The monkeys put their laser guns on "stun" so that they wouldn't damage the aliens. They had to keep the aliens intact so they could get the slime they needed.

With their three-foot-long silver-armored legs, the aliens approached the door in a second leap. The door opened. The aliens stomped into the cockpit.

Bob and Jim hid under the control board. The aliens lowered their arms.

The aliens could talk in monkey language. They told Bob and Jim their names were Kyshea (Kee-sha) and Lajh (Laj). The monkeys understood the aliens. Kyshea and Lajh were saying they were trying to get away from the mother ship that was following them.

The mother ship was a giant spacecraft that had two laser cannons to

destroy asteroids. It was half of the size of planet Earth. Compared to the monkeys' spaceship, the mother ship had *1,000 escape pods!* Just like a chameleon, this mother ship looked invisible as it glided through the galaxy because it changed colors to blend in with its surroundings.

Two elite alien Mother Ship pilots wore gold to set them apart from all of the other aliens. Six elite aliens guarded the King and Queen. The guards wore blue armor. The King and Queen, twice as large as "regular" aliens, wore gold and silver suits made out of plutonium.

The King and Queen were really, really mean. They put a force field around Mars to protect it while they planted thousands of space mines to destroy the rest of the galaxy. Each one of these space mines equaled 100 nuclear bombs. By pressing just one button, they could set off all of the space mines at once. They were the most powerful creatures in the universe.

Kyshea and Lajh, alien passengers in the mother ship, plotted to kill the King and Queen so that the whole galaxy (except Mars) would not be destroyed. They tried to kill the King and Queen with alien blasters. They missed. Now they had to get away before they were killed! They quickly escaped through an escape pod. Now, the mother ship was after them for betraying the alien King and Queen.

After they told their story in Monkey, Bob and Jim realized that the aliens were not going to hurt them. Bob and Jim turned their ship around to head to the closest asteroid. They

attached their ship to it. Lajh went out with a tube that was attached to the ship's fuel tank. Lajh dug a hole a few feet down. Then, he put the tube into the hole. The tube sucked up an energy source from the asteroid for fuel.

Once the fuel tank was filled up, Bob and Jim talked to Kyshea and Lajh about their mission. Now that the aliens were friendly with them, Bob and Jim knew they would be able to collect the slime without being killed. The aliens agreed to go back with them to Earth.

A few days later, they arrived safely on Earth. The NASA scientists were so thrilled with the monkeys! The scientists then asked the monkeys to ask the aliens to produce their slime.

Kyshea and Lajh produced their blue, sticky slime.

NASA scientists studied the aliens' bodies to see how they were built to survive the extreme pressures on Mars. The aliens became part of NASA. The monkeys were honored as the Best Space Monkeys in the World.

As Bob and Jim were standing outside of the space station to receive their medals, they saw a blinding flash of light in the sky. Then they heard a *BOOM!* They ran to the closest telescope to look up into space. They saw Mother Ship pieces floating in space. They figured out what happened. The Mother Ship bumped into a space mine and exploded! The universe was saved!

# The Time Machine

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*Two girls get transported back in time to a dangerous time period. Will they get home safely? Find out in **THE TIME MACHINE**, by **Natalie Cooper**.*

“Abby! Look what I found! It looks like a time machine!” I yelled over to my best friend. We were going through my grandfather’s attic on a hot summer day.

“Yeah sure, let me see.” Abby called back to me. I quickly put the cover back over it to surprise her when she walked over. Right when she stepped through the doorway, I pulled off the blanket.

“That’s definitely not a—” but she couldn’t finish. It started beeping and lighting up. Before we knew it the room was swirling around us, I tried pulling my hand off the machine but, it was stuck. It wouldn’t move. So, I just closed my eyes and waited for what was going to happen next. I could hear Abby breathing quickly and saying something quietly.

“Were going to die, oh we are I just know it!”

Then there was a loud thump and we were sitting on the ground. I opened my eyes and looked around. We were in the middle of the road in a small city. I could hear people yelling, babies crying and bombs exploding. I smelled a strong smell of smoke. The sky was gray and there were people running about into tiny houses that went underground.

“Kate! Katelyn, where are we?”

cried Abby. By now, she was holding my hand, her hand was sweating. I could tell she was scared without even looking at her.

“I don’t know.” Then I remembered, in Social Studies we were learning about the Nazis in Germany and how they were sending Jewish people to concentration camps. The Nazis would lead them into a gas chamber that they said as a shower, but they would get killed! All because Adolf Hitler wanted to take over the world! I didn’t tell Abby any of this. She would be terrified.

“Young ladies, what on earth are you doing out in the street at a time like this? Quick! Get into my bomb shelter! I won’t hurt you,” a lady across the street yelled to us. I was in a daze, but I obeyed her. We scurried into the tiny doorway of the shelter. It was a fowl smelling room and it was packed with crying children and frantic parents. The lady from the street brought us each a blanket and a bowl of soup. I was too nervous to eat and the blanket didn’t help one bit, I was freezing.

“Excuse me miss,” I quietly said to the lady, “What is going on and where are?”

“Don’t you live here? Frankfurt, Germany? 1932?” She answered.

“Uh, no. I live in New York City,



2009. That's where we came from. My best friend," I pointed to her, "and I. We were going through my grandpa's attic. I found something that looked like a time machine and well, that's how we ended up here."

"You poor, poor children, you must be terribly horrified in a place like this. We must find a way to get you safely back home, I'll start planning immediately. Until then, I'd like you to meet my two children, Margret and Charles. Kids, be safe, please."

Abby and I turned to the two kids. They each looked like they had been playing outside before we came, with dirt smudged on their clothes and faces. They each had a wide smile showing all of their teeth. Margret was wearing a pale green dress and Charles was wearing brown overalls with a blue T-shirt underneath.

Then, Margret walked up to me. She looked about three years younger than me.

"Hello, I am Margret. Would you like to play?"

I looked over at Abby she was nodding her head up and down with her blond curls bouncing. "Sure! Anything to get our minds off what is going on around us."

The next few hours Abby, Margret, Charles and I were playing many games: tag, hide and seek, freeze tag and even some we made up. It was fun even though we were in that tiny bomb shelter.

"I can't wait until tomorrow," I thought. "It can be safe in a normal home, even if it isn't mine."

We had a cold dinner of mashed

potatoes and spinach and then had to go off to bed in one of the tiny bunk beds.

"Kate, when do you think we'll get back home? I miss my family. I don't like it here. It is dangerous and scary." Abby whispered to me from across the room on her bunk.

"I'm hoping tomorrow. I miss my family too. Goodnight Abigail."

"Goodnight Katelyn."

And then, I fell asleep. I dreamed I was in the city. It was cold and foggy. There were so many noises; bombs exploding, people yelling and babies crying. It smelled of rotten eggs from the smoke. I was being lifted off the road and into a tiny hut. It smelled even worse in there, like throw-up. There was somebody calling me,

"Kate, Katelyn. Kate, wake up!"

I couldn't find the person though. I was alone in the hut. Then I was being jolted around the room.

"KATELYN!!!"

"What, who? Oh, it's you Abby, I must have been dreaming." She just smiled at me. "How'd you get in my house? Did mother let you in? And, what time is? It must be very early." I tried getting out of bed but, when I pulled my leg off the bed, the ground wasn't there. I pulled my other leg out and- plunk! I fell. I was now sitting on cold, hard, dirty floor. Then, it hit me. Frankfurt, Germany. 1932. Bomb shelter. Nazis.

"Katelyn, we are safer now. We can go into their house with Margret and Charles. Their mother is off to go to the museum for the time machine. Let's hope she can borrow it. Now, let's go."

I got to my feet and walked out the door. Outside, the air was fresh well, fresher than the bomb shelter. It was still foggy with smoke, but the people in the city looked happy to be out.

Charles got to the front door of their house first and unlocked the door. It was sweet and fresh-smelling inside. We all sat down on their couch.

“What’s going on here? Why were we stuck in that room all night?” Abby was the first to speak.

“You don’t know? The Nazis are trying to send all of us that are Jewish out to concentration camps. They don’t like us so, they are attacking our city. Since my family is Jewish, we have to go into our bomb shelter a lot. When we see men in uniforms, we need to tell them that we are not Jewish. Sometimes, they even come into our homes to get us,” Charles told us.

“Well then what on earth are we doing here...alone?” yelled Abby.

“Mama says it’s safe so, we believe her. She would never lie to us!” Margret cried.

“Okay. Who wants to play hide and seek?” asked Charles.

We all said sure and got ready to play. Charles was the seeker and we were all hiding. Margret, Abby and I all ran off giggling, looking for the perfect place to hide.

“28...29...30! Ready or not, here I come!!!”

I just got to my hiding spot as I heard Charles yell to us that he’s done counting. I was hiding in their closet underneath the stairwell.

“Katelyn! I found you! Come help me find the others.”

So, Charles and I set off to find Abby and Margret. Then, there was a knock at the door. I ran over to the door.

“No! Mama says not to open the door when she’s not home! Duck below the window so they can’t see us!”

We both ducked and started crawling along the wall doing our best not to be seen. Then, I heard a faint voice coming from outside.

“Open up! I know you’re in there!” It was a very gruff, deep voice.

“Quick go down to the basement and hide!” Charles was half whispering, half yelling.

I ran as fast as I could to the basement door and then mostly tripped down all of the stairs. I hid in the laundry hamper while Charles could barely fit into the washing machine. Then, I heard the wood upstairs creaking. They must have gotten in. I could hear Charles’ heavy breathing coming from across the room. I then heard the basement door open and more footsteps going to the upstairs. There were also heavy footsteps walking down the stairs into the laundry room.

“Ah! Help me! Help me! Oh no, somebody help!” Oh no, Abby must be in trouble. I have to get out and help her but another person is right out in this room! *Just stay calm. Relax. Breathe. Take a deep breath.* And then the room was spinning. It was a twirling around me. I could no longer hear Charles’ heavy breathing or Abby’s cries for help. I felt like I was going through a dark tunnel. And then it all stopped and I fell onto dark wooden floor.

Something next to me made a noise, like a happy cry. I turned, it was Abby.

“Abby, we’re back! We’re home!” I shouted.

Abby was already up and running around.

“Yay! We’re back! I’m safe!” she cried.

“Let’s go downstairs and check on my grandpa and grandma,” I said.

I ran down the attic steps and then down to the first floor. I ran into the living room and there was my grandpa sleeping in his chair, just how we left him.

“Grandpa, Grandpa, we’re back! How long were we gone? It seemed like forever!”

“What? You were never gone. You girls have been up in the attic for fifteen minutes.”

“But, the time machine Grandpa! We traveled back in time! We had to hide in a bomb shelter, and then we were playing hide-and-seek,” I cried.

“Charles, come over here, your sister Margret is here!” called Grandma from the front hall.

Then, it was all coming together, Grandpa was Charles! Margret was his sister! Abigail and I traveled back to when he was a kid! All of a sudden the room started swirling and I was no longer standing on the hard wood floor.

“Oh no, not again!”

# A Toast to the Alien Nations

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**A TOAST TO THE ALIEN NATIONS**, by *Alex Zufelt*, is a story of a boy who finds a secret in the woods of Yellowstone National Park. The secret will change his life forever.

Peter could not believe the trail with eerie humming noise he had been on came to a stop near big rocks the size of basketball players. He had been to Yellowstone National Park before. He had never gone so far on a hike alone. Strange sounds drew him far into the sunny woods. Now he felt lost from thinking “I am not lost” all the time. “Oh, well, I need to turn around now or I might get lost like the people on TV shows,” he said as he walked back alone.

It was going well for a few minutes until he came to a fork in the trail. He did not remember the fork when he was hiking. “Hmm,” he said as he thought, “I’ll take the right.” He ran full speed down the path because the humming noise got louder and louder. The leaves and twigs crackling under his feet and trees rustling in the refreshing cold breeze made the sun seem cooler. It was all fine and dandy until he fell and felt his face in the dirty leaves and twigs. He got up and said, “What did I trip over...?” He stopped.

He saw a U.F.O. It was silvery like a knight’s helmet and shimmered in the sun so much he had to cover his face. Then a door opened with a creaking, sizzling noise like it was going to fall off. The U.F.O. was as small as a small sofa and was a teardrop shape. “A

U.F.O. I can’t believe it!” he said excitedly. So he got in, like all 16-year-old boys would do.

When he got in, the thing was so big he could stand up. The place was filled with coils and gears. He walked down to the door in the far back and saw warp drive coils like in movies.

He hit a button by accident on the way back to the cockpit. The place started to smell like the boys’ bathroom at school. “Oops, I hope that did not do anything...,” but then he felt a rumble and got into the driver seat.

The ship suddenly jolted. He saw stars fly past the ship. It felt like an earthquake at ground zero. “Oh, no, if my mom finds out I went into space I am dead, but then again my mom won’t find out,” he said.

The ship started to talk. The ship said, “Hello, what’s your name, lucky one?”

“Peter,” he said. “Who are you? How do you talk? Are you alive?” he asked.

The ship replied, “My name is Model 101. I am not alive. I have a robotic brain, and I can remember everything I hear, Peter.” A planet appeared on the monitor. Model 101 said, “Now arriving at autopilot destination, Peter.”

He flew down and saw a bustling

city that had a big marketplace and what looked like Greek architecture. Aliens wearing togas were running or riding on ion floating bikes. They looked like humans with silvery skin, and the togas had gold trim.

The ship came to a shrieking stop on a big star port bigger than three Empire State Buildings. The star port was dark and had pictures of planets everywhere. The star port had no windows, but it had a landing platform about halfway up. There were ships that looked just like the one he was in. "I've never seen a building this big before. I wonder if there is any air at the top," he asked himself.

He landed, and the door reopened. Once he got out he heard two voices. "Hello, Earthling, welcome to Asgard," they said in harmony. They looked like the aliens he saw on the street. Their skin shined like the ship, which still hurt his eyes. It did not seem to hurt their eyes. When he got a closer look at the aliens, he realized that their eyes looked like a fly's eyes.

"Are you two aliens?" Peter asked as he got out of the ship.

"No, we are Randle and Axle, your hosts," they replied in harmony (which Peter thought was weird) as they walked closer.

Peter spent a week telling Axle and Randle about the things picked up by a probe they sent. "Okay, bikes are used for riding, fun, and exercising," Peter said.

"Well, it's just like the old days, about 300 years ago. We had so much fun!" Randal exclaimed.

"Do you live that long?" Peter

asked, surprised.

"Yes, I am 400 years old to be exact." Randle answered.

"It is true, Peter." Axle said in support of Randle.

After awhile Peter went outside with Axle to explore the energetic, lively city. Randle was called home by his dad. "Wow, a hovercraft. And what's that?" Peter asked, pointing at a three-headed creature.

"That's a Crog. It is similar to a cat mixed with a frog on your planet. It is very rare," Axle said.

As they walked, Peter was amazed at the houses made of solid gold. The houses were small and dinky, but they looked amazing to Peter's eyes. He saw a faint blue and yellow glow through the bustling cite of Asgard.

"Let's go to the contest hall," Axel said. They walk about a mile, and then Peter saw it.

The contest hall was big, and "big" means "huge"! It was about 30 football fields high and two long. It was hazy brown with solid gold doors. The doors had diamond doorknobs. All Peter heard was the shouting of someone winning a contest. There was lots of cheering and talking. The windows were glowing blue and yellow from light sources unknown. "Axle, this is great! I never thought a building could get this big," he exclaimed.

"That's because your society is not as advanced," Axel explained. Peter kind of took that as an insult.

As they walked within the contest hall, Peter noticed the place was filled with creatures. They ranged from humanoid creatures to swamp

monsters, like in the movies. Its paint job on the inside was the same as the outside. Strobe lights dangled from the ceiling above him. "Axle, what do we do here?" Peter asked.

"Well, you're in time for the cook-off. Whoever wins gets to take home the spaceship you got here in. It is portable and can fit in your pocket," Axle answered.

"So what do I cook?" Peter asked.

"The best dish your planet has that you know of," Axle answered.

"Hey," an alien asked, like he hated Peter, "what's a human doing here?"

"He found the spaceship on Earth. He got in and came to us!" Axle angrily replied. Axle pushed him out of the way. The Asgardian looked like Axle. But he was buffer and looked richer. He had an expression on his face that said he would kill you if you got too close. His clothes were made of what looked like silk and leather.

Another alien came to Peter and said, "Do you want to know a secret?"

"Yes," Peter said.

"I heard a rumor that the King's son is going to take the throne," the alien said as he walked away.

"Who were they, Axle?" Peter asked.

"That was Garget the King's son, and the man that just said something to you is the gossiper," Axle replied.

Peter had forgotten to ask why he was on Asgard because he was having too much fun. After awhile Peter asked, "Axle, why am I here?"

"Peter, we research other planets by sending spaceships and probes. You

were one of the lucky ones to find one," Axle explained.

"Where is the bake-off?" Peter asked. Axle just pointed at a human kitchen and nodded. Peter got the message and went to the kitchen. It was a typical kitchen. The other kitchens had goo, slime, and swirly tubes like in sciences lab.

The judge was tall and also looked like a movie monster because he was green and gooey. "Hello, planets. Begin cooking!" he said energetically with a French accent.

Peter is not a good cook, to let you know. He sat down wondering what to do. Hours went by, and the judge called, "Three minutes to go."

Peter finally got an idea: "TOAST." He put bread in the toaster and waited.

When it popped up, the judge said, "Time's up. Put your food on the table." The table was as long as the building. Peter put the toast on a platter and went to the table. The judge tasted everyone's dishes in a flash. Then he came to Peter's dish. When he tasted it he yelled, "This is the best food ever! We have a winner here. Come up here, boy, to receive your prize."

People cheered as Peter walked to the judge. "Here is your ship. It is shaped like a matchbox car. When you push the area where the trunk is, it makes your ship grow to full size. You can use it to come back here to see us. You can also use it to go to other planets and check them out. Come back and tell us about your adventures."

"That was easy to win. So how do I get home?" Peter asked Axle.

Just then Randle ran in. Randle replied, "Let's take the portal. It's the fastest way to get you home." The portal looked like an arch with thick hieroglyphic symbols carved into it.

Axle took Peter to the portal; he walked under it and said, "Bye, Axle. See you later."

Axle replied, "Peter, do not forget to visit me and visit other planets,

too."

Then a blue flash came upon him, and Peter was back where he had found the U.F.O. The matchbox car was still in his hand.

Peter started to walk back to his campsite. "They're all probably looking for me," he said to himself. Peter walked down the trail to the fork and took the correct path.

# Uprise in Evil

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**UPRISE IN EVIL**, by *Nick Magnan*, is about an agent who has to fight the greatest beings in the universe. It's a tough job, but somebody has to do it.

It was a hot summer day in California. Everybody was there for summer break including me. My name is Nick. I mean Agent Nick. I work for the A.D.P., or the Alien Destruction Program. We work as secret agents that watch out for alien life forms, and if we see one we destroy it. I work with many other agents including Agent It, who is just a big blob of yellow Jell-O. My partner is Agent Bob, who is a regular human. We all wear black and carry a laser pistol with us just in case of an emergency.

So back to what I was saying...

It was a scorching weekend day, and I was relaxing and cooling off at the beach. My partner Bob was in the ocean cooling off. All of a sudden my phone rings. It is the A.D.P.

"Agent Nick, we just spotted a fleet of aliens ship on our radar entering our atmosphere. They are coming right for us. They are egg-shaped UFOs each the size of 18-wheelers. We are counting on you to keep an eye on the situation."

I replied, "I'm on it!" This new assignment sounded tough, and more difficult than any in the past.

Seconds later it happened. "ALIENS," some tourist at the beach shouted as he was pointing at the sky. The invasion had already begun.

Alien ships started flying

everywhere, and they were shooting what seemed to be an egg bomb. The bombs destroyed a nearby middle school, and the kids yelled, "No school!"

Bob and I pulled out our laser pistols and started shooting. There must have been over two hundred ships flying in the sky. I could not concentrate with all of the people screaming. Bob shouted, "Oh yeah!" as he shot at the UFEs (or "Unidentified Flying Eggs"). The pistols were not doing anything to the ships. This wasn't good.

Soon the military showed up with over 450 missile launchers and tanks. I heard the general shout, "Fire AT WILL." Then 500 missiles went flying, but they still did not do anything.

I could not figure out what was blocking the ships, and then it struck me like a lightning strike. They had energy shields. That meant we would have to use laser rockets to take them down, but we did not have that many. There were not enough. We only had 111, so we would have to get more.

I called the A.D.P. and told them to get more laser rockets. The secretary said, "Yes sir, we can get some there in 30 minutes."

It looked like a deserted blown-up beach. Everybody was hiding in buildings from the aliens.



Finally 30 minutes later, 20 jets arrived with laser rockets. Bob said, "Wow."

The rockets came from the secret storage bunker that we have at the command center. When the first rocket hit a ship, the ship disintegrated into dust. The rockets took down the alien ships just like I was hoping. I counted at least 173 alien ships down and only two jets down. There were still more ships left. The general was also amazed like Agent Bob.

Then a jet fired at the mother ship and nothing happened. I said, "Uh-oh."

We did not know why the rocket didn't penetrate the ship. The ship must have had an energy shield with another energy shield. I called the A.D.P. again and said, "The rocket doesn't penetrate the mother ship."

The secretary put the captain on the phone and he shouted, "The rockets

what? If they don't penetrate two energy shields, then put two lasers on the rockets!"

"Good idea, Captain," I replied.

The secretary said they would send double nuclear warheads. I said, "Good."

Soon enough the jets with the new rockets came, and all of the jets launched the rockets at the same time. When the rockets hit, the mother ship went falling down like the London Bridge into the water. Everybody was cheering in excitement.

*Four days later*

I was sitting in a lounge chair at a pool enjoying my break. I had been given a year off for helping to save the world. That's when I got the call about some escaped mutated gorilla. "Don't I ever get a break?"

# When Fat Aliens Attack

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**WHEN FAT ALIENS ATTACK**, by *Slim Shady*, tells how a below-average kid goes from zero to hero when the Earth receives unwelcome visitors.

“Ahh, I just had the best day at school. I only had five detentions. That is one less than yesterday. My parents will be so proud that they probably will let me sit with them for dinner.”

When I was forced to do my homework that night, I was slacking and fell asleep. I was having a nightmare about Michael Jackson doing his thriller dance, and I was in the background screaming, “Help me, help me!” I saw a zipper on the back of his head. I yanked it down. Out came a fat alien with a ray gun, who shot me.

I ran home to my mommy and said, “An alien shot me.” Then I woke up from the nightmare screaming.

I heard my mom scream, “Shut up, you worthless piece of junk.” I told my mommy about it, and she kicked me out, literally, and said, “Get a life, you loser.” *Not as bad as last time*, I thought.

When I got to school, I tried to tell my classmates that Michael Jackson is an alien, but they didn’t believe me, so they threw stuff at me like sharp pencils. It made me want the only two things that liked me—my teddy bear and blanket—and say, “You are my only friends.” Steve, my bunny, didn’t like me.

I was made fun of from that point

on. They called me bad names. Luckily a loud truck came by most of the time so I wouldn’t hear the name-calling. Then I heard a *BOOM* outside and I said, “I told you that there are aliens.” They said it’s just a mailman exploding.

Then a voice from outside said, “Humans are so dumb. I got one short, young guy to give me his candy. I think his name was Bill, or maybe Bob.” I kept my mouth shut, because what if it was a couple of kids that were trying to embarrass me more? I would be a big, fat, ugly loser.

When I was walking past the teachers’ lounge, I saw green antennas coming out of a body bigger than a sumo wrestler that said, “The invasion starts now.” I took a picture and showed it to Mr. Fisher. He slammed me into the ground and ran.

I called the police, but they wouldn’t believe me, so I called the army. They didn’t care if I was lying or not; they just wanted to kill things. When they got there they said, “Stand back. We’ll take it from here.” They hunted him down and captured him.

They got Mr. Fisher (Dan) to talk. He said, “The alien headquarters are in Berkshire, bottom floor, room 115.”

When the army walked into the aliens’ headquarters, all the aliens tried to pull out their guns. The aliens were

too slow. The humans shot them before they could pull their guns out. It was over; the human race had won.

But then from the corner of my eye I saw big, green eggs, and they started

to hatch. Fat aliens came out. They were unarmed, so the army took them back to the lab to run tests on them.



# THE SCALES OF JUSTICE



# Agent 006

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*A secret agent's job is never done. In **AGENT 006** by **Bralen Dennis**, one man must save the world.*

I was in my base as soon as my mission was over. Suddenly my boss says, "Hello again, 006. I have a mission for you. Meet your nemesis, Shane, and stop him from using his machine that destroys the whole Earth."

"On my way!" I said. I grabbed my usual things and headed off to the place where he was holed up.

I arrived in my sweet car. Shane had guards posted everywhere, so I had to be silent. I grabbed my bulletproof vest and went into the building.

There was a guard standing there,

so I crept up to him and grabbed him. I said, "Hey, you, where can I find Shane? And be creative."

He said, "Upstairs in the room that says 'Evil Room.'" Then I knocked him out carefully.

I went upstairs and found a door with a sign that read "Evil Room." I opened it, and there was nobody there. But I pulled out a gun and shot Shane's machine. I planted a bomb, too, and I ran out of the building.

I detonated the bomb when I got to my car, and I flew out of there.

My mission was complete.

# Christian and the Ring

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*A simple messenger boy is accused of a terrible crime, all because he is caught in the wrong place at the wrong time in the story* **CHRISTIAN AND THE RING**, by *Cam Behnam*.

“*H*ub, bub, bub.” Christian could not control his breath. He felt as though his heart would fly right out of his chest. He could hear the angry villagers shouting, “Get back here, you fiend!”

Christian ran as fast as he could, his feet barely touching the ground as he flew down the stairs and right into a stone wall. Christian screamed in bloody pain, “Ough, my hand!” The impact left him spinning. By then the villagers had caught up with the man with his head buried in his chest.

In extreme pain and agonizing fear over what was about to happen to him, Christian went limp as the villagers dragged him to the dungeon. He was now in a place where the most lowlife people spent their final days. All he could do was sit and wait. The cold and damp from the floor cut through him like a knife, but it wasn’t enough to dull the pain. His hand was increasingly throbbing as though it had a heart of its own.

Struggling to remember what had brought him to this place, he drifted in and out of consciousness. He remembered taking a message to the High Priestess Dianna, and how excited he was to have been chosen for such an important task. When he arrived at her home he was surprised to see that the

door was wide open. Even more shocking was finding this impressive home in such disarray. Furniture had been tipped over. There was smashed pottery on the floor. As he quietly stepped into the dining room he saw her cold, lifeless body lying there on the floor.

Christian had heard noises coming from the south end of the house. With his heart racing and sensing he was in danger, Christian hid behind a wardrobe. Although he didn’t recognize any of the voices, one had a distinctive raspy tone. The men were discussing how they would set the house on fire to cover up the crime.

Even though he had felt like his feet were made of stone, Christian knew he had to get out of that house before someone discovered him or he was trapped in the fire. He slithered across the floor like a snake; stopping in the shadows; hoping he would not be seen, but to no avail; he was. The man with the raspy voice shouted, “It looks like we have a rat among us!”

Christian had bolted out of the door into the darkness. All he could do was to keep on running and running. He never looked back, even when he heard the shouts of the angry villagers behind him.

The stinging pain in his hand



brought him back to the realization that he was sitting on the cold dungeon floor. The chill caused Christian to grab his cloak and wrap himself up tightly in it. Just then he noticed the glimmer of the ring that had fallen out of his pocket. As he picked it up to study it, for a moment it took his mind back to the crime scene where he had picked it up near her body. The ring had a large round ruby for the center stone and was surrounded by gold. Just inside the band were the initials LDS.

He heard the clang of keys at the cell door. His mind left the ring and focused on the uncertainty of his future. The guards had come to get him.

Roughly the guards jerked him toward the courtroom. He could hear people shouting, "Guilty! Murderer! Kill him!"

Christian trembled as he stood in front of the judge. The Judge's gavel came down with a *bang* as he stated, "Christian Timothy Williams, I, Judge Leonardo DeSanto, charge you with the murder of High Priestess Dianna." He then added in a raspy voice, "What say you?"

His stomach sank. Christian could say nothing, for he recognized the Judge's distinctively raspy voice and realized they were his initials on the ring.

# The Escaped Murderer

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*A murderer takes away all that is important to Bella. Her recovery is in doubt in **THE ESCAPED MURDERER**, by *Isabella Shamoun*.*

“I’m scared,” said a nine-year-old named Bella, even though there was nobody there listening. Bella was trying to remember what happened, and then, it just hit her!

It was on a dark stormy day, and Bella had been playing in her room. There was a loud knock on the front door, and Bella’s mother, Susan, yelled for Bella to hide. Bella obeyed her mother.

Bella hid under her bed and was partially hidden by the bed skirt. Susan opened the door, and there was a dark shadow standing in the doorway.

There in the doorway was an escaped murderer that went by the name of Charles Lee Ray. How did Bella and Susan know? Two things gave it away. The first one was that he had an orange striped jail suit on, and the second one was that he was the one that had murdered Bella’s father. He had come back to get them. They could tell because there in his right hand was a gun.

Charles pointed and shot Susan in the chest. Bella screamed, and Charles ran upstairs to search.

Bella quickly ran out and checked if her mother was still alive. She was not breathing. Bella ran across the street to the police station. She reported the murder and told them everything.

The police hurried to her house, and they searched the whole house. They found Charles Lee Ray dead on the bed. After an investigation, they found out that he was depressed and had committed suicide.

Hours passed, and they heard the news from the doctor. Susan had passed away. Bella was sent to an orphanage and lived a miserable life.

When Bella was adopted she was 13. Four years had passed, and Bella had almost forgotten about her mother.

Whenever Bella is sad, she always goes to her real mother and father’s graves. She cries until she feels better.

This day Bella decided to go to her mother and father’s graves. She told them everything. Then she felt okay. Everything was all right.

Bella went home and slept. Her mother and father are still in her dreams every night.

# Gold

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*In the story **GOLD**, a small town in New York is completely controlled by the mob. One precious item is the cause of much mayhem between competing crime bosses in this story by **Joshua Goldfaden**.*

The most dreadful town in the state of New York is Port York. This dangerous city is completely controlled by the mob. The head mobster, Sir Giovonnie, is the controller all through Port York.

His “jealous” enemy, Cougar, has attempted stealing Giovonnie’s prize, the pure golden gun. With its 24-carat gold metallic sparkle, this is the most perfect weapon ever known to man! Cougar nearly got killed on his many attempts to steal that gun.

Here’s the final story behind his gun. Giovonnie was invited to his “work ethic” party (which was a trap). The second he left for the party, Cougar and his henchmen broke through the windows of Giovonnie’s headquarters.

There was always a guard protecting the gun. The minute the guard saw Cougar he called for backup, but when backup arrived they found the guard on the ground bleeding, and the gun gone!

They quickly reacted and called Sir Giovonnie. But he had been trapped and thrown into a car, handcuffed.

Cougar took Giovonnie to the York Bay, where Cougar would dispose of Giovonnie and keep the gun for himself. Out of nowhere, a car came flying out of the air. Giovonnie’s henchmen jumped out and opened fire on Cougar and his assistants. Cougar fell into the water, and the gun went with him. The gold gun was never to be seen again.

# Home Alone

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*A boy and his friend are the only ones home when they are threatened by intruders. The boy decides it is up to him to defend his home in **HOME ALONE**, by **Michael Baccanari**.*

**I**t was Sunday, 1:00 P.M. It was rainy and very cold. My friend was coming over, and my mom had to go shopping. I heard a noise. Someone was trying to break in the house!

I called my mom. My mom didn't answer. I grabbed my phone and hid in a closet and called 911. They didn't answer either. I guess the power was out.

I grabbed my Nerf gun. I could hear the bad guy as he got closer to the closet, and then he opened the door. But before that they took a shot at me and missed.

Then I shot, and *bang, bang, pom!* He was down! No, he got up and ran away. Ah, we can't show my mom because we were using Nerf bullets. I am for sure he will return because when he left I thought I heard him say he would be back. I scared him away because he thought my Nerf gun was real.

I knew he would return. I just knew it. And he did, but that was not important. What was important was that he was trying to kill me. I told my mom, and she didn't believe me.

My friend and I were having a sleepover. We went to his house. He has a very big house, and they followed us there. We were hiding so they couldn't find us because the house was so big.

In the morning, we came back to my house. My mom was at the gym. My friend and I heard a voice. It was the robber. This time he had a buddy. We got the guns out. Then I realized what they were looking for. It was my Grandma's vase.

My friend and I found out that they were looking for the vase. We started to follow them. I had a feeling that they knew we were there. Then they turned around and I shot my Nerf gun and knocked out one of the burglars.

The bad guy's buddy was down. The first bad guy got away, but I did catch the other one. We put him in the closet to show my parents. I said to my friend, "If my parents don't believe me, I guess it is up to us."

Later that night I showed my dad the one burglar that I knocked out, and gave my Dad the bad guy's gun. He thought it was a Nerf gun. I said to my dog, Latté, "I guess it's our time to shine. Ok, Latté?"

He said, "*Bark, bark,*" and I said, "I didn't hear you." Then he said, "*WOOF, WOOF,*" and I said, "Oh, now I know what you mean."

The next day I said, "I am going to catch the bad guy that got away." I said to my dad, "Latté and I can beat them. I just need your help." When the robber came, I finally caught him! Latté and I

were so happy we forgot to breathe.

I told my Mom I caught him. She did not believe me. I went to my Dad and told him I caught him. Finally someone believed me.

I brought the robber to the cops, and he went to jail. My friend went home and told his parents, but they said they already knew. And we all lived happily ever after.

# Lily to the Rescue

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*In LILY TO THE RESCUE by Maxwell Ernst, a banker with an unusual pet finds himself in a dangerous situation. Is help on the way?*

Once upon a time, there was a small bank in a small town called Smallville. Mr. Johnston was a meek and mild bank teller at the Smallville National Bank. He was quiet, wore thick glasses, and liked wearing bow ties. The other unusual thing about Mr. Johnston was that he kept a pet rat at work. Her name was Lily.

Many people thought it was a little strange that Mr. Johnston kept a pet at work, let alone a rat. They would ask, "Why not have a normal pet, like a fish?"

Mr. Johnston always answered, "Rats are very smart and make excellent pets." Mr. Johnston loved Lily, and every day he would share his banana with her during lunch.

One evening, Mr. Johnston was getting ready to close up the bank for the night when he saw two men at the door. Thinking that they were last-minute customers, he opened the door and said, "I was just about to close up, but I can help you two."

One of the men smirked and said, "I bet you can!"

The next thing he knew, Mr. Johnston was tied up with some rope, blindfolded, gagged, and left in his office alone with Lily.

The two robbers were named Joe and Moe, and as far as robbers go, they were not the sharpest tools in the shed.

They began arguing about how to break into the bank vault. Joe wanted to use a hammer, while Moe wanted to use dynamite.

Moe said, "A hammer doesn't go 'BOOM!'"

Joe said, "Don't you think that someone might hear a loud boom, you dope?"

"But I like things that go 'BOOM,'" whined Moe.

"Yeah, and I would like to have my head still attached when we are done with this!" said Joe.

As they argued about which would be better, Lily, sensing trouble, quietly unlatched the door to her cage (as Mr. Johnston said, rats are very smart) and crept out.

At first the robbers did not see her, but as she scuttled across the floor, Joe started shrieking that he just saw a giant rat with huge, fang-like teeth run by him. "You know, Moe, there is nothing more in this world that I hate than rats! I am outta here!"

"Don't be a big baby!" said Moe. "We've got to finish this job and get the money, or else Big Boss Man is going to have our heads."

"I'm not a baby, I just hate rats is all," said Joe, whimpering a little.

"I'll take care of it," said Moe, as he grabbed the big metal hammer and looked around him.

“Aaahhhhh! I think I just felt it going up my leg!” shouted Joe. “Get it off me, get it off me!”

Moe, watching Joe jump around hysterically, spied Lily sitting quite calmly on Joe’s head. “Hold still!” he ordered Joe, and swung the hammer with all his might at Lily. Lily jumped out of harm’s way just in time, and the hammer hit Joe on the head with a loud *THWACK*. Joe fell to the ground, knocked out cold.

Still holding the hammer and really mad now, Moe looked around for Lily. He suddenly felt her scampering across his feet. Moe twisted around as he tried to smash Lily with his hammer. Unfortunately for him, the floors of the bank had just been waxed that morning and were very slippery. Moe slipped and fell backwards, losing grip of the hammer as it flew out of his hand and through the air. Moe fell to the ground. A second later, the hammer came down right on his head with a loud *THUD*, knocking him unconscious. Satisfied, Lily crept quietly back to Mr. Johnston.

Sitting in his office, still tied up and blindfolded, Mr. Johnston had heard muffled arguing, screaming, a loud *THWACK*, and a loud *THUD*. Then everything was silent.

Lily quietly chewed at the ropes holding her owner until they were

loose, and then she darted back into her cage.

Mr. Johnston suddenly found that he was able to get his hands free of the rope. He pulled off his blindfold and discovered the two robbers lying on the floor. “My goodness! What happened here?” he muttered to himself, as he made sure that the robbers were truly out cold. Mr. Johnston tied up Moe and Joe with the rope, and called the police to report the robbery attempt.

The police thought that Mr. Johnston had managed to untie himself and single-handedly take care of the robbers. Mr. Johnston tried to set them straight, saying, “I really didn’t do anything. I was able to get out of my ropes, but I found them lying on the ground like that, really!” But they did not believe him, thinking that he just didn’t want to draw attention to himself. After all, who else could have knocked out the two robbers?

The next day, the story about the robbery attempt and Mr. Johnston’s heroic deeds was on the front page of the *Smallville Chronicle*. Mr. Johnston was promoted to the manager of the Smallville National Bank and got a big new corner office. Lily moved to the corner office, too, and soon everyone had a pet rat in his or her office.

# Unveiled Mask

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*A young town villain is placed in an asylum and has a reputation for escaping and not sharing his personal background. When a mysterious doctor arrives on staff, everything changes for John. Find out what happens in **UNVEILED MASK**, by Nas Sorrell.*

John Perry was a quiet teen-ager who preferred being alone over friendships, mainly because he believed that everyone should do the right thing. Of course, this didn't mean he followed all of his own beliefs. It didn't mean he was always the good guy. In fact, John really didn't do many things in his life the right way, the way a young man should. His mom tried with him in his early years. She reminded him not to get in trouble in school, but John sometimes didn't even go to school. He just skipped it and played hooky all day. It wasn't that his childhood was bad; he was able to make it through his elementary years unnoticed, friendless and indifferent. John's mom told him to always ask before going out and to never go beyond the neighborhood fence. John wasn't a, well...a good listener at all. He ignored it, thinking he could never be caught no matter what. Frustrated, his mother finally gave up and John was pretty much free to do what he wanted with little argument from his young, single mother. She lived her life and he lived his with little conversation between them. It was as if her child had become nothing more than an empty human being living in the same house. Their lives continued like this until there was a murder in

town. She had no proof of course, but she knew in her heart that John had to be involved somehow.

*Ten years later: St. Luke's Asylum for the Criminally Insane*

"That's all we get out of you today John?" the therapist sighed.

"Good, that's all you really need, right?" John said bored.

"Well, we actually need your whole story, like what happened after you were outside," she continued. She was used to playing this little game.

"There's only one person who can make me do that and he's dead," John laughed.

"Well, I guess you'll just stay here," the therapist said.

"That's all right. I think people like me here anyway. Oh and can you close the door on your way out?"

*SLAM!*

"Thank you," John chuckled. "Huh. Well this is boring. What is there to do? HEY! What's that?" As John slowly moved over to the wall, he noticed a sudden change in the air. "What the..." John was surprised with what he saw.

"No need to talk, my boy, I'll do all that," answered Dr. Phillips, a tall, fit-looking older gentleman. He was



dressed in a suit and tie.

“Who the heck are you?”

“Sorry, my name is Dr. Phillips and you must be Johnny?”

“Well, it’s actually just John not Johnny.”

“Well, I’ll be your next therapist.”

“Therapist? I never had any information about a new therapist!” John’s voice grew louder.

“No matter,” Dr. Phillips replied calmly. “Well, let’s get started,” he drew closer standing over John quietly.

“Wait!” John exclaimed nervously. “What’s going on?” John stood up.

“Take a seat John,” Dr. Phillips continued in a quiet, low voice.

“Dude, what the heck? I never heard of you Dr. Phillips!”

“Well, let’s just get started anyway, shall we?”

John sat down. “All right what do you want to know?” He was used to this game by now.

“Why don’t you tell me what happened that night,” the doctor continued settling into a chair across from John.

“When I got over the fence to get my ball I remembered how a kid in my neighborhood, Donny, who lost his ball in the same backyard as I did, never asked whoever was in the house to let him get it,” John continued the same story he told everyone over and over again.

“Tell me John,” the doctor interrupted. “Would you lie to me?”

“Mmm yeah, yeah definitely,” John chuckled.

“Ok, but why lie to me? I’ve done nothing to you.”

“THAT’S JUST THE REASON! HOW CAN YOU EARN SOMEONE’S RESPECT WHEN THEY’VE DONE NOTHING TO EARN YOUR RESPECT? IT JUST SOUNDS STUPID.” John was growing excited.

“Well, would I lie to you?”

“Yes, yes you would! That’s how doctors like you get into peoples’ mind and end their life just like everyone’s been trying to do me in the this dump. People think I don’t know what’s going on in here, but I do!”

“Well, wouldn’t you be able to know if I were lying then?”

“Yeah, I would, but I love a good mind game; it makes me happy.”

“Well, let’s just get back to your story then,” Dr. Phillips continued.

“Ok... I always thought I wasn’t scared of anything but when I got over there I noticed how my mind just changed. In one sense I thought I was in another dimension. Next, everything turned black and I passed out without a warning! When I woke up, I was in a jail of my own brain, trapped. I could only imagine how I must have looked to the real world, but then I didn’t want to know. I probably looked messed up. Then I fell straight toward the ground. I wasn’t thinking about how I got like this, but I think it felt like all my emotions were gone and I didn’t care.” John stared over Dr. Phillips’s head.

“Were you dead?”

“No, no, I was far from dead,” John answered. “I didn’t feel any pain while I was on the ground. I think my brain had been completely drained of everything. I didn’t know who I was but

when I woke all I saw was a..." John's voice faded.

"Tell me Quinn," Dr. Phillips leaned in closer.

"Wait, what did you just call me?"

"I called you Quinn."

"Where did you hear that?" John said, his voice getting more nervous.

"From this document in front of me," Dr. Phillips answered. John stood up suddenly and grabbed him by the throat. His hands were strong and tight around the doctor's throat.

"Look at you, now you're on the floor and I am asking the questions,"

John sneered and then relaxed his grip. Dr. Phillips broke away and stood up, towering over John.

"Shut up! Listen to me Quinn as long as you're in this room, you're going to be called Quinn and you're going to obey ME!" Suddenly John was thrown to the wall and hours later John awoke in an empty room.

"Who am I?" John whispered. "Who am I?" He began rocking back and forth on the floor.

TO BE CONTINUED. . .

# SPECIAL OCCASIONS



# Bad Day

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*Birthdays are supposed to be full of fun. On his special day, Billy wakes up and believes that very idea. He soon discovers that birthdays aren't always happy in*  
**BAD DAY, by Ryan Scott.**

**H**ave you ever had a bad day like me? This day has been the weirdest and the worst day of my life.

*Tick tock, tick tock.* Then the clock rings. Today is going to be the best day. Why do I say this? I say this because today is my birthday. My mom is making me a double chocolate cake with extra icing. I walk down stairs. "Sup, Mom, how's the birthday cake coming?"

"It's going good, go get dressed for school."

"Ok, be down in a minute." I had to get ready for school. "Man, do I hate school, hate, and hate and hate it!"

I don't know that today is going to be the worst day of my life. It starts off as a normal day, but when I get to school I fall to rock bottom. Of course I have the hardest class of all first, and guess what happens? I forget my math binder.

"Where's your binder and homework, Billy?" Mr. The Man barks.

"I forgot it at home because I was in a rush. I didn't mean to forget it. I'm sorry." After that I sat down. There was a rainstorm last night and the roof was leaking and of course it's right over my seat, it's plopping right in my chair but I didn't know that and I plopped into a wet seat. Now it has turned into the worst day ever. Everyone starts to

giggle and now they are crying because they are laughing so hard, which then makes me cry my eyes out because I was embarrassed. It looked like I wet my pants! Mr. The Man sent me down to the office to call my mom to get a new pair of pants. The next class I had was Mrs. Whatever; we call her Mrs. Whatever because she says "whatever" in every sentence. Her real name is Mrs. Goose. She is the second meanest teacher behind Mr. The Man in the whole district. My friend Cameron and I always sit next to each other in the back row so she can't hear us talk. Mrs. Goose is always quacking orders to the class. All she says is "Quack! quack, quack, quack!"

"Mrs. Goose may I go to the bathroom please?" I asked.

"Yes, you can because you asked so nicely," she replied.

Of course my luck, I run into the two meanest kids in the eighth grade, Pablo and Sanchez. I walk into the bathroom and they hear my presence. I drop my pass and I start to run when all of a sudden I slip and fall in the bathroom. They drag me into the stall just as Cameron walks in.

"Save yourself!" I yell.

"I'll sprint down to the Principal's office to get Mr. Strong."

"Please hurry!"

“Be back in a minute!”

It was too late, they already were given me a swirly and wedgies by the time Cameron came into the bathroom. The bathroom floor was filled with water. Over the loud speaker I hear, “Billy Bob Joe to the office” and all of a sudden a roar of laughter bursts out. Gosh do I hate when they call me by my full name. I walk down to the office where my mom is holding my pink Little Pony underwear. I go and change in the bathroom. I went back to Mrs. Goose’s room to get my binders and textbook for my next class Spanish.

“See you tomorrow honey,” Mrs. Goose said in a snicker.

“Bye,” I replied.

We are having a fiesta today and we were supposed to bring in something or you will not be able to participate. “Dang it, I forgot to bring in the salsa.” I walk in and everyone else brought in something except me.

“Where’s the salsa you were going to bring in, Billy?” Señora Scott said.

“It’s at home; I forgot to bring it to school today.”

“Then go outside; you let me down,” she barked.

So I had to sit outside and learn the Spanish alphabet forward and backward. There were brownies, chips and orange pop, my favorite. Everyone was having a blast except for me. Finally, it was over and the bell rang and we all started to run to our next class when someone shoved me and I ran over a banana and slipped into puke. I went back to the office to call my mom to bring me clothes, but she did not pick up so now I have to go

through the next couple of classes smelling like cow manure. I went to science and Mr. Mad Scientist met me at the door and told me I couldn’t go in because of my odor. So I sat outside for the second time today, which was depressing because I love science and I had to miss my fiesta. “TODAY IS THE WORST DAY EVER!” I scream.

The bell rings and I dart to my locker to get my lunch money. I open my locker and there was no money. I tear everything out of my locker and there is nothing. I put everything back and start to trudge back to the cafeteria. I see all of my friends and start to walk over when everybody started to put their hand over their nose to not let the odor into their nostrils. I walk into the cafeteria and time freezes and everyone stares at me because of my smelly, chunky, half-chewed pizza on my new cargo pants and new polo white t-shirt.

“Ugh, what is that?” a kid asked in disgust.

“I think it is Billy,” another kid said.

We went to recess outside and nobody wanted to play with me. If I went near them they would dart off to the opposite side I was on or even further. After recess, I had gym with Cameron and Bob. We had swimming and we had to take showers before we went into the pool. I was thankful for that to get the smell away. I got out and went to my gym locker to get my bathing suit. I put it on and bent down and all of a sudden I heard a tear. I look in the mirror and there was a rip in the middle of my bottom. I ran into the bathroom so no one could see. I started to cry because nothing had gone my

way today. Cameron came looking for me and hears me crying in the stall. “Come on Billy, why are you crying?”

“Because today has been the worst day ever.”

“This is the last class until school is over for the day; make the most out

of it.”

Finally, the bell rang and everyone ran out of the school. I went home on the bus and when I walked in I heard an explosion of poppers and everyone saying, “Happy Birthday Billy!” I was so surprised. I couldn’t believe my eyes.

# Dreams and Disappointments

*In DREAMS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS by Nicole Blackwood, Julia is a reluctant violin player who plays her instrument to make her mother, a has-been musician, happy. But when auditions are held for a prestigious violin school and Julia is asked by her mother to audition, she must find the courage to tell her mom her true feelings for the violin—or keep her secret forever.*

“Home, home on the range,  
Where the deer and the  
antelope play...”

Julia Bentley woke up on Saturday morning to the sound of her mother singing very off-key next to her bed.

“Mom,” she groaned, “five more minutes.”

“You know the rules, Jules,” her mother grinned playfully. “How do we get to Carnegie Hall?”

“Practice, practice, practice,” Julia groaned as her mom playfully lifted her pillow out from under her head. She toppled back onto her headboard and her mom walked out of the room, yelling, “Tune up in five minutes! Up and at ’em!”

Julia sat up in a huff. “Always practicing, always rehearsing.”

Julia was a violin player. She’d been playing Beethoven since she was in diapers. But it wasn’t her passion. She didn’t even like it. She only did it to make her mother proud of her. Her mom had always dreamed of making it big with the violin, but never did. She hoped that someday her daughter, Julia would, and Julia didn’t want to disappoint her.

Julia sat up, punching her mattress angrily. Her punches grew even more pronounced when she saw that it was only five in the morning. If there was one thing she hated even more than violin, it was getting up early. But she did it every day.

*And for what?* she thought angrily, as she did every day. *To get into Julliard? To play at Carnegie Hall? I don’t want that. I should tell Mom today.*

Of course, she thought that every day. But bottling up the courage to actually tell her mom was harder than it seemed. She had tried to tell her once, when she was only about seven.

“Mommy,” she had said, “you know how I play violin and stuff?”

“Yes, darling, I do,” her mother had said absentmindedly, sipping a cup of coffee and skimming the newspaper. Julia had twiddled her thumbs anxiously, unsure as to how to proceed.

“Um,” she had said, “um, Mom, well, I...I, um...”

“Yes, honey?” her mom had tapped her mug, anxious to get back to her article about the local zoo being rebuilt.

And it was at that moment that Julia realized that she just couldn’t tell her



mom about the violin. She didn't have the courage.

Remembering that horrible moment, Julia shuddered and grabbed her violin and music book from her bedside table. She stumbled out of her bedroom and set up her music book on its stand in the front room. Her mom strolled in a few minutes later, whistling.

"Perfect, you're all ready! Let's hear that new piece, shall we?" she smiled, patting Julia on the back. Julia sighed and began to play, wondering when she'd never have to play again.

The next day, Julia came home from a long, hard day of school to see her mother beaming at her and waving an envelope.

"Jules!" she yelled, thrusting the envelope in Julia's hands. "Read *this*."

Julia scanned the flier the envelope contained. It was an advertisement for a music boarding school for violin players, called Deartown Musical School. Julia's heart sank as she realized where this was going.

"So, is this great or what? You want to go, don't you?" Julia's mom asked hurriedly. She mistook the shocked expression on Julia's face for one of extreme excitement. "Oh, Julia, you do! You do! I'll miss you so much at boarding school, but this is such a good opportunity. This school has connections to the top music colleges in the *world*...Oh yes, I'm talking about Julliard! A one-way ticket, no less!" Her smile radiated. Then she paused. "You'll have to try out, of course. However, that new piece you were playing yesterday is guaranteed to get you in if you play it well."

"Great!" Julia fake-smiled, tearing the corners of the flier into pieces behind her back with no regret. After all, it was what had gotten her in this mess. She turned around and, avoiding her mother's eyes, watched the small pieces fall on the ground.

The tryouts were to be two weeks from that day. Julia practiced nonstop each day, until her mother was sure that she was ready. The day before the tryouts, Julia played it one last time in front of her mom. Midway through, she looked over at her mom and saw tears glistening in her eyes. She stopped playing and asked, "Mom, what's wrong?"

"You sound beautiful," her mom smiled. "I'm so lucky to have a daughter with the same passion as mine. But the difference will be that you'll make it in the music world, I'm sure of it. You know that I never did."

Julia stared at her, a sympathetic twinge making its way through her stomach. She knew that she had to play violin. It would break her mother's heart if she didn't.

The next day at the tryouts, Julia dressed in her best clothes.

"Dress to impress," Julia's mother always said, "Then play to match what you're wearing."

At the tryouts, which were in the city ballroom, Julia sat with her mother in two folding chairs, waiting to be called. Julia looked around the ballroom. It had been divided into two sections by a paisley-patterned room divider. There was a waiting room and the auditioning room. Everything about it made her nervous. The crystal

chandelier looked threatening against the charcoal gray walls that surrounded her, the red velvet curtains that draped casually around the huge window on the center wall made her want to rush toward the nearest exit, and the smell of perfume made her head spin. She looked around at all the hopeful young musicians around her. They all looked like they wanted to be there. Julia knew that she didn't.

"Bentley, Julia!" a stout old man called from the waiting room doorway, his mustache quivering as he talked. "It's your turn!"

Julia stood up slowly and smoothed out her ruffled velvet skirt, her sweaty hands making print marks that she hoped the judges wouldn't be able to see. She grabbed her worn out music book and violin.

"Good luck, honey," her mother whispered to her, rubbing her back. Julia walked with the man past the paisley divider and into the auditioning room. In the corner of the room, right in front of the portrait of Mozart, five well-dressed people sat behind tables with clipboards tightly clutched in their hands.

"The judges," the stout man pointed at each of them with a stubby finger, then adjusted his striped tie. Julia nodded slowly and set up her music on the stand that was placed in the center of the room.

"Begin whenever you are ready," the first judge, a woman with a tight bun and angular-looking features told Julia. Julia swallowed the hard lump that was forming in her throat, and picked up her bow and began to play. Well, she

tried to anyway. The music didn't flow out of her. It didn't feel right, holding the bow in her hand. She didn't want to be there, and it showed.

"I can't do this," she told the judges, packing up her things quickly. "I don't want to be in your school."

Leaving the judges and the stout man looking stunned, she shuffled back to the waiting room. Her mom stood up and ran to her as soon as she entered.

"That was quick!" she murmured, grabbing Julia and pulling her into a hug.

"That's because I didn't play," Julia whispered. Her mother pulled back.

"What are you talking about, Jules?" she questioned, her eyes widening slightly.

"I'm talking about...about how I don't like playing violin," Julia spoke quietly, but with each word in her sentence growing louder. Her feelings had been bottled up for a long time, and it felt good to be getting them out. Her mother just gaped at her. Julia repeated herself, and then went on. "I *never* have liked violin, and I probably never will."

"You don't...you don't...but Julia! Think about what you're saying. This is your *chance*. You have *talent*," her mom told her earnestly, looking slightly panicked.

Julia sighed. "I want to make you proud, Mom," she struggled to explain, "but I don't want to play violin anymore, and I most definitely don't want to go to the Deartown Music School. You always said I should do what I loved—but you probably never

considered that it wouldn't be violin." Her mother gave a little gasp.

"Julia, are you sure about this? You might not be thinking clearly. Did you eat breakfast, honey? Is your forehead warm?" She reached out to feel Julia's head. Julia shoved her hand away.

"Mom, I may be young, but I'm well aware that I've only been playing all these years for you. But maybe it's time I quit for *me*. I'm sorry that I can never make you proud."

"Julia," her mom whispered, "you have to play. You just *have* to."

"Why?" Julia asked defiantly. Her mom's eyes filled with tears.

"Julia, do you know how hard I worked to try to get into a good violin school? Do you know how devastated I was when I didn't get in? Do you know how much I want you to experience what I never did? I will do anything to get you to that point. You can't stop now."

"I..." Julia fiddled with the ties on her skirt. "I never knew how much it meant to you, Mom. But I'm not backing down. Not this time. I know that you want a good career for me, doing what you always wanted to do. I know you think it will make me happy, just like it would have made you happy. Well, think again, Mom."

"Oh," Julia's mom whimpered.

"Oh, honey, if you don't love violin, then...well, I think you should do what you do love. You only have one life to live...you should follow your dreams. And I mean yours. Not mine."

Julia looked up at her mom. "Thank you, Mom."

Her mother brushed a stray tear away from her face and smiled a wobbly little smile. "Jules, you don't have to if you don't want to, but won't you play me one last song on your violin?"

A small smile played at the corner of Julia's lips and she nodded and picked her instrument up. Everyone in the waiting room, ranging from wrinkly old grandmothers to small toddlers, turned to listen as she began to play one of her favorite pieces. Even the judges came out of the large room to see who was making the beautiful music that they had heard.

After she was done and the applause from everyone had died down, one of the judges said to her mom, "You've got a talented little girl there, ma'am. Make sure she sticks with this. She'll make you proud."

Julia's mom's smile radiated through her tears as she winked at Julia. "Violin or no violin, my daughter will *always* make me proud."

And Julia knew she meant it.

# Just Me

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*Sean is a lonely little boy who needs more than just the same old toys to be happy in JUST ME, by Cara J. Young.*

“Ah, ha!” Sean said as he fought the enemy in his game of secret agents.

Sean was an only child and had a wild imagination, but he had no one to play with and needed backup. He had bundles and piles of toys, but every time he played a game something seemed to be missing.

“Dinner is ready,” his grandmother called.

Sean was having his favorite food: Ramen noodles. Sean’s mom had been in the hospital for a few months and hadn’t been feeling well. Since Sean’s mother wasn’t feeling well his grandma was with him most of the time. It was getting close to Christmas, and Sean really missed his mother.

“Grandma,” Sean said, “do you think Momma will come home for Christmas?”

“Oh, I think she’ll be home in time if you ask Santa to bring her home,” Grandma said.

“Really?” Sean asked.

“Yes,” Sean’s grandma said. “You know, people can come when you least expect them.”

Sean wasn’t sure what Grandma meant, but he definitely wanted to see Santa. “Will you take me to see Santa?” Sean said.

“Sure. Now you should be getting

to bed,” his grandma said.

In the morning Sean and his grandmother went to see Santa. When it was Sean’s turn, Santa said, “Now what toy would you like for Christmas?”

Sean immediately said, “Oh, I don’t want a toy. I just want my momma to come home for Christmas.”

“Hmm, and why don’t you want something like an action figure for Christmas?”

“I just really miss my momma. So can you please bring her home?”

Then Santa looked at Sean’s grandma as she winked. “I think I can arrange that,” said Santa.

That afternoon Sean decided to play pirates. “Capture him,” Sean announced aloud to his workers, but there wasn’t anyone to capture or walk the plank.

“Ah, I wish I had someone to play with,” Sean said as his head hung.

*Brrng, Brrng,* the phone rang. He answered the phone.

“Hi, sweetie,” a voice said. It was Momma!

“Hi, Momma,” Sean said with excitement. “Are you coming home for Christmas?”

“I’m not sure, Sean. I’m not feeling too well.”

“But, Momma, Santa said he’d bring you home, and Santa doesn’t lie.”

“Sean, I’m just not sure. I’ll make it

if I can.”

“Are you saying Santa lied to me?”

“No, no, Sean, Santa is not a liar,” said Sean’s mom.

“Well, if you don’t come, he is,” Sean said as he hung up the phone. Sean couldn’t believe his mom might not come home for Christmas.

The next day Sean decided to play ninjas. He had everything he needed: backup, ninja suit...but wait; he needed an enemy to face. Christmas was coming tomorrow, and Sean had no one to play with, and his mom wasn’t coming home.

Sean thought maybe if he wished hard enough his momma would be home. That night, Sean wished on one of the brightest stars in the sky. He wished on this star hoping his mom would come home for Christmas.

On Christmas morning Sean saw so many presents under the tree. “*But what’s the use of having all of them if you have*

*no one to play with?*” Sean thought.

*Ding, ding, dong.* The doorbell rang. “*Who is it?*” Sean thought. It was just a person selling newspapers.

“I want Momma to come home!” Sean screamed as he ran to his room.

Then the door opened, and Sean’s mom was there holding a baby!

“This is your new sister,” his mom said.

“*A new sister,*” Sean thought. “*What a wonderful thing. I can help her learn to walk and feed her. I can hold her and see her every day. We’ll have so much fun together. I can’t believe I have a sister.*”

Now he had the best gift of all, a little sister. She could be his person for backup when they played secret agents, she could be someone to walk the plank when he decided to play ship, or she could be his enemy when he wanted to play ninjas or any other game. But little did he know that in the future playtime would go a different way.

# My Family and Me in Nevada

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*You might want to bring snacks on this vacation. A family takes a trip to Nevada on Halloween in MY FAMILY AND ME IN NEVADA, by Robert Hatchett.*

Once upon a time, my family and I went to Nevada. We visited a place called Yellowbone Park. It's a national park. We started at the statues with presidents' faces on them, and then looked around.

As we went into the woods, we began starving after that long sixteen-hour drive. We had traveled non-stop. Unfortunately, my mother, Trina, had mistakenly brought us some microwaveable snacks that were supposed to be eaten after school. We weren't disappointed. We were just very hungry.

"Dad, did you bring us some snacks?" my sister asked.

"Umm, yeah, no...no, I didn't," my dad, Rob, said.

"You are the main one talking about how we are going to pass out from not eating," I said quietly.

"What'd you just say?" my dad asked in a harsh way.

"Nothing," I said in a whining voice.

"I will give you something to whine about in a minute, son," he said angrily.

"Umm...", I said.

"You still talking, boy?" he replied swiftly.

"We...we see some huge black and brown bears," I said softly.

"Wha...wha...you still talking, boy?" Dad said.

"We really see some bears," Trina said softly.

Rob looked back and saw what we had seen. We stared at the bears like the duck stared at the big air rod in the movie *Chicken Little*.

The bears growled at us, and then we ran. The bears started chasing after us. We ran as fast as we could, and they did, too.

We started at a house in the woods and ran around obstacles. We then knocked on a door and went in. We saw the darkness, but it was not the back of our eyelids. We only saw one light that read "Haunted Houses for Hooligans." We called it "Three H's" when we saw it.

When it was over, we fell down a seven-foot mini-cliff, and we were back where we were when we got there.

We went home and called it a day.

# The True Meaning of Christmas

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*Christmas isn't only about gifts and Santa. In **THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS**, **Koreh Claybrooks** shows how Christmas means much more to those who believe.*

It's the day before Christmas, and Kerry is sitting in her room thinking about all the gifts she will get for Christmas. Kerry is nine years old and can't wait to see what Santa will bring for her for Christmas. Yes, she believes in Santa and loves him because he brings lots of gifts every year. Some people think it's silly of her to believe in Santa. Kerry doesn't care. There would not be a Christmas without a Santa. Santa makes sure all the kids in the world have gifts. How could you not believe in him?

As the snow falls rapidly she looks out her window thinking about the huge snowman she is going to make, and sees her new neighbors moving in. She sees a tall girl wearing bright red boots, a pretty white coat with red buttons, and a fluffy, red hat. She looks about Kerry's age, and she has good taste in clothes. *I think I like her already, and I know we will be great friends.* She grabbed her coat and raced outside to meet her new neighbor.

"Hi, my name is Kerry, and I love your boots and coat. What's your name?"

"My name is Meagan."

"Meagan, I bet you're bored sitting here watching the movers. Want to come to my house for Christmas Eve breakfast? We are having hotcakes with

lots of syrup, eggs and bacon."

"Okay, Kerry. I love hotcakes. Let's go. Do you think your mom will let me have seconds?"

Kerry smiled and knew she had a new best friend.

The girls hurried through breakfast and went to Kerry's room to play and talk. As they ran through the house Meagan stopped and stared at the large, beautiful Christmas tree with all the shiny ornaments and the huge angel on top.

"Meagan, what are you looking at?"

"I'm looking at the beautiful angel on top of the tree."

"Forget the angel! Let's count all the gifts under the tree." Kerry shook the gifts, and then frowned. The gift she really wanted wasn't there, but she was sure Santa would bring it tonight.

"Kerry, why are you frowning?"

"Because," Kerry said, "my very special gift isn't here, but I'm sure Santa will bring it tonight. I have been very nice all year long. Then," Kerry said, "my Christmas will be complete."

Meagan stared for a minute and said, "Kerry, don't you know that Christmas isn't about how many gifts you get, but is about the birth of baby Jesus? I don't care about how many gifts I get or if a make-believe Santa comes to my

house.”

Kerry stood very still and looked surprised. She couldn't believe what she had just heard. How could there be a Christmas if there wasn't a Santa?

“Kerry, you should come to church with my family to learn the true meaning of Christmas,” Meagan said.

Meagan heard her mother call and said she had to go. “Kerry, don't forget to ask your parents if you can go to church with me tomorrow to learn the true meaning of Christmas.”

Kerry waved goodbye and could not figure out what Meagan was talking about. *That's silly,* Kerry thought. *Everyone knows that the true meaning of Christmas is baking cookies for Santa, decorating the tree, and opening gifts.*

Kerry woke bright and early on Christmas morning and raced downstairs to open all of her gifts. Thank God Santa brought her shiny new bike. Now, her Christmas was perfect. After playing with her toys for a few hours Kerry had to get ready to go to church with Meagan. She didn't know why she was going because she already knew the true meaning of Christmas.

Kerry walked to the kitchen where her mom was stuffing the turkey. She asked, “Mom, do you know the true meaning of Christmas?”

Her mom paused for a minute and said, “I never gave it much thought.” Her mom said, “Christmas means different things to people.”

“Mom, may I go to church with Meagan?”

“Why do you want to go to church?”

“Meagan said if I go to church with her I will learn the true meaning of Christmas.”

Her mom said, “I haven't been to church in a long time. Maybe it's time for someone in this house to start going.”

“Well,” Kerry said, “when I go to church with Meagan, I will find out the true meaning of Christmas. I'll tell you all about it when I get back.”

When they arrived at Meagan's church, Kerry was surprised because the building was really small. She was expecting it to be huge with large windows like the church she went to years ago with her grandmother. The church was decorated really nicely. There were red flowers sitting on the altar and large wreaths with lights and red bows hanging on the walls. There were angels in pretty white dresses hanging from the ceiling as if they were floating. Kerry looked puzzled because there were no Santas or reindeer in sight. Not even one.

As Kerry walked through the door she heard the music playing and the choir singing, “Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the new born king!” The pastor walked to the microphone and shouted “Happy birthday, Jesus!” Everyone stood up and sang “Happy Birthday.” Kerry was confused. Who is Jesus, and why are they singing “Happy Birthday” to him on Christmas? The pastor said again, “Happy birthday to Jesus Christ.”

Meagan whispered in Kerry's ear, “Because his name is Jesus Christ, that's how we got the name Christmas.”



The pastor said, “Jesus is the reason for the season!” He went on to tell the story of the birth of Jesus. He said that Jesus was a gift from God and because Jesus loved us he gave his life for us. The pastor said, “Because God loved us, he gave us his only son.”

Then it hit Kerry all at once. The true meaning of Christmas was not about Santa and toys, but the gift of the

love of God through Jesus. Kerry whispered in Meagan’s ear, “This is the best gift ever. Thank you for helping me to learn the true meaning of Christmas. I will never forget it.”

When Kerry returned home she explained to her family what she had learned about the true meaning of Christmas. She told them that Jesus is the reason for the season.

# The Unexpected Snow Day

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*In THE UNEXPECTED SNOW DAY by Jeanne Lampertius, three ordinary kids are on their school's winter break and have nothing to do. Two scary humongous dogs come along. Will the dogs hurt them or do they just want to play?*

Winter Break was here and their family was not traveling anywhere. With two weeks off Jeanne, 11, Carlos, 10 and Perry, 7, thought this could be a really long and boring vacation. The kids decided they needed to create their own fun. It was the first day of Winter Break and snowing outside. "What are we going to do today?" said Carlos.

"How about we go sledding?" added Perry very enthusiastically.

"That sounds great. Let's go and get dressed!" piped in Jeanne. They ran and got bundled up in pants, socks, sweatshirts, hats and gloves. After putting their coats and boots on, they ran outside to get their sleds out from the attic.

Perry is in first grade, and is a fun-loving, athletic kid. He moves fast and is easy-going. Carlos is the jokester and the risk-taker outside. He tends to be the ring leader and creative one. Jeanne is the planner and loves to go with the flow and add to the fun. They all really enjoy playing outside and hanging out together.

It was very cold outside and the snow was blowing everywhere. The snow looked like a huge white blanket over the world, thought Jeanne. When they got outside they started up the hill

to their neighbors to ask if they could go sledding. When they got to the top they knocked on the door. When Mrs. Ross answered the door, Carlos spoke up first. "Can we go sledding on your hill?"

"Sure. Have fun and watch out for the trees. They can be such a problem," stated Mrs. Ross.

"Thank you," chimed Carlos, Jeanne, and Perry together.

"They have the best hill to go sledding on. We are so lucky that we live right across the street," sang out Jeanne. They put their sleds on the snow and got their sleds ready to go down.

Mr. and Mrs. Ross lived across the street. Both of their girls had grown up and were living out of state. Mrs. Ross had no grandchildren yet, so she would love to look out her window and watch the kids having fun. She was so sweet and thoughtful. On every holiday, she made the kids homemade cookies with their names on them. She even made a homemade gingerbread house with icing and gumdrops all in perfect rows.

It wasn't long before Carlos shouted, "Beat you to the bottom of the hill guys."

"No way, Jose!" laughed Perry. "Can I share the sled with you Jeanne?"

asked Perry.

“Sure,” said Jeanne. “On your mark, get set.....GO!” Once they pushed off, they were about half way down the hill when they collided into each other. They flipped over and started to laugh. Luckily, no one was hurt and clearly this was a tie.

After they went down the hill a couple more times, Carlos decided to spice it up a bit and ran to get his skateboard ramp from the garage. He set up the ramp near the bottom of the hill. When Carlos got to the top of the hill, Jeanne and Perry were ready to go down the hill. Carlos said, “We should go down one at a time.”

Jeanne added, “We should rank each other from 1 to 10.”

Perry went down first and went off the ramp and fell in the snow face first. When he came up the hill he asked, “How did I do?”

Carlos said, “Dude that was crazy and I mean crazy cool. I give that a 9.5.”

Jeanne shouted, “The way you took the face first in the snow was awesome, I give that a 10.”

Then it was Carlos’s turn. He started standing up then instead of falling in the snow he bent his knees, went off the ramp and did a summersault in the air. When he landed on the ground he heard all kinds of clapping and yelling. As he looked up, he saw a lot of kids watching. “Wow that was sweet,” yelled Perry.

Next it was Jeanne’s turn. She stood on the sled and did 360 degree turns the whole time down the hill. She screamed, “I did it. I did it.” The crowd of neighbors went wild and

cheered on the kids to keep up the stunts.

The dogs had heard all the noise and clapping and wanted to join in the fun. The dogs surprised themselves with how well they went down on the sleds. In fact they enjoyed it so much, they went down the hill ten more times.

Suddenly, out of nowhere two of the fiercest dogs ever seen, tore around the corner bend of the road. When the dogs came charging toward them, the kids were screaming with fright and jumped to climb the nearby trees. All of the fun they had been having disappeared in an instant. “Whatever you do, don’t move down the tree. We are going to be attacked any minute now. Just look at their growling teeth,” screeched Carlos.

Jeanne, Carlos, and Perry were terrified of the big dogs. They had sharp teeth and big ears and howled loudly. Their eyes were filled with anger. No one knew why they had appeared on the scene. Were they going to attack? Who did they belong to?

“Go Away! Go Away!” yelled the crowd of kids. One of the kids starting throwing snowballs at the dogs to get them to leave. Instead of attacking them, the two dogs jumped on the sleds and hooked their paws on to the edges. It wasn’t long before they started sledding. The kids were absolutely amazed and began cheering on the dogs. “I guess they wanted to see what all the fun was about over here,” said Jeanne.

Jeanne had her camera in her pocket and it had the ability to take videos. She videotaped the dogs doing

all kinds of stunts. First, they flipped, and then they did handstands on their sleds. No one could believe when the two dogs stood on each other's backs' and took the sled down over the ramp. In mid air, the dogs looked toward the crowd and gave them a paw up. By that time, over 30 people had gathered to see the dogs in action. Even their younger sister, Ana, woke up from her nap and came out to watch.

After the kids climbed down the tree, the dogs ran home. No one knew who they belonged to. Jeanne, Carlos, Perry and Ana went inside laughing and begged their parents if they could post the video on You-Tube. "Please, Please, Please," they cried. They had to show their parents the video clip first... which was a drag. They wanted to post it right away to see how many hits it would get. Their parents insisted that they had to put signs up in the neighborhood asking who these dogs belonged to before posting anything.

After two weeks when no one had responded to their signs, they requested again if they could post the video. Since they didn't know the dogs' names, they came up with their own names. They chose Speedo and Spicket, the "Super Dogs" because of their speed and super stunts. After editing the video, they put it on You-Tube under "Speedo and Spicket... The Super Cool Dogs who are Hot Dogs on the Hills."

It wasn't long before the owners of the dogs became famous and contacted Jeanne, Carlos, and Perry to thank them for capturing the video. They had no idea their dogs were so talented. Speedo and Spicket were known to escape at

times and for their incredible sense of hearing. "They are also very curious," said their owners Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln.

The Lincoln's loved the outdoors and skiing in the winter. They were stunned to see their dogs perform on the hill.

It was amazing to see how many people had watched the dogs' video on You-Tube. Within a month, it had reached close to 1,000,000 hits. When they got home from school one day, they turned on the TV and saw their video clip being shown. The reporter announced, "Speedo and Spicket, the first dogs to compete in the Winter Olympics." They played the theme song, "Who Let The Dogs Out," while playing the video clip.

Jeanne, Carlos, and Perry high-fived each other and jumped up and down. "This is truly amazing," said Carlos.

That evening, the phone rang and a representative from the Winter Olympics Committee called to invite the children to attend the Winter Olympics. "The Lincolns have requested you to join them at the Olympics along with Speedo and Spicket," said the voice proudly.

"We will be there for sure. This is just fantastic. Thank you so much," smiled Jeanne enthusiastically. She hung up the phone and shouted, "We're going to the Olympics!"

"Who would have thought our boring vacation would have turned out so exciting?" laughed Carlos.

"It's a good thing I said we should go sledding," chimed in Perry.

"We're going to Canada. Let's get packing," exclaimed Jeanne.

THIS CAN'T  
BE HAPPENING



# Atheres and the Greeks

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*The Greek cities are waiting for a hero to rise. You can see if Atheres is the one in **ATHERES AND THE GREEKS**, by **Luc Blondet**.*

A long time ago, Greek cities were training together to get ready for a god's child to lead them into battle. This young god would be sent to help defeat the barbarians who had conquered the north. The child was named Atheres. He was the son of the goddess Athena and the god Ares. When the chieftains of all the cities of Greece were united at the temple of Zeus, Atheres came. A warrior from the city of Athens raised him.

When Atheres was grown up, the warrior took him and the new warriors to a camp in South Athens to meet the most important chiefs of the Athens army. They prepared war tactics, and because Atheres had as mother the goddess of wisdom and war tactics and as father the god of war, the Greeks had an advantage.

In the battle of Wartex, Atheres could not die from an arrow or a sword. Then out of nowhere an arrow stabbed

the ground, and Atheres knelt down and prayed. It was the arrow of the gods. Atheres told his troops to do what he was doing and all gods and heroes would appear and help them fight. They all knelt and prayed.

The barbarians were laughing and started to try to kill the Greek soldiers, but every time a sword touched a soldier, the sword would break and a god would come out. The barbarians were as scared as the Greeks of having gods appear. When all the gods had appeared Zeus sent Ares and some other gods to go and scare the barbarians away.

Atheres was happy to see his family. Then he was told that the warrior that had raised him had died. He was very sad. All the gods were at the funeral. Then they celebrated with the Greeks that they had defeated the barbarians and sent them out of the country; but not for long.

# Candy City

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*When a young girl finds out her whole city is in danger, what can she do to save it? In **CANDY CITY** by **Christine A. Mestdagh**, you will see what it takes to save a sweet city from a man with a sour personality.*

“Cindy, look what I found out on the news!” my absolute BFF, Carly, announced.

“Like, OMG, OH MY GOSH, WHAT?” I replied excitedly.

“Why be so pepped up? Gary just made some kind of new machine that distributes candy, but instead, it does something evil!”

“Well, duh. He is evil after all, but that’s not important. You disrupted my lunch in my wonderful room for *this*?”

Carly was my best friend forever. She was always over, every day, or I was at her house. She was a tiny little human with brown curly hair, and always wore it down with a barrette. On the other hand, I was a little taller, by an inch or so. I had straight brown hair that always looked smooth, but was (and still is) ALWAYS tangled.

“Carly, why did you *insist* on bringing up Gary?” I asked.

Gary was a “professor.” He was a mad scientist, and he had a plastic globe above his head with a fake brain in it. He always looked like he was on a mission; of course nobody except his minions knew what Gary’s mission was. And, he was very tiny. He was even tinier than Carly, and nobody knew how old he was. I’m thinking he had a secret potion that made him shrink and stop aging.

“Well, excuse me, but look! The newscasters are showing a letter Gary wrote to them!” Carly exclaimed.

“It might say he did something terrible!” I asked.

“Oh, no, I hope it doesn’t mean that!”

I was about to answer Carly, but I was thinking about something. “Let’s walk and talk on Starburst Street.” We walked and talked about the last time anyone had ever heard about Gary, which was when he made the Eater Machiner, a robot of his. The Eater Machiner would eat up anything you put into this robot’s “mouth.” And, Gary has said in the past that he loves all candy. Did I mention the Eater Machiner keeps everything you put into it somewhere in it? And since we live in an all-candy-made world, what if he plans to eat all of Candy City, the place where Gary, Carly, my family, her family, our friends, bunches of other citizens, and I live?

We were finally home, so she replied while she was panting. “I have a plan. Let’s gather all of our family, not our friends yet, ‘cause they might take credit for your beautiful idea.”

“Okay . . . beautiful? Anyways, at school let’s spread the news.”

I said good-bye to Carly as she unlatched the front door and hopped



onto the porch. She skipped all the way to her house, two blocks down.

“Oh, I’m so tired.” I yawned, but it was only two o’clock. “Time must go by slowly when you’re anxious to solve Gary’s little plot!”

I ran to the elevator inside of our house and pushed the buttons to take me to my room. After about five seconds of waiting, the sliding doors made their way out of my sight so I could go to my destination.

I watched television, but nothing about Professor Gary, though. I played board games, played the piano, played pool, played with markers, and drew a picture of a candy bar.

It was finally 4:30 P.M. My parents had gotten home about five minutes ago, so I rushed down the elevator and into the office.

“Guess what, Mom? Guess what, Dad? Carly and I figured out Gary’s evil plan!” My mother stared at me like I had just drunk too much caffeine or so, so I pushed her toward the elevator so she could finally get her system working and moving.

Later on, Carly called, and she spoke to me, first.

“I’m thinking we can pass the news about Gary to all of our friends and their parents and spread it around, but just enough so it won’t be in the news or get to Gary somehow. So, maybe we shouldn’t spread it in public places.”

“I think so, too. That would be perfect. If it gets to Gary he might do his little plan sooner. Well, that leaves us to having to spread around to the whole city, except Gary and his minions, about Gary’s plan,” I said.

The next day I awoke and said to my father, “Is there school today?” The answer was yes, so I nodded and hurried over to the Get Ready and Go (GRG) Station. It was a station in my room with my closet, a bathroom, hair products, homework, and a food maker so I could get ready easily.

I was done with the GRG after about two minutes, so I hurried outside where the School Cookie would come. The School Cookie was a chocolate chip cookie that moved around the town. The chocolate chips were seats, very huge seats. So, we basically sat in a secure cookie that you could eat, but of course no one would because it was very dirty.

After school ended, when my mom picked me up and we arrived home, my father greeted me with “Hello” and “What you up to?” stuff. I replied with one- or two-word answers. I needed to call Carly!

“Hello?”

It was my turn to talk on the phone, now. “Hi, this is Cind—”

“Oh, Cindy! Hello, this is Mrs.— well, let’s just say Carly’s mother. I’ll get her on the phone now.” A few seconds passed, maybe 1ten, so I started to get worried if maybe Carly wasn’t there. “Oh, it seems Carly has made her way over to your house a few minutes ago! She’ll be there shortly. Have fun, and good luck solving Gary’s plan.”

“Thanks. Bye.”

To start up Carly’s and my problem planning, I sketched a map of town, including where Gary’s HQ was. I was hoping this could help us in trying to

save our little city. Suddenly, I thought of a plan.

“Hey, Carly, I just figured it out. So, here’s a map of Candy City. What I’m planning to do is, maybe, have some of our parents prank Gary. I don’t know what they could do, but for now, just pranking,” I started when she arrived. “Oh, the parents could say someone broke his Eater Machiner, and we could get the officers from the Police Station to really break it so Gary can’t do his plan anymore!”

“Fantasy—I mean, fantastic idea. If only the officers knew Gary’s plan would officially be evil, or else they can’t break it for no, I don’t know, well, like if Gary didn’t do anything wrong, so far,” Carly added.

“Oh, great, so who cares. Let’s go get our parents to talk to the officers now, and it’s getting late. I had a rough day at school; I didn’t feel good. The nurse let me stay the whole day in the office. My tummy hurt badly. So, you better head home. It’s getting dark, and you live a few blocks away.”

Carly had to leave, so I said goodbye to her.

It was late, and I was hungry. Since Carly and I were in the cramped foyer, I decided to move to a more spaced-out room. *The kitchen*, I thought. So I walked over there happily and plopped my buttocks right on the seat.

“Good evening, Cindy! How was your day at school? The better question is . . . why are you so happy?” my father asked oddly. I decided to ignore the “school” part of the question, so I went ahead and talked about Carly’s and my progress with Gary and his Eater

Machiner.

“When Carly was over, we were thinking about the Gary stuff.” I continued to go through the pranking plan and the officers. “Could you and Carly’s parents ask the officers, you think?”

“Oh sweets, this ain’t really the time to ask. I’m a bit busy—”

He cut himself off, and I don’t know why. Maybe he saw something, maybe he just did it because he felt I wasn’t listening, and he was correct. My eyelids were falling on me, and I was tired...I guess.

The next morning I woke up to my alarm clock and pounded it until it stopped beeping. *School*, I murmured to myself. *Another day of sickness, maybe*, I thought again. I went to the GRG Station and ran downstairs to ask my dad to go ask the officers pronto.

“What’s the rush?” he asked.

“Daddio, Carly and I don’t have a clue when Gary is going to do his plan, and it could be in a few minutes when people are at school and work. So you better, I mean, please, go to Carly and her family and start yacking to them.” I thought I didn’t say enough, so I continued. “You see, we’d be coming to an end if Gary is successful. He’ll consider himself the king of Candy City, or so he thinks. Plus, me and Carly thought that the officers might not approve of the breaking of the Eater Machine—did I tell you about that part?”

“I don’t know, honey. If I recall, my answer is no. Go on, I’m interested...and hearing about breaking something of Gary’s pleases me in some way.”

“Okay. Well, if the officers break the Eater Machiner, since that’s allowed in Candy City, Gary can’t do his little plan. But if the officers don’t approve of them breaking something of Gary’s, then Candy City could fall to an end if someone else doesn’t break it...” I didn’t know what else to say.

“If someone else breaks it they would probably get into trouble for breaking an item. More so, a Gary item,” my dad corrected me.

“Okay, okay. *Good!* I was thinking about saying that, but then I forgot, and you brought it up. So please go to the officers. But, you have to drive me to school now!”

My dad drove me to school today. I think the parents are all afraid of Gary and his machine now. It’s fine with me that I don’t have to go on the School Cookie anyway.

The day at school was all make-up work. I thought I didn’t have homework, but I had lots of class work. And since I wasn’t there the day the whole class did the work together, I had to do it on my own. A kid with very sloppy handwriting leant me his paper so I could base my answers off of it, but I couldn’t even read his handwriting! Every two minutes I would interrupt class to ask Charlie what it said.

The school day finally ended, and when I got home the officers, Carly’s family, my family, and some other parents with their children were standing in and out of my house. The officers had approved of the plan, so I was excited and decided to walk over to Carly.

“What’s up, Cindy? I hear it was all

make-up work today, right? Eh?” she greeted.

“Yeah, sure, boring. Charlie has the sloppiest handwriting! And, why is everyone at my house?”

“Why are you talking about Charlie? And people are at your house because the officers said yes to the plan and parents are bringing tools over to your house to get Gary’s machine.”

“Hear ye, all Candy City-zens. Thou police officers—” one police officer started, but another continued.

“Instead of hearing medieval talk, here’s how it goes,” the other police officer began. “We’re gathering items that can be useful in the breaking of Gary’s item. Nobody will be fined for this, and we will not take any valuable items. However, we will give all of you participating a pile of cash to pay for any damages or unreturned items. Chief, take it over.”

“All right. I’m the Chief. I think my worker—er, officer, here, has said enough. Now get to work and we’ll search through houses to look for items. Children, go play in the park. We have officers there, but Carly, please stay, and Cindy Gumdrop, please stay.”

“Hey, Carly,” I nudged her in the ribs softly. “Why’d he say my last name, and not yours?”

“Cause there’s one Carly in the whole town and like five Cindys.”

I nodded and helped the officers find some items. We found knives, forks, spoons, statues, cups, blankets, purses, bags, televisions, computers, lights, lamps, pictures, ropes, rakes, and

anything else that might be in a house.

“Officer Riley, this is Chief. Call all children to Cindy Gumdrop’s house immediately. Over,” the Chief announced into his walkie-talkie. And sure enough, a few minutes later, all of the children and Officer Riley were standing right by me.

“No school or work for those participating, yes, children and parents. You heard me. That means tonight at midnight we will walk over to Gary’s and bring non-valuable possessions. I repeat, non-valuable possessions you are fine with maybe not being returned.”

The rest of the day, for about five hours, was a huge celebration with food, games, movies, prizes, and many announcements and talking. The hours passed by quickly, and finally the clock rang 11:59 P.M.

“Here ye, here comes Chief with an announcement,” the medieval police officer yelled.

“WELCOME CITY-ZENS. I am Chief. MUSIC OFF!” There was music so loud I couldn’t hear anything, but when the music turned off I could hear Chief very well. “Nice. Now in one minute you will all follow Officer Riley to GARY HEADQUARTERS, or GARY HQ.”

“Hello. I am Officer Riley. Please follow me in an orderly fashion. Children, please hold onto your parents, and parents, make sure you do not lose your children at all. We will head onto Main Street, through the Town Square, passing Hershey Street and Candy Cane Circle. We will head past Ralph Road and onto Lollipop Lane. There we will

turn two rights and a left. When we walk up the stairs, be careful as it is very steep.”

His directions were well said but difficult to remember even a few roads. I followed the crowd to Gary’s HQ, but my fingers were trembling. My mom noticed and calmed me down by giving me a nice hug and a jacket. She must have thought it was cold at midnight maybe.

There must have been 30 or 40 steps to get to Gary’s place. I counted, but I think I skipped a few. I knew when we reached Gary because the Chief and the medieval guy said we must be quiet and told the parents in the back with no children at their side to prank Gary. The Chief grinned, and said, “Thank you. Here’s some instructions I typed up on what to say, etcetera.”

When the parents knocked on the very strange, yet tiny front door, I gasped when Gary and every minion popped out and told the parents about his liking for candy. I guess it wasn’t all that scary. The parents nodded, some stretched, and then they did their script for the prank. Meanwhile, the officers were gathering us to the back of the HQ as witnesses while they got in and broke the machine.

“Yes!” everyone said cheerfully but quietly. Soon another parent walked up to Gary’s front door and said that the parents had to go for something important, and everyone ran away. I didn’t get to see the expression on Gary’s face when he probably saw all of us running away because everyone sprinted so quickly.

An hour later I climbed into bed at 3:30 A.M. and turned on the television.

“—er Riley says, ‘It wouldn’t be a miracle without Cindy Gumdrop and Carly.’”

What was the news reporter saying? The reporter said something about Officer Riley, I think. I think I’m a hero if he said something wouldn’t be a miracle without Carly and me! I decided to go to sleep to see what happened in the morning, and if there was any news about Gary. I couldn’t fall asleep, though. I tried counting sheep, listening to peaceful music, and closing my eyes, and finally I fell asleep.

I crawled out of bed the next morning and everyone was at my house, even the officers and Gary!

“Yo, Cindy Gumdrop! I hear dat you stopped me machine. Yeah, well, thanks, actually. I would’ve gotten into serious trouble. Now I only have to give up all candy I stole before. That’s it. So

thanks. I’m still *evil* and I’ll get you back. I’ll haunt you forever,” Gary told me.

I was suddenly freaked out, and the police officers took Gary away and talked to him. I saw and heard him yelling and being very angry. He was pointing at me and looking at me, so the officers took Gary away so I wouldn’t be pointed at and scared anymore.

Later on I was playing outside with Carly and some other friends, like Cassie, when I saw a figure in the distance.

“GARY!” I shrieked. Suddenly I looked behind me and a minion was there—oh wait, that’s not a minion! That’s not Gary, either. I’ve been watching too many cartoons recently. All I saw was a friend walking on the street, just like it was before Gary moved into town. Of course, we all know now that he’s gone and will never come back, ever, ever again.

# Caroline

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*A girl has to decide; a life on land or life in the water. Find out her big secret in the thrilling story of **CAROLINE**, by **Lilly Flechsig**.*

The sun is baking me through and the water might be cool, but I will not be with my dumb cousin in the water here he jumps on me and drowns me.” I mutter.

“Honey, come on, your cousin loves to play with you,” my mom presses.

“I am going to call Isabelle, mom,” I snap.

“Fine, fine, go ahead.” She says with irritation in her voice.

“Hi Isabelle, once again I am the one sitting out of the water at a beach party. Why do I even go to these?”

“Your makes you, remember? Anyway, at least you are in the water! Water girls forever, right?” she asks.

“I know, it’s my cousin’s birthday party and well, I don’t like my cousin. So why do I go? My mom makes me go to all of my little cousin’s parties, even sleepovers!” I exclaim.

“You’re near the water though, right?” she prods.

“But I can’t go in the water because we” are mermaids. Oh no, here comes my cousin. Later, bye,” I say. “What do you want twerp?” I sneer.

“You’re coming swimming now whether you want to or not,” he snaps.

“What? Ahhh, get off me you twerp! Mom! Mom! Help!” I scream.

“Who wants cake?” my mom asks.

“Hey, cake!” George says.

“Oh, he’s a jolly good fellow,” my mom sings. I grab my mom by the arm and pull her away to yell at her but she backs away.

“I’m going to call Isabelle!” I yell and stomp off dialing my cell phone. “Oh my gosh, my dumb little cousin almost dragged me to the water. So I had to get away. Luckily, my mom brought cake and distracted my little cousin for now! My mom doesn’t get me at all. I don’t like my little cousin. I only have three true friends, Sam and Maggie and you!” I cry.

“Well, that’s a nice way to say hello, with someone screaming in my ear,” Isabelle retorts.

“Sorry, but ‘changing day’ was the last day I saw all of you. Changing day is the day we all became mermaids and Sam, a merman. We are still going for that swim at 4:00 a.m., right?” I ask hopefully.

“Yes, I’m going to go to lunch now,” she says and hangs up.

I am so tired of this whole cousin thing. I’m going to leave and go home. I leave the party without telling my mom and head home. I go to bed early so I can meet Isabelle for the morning swim.

*BEEP, BEEP! SMACK!* “Shut up you stupid alarm clock. You’ll wake my mom,” I whisper. I climb out the window, head down to the beach, and

take off my clothes before jumping in. My mermaid mind cancels out all thought.

Later, I am human again. Thoughts return to my mind. I wiggle my toes and my fingers. I take a deep breath of air. My human transformation seems to have gone well, but Isabelle's hasn't. I run to her; she is still a mermaid and flopping like a fish. I drag her to the water, she looks at me, and then she jumps back in. Once she jumps in she is fine, but she says, "I am a full mermaid now, and I don't know why. Tell my parents everything, and then come in

with me."

I begin to cry. *What about Sam and Maggie?* I wonder. I run home crying and wet and I tell my mom everything first. Then she helps me tell Isabelle's parents. They cried and sobbed as I showed them their daughter. I jumped in, and my parents cried. I turned and swam away.

I came back every day and waited for Sam and Maggie. They both came eventually. Then, we were merpeople forever. We never saw our parents again, but we were happy with our new lives.

# Chookabookas Invade!

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*In the story **CHOOKABOOKS INVADE!** by Leo Dudas, two average boys with everyday problems run into a week of discovery. It might just be the wildest week of their lives.*

When you're at Berkshire Middle School, you're in one of two groups: the cool group, or the not-so-popular group. Unfortunately, I—Leo—and my friend Cameron are in the popular group *and* the not-so-popular group. This leads to the fact that we get bullied by Mark. Mark is captain of the wrestling team and “Top Dog” of the Get-Bad-Grades-and-Beat-Up-the-Little-Kid group, you would think. It's actually not so bad being called stuff I don't know the definition of, and going to the store to get non-stretchable underwear. Let me tell you that in fact they are stretchable.

Just last week he pushed...he pushed... I don't know his name. I don't even think the teachers know his real name. Well, he pushed “him” into a locker. It was a very effective type of bullying, but he couldn't come up with a halfway decent name for it, so he called it the polka-dotted potato. The polka-dotted potato! Not anything decent like the wedgie and the swirly. It was just the polka-dotted potato.

The only thing worse than the polka-dotted potato is the feeling in your stomach you get after a weekend filled with sledding and hot chocolate, especially knowing that you're getting a substitute teacher for a week in your favorite class with your favorite teacher

Mr. Fisher who teaches language arts.

“Hi, Cameron,” I say, walking into school on Monday. “Why are you hiding behind the garbage—?” was all I was able to spit out before I was yanked down behind the garbage can by Cameron who was looking at something. I asked, “What are you looking at?”

“Shush up!” Cameron barked back. “Do you know who that is?” he whispered, pointing at a short and a little chubby guy eating a submarine sandwich.

“No, who?” I asked unknowingly as he took another humongous bite from his sandwich.

“It's Mr. Moop, our substitute teacher for Mr. Fisher.”

“Never heard of him,” I replied.

“Never heard of him? Never heard of him?” he shouted at me in disbelief. “He is said to be an—” he looked to both of his sides suspiciously “—an alien, because he acts weird and is the only one that has beaten me on a science project.”

I went to Mr. Fisher's class with Mr. Moop. He made us recite these weird spells. I guess that's what they were. When my peers recited them it looked like they were in some sort of trance. When I saw them I knew I had to get out. So I wrote myself up a fake



doctor's note. This was one of my better ones, I think.

*Dear, The teacher*

*Mr. Leo Dudas has experienced some explosions in the mind so he might have to leave class for this reason he might have to leave class early. While your at it could you change his grade from a F to an A for all he has been through.*

*Sincerely, the doctor*

When I showed that to him he didn't even look at me. He just stared at the others, and it looked as if he was causing the trance. So I took Cameron and went for it.

We talked about how weird it was and how we both refused to do what he said. In the hall we saw Mark skipping class as usual.

When we tried to run he caught Cameron and gave him the polka-dotted potato in the worst locker in the school. It was abandoned, so everyone put leftovers of lunch in there to see it mold and sometimes use it as a backup science project.

"Whatever happened to no man left behind?" I heard as I ran to my house next to the school.

That night during dinner I remembered the homework that I get in my helping-class-for-not-the-smartest-of-people that went on before school. So I went over to the school and started to go to where I left it, Mr. Fisher's classroom.

When I got there I saw that no one had moved from five hours ago, and

they were now all fuzzy creatures with no mouths, noses, or eyes. They had the largest long nails. They were dark green and yellow.

They didn't see me at first. They just kept saying, "We chookabookas will be kind to almighty and powerful Moopalopagus." Then when they finally got to their senses they looked at me in unison and said, "You must be a Moopalopagus follower. Be a chookabooka." Their voices sounded like sandpaper rubbing on concrete.

I just ran like a football fan racing for the last hotdog.

When I got home I ran to my room to see an army of rabbits listening to a squirrel with a gray stripe down his back. He was talking in a squeaky squirrel tone that I couldn't understand. One rabbit could speak English and told me that the evil chookabookas had returned, and that is why they are here.

He also told me a story about how all rabbits lived on a separate world called Appletonia. I asked him why it was apple they named the planet after and not carrots, and he said that there weren't carrots on Appletonia, only apples. He went on saying that chookabookas had invaded and forced the rabbits to move to Earth. I told him that I could ask Cameron if he would make some sort of contraption to capture and send them back to their home planet.

I ran to Cameron's house as fast as I could to see police around Cameron's house. I asked where Cameron was, and his mom said she couldn't find him, so she called the police.

I ran back over to the school, careful to avoid Mr. Fisher's classroom, to see some more police surrounding Mark and asking for the master key to the lockers. Mark, the so-called "smart one," ate the key and jumped out the window two feet above the ground into a Dumpster.

I slipped little pieces of scrap metal into the locker through the slits at the top and told Cameron the whole story and how we needed a contraption to eat up and send back to their home planet the chookabookas. I started to leave when I heard "Done," and looked back to see a small contraption he said would do the trick. I tried to work it, but my hand was too big to pull the lever.

I gave it to the squirrel with the gray stripe to use, and we came up with the game plan.

The next day I came to Mr. Fisher's class with no worries. I placed myself right in front of Mr. Moop, and the whole class turned to chookabookas. Then I screamed, "Now! Go now!"

The army of rabbits came pouring out, and the squirrel that was the leader of Appletonia and the leader of their army showed up in a hovercraft and calmly said, "Fire." They bombarded the chookabookas with carrots, and the squirrel ate the chookabookas up with the contraption until they were all

gone. I nearly fainted I was so happy.

The first thing I did was thank Cameron. When I got back to the room I gave the squirrel the mission to get Cameron out of the locker. They all did except for the squirrel. I asked him why he looked so sad, and he said, "I want to go rule my planet. I just didn't want them there." For some reason I promised I would help get the chookabookas out of their planet.

"Leo."

I woke to the sound of my name. I looked around, and my head was on my desk, and I was in math.

"Leo, wake up, or I will give you a detention!" my math teacher screamed. Then she looked at the class the same way Mr. Moop did in my dream. I knew she didn't really care what I did, so I made a paper airplane with a note that said, "Can you make a contraption that eats things up and spits things out in another dimension?" I threw it at Cameron.

As I was digging out my fake doctor's note, I felt something on my right side. It was a paper airplane that said, "This was in my dream once, so I will try."

"Just for the purpose of saving the universe—that was my dream, too!" we said in unison as the teacher put everyone in a trance. "Whoa!"

# The Day I Went to the Carnival

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**THE DAY I WENT TO THE CARNIVAL**, by *Kyra Alpiner*, is about twelve-year-old *Alyssa*, who has to go to the carnival for her little sister's birthday. Someone she meets there helps *Alyssa* see her family in a new light.

“Do I have to go?” I said in a whiny voice. “The carnival is for babies, and I’m twelve years old,” I complained on.

You see, we have to go to the carnival. It is my little sister Jamie’s birthday. The only thing she wants is to go to the carnival. One reason I don’t like carnivals is because there are always a lot of clowns. I hate clowns.

“Yes, you do have to go to the carnival,” my mom replied. “It is the only thing Jamie wants for her fifth birthday, and we want her to be happy.”

Sweet, little, innocent Jamie ALWAYS gets what she wants! Also, it isn’t the only thing she asked for for her birthday.

“Are we all ready to go? If we don’t move we will hit traffic,” my dad said in a positive and happy voice. Everyone was so excited to leave and spend the day at the carnival, except me.

We are in the car driving for what seems like four hours. Of course, we get lost. After asking a man where the Vingo and Friends Carnival is, we finally find it. It looks like there are about 2,000 people there. This is going to be a long day.

As soon as we walk into the carnival, we see a creepy, old booth with cobwebs hanging down the sides. There is dust everywhere. There also is

a big, creepy, dark woods behind the carnival. To make it even creepier, the man running the booth is very small with a lazy eye, and he only has four fingers on his left hand. He says, “Step right up and see an amazing surprise. A woman has a body of a human, but snake eyes. She never feels, nor loves. She also never cries.”

My sister immediately says, “I want to go in here.” My parents agree and ask if I want to come in. I say that I will just wait outside for them. As soon as they are in the booth and I can’t see them anymore, I dart into the woods. I have become angry because I hate carnivals and my sister always seemed to get her way.

I say out loud, “Why the carnival?” As soon as I say that, I see something in a tree. Its head is slimy and has a lot of scales. The creature comes close to my face. Now I can tell what it is. It is the «snake woman.»

I say, “Hello, is someone there?” without thinking.

The snake woman says, “Hi” in a gentle voice.

“Who are you?” I ask in a scratchy voice.

“I am Aloria, and I am a Snavilian.”

“What is a Snavilian?” I ask with curiosity.

“It is someone who has the body of

a human but a snake head.”

“Why are you here at the carnival?” I ask politely.

“Because I am proud to show people that I am real, and they are so curious,” she says in a proud way. Then she says to me, “You seem angry.”

“Yeah, the reason is because I always have to make my little sister, Jamie, happy. I always have to do what she says. Also, my parents put me in charge of my sister. It seems like my parents only care about Jamie, not me.”

“I know what you feel like. I have to make the man running the booth happy all the time, too. He doesn’t care about me. He only cares about the money he makes from people who pay to see the slimy, gross snake woman. The only advice I have for you is be grateful that you have a family who loves you, even if you don’t always feel like it.”

“Why aren’t you back in the show?” I ask.

“The man running it is very nice, but he doesn’t realize I need a break sometimes. He can sometimes be

forgetful,” she says in a funny way.

“I understand now,” I say. “I have to go now, but it was nice meeting you.”

“You, too. What is your name?”

“Alyssa Goly,” I say with pride.

“Alyssa is a beautiful name,” she says.

After that I leave to go back to find my family. I go back and hear my dad yelling at the creepy man, and find my mom screaming my name.

“Mom!” I say with pleasure, realizing she was worried about me.

“Alyssa, you’re okay,” she says with relief.

“Why is Dad yelling at that man?” I say.

“The snake woman never showed. The man running the booth made us wait for ten minutes.”

When my mom said that, I knew I was the only one that knew Aloria, the snake woman, was real. Aloria was real, and she taught me a lot today. I guess that I might be able to enjoy the rest of the day at the carnival. But if I see a clown...then I will freak out.

# The Day Plastic Trucks Saved the Day

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*Kristina, Kate, and Emily are at a party in Kristina's house. All of a sudden their "friends" attack them. Kristina vows to get revenge. What will be their fate? Find out in **THE DAY PLASTIC TRUCKS SAVED THE DAY**, by **Johanna Hopkins**.*

Kristina was planning a party; it was going to be the biggest and best party in the whole universe. She was so excited about the party; everything just had to be perfect. She invited all her friends and some other people that her mom invited. She knew that everything would go just fine...or would it?

She was putting up the disco ball when the door rang; it was one of her friends, Kate. Kate was wearing a dark green dress that had sparkles that seemed as if someone had drawn them. Her dress had a bow that was exactly in the middle of her dress and the bow stretched almost through her whole dress, only to an end at three-quarters of her dress. Her long, brown bushy hair had been curled for the occasion and fell on her shoulder. Kate was wearing a light shade of pink of lipstick, which perfectly matched her dress and her face. She had on a light shade of green for her eye shadow and her cheeks couldn't be pinker from the make-up. Her sneakers totally clashed with her whole outfit. They were faded and smelled a little. They had pink lines on the side and a big green star at the end of the shoe and the background was white. She smelled slightly of

perfume and onions, when mixed together making a disgusting smell. Kristina brought her inside and Kate helped her put up the rest of the decorations because she was early. As time went by, friends piled in the house and by the time everyone was at Kristina's house, it was already time to eat cake. They all sat down at the long, brown wood table. Everyone could barely fit; they were all crammed together. Kristina had to sit right next to her tobacco-smelling uncle and her disgusting brother. *Maybe it wouldn't be that fun after all*, Kristina thought. All her friends were acting weird. They did not eat a single bite of cake and were all staring at her hungrily.

*This is kind of scaring me*, Kristina thought to herself. *They look too weird. At least two of my friends aren't weird.* Kate and Emily were the only friends that weren't looking at her in that weird way.

When everybody at the table finished eating, at least some people finished, Kristina and her friends went outside to just hang out and talk. As they walked outside into the cool, fresh air Kristina noticed that her friends, except Kate and Emily, were watching her with an even more hungry and

greedy stare than ever. She was very scared so she tried to hide behind Kate and Emily. All of her friends were looking at her, Kate and Emily. It felt like their eyes were making a hole right through her. *If looks could kill...*, Kristina thought. Kristina saw their neighbor watching them in puzzled looks. Kate was the only one to notice that one of their friends ran behind the house so that he could catch Kristina's neighbor in surprise. He crept up slowly and Kate screamed, "WATCH OUT!!" But it was too late. Before he could turn around Kristina's "friend" had started ripping the little boy to shreds. He screamed as blood squirted out of his side. Kate turned away and started to cry.

The little boy's mom came out to see what was happening only to see her little boy ripped into shreds. She screamed in anguish, "HELP ME!"

Kristina sat down thinking to herself. "I got it," she screeched. "They're cannibals!" Then, all at once her friends started running toward them, Kristina, Kate and Emily. They watched in horror as they came rumbling toward them. *This is a nightmare*, Kristina thought to herself. "WAKE UP WAKE UP!" she screamed as she desperately pinched herself. "I'm too young to die!"

Then, it all happened so suddenly: Her friends hit her so hard and so fast she could hardly think. Then, she ran for her life. Kristina had never run so fast in her life. She thought she was going faster than the wind. She turned around to see if Emily and Kate were okay, and there she saw them, fighting back at their "friends". They were

fighting with all their might so that they would live.

Kristina kept running until she reached her house and there she burst into the living room and panting heavily. She said, "My...friends...are ...attacking...us...HELP!" She almost fell to the floor because she had no energy left. The parents hurried to the window and peeked outside. There they saw Kristina's friends attacking Kate and Emily, but the moment they saw the parents looking at them, they stopped and started being very nice to Kate and Emily. Kristina, Kate and Emily exchanged puzzled looks. Then, out of nowhere a strange girl came in driving a small plastic truck. Kristina thought it was hilarious and laughed so hard that she started to cry, then Kate and Emily started to laugh and before you could even think about it, everyone was laughing, even Kristina's so-called "friends."

Kristina then took the time that her "friends" were distracted and somehow found a plastic truck of her own and "drove" off with it. Kate and Emily soon realized what happened and they found some other plastic trucks and drove off with them too. Their friends chased after them. They soon caught up to them and said that there would be a race, one cannibal against the strange girl, Kate, Kristina and Emily. They agreed and they all lined up, and one of the cannibals had a flag. He yelled, "READY....SET....GO!" Kristina pushed the pedal so hard she thought it would break. She lunged forward and almost fell out of her plastic truck. She went so fast she thought her hair would

be ripped off by the tremendous wind. She turned the wheel and went crashing into the woods, Kate, Emily and the strange girl followed. Kristina whipped her head around and saw that the cannibal was catching up to them and a huge mob of cheering cannibals was after him. She turned her head back and pushed the pedal even harder. Through clenched teeth she shouted, "I just have to win this, it means life or death."

They were all suddenly surprised when a huge group of skateboarding squirrels came out of the bushes. They were going toward Kristina and her friends! Kristina exclaimed, "I think I just had enough excitement to for my whole life." She closed her eyes and waited for her fate to come, but nothing happened. Kristina slowly opened her eyes and saw her friends laughing and pointing at the cannibals, so she turned her head to see the skateboarding squirrels biting, scratching and hitting the cannibals with their skateboards. The squirrels were about four feet high and were different shades of brown and black. They all had different colored skateboards but they all said the same thing, "FREEDOM." It seemed like every muscle tensed in their body, and fought as if they didn't care if they died

and they didn't care if they got hurt, they just somehow magically healed themselves it seemed. They all had helmets that matched their skateboards and kneepads and elbow pads that also matched the outfit.

Now was their time to escape. They started their engines and took off. They heard the cries of the cannibals getting fainter and fainter. She was rejoicing inside.

Kristina and her friends then drove to Kristina's house. When they got there they all ran to their moms and hugged them as hard as they could. They drank some hot cocoa with lots of marshmallows and told what just had happened to them. And of course, they didn't believe them and said, "You three girls are great storytellers. You should sign up to be storytellers in the library," and laughed. The three girls looked at each other and shook their heads.

Many years later Kristina was napping in her rocking chair when she had a heart attack and died. Some people say the story of her adventure is true, and some say it's not. But as she said in her will, "Keep away from your untrusted friends, for that could save your life."

# The Discovery of Magic

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*Magic is real, according to a boy named Jack. Robin Thierry tells how Jack brings it back to the world in **THE DISCOVERY OF MAGIC**.*

As I was walking to school, I was bored so I started making weird noises to have some fun. Suddenly a 2,000-year-old redwood tree ahead of me burst into flames. It happened so quickly I couldn't tell what caused the flames, but the flames disappeared just as quickly as they appeared. I was curious and stopped to examine it. After a good look around, I still couldn't figure out what caused the massive flame to appear. I was running out of time to get to school, so I decided to look at it once school was over. Besides, it was the last day of school until September.

I had just finished school and was on my way home. I knew I wanted to do something after school, but my brain wouldn't tell me. I took a moment to think. I uttered "Nar," and the sidewalk ahead of me melted from the heat from a fire that seemed to appear from thin air!

When I got home, I searched the Internet to find out what could have caused the flames, but found nothing. Whoops, I had forgotten to examine the tree. With all the things going through my mind, I had completely forgotten to examine the tree after school. So I told my mom, Ellie, that I wanted to walk around for a while outside.

After a while I found the tree again

and started to examine it. I wondered if I were causing the flames or not. So I uttered "Nar,"

and the flame appeared. I imagined the flame as a horse, and the flame became the shape of a horse, just like that!

I decided to experiment with magic. I yelled, "Knar," and the tree started to walk around! I made the tree dance and do a summersault. I had to crack up after that. Then I realized how dangerous magic was. If the world found out about magic, everything would get out of hand. Robbers would become too powerful for the police to stop. They would only need to say a single word to get out of jail! Then pirates would take over the world, and then this would happen, and then this and that and this...

"Stop it!" I told myself. So I made a list of what I already knew about magic, like "Nar" is fire and "Knar" (knar) is tree and you can make the substance do whatever you want! So I spent the next three weeks experimenting with magic and found out you can pick up an object by imagining the object being lifted off the ground. Then I realized something that calmed me down a bit: I might be the only one that could use magic.

As I turned the corner to get home, my mom and dad were waiting for me on the front porch. When they saw me



they said, “Get in the car. We’re going to miss our flight to Germany! It was supposed to be a surprise! I thought you said you’re going on a *short* walk, and by ‘short’ I thought you meant ten minutes—not almost half an hour!”

It was a long drive and flight, and I couldn’t fall asleep.

The next morning I woke up at 12:00 noon and my parents said that we were going to a castle. It was an hour drive. At the castle we went to see what is believed to be a book of spells. As I looked down, the book was surprisingly opened to the “B” section. I found the word Baum which means tree in German and the book. Just then I saw that there was a hidden note on the wall that said everyone that knows the language created by the monks and they discovered that anyone who knows their language could use magic ! I asked my parents if we could go to another room immediately. All I found was more bad news. I found out that it could take years to find a magician who was on the loose, and it’s hard to capture a magician. All he needs to do was say a word and he could end up in a different place in a different dimension and look different than he did before the spell was said! All I wanted to do was leave Europe for the rest of my life! Then I learned that his or her voice could also change! I just couldn’t bear it any longer when my parents said, “Come, Jack, we are going to miss the train to Paris!” When my parents said that I felt so relieved. At least it isn’t Germany I thought, plus I don’t think I’m going see a castle in Paris. When we arrived at the station,

the train to France was canceled because of a land slide that covered the tracks! I thought I was going to barf. We stayed in a hotel that is thought to be a monk temple! All over the walls I found spells and they were already translated into German. I spent some time memorizing the spells that were written all over the walls. I noticed that some spells sounded almost exactly the same but meant completely different things, like “nora” means “on” and “noro” means “off”. When you are picking up an object with your mind and you imagine one to jerk violently and the thing could snap in half like a branch when someone is sitting on it and the person is too much weight for the tree. And in the spell, instead of a tree snapping, it could be the person you’re using the spell on ! This was too much for me to bear, so I went to bed.

The next morning my parents said that we’re going to take a ship from Germany to New York City and an airplane from New York City to California, which is where I live. The next two weeks I spent sitting around either on a ferry, in a port, or on an airplane. Finally when we arrived in Los Angeles I couldn’t wait to see my friends again.

Then, it was the first day of seventh grade. I felt so nervous because the kid that always bugs me sat next to me in every class I have for the whole year! It’s not because he bugs me. It’s because I thought about what could happen when the world found out about and learned magic again. I thought it could happen because I will probably use magic to bug him or to

stop him from bugging me.

When he scribbled on my paper I decided to tease him. I took his arm with magic and made him break his pencil, and then I erased my paper and wrote down all the right answers. The reason I broke his pencil is because Mrs. Heart doesn't let anyone get up to sharpen their pencils during class, and he doesn't have a small handheld one. I could see that this drove him nuts, especially because we're taking very important notes on a special method. We're going to have a test on this method Monday, and this is the only day you can take notes on this! This made me feel better because now he will have to spend lunch and lunch rec. taking notes so he can't tease me for that one hour of the day.

I discovered that I could use magic to memorize things. This made me feel worse because now someone could learn the entire language created by the monks in just a week instead of about four to five years, making magic even more dangerous if the world found out about magic!

On my way home, a strange guy seemed to be following me. I looked back, and all of a sudden I was back in the temple in Germany and the monk was in front of me. Then he spoke in English without an accent. This is what

he said: "The dark is growing in power. You're the last hope to save the world from the dark. Master our language. You must! Only at your full strength will you be able to destroy Metrox, the most powerful magician in the universe that is known to anyone." I was so scared that I almost peed in my pants.

They trained me for the next two days at the temple. I learned a lot in those 48 hours. When they sent me back to my real time not a tenth of a second had gone by! This surprised me quite a bit. Then from nowhere a voice said, "Come here, Jack." It sounded exactly like my but I knew who it was: Metrox.

The dark magician rose from a shadow. His cloak was covered with mold, and his breath smelled like blood. The first thing that came to my mind was, *I'm done for.*

Fire came out of his hand with enough force to destroy a brick wall. I quickly imagined a force field around me and stopped the flames. But the impact surprised me so much that I almost fell backwards. I imagined a tree snatching him up just as a distraction. From behind him, I broke the road and chucked a piece at him, and he seemed to disappear. By that I knew he would stay hidden until he is even stronger because he doesn't want to be defeated.

# Dragon Queen

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*When orphaned dragon Emma finds out that she is the daughter of the murdered Dragon Queen, she seeks to avenge her family's death in **DRAGON QUEEN**, by Anya Lev.*

“Ugh!” I grunted as I skillfully dodged Rubio’s claw.

“You always know when I do that! How? I have never met anyone who fights like you do,” Rubio breathlessly said as he walked over to our fire and sat down for a little rest.

How I got here? It’s a long story, so if I were you, I’d get comfortable.

First, you probably want to know who I am. Well, in the beginning of my story I was just a young small-town dragon. My name is Emma, which is short for Emeraldal. I am pretty small for my age of 98. As you might have imagined, dragons live much longer than humans do. Anyway, I am small, but my size doesn’t matter. I’m stronger than just about the strongest boy in my tribe. My scales (if I do say so myself) are very pretty. Each one looks like a shining, bright emerald, each a different shade of green. Of course, I will never be as beautiful as Amythea. I have a picture of her in my room.

Queen Amythea is the queen of all dragons. That is, she was until somebody shot her in her sleep. She had the most beautiful scales ever. They were purple like amethyst. I don’t know why, but Queen Amythea’s death was almost like finding out that my mom was dead all over again.

I remember the night that my

family was murdered. I was about five years old, and was asleep. I felt dragon fire, and when I woke up, my mom, dad, and brother were all dead. I still wonder to this day why the murderers spared only me. I remember feeling so alone, like everybody ditched me for death. A nice family that told me I was their kid took me in, and that whatever happened that night was just a dream.

Well, now I’m leaving my nice family to go find my real family’s murderers. The night before, they told me that my parents actually had been shot by two crazy dragons both as black as night itself. I felt so angry, betrayed, sad, happy, and surprised all at once. I didn’t even know that was possible. I felt angry and betrayed because I thought that these people were actually my real family and that I could trust them. I thought that they would tell me everything, and here they suddenly tell me, when I’m 98 years old, the most important secret of my life. I’m sad because even though my mom already died, and I knew that, it felt like she died all over again. I am happy because now I know who my real parents are and who wouldn’t be happy if they just found out that they were royalty? So now I’m setting off in hope of finding someone that knows a little bit more

about these two dragons than just their color.

It was probably somewhere around that thought that I met them. No, fortunately it was not the murderers. I said “fortunately” because though I might have thought that I did, now I know that I had no idea how to fight, and I wouldn’t have stood a chance against two professional killers. No, it was two other dragons. The bigger one was red as ruby, but the other one was dark blue, like he was made from the sea. The red one came forward and said, “Oh, hello, and what would a nice girl like you be doing out on a night like this?” As he said that, he cocked his head to one side in a way that reminded me so much of my foster brother.

“I am Emma. And I am just going on a walk. I love taking walks at night. Who are you?” I said casually, not wanting to let these strangers know too much about me. It was dangerous for a girl to go outside alone, especially at night.

“I am Rubio, and this is my helper, Zircon. Are you sure that you are just Emma going for a walk? Or could you be Emeraldalda setting off to find her family’s killers? Do not be afraid. We will not injure or harm you in any way.” I gasped at the correct assumption. How could he possibly have known?

“Yes, er, I mean no, but yes, no, no, no! I mean yes, er, wait, no! But, how?” I stammered. I was so confused! Zircon chuckled at my answer, but Rubio stayed calm with a warm smile playing at his lips. I liked

him for that.

“Are you Emeraldalda or Emma?” he asked simply.

“Emeraldalda, but I like to be called Emma. How did you know that I was going to find my family’s murderers? What do you know about them?” I asked.

“I actually know quite a bit about your parents’ death. I also know a lot about you. More than you could ever imagine,” Rubio said mysteriously. The last part about knowing me creeped me out a little. Who was this guy, anyway, and what did he know about me that I didn’t?

“Like what do you know about my family’s assassins?” I demanded. “I’ve had enough of playing games.” I needed some serious answers.

“Well, their names are Onyx and Ebony. They are mates in work and in life. Onyx looks like onyx, and as some people say, his heart is as black as his scales. Ebony looks like ebony, she has been with him for as long as any of us remember, and they always go out during nighttime together either to hunt or to murder.” Wow, Rubio did know a lot.

“So, what exactly are you doing here?” I asked, a little bit harsher than I intended.

“We are looking for you, Emma. Come with us. Your foster parents know that you will be coming. I will explain everything. We just need to get out of here because you never know who will be hiding in the shadows.” Rubio’s voice still sounded calm even when it was rushed. So, thinking that I was really stupid (I now realize that I

made a very smart choice indeed), I went with Rubio and Zircon.

We flew to a big forest and stopped at a small clearing with a tiny little cottage in the middle of it. We all sat down in the living room on a bunch of weird red and brown leather couches.

“Now, let me tell you what happened. Oh bother, someone is outside, and it doesn’t sound like a good guy,” Rubio muttered. I, too, heard a lot of grumbling and people stepping on twigs from outside.

“Zircon, you know, I told you everything she needs to know. Can you tell her?” Rubio yelled from outside.

“Emma, you are not really who you think you are. You are the daughter of Queen Amythea. Your foster parents helped you just as Onyx and Ebony were about to shoot you. Onyx and Ebony only had a little fire left, so when Amber, your foster mother, jumped in front of you, they couldn’t do anything. Amber said to leave, and she had a lot of fire in her stomach, so, they were forced to leave without killing you. Amber took you in and treated you as her own. When I found out that Onyx and Ebony knew where you were, I told your uncle, so we came to get you,” Zircon explained.

I jumped up and said, “Well, what are we doing here? We have to find my uncle!” while walking to the door.

“Wait, I will show you where your uncle is. Follow me,” Zircon said. I followed him outside where he took me to the backyard. He stopped right behind Rubio who was staring into the forest and growling.

“So, this is my uncle? Rubio is my

uncle?” Oh, this was just getting better and better. Rubio turned around at the sound of my voice and answered, “Yes, I am your uncle. The reason I didn’t take you in earlier was that you weren’t old enough to understand.” I rolled my eyes at that.

“Yeah, that’s what everyone says. Are you sure that it’s not just that nobody wanted me? ‘Cause I’m not,” I growled as I started walking back to the house.

“Yes, I am absolutely positive,” Rubio answered my rhetorical question. I walked into the house and sat in one of the couches.

“Training begins tomorrow morning,” Rubio told me as he walked to his room. I walked outside and lay down in the soft grass. I lay there thinking about the day. It was late, and soon I fell asleep in my favorite bed of all, where there is nothing separating me from the moon and stars.

Rubio came outside looking for me at around six. I was already awake and eating my breakfast of deer and leaves. Rubio looked surprised and approving of my early rise. When I was done, Zircon and I started training with Rubio.

That’s how I got here. Or rather that was about a year ago. Now we are almost to Onyx and Ebony’s cave.

Suddenly, we all heard a rustling in the bushes. Since I was the smallest, quietest, and strongest out of all of us, I went to go check it out. I went to the bush and found myself staring straight into the bright red eyes of a black dragon. Right beside him was another

dragon that looked like him, only she was female.

“Onyxo and Ebony,” I breathed. And the fight began. Onyxo jumped at me, and the rest was a blur. I just followed my instincts. He slashed at me; I blocked with my claw. He tried to bite; I dodged and slashed. It went on like this for some time.

I was too busy with Onyxo to look over and see how Rubio and Zircon were doing. I thought I was doing really well, and now I knew why Rubio made us do all of those exercises. But the bigger dragon was older, more experienced, and stronger, and I was tiring quickly.

He slashed with both claws. I only managed to block one. I felt a sharp stab of pain as Onyxo’s claw hit home. I felt blood oozing down my side as his sharp claw found its way through the thick, hard scales, and cut easily through my soft, unprotected skin. I felt excruciating pain. My vision blurred. I knew that this was the end of Emeraldal Greenscales. *At least I’ll get to see my family*, I thought.

Then I remember how they died. They didn’t deserve to die. They had no choice. They couldn’t fight for themselves like I could. I was a disgrace. Finally someone in my family gets the chance to survive, and I was ruining that chance. Then I got angry. Who did this guy think he was? Messing with my family is not something I will allow, and he will not get away with it. So, I got up, much to everyone’s surprise (Onyxo thought that he had killed me, so he went to help Ebony kill Rubio and Zircon), and

I went behind Onyxo and waited for my moment to attack.

Onyxo and Ebony were having a hard time, though. Onyxo wasn’t in such bad condition; I had given him a lot of cuts, but they were small and not very deep. It was a different case with Ebony. She was gushing thick, blue blood from head to toe. If you looked at her from far away, you would think that she was a blue dragon instead of a black dragon.

Finally, Rubio attacked Onyxo suddenly, and Ebony went to help Onyxo finish Rubio off. She never got the chance. Zircon came up from behind her and slashed viciously at her neck. This was too much for her. She collapsed in a dead heap with blood still streaming from like a river. Onyxo howled at the sight of his dead girlfriend.

“Now I shall kill you for what you have done to my loved one!” he was saying.

“Well, my friend, I’m afraid that may be rather difficult considering you have horrible wounds and gashes, while my helper and I are not in such a bad condition, and there are two of us, and only one of you,” Rubio answered. By this time, Onyxo was also covered in blood. When I looked over at Zircon and Rubio, I winced because they were not as bad as Onyxo, but they did have a lot of pretty deep cuts.

“Ooh, I just love a good fight,” Onyxo said while laughing somewhat oddly. It was sort of like a mix between a chuckle and a giggle that made him sound completely crazy, and

a little scary, too.

“Then you’re gonna love me,” I growled while stepping out of the shadows. Rubio and Zircon both looked relieved because they both had thought that I was dead. Onyx had a horrified expression on his face as if to say, *You came back from the dead!*

If he were going to say that, he never got the chance. I pounced on him, clawed, and bit with all of my leftover strength that even I didn’t know that I had. I guess anger can be super-strong sometimes. With my energy up, and Rubio and Zircon both helping me, we beat Onyx pretty easily.

“Wow, Emma, that was some fighting you did back there. Now lie down in the grass and let me look at

that wound of yours.

“Hmm...I don’t know much about medical stuff, but I can tell that is some nasty wound,” Rubio murmured after a long time.

“Here, let me try. I think I might know a thing or two how to help,” Zircon suggested.

Well, it turns out, Zircon knows more than just a thing or two, and when he was finished, I had a bunch of fancy medicine on my cut and a huge bandage. It took forever to get it on, but I already felt better.

“Now that you’re all fixed up, why don’t we go back home?” suggested Rubio. So we all started flying toward the Dragon Castle, where I would soon get crowned Dragon Queen.

# Fairy Gardens

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*In FAIRY GARDENS by Amanda Bonilla Taylor, two fairies try to make the Queen healthy again by traveling through realms to find a cure to her illness. Follow the fairies as they encounter new challenges and make new discoveries.*

Do you know about Fairy Gardens? No? Well, then, here is the story of “Fairy Gardens.”

Once upon a time there was a garden. Part of the garden was called Fairy Garden. The sun is always bright and beautiful. Flowers are everywhere in Fairy Garden. Now in Fairy Garden there were two little fairies that stood out against the rest: Princess Pea and Chestnut. Princess Pea is a small redheaded fairy who is usually in her own world. Chestnut has chestnut colored hair and wears a chestnut hat wherever she goes. These two fairies are best friends.

One day Princess Pea and Chestnut were staring at the clouds. Chestnut saw a cloud that had the shape of a magnifying glass. Chestnut had an idea. “How about we become explorers and private-eye detectives?”

“Sure, why not?” said Princess Pea. They made signs out of leaves and pasted them with tree sap all over Fairy Garden.

Disgraced by her daughter for not telling her what she was doing, Queenie banished Princess Pea to the dark, dreadful dungeon. While Princess Pea was in the dungeon, Queenie became ill. Princess Pea had an older sister name Princess Tiger Lily, who was very

mischievous. Princess Tiger Lily was immediately crowned queen after Queenie became ill. All of this happened while Princess Pea was in the dungeon. No one told Princess Pea any of this until she and Chestnut were kicked out of Fairy Garden.

While Queenie’s enormous bodyguards that look like they can crush anything are escorting Chestnut and Princess Pea out of Fairy Garden, Chestnut asks them, “Why are we being banished from Fairy Garden?”

The bodyguards said in unison, “You two are suspects, accused of using dual magic to poison Queenie’s drink, in an attempt to receive half of Queenie’s life savings.”

“That’s absurd,” said Chestnut. “We would never do a thing like that.”

“We know, but still these are Princess, I mean Queen, Tiger Lily’s orders. We can’t even let you stay if we wanted to.”

“I understand,” said Princess Pea. The guards opened the gate that separated Fairy Garden and the dark woods (tall grass).

After walking about two hours into the woods, the two finally found a clearing where they could set up camp. Chestnut found small twigs and started trying to make a flame. Meanwhile,



Princess Pea went to find something to sleep on for the night. Just then, Princess Pea heard something out in the dark, creepy woods.

“Chestnut, is that you?” said Princess Pea in a shy little voice. Out of the dark woods walked a male fairy who appeared to be 100 years old.

The male fairy immediately said in a low voice, “Hello, my name is Howard the wizard. You may call me ‘Wizard.’ I saw in my magic ball that you need answers. I am here to give you answers.”

“Chestnut!”

“Yeah,” Chestnut said while hard at work trying to make a flame.

“This is the wizard. He knows how to make Queenie healthy!”

The three gathered around the small flame. The wizard talked about how he battled the pixies, made peace with the gnomes, and met the wisest gnome. The wisest gnome told him about the stone of cures, and how it can cure any disease or illness. The wise gnome said that the stone is somewhere in the three gardens: Fairy Garden, Pixie Garden, or the Gnome Garden. “After you find the stone of cures,” said the wizard, “you will live for eternity. The stone of cures does not look like a regular stone. When someone touches it, it lights up and shows the symbols of fire, air and water.”

“Then let’s go find the stone,” said Princess Pea.

“Wait a second, ladies. You need to get some rest before you go.”

“Fine!”

\* \* \*

“Rise and shine, Princess Pea,” said the wizard.

“No! Go back to Queenie,” said Princess Pea in a sleepy voice.

“You are not in the palace anymore, let me tell you that,” said Chestnut.

Right before they were about to leave camp, Wizard gave a bronze pocket watch and a small blue bottle to his companions.

“The bottle is fairy dust, and the pocket watch is to only be opened if you want to change into a pixie, gnome or fairy,” said wizard.

“Why would we need to change into fairies? We’re already fairies,” said Chestnut.

“You will find out in time, my dear,” said the wizard.

After walking 30 minutes on a path through the dark forest, they came upon a patch of tall grass and parted the blades with their hands to peer through and see if anyone was there. Instead, they saw several strange plants with what appeared to be teeth. Just then a fly landed right in the middle of the strange plant’s mouth. *Wham!* The mouth closed, and they heard a faint buzzing sound. Then it died out. A pixie approached and petted it. Then she walked away.

The girls opened the pocket watch. Just then a speaker announced from the pocket watch, “Pixie, fairy or gnome?”

“Pixie,” said Chestnut.

“How many people?” said the pocket watch.

“Two,” said Princess Pea. *BAAM!* They had two wings instead of one like they were accustomed to having.

They rose by fluttering their wings and started looking for the stone.

A large pixie said, "Leave immediately."

Chestnut said, "Why? We are pixies."

"No, you are not. You are trespassers," said the large pixie.

"How do you know that we are trespassers?" said Princess Pea.

"Because you don't have a stamp on your hand," said the large pixie. Since they were dishonest, the large pixie took the two trespassers to the palace so the king could determine their fate.

Suddenly, Princess Pea and Chestnut took out their swords and yelled, "Where can we find the stone of cures?" No one answered. Instead, a lot of pixies flew toward them. Chestnut screamed, flew away, and hid. She yelled, "Princess, fly away."

Then all of the pixies stopped and said, "If you are a princess from a faraway land, where is your necklace?" Princess Pea proudly pulled out her necklace. All the pixies bowed, because pixies respect princesses.

Then they asked, "Who is your companion?"

Princess Pea lied and said, "This is Lady Chestnut."

They put Princess Pea and Chestnut in the finest rooms in the palace, with all the food they could eat.

The following day the fake pixies, Chestnut and Princess Pea, were taken on a tour of Pixie Garden. During the tour they learned that the pixies know how to harvest food without using pixie dust. This was surprising to Chestnut and Princess Pea. After a few more

days of luxury, they had to go off and explore another garden.

When they got into the gnome boundary they remained pixies. The two saw that gnomes were good at making sturdy, warm houses out of mud. They flew straight into the Gnome Garden and hid behind the big, green, bushy leaves.

"What are we looking for?" asked Princess Pea.

"We are looking for an old, wise gnome."

"I found him," said Chestnut. The wise gnome was a mass of wrinkles with a long, straight, white beard that stopped at his feet.

The two fake pixies flew up to the wise gnome and asked, "Where is the stone of cures?"

The wise gnome said, "Somewhere lost in the Fairy Garden."

"Thank you," said Chestnut. The fake pixies flew away.

"That was easy," said Princess Pea.

By the end of the day they were at the gate that separates the woods from Fairy Garden. So again they took out the pocket watch and changed back to fairies.

The two fairies flew over the gate and went from house to house as fast as they could in search of the stone of cures. By the time they got to the corner of the garden, Chestnut was tired, so Chestnut sat down on a rock.

"Chestnut, look what you're sitting on: the stone of cures!" said Princess Pea. Chestnut was sitting on a glowing rock with the symbols of water, fire, and air. The two crushed up the rock, and then they mixed it with a flower of

water and flew to Queenie to let her drink it. Right after she drank the water, she immediately felt better.

Queenie banished Tiger Lily for poisoning her and retired. She named Princess Pea the new Queen Pea and gave Chestnut the title “Lady Chestnut.”

Queen Pea made peace with pixies

and gnomes. Queen Pea started trading with the pixies for food and the gnomes for mud. In return the pixies and gnomes received flowers to make roofs. Eventually, Gnome Garden, Pixie Garden, and Fairy Garden became Fairy Gardens.

Queen Pea and Lady Chestnut lived for eternity.

# From a Squirrel's Point of View

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**FROM A SQUIRREL'S POINT OF VIEW** by *Pierce B.* is a quest of survival. The squirrels must get back the corn from the evil Mr. Fisher. Will they make it through the challenges ahead of them?

In Squirrel Town, everything is nice. There is no fighting and no crimes. There is nothing bad. There is, however, a lot of corn. Corn is everything to everyone in Squirrel Town. They sell corn, they trade corn, and they eat lots of corn. Without corn, Squirrel Town would be a very bad place.

One terrible day Mr. Fisher and his posse stole all of the corn. They tore through every building in town and took every grain of corn. They left nothing. They took all of the corn to Berkshire Middle School.

The squirrels all knew why Mr. Fisher needed this corn. He is a robot who uses corn as fuel to keep him running throughout the day.

The squirrels were scared. They did not know what to do. They had no food, and everything started to go bad. The U.S.O.S. (United States of Squirrels) decided to go to Berkshire Middle School to take back the corn.

Everyone knew that Berkshire Middle School was the most dangerous place in the entire world. Legend has it that five brave squirrels went to Berkshire to prove that the school was not haunted. However, only one squirrel made it out alive. For the rest of that squirrel's life, he never spoke a word again.

All of the squirrels in Squirrel Town were terrified. Most of the squirrels were too scared to get the corn back. They ran and fled to either Raccoonville or to Cat County. There were very few who found the courage to go to Berkshire to get their corn back.

After days of preparing, the squirrels were ready. The U.S.O.S.'s army marched to Berkshire Middle School. They found a tall tree that dangled over the roof of the school and climbed it. The climb that really took two minutes felt like two hours. The squirrels were shivering and shaking out of fear. After a few minutes, they finally made it to the top of the roof.

The map of Berkshire, which they found in the dumpster, read that a courtyard was only two hallways down. The squirrels knew if they found the courtyard, they would also find an unlocked door that would lead into the school.

The squirrels quickly ran along the roof's edge to find the courtyard. "Parachutes, ready!" yelled the General. The squirrels got ready and jumped off the roof. They all jumped and landed safely in the courtyard.

Suddenly, they heard a "GRRRR" sound coming from the distance. "It sounds like a dog," said a squirrel. A split second later, a giant dog leapt out

from a dark corner. “GRRRR,” it growled again.

The dog finally said “Hi!” in a very happy voice. “My name is Chance.”

The squirrels all gave a sigh of relief. They were happy to find out that the dog was friendly.

The General of the U.S.O.S. stepped forward to say in a gruff voice, “We are citizens of the U.S.O.S.”

Chance asked, “Why are you here?”

The General replied, “We have come to take back what is ours!”

“What would that be?” asked Chance.

“The corn that Mr. Fisher stole from us,” said the General.

Suddenly, Chance’s ears perked up. “M-M-Mr. Fisher!” stuttered Chance.

“Yes,” replied the General.

“Good luck getting that back from him. He will not give anything back. He is pure evil. He hates squirrels most of all,” said Chance. “Last time squirrels came to Berkshire, only one survived,” he said.

“So the legend is true,” they whispered among themselves.

Chance told them he would lead the way to Mr. Fisher, but as far as the corn part goes, they were on their own.

Chance leads the way. When they arrived at Mr. Fisher’s room, he said, “Hear you go!” He turned and ran away.

The squirrels pulled out their paper

clips to use as swords, and Doritos chips to use as shields. They bravely marched into Mr. Fisher’s room. The room was completely dark. They could not see anything. Suddenly, the lights turned on.

“I knew you were coming,” Mr. Fisher said as he nibbled on some of the corn.

“CHARGE!” said the general.

The squirrels ran toward Mr. Fisher. They jumped up at Mr. Fisher, but he easily knocked them away. They were losing more and more squirrels by the second. Suddenly, out of a dark corner leaps Chance.

“YEAH!!” yelled the squirrels.

Chance jumped up on Mr. Fisher and knocked him down. The squirrels quickly tied him to a chair. They decided they would leave Mr. Fisher there and march home with all of the corn.

All of the squirrels back at Squirrel Town gasped when they saw Chance. “This dog won the battle for us!” yelled the General. Squirrel Town cheered for joy, and for Chance.

When I arrived at school early the next morning, I saw Mr. Fisher tied to a chair. He told me all about the squirrels and the corn.

I said, “Mr. Fisher, have you had your coffee yet?” Then I turned around and left. Now that I think about it, I forgot to untie Mr. Fisher. Oh well!

# From the U.S. to France on a Skateboard

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**FROM THE U.S. TO FRANCE ON A SKATEBOARD**, by *Sebastien Jones*, is the story of a \$100,000 bet. A young man has to go from New York to Paris without using engines of his own. He may only use a skateboard!

“I will give you \$100,000 if you go from the U.S. to France on a skateboard with a screwdriver and a grappling hook,” says Mr. Jib Jab!

“Yes,” I reply in a shaky voice. “But you must sign a contract and pay me if I do the trip and come back!” I am hoping that this will be a fun trip, and that I will get \$100,000 at the same time.

Mr. Jib Jab nods his head and makes noise while signing: *Skkkkkkkrrrrcccccchhhh!*

“Here it is,” he says, “and now bye-bye. And remember, NO planes or boats for crossing the sea! You must use a skateboard to win. And you must show me pictures of Paris.”

So here I am in the middle of New York, wondering when I will be able to use my skateboard. There are cars everywhere in all different colors. I hop on my skateboard and start swerving around the cars. By nighttime, I am out of New York, under a bridge, in front of a blazing campfire, falling asleep.

When I wake up, I see a car going in the direction I want to go. I jump on my skateboard, grab the bumper of the car, and get pulled for five hours. After a while, I see the beach, and I gaze at it

until I hear a loud noise. The bumper falls off the car. I am slowing down, and I stop in front of the beach.

I take off the wheels of my skateboard and hop on the board. I paddle toward the big waves going to France and start surfing. When nighttime arrives, I catch a fish and cook it over my lighter. After eating pretty much raw fish, I fall asleep.

In the morning, I catch another fish and cook it over my lighter again. Thirty minutes later, I get a stomachache. The wind dies off. I lie down for four hours until I start feeling better.

There are still no waves when a boat passes by. Quickly, I throw my grappling hook onto the railing at the back of the boat. We are going fast! Water splashes around me. It is fun, but I wonder how long I will surf behind the boat. I am starting to be tired!

After a while I am wondering when I will arrive when all of a sudden, it is there. “France!” I yell in joy. Then a man comes out of the boat wondering what is going on. I notice that he starts fiddling around with the radio, so I prefer to unhook my grappling hook

and surf the rest on the way. I forget that I am tired. I am approaching France, and am almost done with the trip.

After landing on the beach, there is a huge mountain in front of me covered with snow. I wonder if I have arrived in France or somewhere else. Then I see a big boat plane flying over the mountain. I throw my grappling hook and catch the boat part. Here I am snowboarding up a mountain instead of down the mountain! At the top, I grab my grappling hook and go down the rest. I did not think this would be so much fun. But I must take pictures of Paris!

Someone shows me the direction. I

hop on my board and get to Paris.

In Paris people are offering me food and water! They think crossing the ocean on a skateboard was hard. It was just fun! I get a chance to visit Paris, take a lot of pictures, and rest for three months! I visit the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, and Notre Dame. I finally say good-bye and thank everyone.

I am in front of Mr. Jib Jab's door ringing the doorbell. He opens up and says: "I am so happy to see you." We drink and eat some food. He listens to my adventures and looks at my pictures. He agrees that I won!

I finally leave with \$100,000 in my right front pocket!

# From Your Friends, Katie and Keke

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*Elina comes home from a party and finds out that her posters have switched props! Her WNBA poster has a microphone in its hand, and her Keke Palmer poster has a basketball in her hand. Elina is determined to get to the bottom of this mystery in **FROM YOUR FRIENDS, KATIE AND KEKE** by Jazmyn Rivera.*

Elina Thornmay was the daughter of Mary and Gerald Thornmay. Elina had blonde, wavy hair and always wore it in braids. Most of her closet was filled with blue, her favorite color! All kinds of shades of blue filled the hangers in her closet: dark blue, light blue, teal, turquoise, midnight blue and two dresses. One was green for fancy occasions and the other one was purple with sparkles for church on Sunday. Their life was typical. Elina was in seventh grade, was on the swim team, and collected the turtles whose heads bobbed. Normal life, right? Wrong. Her parents were FBI agents! They worked for the White House! Elina wanted to become an FBI agent when she got older, too. She was amazed by all the work her parents did.

A couple of weeks ago, Elina received an invitation from her “Best Friend for Life” to her Amazing, Brilliant, Breathtaking, Incredible birthday party (all spelling out her name: Abbi)!

Her mom told her one sunny August day (the very same of the A.B.B.I party), “For you to go to the party, you must clean your room.” Elina straightened every single item in her room until it looked like a bedroom

out of a catalogue. She walked into the kitchen bouncing with every step. She saw her mom doing the dishes and told her, “It’s clean. Can I have a ride to the party now?”

After she came back from her fabulous time at Abbi’s party, she walked slowly into her room. The party was exhausting! But she stopped and stood straight up after noticing something different about her room. She looked to the left of the room. *How did that get there?* Elina thought as she noticed that her Katie Smith, lead scorer in the WNBA, poster had a microphone in her hand instead of a basketball. *That was freaky. I probably had too much sugar at Abbi’s party. I should take a nap,* she thought while taking out her ponytail.

After twisting, turning and getting comfortable, she saw her Keke Palmer poster. *A basketball? In Keke Palmer’s hand? What’s going on?* Her mind was determined to do something, but her body was too tired to do anything. It was only a short time before she drifted into dreamland.

Waking up to the smell of her dad’s famous chocolate-chip pancakes was the best part of Saturday mornings. Her eyes shot open and she literally



jumped out of her bed. Rushing to the kitchen to get the largest “chocopancake,” as her dad called them, she remembered what had happened yesterday. Elina decided to keep this to herself. She thought, *Knowing my parents, they would overreact, go “spy-mode,” and take over my room.* Instead of consulting her parents, she decided to take one of her mom’s old spy video cameras from one of the old dusty boxes stored downstairs, and hide it between the books on the top shelf of her bookshelf. She pointed the lens at her whole room, hoping to get some kind of evidence on tape.

“Get ready, Elina! We’re going to the Kal\*Mart for groceries!” yelled Mrs. Thornmay.

“Perfect! I can catch what’s going on in my room and get some new make-up! It’s a double win!” she said.

“Who are you talking to, sweetheart?” questioned her father as he walked past to get to the bathroom. Elina was caught by surprise.

“Um, no one, just reviewing my...” she looked around, “...planner! Making sure I did all my homework!” Her father gave her a look of approval and left to go fix his hair.

Shopping at Kal\*Mart always made Elina happy. After getting what they needed, she left to see her friend at the pharmacy, check out the toy aisles, and her favorite, the beauty section.

“Dinner is gonna be macaroni and cheese. Is that all right, Elina?” Mrs. Thornmay joked while putting the box in the cart.

As soon as she got home, she pressed the power button on her laptop

and watched as it turned blue in the shape of the power symbol. She plugged the USB from the camera into the port on the left side.

“I’m ready to view some action!” she whispered to herself. This whole thing puzzled her. With her Mom and Dad being FBI agents, she was used to the crazy cases and crimes. Yet she had never seen or heard anything like this. It was going to be her first case for her future career!

She suspected that maybe someone had gotten into her room and replaced the posters, but there wasn’t a poster like it in the world! Katie Smith didn’t sing with her jersey on, and no one got a picture of Keke Palmer playing basketball that looked that perfect, according to Google.

Watching the video left Elina in awe. It was crazy. She didn’t believe it! They had actually come to life and...read her magazines! She replayed the video. Yep! They sat down in her beanbag chair and read her magazines!

To make sure what she was seeing was true, she peered under her loft to check the shelf where her favorite magazines were. It was true! She always kept them in cereal box containers, and now they were a mess! Organizing them took forever! But then, something emerged from underneath *American Girl*, her favorite series. It looked like a note:

***To make us come into view,  
recite these words, wearing blue.***

*Make who come into view? I-I don’t understand. What? Wait, if Katie and Keke*

*were here, maybe it's them!* she wondered. Elina dressed in her blue denim jeans and a teal Jonas Brothers shirt then stood in the center of her room. "Coconut, Poconut, Hallabaloo, Shallabaloo!" she recited nervously.

She was suddenly sucked into a vortex that brought her to a party store. This party store had something different about it. Elina just couldn't put her finger on it. The party store had three rooms, the main room and a room to the left and right. The main room carried what you would normally find in any party store. There were balloons, party favors, napkins, plates and decorations for just about any birthday theme. There was an orange door to the right, and a teal door on the left.

Elina was still dizzy from the vortex when Katie Smith and Keke Palmer came into view! "You made it! Nice to meet you." said Keke. Elina almost fainted. It was Keke Palmer! And Katie Smith! And they were blowing up...balloons?

"Hey, there!" said Katie Smith in her southern-like accent.

"We heard it was your birthday, soon. Am I right?" Keke asked.

"Y-yes, in five days. Are you—" A big grin came over Elina's face. "Two of my favorite celebrities surprising me for my birthday! Oh my gosh!" she exclaimed in a singsong kind of voice.

"Hey, no problem!" Katie screamed over the helium machine that had started up. They finished the last balloon and tied it to a blue ribbon. She handed it to Elina in a very fancy manner as if she were a queen!

"We understand you have a swim meet today, correct?" Keke asked.

"What time is it?" Elina nervously asked.

"Um," Katie checked her phone, "3:15."

Elina gasped. She did have a swim meet today, at 4:00 P.M.

"Uh-oh! How do I get back?" cried Elina.

"Well, you have to do the opposite of what you did to get here," explained Keke. She had dressed in blue to get here, so she had to dress in orange to get back!

"Where would I get orange clothes in a party store?" she said to herself.

"Try the orange door!" suggested Katie. Elina turned the brass knob to open the orange door. Creeeek! Elina's jaw dropped open.

"Whoa! Look!" exclaimed Elina. There was every orange piece of clothing imaginable: orange vests, orange shoes, orange skirts and orange shirts filled the closet, side to side, top to bottom. She chose an orange-red long-sleeved t-shirt with a bright orange vest and mandarin shorts.

"Okay, backwards. Hmm..." Elina whispered. "I'll miss you guys!"

"We will, too, Elina." They both said in unison. Katie and Keke waved good-bye as Elina sadly said the magic words.

"Shullabaloo, Hullabaloo, Poconut, Coconut!" Elina shouted! A whirl of colors flashed before her eyes. She felt as if she was floating in mid-air. She spun out of the vortex and ended up on the diving block. Swim cap tight, goggles suctioned on, and her hands

gripping the edge of the diving block, the position of a true swimmer. BEEP! The sound went off. She flung herself into the water.

That Friday, her birthday, she had a swim meet. After school, she dropped off her backpack by Coach Blake and hopped down the steps by the pool. She stopped by the list of events and looked for E. Thornmay. She was swimming her favorite, the 200m freestyle! “Yes!” she cheered as she left the still, clear, water.

As she entered the locker room, she smelled what every locker room smells

like after school: stinky, sweaty feet. Luckily, her locker was close to the door.

She opened the pink lock and saw a white corner sticking out from her swim cap. She reached inside to grab the corner. She unfolded the mysterious paper. In really big letters the card said, “HAPPY BIRTHDAY!” Other messages like, “Good luck! Have fun! Do your best!” were printed inside of the card. She read down to the bottom, “From your friends, Katie and Keke.”

# Frozen Global Territory

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*Relic Con makes a video game real, which in effect freezes the planet. So his squad heads down to the Amazon rain forest to destroy the culprit of the low temperatures, Icetreeon. Will they eradicate Icetreeon from the Amazon rain forest? To find out read **FROZEN GLOBAL TERRITORY**, by **Alex Straith**.*

In a summer day in July of 2010 in Beverly Hills, Michigan, I, Relic Con, was playing the video game *Frozen Global Territory*. (In the game, Icerow wants a row of Icetreeon to lower global temperatures so that the human race can evolve, the Thaw wants to raise temperature back to normal temperatures, and the Sice is hostile to all other life.)

Come on, spark troopers! Then I took a drink of water, and as I was setting down my drink of water, I bumped a machine I had made. It makes things in video games real. Then I heard a rumbling in the ground and ice plants started to grow outside my house.

I recognized it immediately: It was Icetreeon. I immediately went to the TV. The news was wild! Everyone was reporting on the Icetreeon, the Sice, the Sice spaceships made out of what looks like ice, and the sudden drop of temperatures by 120 degrees everywhere in the world. Environment Games says the plants have the exact characteristics of Icetreeon, and the aliens are exactly like Sice. As I was watching the news, the reporter said, "Environment Games has just released a new announcement that says that

icetreeon is almost cold enough to freeze carbon dioxide and there is only one way to stop Icetreeon from growing; that is to harvest it and use it as rounds or fuel."

Then I went to an army recruitment camp to find that it is now a Thaw recruitment camp. So I signed up to become a Spark Trooper. Within the first two weeks I went on a few training missions just outside of Washington D.C. We spotted a construction vehicle on a trip. The construction vehicle looked exactly like ours except it looked like energy instead of metal. I reported it to the general and he told me to take two other spark troopers and try to take out the vehicle. We spotted it unfolding except that it unfolded into an icerow construction yard. We fired our MAFC (magnetically accelerated fire cannons) guns but they had built an Icretreaner before we destroyed the Construction Yard.

They built two squads of anti-infantry troops, which we defeated easily, but that gave them time to make upgraded units so we had to flee. When we got back to camp we told them what we had seen. The general said, "Next time take out the structures first if they are just normal infantry. And I want

four squads of missile troops, two squads of spark troopers, and one fire tank to storm their base,” ordered the general. The fight was intense but brief. All the Icerow troops focused on the fire tank. This gave the infantry an easy time destroying their new construction yard and Icretreaner.

After we destroyed the base we got an urgent distress call from in The Amazon Rainforest. They said they got a new, much colder type of Icretreon growing there. It was so cold that there was a column of ice all the way to the end of the atmosphere. The ice was a white blue and at the bottom there were branches made of ice that were probably ten meters in length. They also told us that there were sice growing it there.

So everyone at the base packed up and went to The Amazon Rainforest. We found one crashed Sice ship. “Based on the angle of the crash, I want one plane to go scout for Sice bases up magnetic north,” said the general. Within two minutes we lost contact with the plane but the crash detector was blaring.

“I want one legion of troopers, five bombers, ten planes, and two fire tanks

to go to the crash site and wipe out all Sice and Icerow troops, tanks, and structures,” said the general.

As soon as we got there we were under attack by the Sice. The Icerow noticed the weakness of our defense at the base, so they attacked. Then the Thaw sent a troop carrier to pick up all the spark troopers and a fire tank and sent us to the base. When we arrived our tank facility had been blown up. They ordered the spark troopers to go with all the harvesters and protect them while a spark tank and an anti-infantry chopper took out the enemies. As soon as we left the driver of the harvester was sniped by an Icerow sniper.

“I’ll take over the driving of the harvester,” I called.

We were in intense combat for three hours until we eradicated Icretreon from the Amazon. This raises the temperature so that it is 50 degrees Fahrenheit in the Bahamas in the summer. Because of the low amount of Icretreon the Sice packed up in their mother ship and before they left, there was a sonic anomaly, and then they disappeared. The Icerow disbanded since there was so little Icretreon left to make the human race evolve.

# King of the Ocean

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In **KING OF THE OCEAN** by **Leader Barnett**, against his son's wishes Prince Peter's father, King Nety, has sent his bounty hunter to kill the King of the Ocean, Neking. Prince Peter uses special powers to distract the bounty hunters in hopes to see King of the Ocean of Zayachii Island. His adventure awaits him.

People in Saint Petersburg, Russia were shouting all over their city. Prince Peter shouted to the people of Saint Petersburg, "Why are you all screaming?"

One of them trembled, "It was the King of the Ocean who frightened us!"

"King of the Ocean?" Prince Peter said.

"Yeah, it has six legs, two flippers, huge teeth like a shark, it weighs about five tons, and it looks to be about 50 feet long," one of the villagers responded.

"Where did you see it?" Prince Peter asked.

"It was seen near the Zayachii, Ostrov Island, in the Arctic Ocean," one of villagers said, shaking.

"Okay," Prince Peter replied. "I will get my father and his men to locate the King of the Oceans."

"Thank you, Prince Peter," the villagers replied, with smiles on their faces.

Prince Peter rushed back to tell his father about the King of the Ocean and how frightened the villagers were. The Prince asked the servants, where his father, King Nety was. They pointed to the feast room where King Nety was eating chicken, rice, string beans, and

fresh fruit with a strawberry smoothie for dinner.

Prince Peter told his father about people seeing King of the Ocean near Zayachii Ostrov island and asked if he was going to kill it or not.

King Nety jumped up and shouted, "Bucher," the bounty hunters' name.

Bucher came running down the hall and replied, "Yes sir!"

"Get your men! We are on a mission to kill the King of the Ocean, near Zayachii Ostrov Island."

After a long and tiring day, Prince Peter was about to lay down to sleep when he heard somebody screaming outside the palace. Prince Peter got up to see his two best friends, Alex and Joe running in the middle of the street. Prince Peter wondered, *What are they running from?* He looked and it was a villager chasing them with a sword. They were holding a piece of meat that they had taken from a restaurant.

Price Peter wanted to save Joe and Alex, so he transformed into what the villagers called, the Twelve Tail Shark. He had two wings, 12 shark tails; blue eyes, many sharp teeth like a shark, pointy ears, sharp claws and sharp toes. He weighs about 150 pounds and stood six feet tall.

Prince Peter flew down to his friends, grabbed them and took them to his room. Gently, the Prince said to the villager, "Why are you chasing them?"

The villager said, "They stole my food off my plate while I wasn't looking."

Instantly, the prince asked, "Joe and Alex why did you steal his food?"

Joe wailed, "Because we didn't have anything to eat and he was eating our favorite pork dish."

Prince Peter told them, "If either of you get caught stealing again, you both will go to jail."

"Ok," they both said.

They both went home and the prince heard a loud humming sound coming from the ocean. Prince Peter was curious and flew to the ocean to see what the strange humming noise was. The humming sound grew stronger and sounded as if it were under him. As Prince Peter looked over the ocean in the dark, there were light green eyes coming toward him on the surface. It was the great beast of the ocean, Neking. Neking became very angry and his eyes turned red when he missed biting the prince's wing. The Prince used his telepathic powers to find out why Neking was upset and tried to attack him. Prince Peter read his mind and he spoke to him and asked, "Why are you trying to attack me?"

"The men were shooting at me for no reason," fumed Neking.

Prince Peter asked him, "Why were they shooting at you?"

In rage, Neking answered, "With my powers, I will show you the past!" Neking showed Prince Peter the past

and he saw his father, Bucher and his hunters shooting at Neking, but they missed. While the hunters were shooting at Neking, one threw a tracking device at him but he got away safely.

Prince Peter realized that was the reason for Neking's anger. It was due to his father and the bounty hunters. Peter felt bad for Neking because Neking wasn't trying to hurt anyone. "I'm sorry Prince Peter, that I attacked you," wept Neking.

Neking and Prince Peter both saw King Nety's ship coming toward them. Neking and Prince Peter went to the bottom of the ocean to hide. It was pitch-black at the bottom of the ocean and Prince Peter was uncomfortable and a little scared hanging at the bottom of the ocean. Neking told Prince Peter to follow him and he took him into a hidden cavern deep in the ocean. "Prince Peter," said Neking. "This is where I live, the only place for creatures like me."

"Are there more creatures like you?" Prince Peter asked.

"Yes, there are many more such as, Toroep, the King of Snow, Starshah, the King of the Universe, Neko, the King of Fire, Delea, the King of Wind, Shamo, the King of Earth, and Neking, the King of the Ocean," Neking answered.

"Where are the other creatures?" Prince Peter asked.

"They're all over the whole world, somewhere," Neking mumbled.

Prince Peter realized he better get home before his father missed him. Neking gave Prince Peter a boost by his

tail so he could swim faster.

Prince Peter transformed back into the prince when he reached land. He rushed to the palace and lay down for a while. When the prince woke up, he looked out the window and saw his father get off his ship and rush toward the palace. When King Nety came home, he asked one of his servants if Peter was home. Prince Peter pretended to be sleep when King Nety looked in the room. Prince Peter got caught giggling by King Nety when he thought he left his room. "Peter, I knew you were awake," King Nety said.

King Nety asked, "Peter could you help capture the King of the Ocean with your special powers?" Prince Peter did not want to kill the King of the Ocean now because he realized that he too would be considered a creature if he weren't the king's son.

Prince Peter replied, "No! I want to save the King of the Ocean and he doesn't try to hurt anyone. Only your men try to kill him and upset him. Leave him be!"

King Nety said, "You think about it. I don't want to wait until he does try to kill someone."

"Goodnight," they both said it at the same time.

The next morning about 6:00 a.m., Prince Peter saw Bucher and his men get ready to hunt for the King of the Ocean. Prince Peter woke his friends Alex and Joe and told them he needed their help and they owed him for not taking them to jail for stealing a piece of pork. Alex, Joe, and Prince Peter packed weapons, binoculars, bow and arrows and snuck onto Bucher's ship.

Joe whispered, "You never told us why you need our help and what is your father going to say?"

Prince Peter explained to Alex and Joe that he wanted to save the King of the Ocean and not kill him like his father requested. "Our mission is to stop the men from hurting the King of the Ocean," Prince Peter said quietly.

As Prince Peter and his friends searched around the ship they discovered the map of the deep cavern where the King of the Ocean lived. "Wow, it's a map where Neking lives, in the middle of the Arctic Ocean," Prince Peter said. The map also showed where the other creatures lived around the world, such as; Toroep, the King of Snow, Starshah, the King of the Universe, Neko, the King of Fire, Delea, the King of Wind, Shamo, the King of Earth, and Neking, the King of the Ocean.

After sailing for hours, the prince and his two friends saw light green eyes peeping out from the ocean at Bucher. It was too late, Bucher's men started shooting at Neking, but they all missed. Neking dodged bullets as he swam in and out, swerving from side to side in the water. Prince Peter and his friend started shooting Bucher's men with bows and arrows, hitting some. Bucher's hunter didn't know who to attack, Neking or the Prince and his friends. The men turned around and didn't have clear shots. At the moment, Neking attacked and killed three of Bucher's hunters at one time with its long tail.

Bucher threw out a sleeping powder after telling his men to put their masks



on and Joe, Alex and Prince Peter fell asleep.

Before falling asleep from the sleeping powder, Prince Peter moaned, "Neking help!" When the prince woke up, he was standing on the plank with his hands tied behind his back. Joe and Alex were behind Bucher's men tied with their hands behind their backs too. Since Prince Peter is the son of King Nety's, Bucher did not have the authority to kill him.

Bucher said with a smirk on his face, "Your days are over Prince." Butcher told the prince and his friends that he was going to tell King Nety that the beast killed them. Butcher laughed as he said, "Take good care of them boys!"

Prince Peter used his telepathic powers to plead out to Neking, *Please Neking, help us!* Prince Peter tried to break free from the ropes, but they were tied too tightly. Prince Peter used all of his strength to break free and transformed into Twelve Tails Shark. He used his powers to fly and take down Bucher's men and save his friends. The transformed prince cut his friends' ropes with its sharp claws. Bucher and his men were astonished by how fast he was.

Next, Bucher and his men tried to catch Neking with a huge net. Neking

hit the bottom of the ship and Bucher and several of his men fell into the Arctic Ocean and died. Bucher's remaining men begged and pleaded for their lives.

Neking came to the side of the ship and Prince Peter patted him on the top of his head. Thanking Neking for saving him and his friends and to say he was sorry for the past. Prince Peter promised Neking that no one would ever try to harm him or his friend again. They were welcome to live free just as everyone else on land could. Prince Peter and his friend waved goodbye as Neking swam back into the ocean. "Hope to see you again!" Neking said to Prince Peter using his telepathic mind. Neking swam away to his home deep in the ocean and the prince returned home hoping his father did not find out Neking was still free and Bucher died.

Prince Peter's father never understood why his son had these special powers and wanted his son to be the only creature in Saint Petersburg. If his father discovered his bounty hunter Bucher died due to his son he would disown his son and never speak to him again. Therefore, Prince Peter never told what really happened and it was Alex, Joe and the Prince's secret for life.

# Lily in Wonderland

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*A girl tries to find her way home from an unexpected place in **LILY IN WONDERLAND**, by Kara Kennedy. Will she be able evade the clutches of the dreaded Queen of Spades?*

*I have to get to that door. I absolutely, positively have to get to that door before they do. Please don't let them catch up with me; I need to get to that door.*

We should back up a minute and start at the beginning of the story.

One spring day in May, in a house by the woods, there were two people. They were arguing. "But, Mom, I don't want to go to the store. It's all the way across the forest. It would waste my entire day," whined Lily. She usually was cranky in the morning, and pretty much always.

Her mom replied, "But...Well...really, Lily, it isn't that far, and we need the stuff."

Lily ignored her and just walked out the door. *Why is every morning always the same?* she thought.

"I am ordering you to go right now!"

"Well, fine! Be that way!" Lily screamed back.

She set out toward the woods, and then she saw a rabbit scurrying along her path. She decided to follow him because he looked quite interesting. She heard him mutter under his breath, "Oh no. Must not be late. Not this date. Must not be late." Soon after that he disappeared, and Lily was intrigued.

She searched for him for what felt like hours. Despairingly, she rested on a

maple tree. As she touched it, the clouds darkened, the wind picked up, and a giant roar of thunder ran across the sky. Suddenly, a gap in the sky appeared, and a fierce, spinning tornado plunged down toward Earth. Lily screamed and tried to run, but too late; she was already lost in it.

Lily opened her eyes. She was in a different forest. It was dark, and shadows danced around her. Then, she saw a puff of white tail dart through the trees. *Oh, it was the rabbit. A familiar face. I mean tail.* She ran after him as fast as she could, dodging and ducking through the trees.

Lily emerged in a small clearing where there was complete sunlight and a tea table set for two, with the rabbit sitting in one of the seats. She slowed down and timidly asked, "Mr. ... uh...Rabbit, hi, my name is Lily." What was she thinking, talking to a rabbit? Rabbits didn't talk.

Just when she decided to turn around and leave, he turned around and said, "Hello, Lily, I have been expecting you. My name is Jack."

She stood there staring at him wordlessly. "You know, good manners are always in style." Lily sat down. He then poured them both some tea, and told her all about Wonderland and

answered her questions.

*I knew it. I knew it. I was dreaming. This just can't be real. There is no way that this could be happening.* “How do I get out of Wonderland?” asked Lily.

“Well,” Jack responded, “I heard that the only way out is Spade Castle. I have a privilege that allows me to go through the portal. The only problem is that I can't take anyone with me.”

There came a small beeping noise from the rabbit's watch. He looked at it, and without warning, jumped up and started running. “Oh no, I'm going to be late. I know I am. I know it, I know it, I just know it. Oh...This is very bad, so very, very bad.”

Lily jumped up too, worried he would leave her and she would be lost in the mysterious forest. “Wait! What are you doing? Where are you going?” She ran through the clearing, following the disappearing white dot.

But then there was an odd sensation vibrating through her. The grass was amazingly taller than she was, just like a forest. A flower called out to her, “Hey, you're trampling our roots.”

*Wow, I am really going crazy now. This just keeps getting weirder and weirder.* “Well, I am sorry. I didn't mean to, really. I just need directions,” said Lily.

The flower replied, “Where are you going?”

“I am trying to get to Spade Castle. I need some directions. Do you know where I can find them?”

The flower replied, “You should just ask the owl. He knows his way around Wonderland.”

The owl swooped down from a low tree branch and said, “Did someone call

me?”

Lily replied, “Yes, I did. I was wondering if you could give me directions to Spade Castle. It is the only way I can get home.”

The owl lowered his wing and allowed Lily to get on his back. They soared up past the trees and into the sky. Lily felt like the queen of the world! Exhilarated, she saw a little tiny town below her and a few people waved up at her. The scenery was beautiful. They passed through the trees, across a big lake and soared through the giant mountains. She was sad when the owl was dipping down toward a black castle. She stepped off of the owl and gave him a big hug and told him it was the best ride of her life!

She then turned and set off toward the castle. She grew back to her normal size with each step. Then a guard spotted her and said, “Look, there is a girl walking unauthorized on the property. Let's take her to the queen.” He grabbed Lily, and started dragging her toward the castle. A servant with a kind face tried to stop the other servant, but he wouldn't stop walking.

The second servant leaned down and whispered to Lily, “You must be careful. Don't upset the Queen of Spades. She is going to use force. Also be careful of her pack of cards. You can't see them until they are called by the Queen.” They then reached the palace. The kind servant left, and the mean servant took her inside the palace.

Everything was like an explosion of black. Anything inside was either done in black or the spade symbol. A cold, piercing, voice screeched, “What? Why

are you here? Why aren't you working? What do you think...? What are you doing bringing a foolish girl into my castle?"

Lily retorted, "Hey, I am not a foolish little girl, and who do you think you are anyway?"

All the servants nearby gasped. Who was this person? No one ever stood up to the queen.

The queen was astounded. "You don't know who I am? I am the Queen of Spades, Ruler of all Wonderland."

Lily said, "The only thing that I want to do is go home. Is there anything you can do about that?"

At that moment, Jack burst through the doors panting. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry I'm late." *What in the world was Jack doing here?*

The queen answered, "Yes, I can do something about it because I am the only one who has the key to get out of Wonderland. And yes, Jack, you are late. I will deal with you later." An evil smile washed over her face while horror filled Lily's. "There is one option," continued the Queen of Spades. "You could play me in croquet. If you win, you get the key to the portal that leads out of Wonderland, and I shall show you the door to get out. But if I win, you must live in the forest, be my servant and never go home. Do we have a deal?"

Lily thought about her chances. "Yeah, we have a deal." And they set out to play croquet.

Jack came over to her, and muttered under his breath, "The Queen of Spades has never lost a game of croquet. If we can catch her cheating

you can scrape and win and get out of here."

They played, and though her personal referee never saw her cheat, Jack and Lily sure did. Anyway, Lily was very good at croquet, so she kept the game tied through the last point.

She had one shot to make. She swung for the ball, but it flew in the opposite direction. Jack then shouted, "Look, look, look, the Queen is cheating and controlling Lily's ball!" The crowd's heads turned, and the queen sat there, shocked that she lost.

"Get them!" she screeched. A pack of cards sprang up from nowhere and chased Lily across the front of Spade castle.

Up at one of the towers, Jack called, "Lily, I have a rope. Climb quickly." She struggled to get up the rope. When she got to the top, Jack and Lily fled down the corridor to a single door at the end of it. The pack of cards had made it up the wall and was gaining on them quickly. *I have to get to that door. I absolutely, positively have to get to that door before they do. Please don't let them catch up with me; I need to get to that door.*

Lily swung it open, and they both stepped inside. Everything was a swirl of colors as Lily and the rabbit walked through it. "You know what they say: Cheaters never prosper."

"Where did you get the rope, and how do we get out of here? You heard her; she has the key," said Lily.

"Well, I knew something was bound to happen, so I put up the rope to climb away. I mean, even if you had won, the queen would never give away the key. And speaking of the key: ta-

da!” He pulled out a gold key. “I stole it from her. I figured my job didn’t matter if you got away. People might rebel against the queen now; she might get off the throne. I hope that will happen soon.”

Lily asked her next question. “How did you get up there so fast?”

Jack answered, “I have heard about her pack of cards, and I figured she would order them to put us in the prison. So, as soon as I told everyone she cheated, I sprinted over to where I had the rope set up. Some animals in Wonderland have special hands and feet that allow us to run faster and grip things more easily. I have them, so I could climb up the rope easier. By that time you were running by, so I alerted you that I had the rope ready.”

There was a small light at the end of the tunnel. Jack took the key, and put it into what looked like thin air. They both walked straight ahead, and emerged next to the red maple tree. “I never imagined there would be a place like that,” said Lily.

“Limits exist only in your mind,” replied Jack.

*Wow. That rabbit has a saying for everything.*

He turned around, and started hopping toward the forest. “Wait!” cried Lily. “When will I see you again?”

He answered, “In a month, to this date; got to go, so don’t be late.”

Lily set off for her mother’s house feeling quite different. She couldn’t wait for the next day in wonderful Wonderland.

# Madeline's Present

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*In MADELINE'S PRESENT, by Coco Lurz, Madeline makes a terrible wish. Will she be able to undo it?*

“Madeline! Madeline! Wake up! It's Christmas morning.”

Annabelle jumped on me and made my cot screech even louder than it screeched with just one person on it.

I was as excited as I should've been: not excited at all. Ever since I was eight I hadn't gotten a present on Christmas day. It wasn't just me; it was every child over the age of eight. Jan, the lady who runs the orphanage, decided that anyone over eight should be old enough to know that Santa Claus doesn't exist. Unfortunately when I was eight I still believed in Santa Claus. He was my only hope.

“Madeline! Madeline! There are presents under our tree!” Annabelle screeched.

“What do you mean ‘presents?’” I responded.

“I mean what I said. And there's one for you! This year is special! Everyone older than eight got a present, too!” Annabelle replied in a sassy little voice. You know how six-year-olds can be sometimes: sassy.

Annabelle is my foster sister, but to me she's more like a sister. We've been through it all. Through the bad and the good, we've always been there for each other. We would be lost without one another. She's six, and energetic. She has straight blond locks

that go down to her shoulders. Her eyes are so blue they blend in with the ocean. Annabelle is just the right height for a six-year-old, and she is very slender. She came to the orphanage when she was not even a year old. Since then we've considered ourselves sisters.

I came to the orphanage right after I was born. I don't know my parents, and I never want to meet them. I still can't believe that they gave me up. Now I'm eleven years old, and have lived every day of my life belonging to this old, stuffy, cold, dirty, boring orphanage. I have brown hair that goes down to my belly button, and hazel eyes. I'm very petite for eleven, and like everyone else in the shelter I'm very, very skinny.

“Ok, ok. I'll come down,” I finally decided.

I grabbed my slippers, put them on my feet, and headed out the door. As I walked down the hard, cold, old steps that leaned against the bare red brick wall of the orphanage, I saw ALL the other boys and girls running around playing with the toys they had received for Christmas.

“What do you think I got, Annie?” I asked Annabelle.

“Well, what do you want your present to be?”

“Hmm. I do like to read those

*Teen Vogue* magazines!”

“Well, then hope for a magazine. That’s not what I would want, though. I want a Barbie doll and a new outfit. My Barbie does need a friend!”

We kept walking. I was quite excited that there was a present for me, but maybe Annabelle was just playing a trick on me. She is a big trickster. There was the time when she told me we were having something other than bean soup for dinner. She was good at tricking people, especially me. Maybe there was no present.

“Annabelle, stop!” I shouted.

I looked into her deep blue eyes, and all I saw was nervousness. She looked right back at me, straight into my eyes. Annabelle started playing with the bottom of her reddish-brown knee-length dress that she wore almost every day. I know, as practically being her older sister, that whenever she does that, she’s nervous.

“Never mind,” I said after a brief moment.

We kept walking down the rusty steps to the tree. The tree was nothing much. It was a tree that we went out and handpicked ourselves. It was forest green with five ornaments and a little star at the top. When I looked under the tree I saw an envelope.

Now this wasn’t just an ordinary envelope. It was cream-colored with red candy canes bordering the edges. There was a sour gummy candy that sealed it closed. I looked at the name it had on it, and in fine print it said:

**To: Madeline  
With Love: Santa Claus**

I looked at the envelope in amazement. Why, after all of these years, has Santa finally decided to give me a present? I mean, what about nine and ten? Why didn’t I get a present when I was nine or ten? Anyway, I didn’t have time for questions. I snatched up the envelope as if it were homemade brownies.

When it was in my hand I felt like it was too good to be true. I opened it as if inside were a million dollars. As I unfolded the letter something gold with silver writing slipped out and landed perfectly on the floor, face up. I bent down and slowly put it back tightly in my hands. It read:

**Make a wish on a bad day.  
This will make it come true.**

“Yeah, right,” I thought. “This is totally fake.”

The actual letter was in my other hand, and I hadn’t read it yet, so I lifted it close to my eyes and read what it said.

*Dear Madeline,*

*I know what you are going through is hard. Being in an orphanage is very difficult. I know you are probably asking why I didn’t give you presents*

when you were nine or ten,  
but this is your year.

All My Love,  
Santa Claus

“Annabelle, let’s go back up,” I said.

When we got upstairs I lay down on my cot and looked at the letter. I sat there and just stared at it for five minutes until I decided it couldn’t possibly be true. I put the letter on my bed stand and went downstairs to take my shower.

The rest of the day was rough. Annabelle was complaining non-stop, and I just wanted to leave. I needed to get away. Everyone was cranky, and Jan was being super-mean. I needed to go somewhere better than this junky place.

For dinner we had pea soup. It was different but pretty gross. When we finished eating, I went to the bathroom and showered. After showering, I went back upstairs, tucked myself in, and started to think about the letter. I picked it up and read it over and over and over until I finally made up my mind. I got up, walked to the bathroom, turned on the light, and held the wish ticket up in front of my hazel eyes. I closed my eyes one at a time, and made my wish.

“I wish I could get adopted and never see this terrible place again!” I said in a tiny mouse voice.

*Poof!*

Did it come true? Did my wish come true? I opened my eyes and what

I saw was a desk, pink walls, and clothes all over the floor. Where was I?

“Madeline darling, wake u— oh, good, you’re awake. It’s time for school.”

I rose up out of the bed, and knew I wasn’t in the orphanage. Where was I? Why wasn’t I in the orphanage?

“Madeline, get ready for school. Jenna and her mother are going to be here in fifteen minutes,” said a strange lady about five foot eight with straight blond hair and glistening blue eyes.

“Wait, who are you? What am I doing here? Why am I not with Annabelle?” I replied.

“Oh, Maddie. Sometimes you can be so silly. Now hurry up! Jenna’s going to be here in twelve minutes!”

Then it was all coming back to me. The ticket, the wish: It had come true. I had a family. I wasn’t at the orphanage. But where was Annabelle?

I got ready anyway. I went to this large closet that was MINE? Oh my goodness. This was great! I had a huge room all to myself! I also had a big closet and bathroom! It couldn’t get any better!

I decided to wear a neon yellow V-neck with a purple sweatshirt over it. I chose dark rinse skinny jeans to accompany my black Ugg boots, and a white lululemon headband to top it all off. This was great. I looked fantastic, and I felt it, too. I always knew reading *Teen Vogue* would come in handy some day.

“Okay, um...um...what should I call you?” I asked the lady with the blond hair.



“Maddie, I’m still your mother. Now hurry and get breakfast.”

This all seemed so weird to me. I didn’t know how to act, or who my friends were.

For breakfast I had cereal with milk. I got my backpack, said goodbye, and walked outside. It took me a few tries because it was only my first day at this house, but I finally found the front door.

When I got outside I turned around and looked at the house I had just walked out of. It was really big, but not too big. It was just right.

I opened the little door of the picket fence and walked through. I waited for about two minutes, and then my ride pulled up.

“Hey, Maddie! So yesterday in dance we had this instructor and she was so mean! I wish you could’ve been there! It was totally boring without you,” Jenna blabbed.

“Oh. I’m sorry. Maybe next time I’ll come and watch you,” I responded

“What do you mean watch me? You’re in my dance class, silly! We’ve been taking dance together for years! You just had a club meeting yesterday!”

“Oh yeah. I forgot. Sorry,”

The drive to school was about five minutes. Jenna and I talked the whole ride. When we pulled up to the school I couldn’t believe my eyes. A huge red brick building stood in front of me. This was my school.

“Jenna, is this our school?”

“Have you gone psycho? Of course it’s our school.”

The day went by very quickly. I had a great time. Apparently, I was friends

with everyone. Everyone knew me. At lunch I sat with Jenna and six other girls. At the end of the day my ‘mom’ picked Jenna and me up. We hopped in, and I was ready to go home and relax.

“So how was school today, girls?”

“Good,” Jenna and I said at the same time.

“Ok, now we’re off to dance. Jen, your mom is picking you up. Maddie, I’m picking you up early because we have a dinner after at six o’clock, and you need to be ready. After the dinner you have photography club. I’ll pick you up from photography club at eight thirty. After photography you need to take the dog on a walk.”

*Wow*, I thought, *that’s a lot to do in one night*. “What about my homework, Mom? When will I have time to do it? I have a lot tonight.”

“Well, once you’re done with everything else,” she responded, as if I were a big dummy.

“Why do I have to do all of these activities anyway?”

“Madeline, we discussed this when you chose your activities for the year. You need to do extracurricular activities. Now I have to make an important business call. Excuse me.”

We got to dance right away. It was this really cool place with a lot of futuristic designs.

“Wow, Jen. This place is amazing!”

“It’s not like you’ve never been here before.”

Some lady in a long blue skirt and crazy purple sweater escorted us to our class.

“You guys have Melanie today. She’s very nice, but don’t get on her bad

side. Now remember that even though you are in Hip Hop-A4 you need to stay at the same level as everyone else. You will be working with Hip Hop-B1's today. Now run along, have fun."

I walked into the room and had a million thoughts running through my head. *What if she realizes I don't know the dance? What if I fall?* I decided that I was going to ask Melanie if I could sit and watch for a few minutes just to refresh my memory, but she said no.

I stood up and walked to an open spot on the dance floor. I watched everyone else, and the way they moved their feet so swiftly and their bodies so gracefully. I repeated after them.

"Madeline, what are you doing? You're a good three seconds behind everyone else! Catch up! D.J., replay."

"Sorry, I'm very tired, and I kinda forgot some parts."

The music started again, and I did as much as I could remember. I thought I was going to die, but I regained hope when my 'mom' walked through the door of the studio.

"Hi. I'm here to pick up Madeline. She's leaving early."

I grabbed my bags and ran out of that studio like a lion was chasing me. We got in the car and my 'mom' started talking to me.

"Hi, honey, how was dance?"

"Good. The instructor was mean, though."

"Well, good thing she's only a substitute. You'll have your normal teacher tomorrow."

When we finally got home, I ran upstairs to my room and showered. I got into my room and found a yellow

dress with a white jacket over it. I put it on and wore it for dinner. Dinner was good, but I was so tired from dance, and I really didn't want to go to this photography club. I asked my 'mom' if I could skip, but of course she refused.

After photography club, which was terribly boring, I got home, and all I wanted to do was do my homework and go to bed. Right as I was starting my homework my 'mom' came walking in.

"Madeline Rose. What do you think you are doing? You are the one who wanted this dog, and now you don't take care of it? This is not acceptable. Go downstairs right now and take Libby on a walk. You're grounded for a week. You know family and activities come before school and relaxation. Now shoo! Go and take care of the dog!"

"But Mom! I'm so tired! I had dance and photography today! I can't possibly get up and take Libby on a walk! I need to do my homework!"

"NO! Go take Libby on a walk now! End of discussion. No more."

I ran out of my room. I didn't know that she was so mean. In my opinion she was overreacting. I mean, I was really just tired.

After my walk with Libby, I stomped back into my room and did my homework. My math homework was a worksheet on two-step equations. It was pretty easy. In science I had to draw a poster of volcanoes, and in social studies I had to study for my test that was tomorrow. When I was done with my homework I took my shower, and got ready for bed. By the time I was actually getting in bed it

was eleven thirty. I was exhausted, and didn't know if I could survive school tomorrow. My eyes were trying to shut, but all I could think about was Annabelle, and how life outside of the orphanage was far worse than in it. I was worried about her. I was really worried. I didn't know what I could do to make this undo.

I slowly walked into my bathroom and thought about it. I had the wish ticket, but it was useless because I had already wished on it. This life was terrible! I mean, this life was good because I got whatever I wanted, but I have a crazy mother, and a load of stuff to do each day. My old life was better because I didn't have to do things I didn't want to, and I had Annabelle. After a while of comparing I finally made a gut-wrenching decision.

I snatched up this wish ticket and ran down to the office. As soon as I reached the office I found the copier, and put the ticket under the lid of the copier. I pressed "Copy," and there it was: a brand new wish ticket, ready for me to make a wish!

As I was standing there in my pajamas I thought about how my life had been changed in a good way and

how it had been changed in a bad way. After thinking it over I realized that my life was better here, but I decided I couldn't leave Annabelle all alone.

I held the ticket up and said, "I wish I had never made my first wish!"

*Poof!*

I opened my eyes, and what I saw in front of me was great. It was Annabelle! I jumped out from under my covers and squeezed her as tightly as I could.

"Annabelle! I missed you! I'm so glad I'm back!"

"What do you mean, 'back'?" Annie replied "It's been like two minutes since I saw you last. Are you going psycho?"

"Oh, Annabelle! I missed you!"

We giggled together and laughed. Good thing I found a way to undo my wish. All I wanted to do was be with Annabelle.

That day I learned many things, but the most important thing I learned was to be thankful for what you have, because when you finally get what you want you realize it's not what you expect. I always wanted more, but I never appreciated what I had. Now I really appreciate what I have, and the person that I am most thankful for is Annabelle. She is the greatest girl ever.

# The Magic Easel

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In **THE MAGIC EASEL**, *Katie Lu* tells about a girl whose painting technique might just be the most lifelike ever seen.

Once there was a girl named Sam. She was an amazing artist. Sam liked to paint fantasy scenes.

One morning Sam was thinking of something good to paint in her art studio at her house. Inside of Sam's studio is a big pink desk in the corner. On the desk there are fine paints from Spain in 24 different colors. Also there are freshly sharpened pencils, with big pink erasers, a lot of paintbrushes, and endless amounts of sketch paper and canvases.

"Eureka! I've got it!" exclaimed Sam, and she got to work.

That morning Sam painted a girl in a dress like the dress worn by Snow White, but it was lime green. Then she painted a man that looked like Prince Charming, but he was red. She had always dreamed of painting a castle like the one at Disneyland, so she did, but it was yellow. Then she decided to paint all the Disney characters, but in her own way: Puss-in-Boots in heels, the seven dwarfs in tutus, Tinkerbell in pink, and the dog from *Beauty and the Beast*, but as a large dining room table. Sam loved this painting. She would hate it if something bad happened to the painting because of all the work she put into it.

While Sam was in the middle of a brush stroke, suddenly her mom yelled, "Come and eat, or you will be late for

school," and Sam darted to the kitchen and gobbled down the pancakes that her mom had made. They rushed out the door.

Two hours had passed since Sam arrived at school, and she was so tired. Sam was awake until the middle of second hour. The last word she heard was "verb."

\* \* \*

"Hello?" Sam asked. "Where am I?"

"Hello," said a sweet voice that sounded like a little girl. "You are in fairly-not-land, and I am Snow Lime Green."

"Hello, Snow Green."

"I'M NOT SNOW GREEN!" She paused and took a deep breath. "I'm Snow *Lime* Green."

Just then a big pink ball of light came toward her. "A shooting star!" Sam hollered.

"No, silly, that is Pinker Bell, the pink fairy," said Snow Lime Green.

"Is she like a genie? Do I get three wishes?" Sam asked.

"Hello, I'm Prince Red-markable. Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Sam from...from... I'm sorry, but you all remind me of something, like *déjà-vu*...um...oh, my painting! Now where's the castle?"

"What castle?" asked the prince.

“Well, it’s yellow and tall and someone amazing lives there like, like Cinderella.”

“No, not ‘Cin-der-kdela’; just Cinder-fella. Yes, he is a man who wears a dress.”

All of a sudden a dog came out, and it was the dog from her painting. It looked more vicious than she had painted it with its big teeth (that was new), huge paws, and all these changes. *What’s going on?* she thought.

Meanwhile the dog darted straight at her. “Watch out. That cutie is the meanest dog to ever live. Move!” said

Snow Lime Green.

The dog reminded Sam of her brother Max. *What if Max got into my art studio?* She tried to get all the words before the... *BOOOOOM!*

She was in language arts, listening to her classmates reading their stories that Mr. Fisher had passed out. One of her classmates was in the middle of “The Virus.” Then Sam bellowed, “True! False! All of the above!”

An awkward silence came over the class.

“Sorry, but, uh...did I still paint the painting?”

# The Magic Vase

---

*In THE MAGIC VASE by Rain Lybbert, Hallie Dinsley is being chased by Fretlig the evil troll. Fretlig's job is to trap Hallie in a magical vase, but Hallie has an advantage that could save her life. Can Hallie outsmart Fretlig?*

**T**HUNK! “Ow! My head! Who threw that?” yelled the small Hallie Dinsley. Hallie was the smallest kid in sixth grade. She was often bullied because she was so short. Her long black hair always covered her face. She and her class were on their way to the local history museum on a school bus. She could feel the hard springs in the seats and the so-called “leather” was as hard as concrete on a sidewalk.

“I did!” said the evil sixth-grade bully, Billy “Bulldog” Benson. Billy has red hair that sticks up in every direction and a face with freckles all over it. He is tall and kind of chubby, and he always wears a brown and red sports jacket. After that, Billy took every opportunity he could to hit Hallie in the back of the head with grapes.

After about thirty minutes of being pelted with grapes, Hallie could see the museum down the busy street. Hallie and her class piled out of the bus and onto the sidewalk. John (Billy’s sidekick), jumped down too fast, and hit the teacher right in the gut with his big head. “Detention, tomorrow at lunch, be there!” roared Mr. Teeny to John. As they walked inside the museum, Hallie could see many cool exhibits that she wanted to visit. After they waited for a few minutes, Hallie’s teacher, Mr.

Teeny, came back to them from the front desk where he was giving the worker the class’ tickets. “Okay class! This is our tour guide!” Mr. Teeny pointed to a short man with a black mullet. Until this point, it looked like he had been sleeping. He had potato chip crumbs on his shirt and his tie was loose.

“Hello class, I’m Jibble. I will be your tour guide,” said the stubby man. “First off, we are going to go see the Cave Man Exhibit! Follow me this way.” All of the class whined, except for Hallie. She was totally quiet. It was like that for three other exhibits, until they saw the Ancient Artifact Exhibit. While Jibble talked everyone’s toes off, Hallie spied a beautiful purple vase at the very back of the exhibit. “Excuse me? What’s the story behind that vase?” Hallie said loudly over the sounds of her classmates chatter.

“Well, that vase has a myth, behind it, not a story. The myth states that the troll was cursed into the vase by a wizard, and was supposed to be trapped until it was broken. If ever it breaks, the troll is supposed to trap the person who broke the vase, into the vase as the replacement. But here’s the catch, the one who breaks the vase, can also put the troll back into another vase just by

holding the vase and enchanting it by saying ‘POOF, POOF, POOF’” replied Jibble.

Hallie was very interested in getting a closer look at the strange vase, so she tiptoed away from the group and over to the vase. As she drew closer, the museum custodian turned on his vacuum. It made a loud roar as it started, which surprised Hallie because her eyes were fixed on the vase. And of course, she was trying not to get caught. Sure enough, Hallie tripped over the vacuum cord and fell. *BOOM! CRASH!* Hallie hit the vase with the back of her arm as she fell, and the vase fell with her. As soon as the majestic vase had its first crack in it, something strange happened. Thick purple smoke filled the air around the broken vase. “HA HA HA! I’M FREE!” said a low, cackling voice. Hallie stood up from where she fell and stared at the horrid monster.

“You’re...you’re...a troll!” yelled Hallie.

The troll had bright orange hair and a hog face with a pair of buck teeth sticking out from under his large purple lips. He had large human-like feet, and arms with scraggly black hair all over them. He was the type of creature that children imagined were under their bed ready to attack them when the light goes off. He was the type of monster that you thought you saw creeping out of your closet.

“Indeed, I am, you little spider eater! I’ll give you to the count of three to start running,” yelled the evil troll. Hallie didn’t wait to hear the “one” and ran as fast as she could down the

museum stairs. Behind her, she could hear the troll’s big feet bang on the floor as he ran a few feet behind her. While running, Hallie noticed that there was no movement or sounds except for the sounds coming from the chase that was going on. Everyone was frozen in time. Hallie ran into a ticket booth and shut the door behind her. *What’s going on?* The troll approached the booth, and started banging on the door.

“Let me in you little rat!” yelled the troll.

“No! Tell me what’s going on!”

“Well, obviously time is stopped! Can’t you see that, you dumb child!”

“DUH! What I’m trying to ask is why?”

“Well, time will be stopped until the chase is over! That’s just how the game is!”

“Thanks for nothing, you stupid troll!”

“Excuse me, you little brat, but I demand you address me as Fretlig!”

“Hey, look over there! A tasty frog is hopping around by the phone booth!” Hallie lied.

“Where? Where?” cooed Fretlig, as he ran to look for the frog. Hallie opened one of the side windows of the booth and jumped out. She sprinted to the woman’s restroom. When she stepped through the big bathroom door, she looked around and saw a long hallway with stalls and sinks aligning the walls of the bathroom. There was also a coffee table covered with lotions and towels in the middle of the round waiting room right before the beginning of the hallway. *A waiting room? In a bathroom? That’s weird!* She dumped the

towels and lotions on the floor, then used the table to keep the door shut.

At the end of the long hallway, there was a long coat rack with many coats, vests, and sweaters hanging on it. She ran down the hallway, past all of the frozen women walking down the hallway, and the frozen women using the sinks. At the end of the hallway, she slipped herself behind all the coats and put on a fluffy brown fur coat for extra camouflage. CRASH! Fretlig broke down the door. “Come out, come out, wherever you are!” teased Fretlig. Fretlig leaned into a stall and looked under it at the surrounding stalls.

At that moment, Hallie saw a door labeled, “STAFF ONLY”. It was hard to see though because it was the same color as the bright pink walls. Hallie took the chance to sneak through the coats and through the door. The door led into a room with coffee machines lined against the wall and a few old couches scattered here and there. *Staff lounge*, thought Hallie. “Ha ha ha! I see you!” snickered Fretlig. There was a door at the other side of the lounge that led her back to the main lobby. Hallie dashed up the stairs on her way to the ancient artifacts exhibit.

When she arrived, she scanned all of the artifacts to find another vase. She was running out of time because Fretlig was across the huge Ancient Artifact exhibit room. “I’m gonna get you,” belched Fretlig. Finally, Hallie found an old brown pottery vase that was covered in dirt and mud from when it was underground. Hallie picked it up and ran past the frozen

Mr. Teeny and all of her frozen classmates. Hallie ran as fast as her legs would take her. She ran downstairs and into the food court. She dove behind a cotton candy cart just as Fretlig came around the corner. Hallie whispered, “POOF, POOF, POOF” and the vase started glowing bright red. Hallie could hear his feet smack on the tile floor. She could hear him breathe as he got closer.

“ROARRRRR!” Fretlig leaned over the cart, but Hallie wasn’t there.

“ROAR, right back to you, pal,” Hallie exclaimed. She had snuck around the cart and had hit Fretlig in the leg right as he was leaning over the cart. Purple smoke went into the air as Fretlig was pulled into the vase. Hallie sat against the cart and watched all the walls and artifacts go back to their original stage when Fretlig first came out of the vase. Then everyone unfroze and kept on with their conversations as if nothing had happened. Hallie stuffed the vase into her backpack and went back upstairs to rejoin her class.

Back at school, Hallie tried to tell her best friend, Sara, about the big chase with Fretlig, but she just laughed and walked away. So did everyone else when she tried to tell them of her adventure with Fretlig.

When the school bell rang, Hallie ran down the hallway and out the two big green front doors of the school. She was so eager to tell her mom about her day. She knew her mom would believe her. Hallie saw her mom parked at the back of the car loop. “Mom! Mom! You won’t believe the day I...” Right at that moment an eighth-grader



came skateboarding around the corner of the school. He had no idea that Hallie was standing there.

“AHHHHH!” wailed the skateboarder.

“WWAAAAA!” shrieked Hallie. Hallie was hit hard by the skateboarder

as he fell toward her. She landed on her back on the sidewalk. *CRACK!* Her back pack broke her fall to the sidewalk. Everything in her backpack was fine, except for the vase. Purple smoke filled the air as Hallie screamed, “Oh no! Not again!”

# A Magical Tour of Ancient Greece

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*When the god of helpfulness is sent on mission to retrieve a valuable object, he experiences the adventures of a true immortal in* **A MAGICAL TOUR OF ANCIENT GREECE**, *by David Pirog.*

**H**orus, the god of helpfulness was a slim, tall, well-built, muscular god with brown hair and blue eyes who still had a gash with dried *ichor* on his left knee. Dried *ichor* is the golden-colored blood of the gods. He had been sent to retrieve the pearls of Athena. They had been stolen by a mysterious stranger. The pearls are the power source for the trees in Athens. The Athenians need the trees because they are used for food, medicine, and olive oil, which have healing and cleansing properties.

Horus must go to Calypso's island where the pearls had been reported seen. To do all this, he was given five wishes by the council of gods because he could not get the pearls instantly since they were invulnerable to magic. To get there, he will have to venture into the Forest of Life, which is where the Minotaur is staying. From the Forest, he will have to find the entrance to the Underworld. The Minotaur is a terrifying monster who is half-bull and half-man. He wants revenge on mankind because they tried to destroy him. From the Forest, Horus will have to find the entrance to the Underworld.

When Horus entered the Forest of Life, something moved, making a bush rustle. "Hey, is anybody there?" Horus asked in a frightened tone. Getting ready for danger, he dropped to the

ground. The leaves crunched as Horus lowered his belly to the ground and started to army crawl. He heard a deep snuffle. He looked up expecting a boar. "It" was staring at him, its blood-shot eyes seeing straight through him. It was the Minotaur.

It was snarling at him, its eyes burning with hatred. "I will crush you, insolent immortal," the Minotaur growled in a voice that split the forest in half. Then, he charged, quick as thunder, and Horus almost got hit by the deadly horns.

"Stop, please, I don't want to do anything to you!" Horus yelled in a frightened tone. The Minotaur charged again without mercy, speeding and knocking down trees. Horus moved out of the way. They were both out of breath.

Horus knew he couldn't keep this up for long. It struck him that he had to devise a plan. The Minotaur came crashing through the woods. Right as he was about to impale Horus, the god of helpfulness closed his eyes and wished for a very strong, durable tree to appear in front of him.

Horus opened his eyes and he saw a magnificent oak tree. He heard a loud thump and gazed at the other side. The Minotaur's horns were stuck in the tree, and despite all of his efforts, he could

not move because his horns were in too deep. “*Rawrr*, foolish god, we will meet again!” the Minotaur said in a voice that sounded like distorted gnarls. It was time for Horus to escape, so he started walking down a steep hill with dead grass. He knew this was the entrance to the Underworld!

As Horus arrived at the dark Land of the Dead, he felt uncomfortable because of the ghosts wandering around, making strange noises. Horus kept walking for what seemed like an eternity, but finally arrived at a stream of light, which was probably the exit door of the gloomy Kingdom of the Dead. He started to run to the door when he spotted six yellow eyes in the shadows. Then a paw came out, and then a second, and a third, and a fourth. “Hey, these are dog paws,” Horus said in a surprised tone. Then the whole body stepped out. Those six yellow eyes were accompanied by three mouths with razor sharp teeth!

This was Cerberus, the fierce three-headed dog of Hades, the ruler of the Underworld. As Horus backed away, Cerberus licked its lips, drool splattering like rainfalls. Its ears twitched while its eyes bore into his. Its nose rose up and down sniffing Horus who was frightened to death (and he was in the Land of the Dead, too!).

Horus was sure this was no ordinary dog, but he might like ordinary food! Horus wished for a five-ton T-bone steak to appear at Cerberus’s feet.

Cerberus, happy as a lark and barking like a little puppy, totally forgot about Horus and started tearing

humongous chunks of meat from the steak. His three heads were fighting to get the best parts. Horus ran out as fast as he could to avoid staying just in case Cerberus had finished the meal and was still hungry.

Out of that desert of darkness, Horus observed that there was a vast, sparkling sea separating Calypso’s island from the Underworld borders. Horus still had three wishes and so decided to wish he were at Calypso’s island. Instantly, the green forest surrounding the Underworld changed into a yellow beach with silver flowers and a huge mountain with some rocky terrain. Horus then spotted a dazzling light in a cave upon the mountain. “The pearls might be there!” Horus exclaimed. Horus then wished he were in the bright cave.

As the heat of the sun instantly vanished and Horus felt the shade and the cool, bumpy walls of the cavern, he saw a blinding light. “The pearls! I finally found them!” Horus screamed in delight. But as he looked more closely, his smile faded. “These don’t have the right shine,” Horus said in a disappointed voice.

Horus was furious, but he only had one wish left, so he decided to descend to the shore himself. As he reached the shore, he became so mad he threw the fake pearls in the sea. As they sank, the water started boiling and splattering. As the pearls sank deeper, and then out of sight, Horus heard a huge tearing sound. Then, blackness....

When Horus woke up, his back and his head were aching. He then realized it was dark. Horus stayed calm and

started to re-analyze things. “The pearls must have launched a huge earthquake that tore the island apart, and I must have fallen into an underground cave,” Horus said.

Then a bright light shimmered between two massive rocks. Horus came closer to inspect this mysterious phenomenon and realized that this light was coming from the real pearls! They looked smooth and had a green tint.

As he grabbed them, he felt the intense energy of the pearls coursing through him. Horus then looked up and saw there was no way out of the cave he was in. “I still have a wish left; no, I have two wishes left!” Horus said.

As Horus wished he would return to the shoreline, the darkness lifted up, and the cave was transformed into an illuminated beach. “All I have to do now is to wish I was back in Athens. I wish, I wish... It isn’t working!” Horus said worryingly. “I must have no more wishes.”

Right when Horus was muttering these words, he saw a blazing chariot with tall, well-built stallions and shining

wheels appearing out of thin air. Apollo, the god of Sun, looking like a golden, shimmering light and carrying the reins in one hand and a ball of light in the other, was standing on the chariot; he had come to save him.

“Hello, Horus. I think I came at about the right time,” Apollo said with a stifled laugh.

“How did you know I was here?” Horus asked.

“You see the sun?” Apollo said as he pointed to the fiery ball of light “I can see almost anything from up there.”

Horus jumped onto the chariot of the sun, and they rode off to Athens.

When they arrived, crowds had appeared and were clapping and shouting compliments. Athena stepped forward and took the pearls from Horus’s hands and said, “Horus, thank you. We are very grateful. Would you like anything in return for bringing back the gift of life to this city?” Athena asked.

“Yes, some of that olive oil over there!” Horus said with a huge grin on his face.

# Monster Hockey!!!!!!!

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*In MONSTER HOCKEY!!!!!!! by Jonah Goldberg, Dav's trip to the hospital is just the beginning of a chain of events that will link his day to a startling transformation of the Detroit Red Wings hockey team.*

One day there was a Red Wings game. Dav was a kid who was going to that game, and he didn't know he was getting a lot more than he paid for.

After Dav heard the school bell ring, he ran home as fast as fast as he could. After he ran up his driveway he tripped on his porch step. His mom came running out of the door to his scream of panic.

After that painful trip he woke up in the hospital two hours late. The doctor said to him, "Don't worry; you will be able to go to the game."

Dav said back to him, "What game?"

The doctor responded, "The Red Wings game." Dav was in shock after the doctor told him that.

When he heard what happened to his leg, he thought it was bad. But the next thing he knew, he was up on his broken leg and walking on it.

On the way to the game, his dad said, "Look what the doctor gave me," and he held up two front row tickets. Dav was amazed.

When they got there they went to their seats. While they were sitting there his dad looked at his watch, and it was only 5:00. The game started at 7:00

As he was looking at his watch, the whole Red Wings team was at the bar

ordering chocolate milk. When Kris Draper looked in his milk, he said, "Why is it bubbly?"

The waiter said to him that he had added his own touch. Then everyone on the team looked in his own milk and saw the same, but all of the team members just drank it. They didn't know that bubbly stuff was acid.

*Two hours later*

*BZZZZZZZZZZZZZ.*

The teams spilled onto the ice. Then all of the Red Wings players felt weird. They felt a stretching in their stomachs. Then they were monsters! They were huge, hairy, scary, and super-strong monsters.

The crowd went wild seeing they were monsters. The announcer said, "We have never seen this before! This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! Come on, fans; let's hear it for the Red Wings!"

At first the players had to get used to their monster bodies. They warmed up by skating across their half of the ice. After ten minutes of warm-ups, it was time for the game.

Pavel Datsyuk was at center. When the puck dropped, he won the face-off and passed it to Tomas Holstrom, who skated over everyone. He took a slap

shot, and he scored. The announcer said, "That shot was 900 miles per hour!"

*Two periods later*

In the third period of the game the Red Wings scored 2,345 goals, and the away team scored zero goals. After 306 more goals, Kris Draper was skating up the ice with the puck. When he got to the blue line he took a slap shot. The rest was a blur....

...and Dav heard, "Dav, wake up."

Dav woke up in the hospital five days later with a bad headache and a huge bump on his head. He asked, "Doctor, what happened?"

He responded, "You got hit with Kris Draper's slap shot. It broke through the boards and hit you in the head."

Dav looked at the TV screen. The TV had ESPN on, and it showed the clip of him getting hit in the head and the player interviews after the game:

**Reporter:** What was it like playing as a monster?

**Kris Draper:** It was a lot different from normal hockey because I was so big and powerful like my teammates. That made us unstoppable.

**Reporter:** How did you turn into monsters?

**Pavel Datsyuk:** The guy at the restaurant put something in our chocolate milk.

**Reporter:** Well, that's our latest news. Thank you for watching ESPN news.

Dav was amazed after the news, but he didn't remember any of it.

# The Morph Club

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*Arthur's sister, Kendra, goes to strange club every day. No one knows about it and she's never told him a thing—until now. When Art turns twelve, Kendra reveals what she has been hiding from him for a long time. Will this club be dumb and boring? Or will it decide the fate of the world? Find out in **THE MORPH CLUB** by **Giselle Ulep**.*

**O**ur planet was created by the mother planet of Natsbika (NAHT-shi-kah). This was an all-powerful planet back when it created our solar system. When they created Earth, one of the Natsbikians was helping to make a planet for the first time. He accidentally punctured a hole right about where an old building stands. The hole was a portal to a separate dimension full of other portals to Natsbika. Several millennium later, our ancestor, Dr. Milton J. Line, settled there and built a building over the portal where it still stands today. He went to open his closet and ended up in another dimension. When he first passed through the portal, something changed. His blood suddenly was mixed with other animals' blood. In the castle, he found doors with dragon crests on them. They led into different parts of Natsbika. You see, life on Natsbika was not as great as it was when Earth was created. The great king of Natsbika, King Vostrio, had died. He had no children that would continue the Natsbikian blood line. The Natsbikians could shift their shapes, and he wanted his kingdom to continue like that. He chose his advisor to take the throne. They were friends and he thought that he would be a good king.

But the advisor, Kolesten, had different plans. He thought it was useless to create worlds to share the kingdom's power. He wanted to destroy other worlds so that

Natsbika would be more powerful. So they destroyed the other solar systems until Dr. Line moved into the building and his blood became Natsbikian blood. By then, the people of the Natsbikian Kingdom had lost all of their Natsbikian blood. Kolesten was the only true Natsbikian in the kingdom. Dr. Line had perfected his morphing skills and heard that the Natsbikians were planning to strike Earth. He snuck into the kingdom and fought Kolesten until the evil king fell. The kingdom split up and was ruled by different kings and queens. They followed Kolesten and constantly attacked our solar system, but Dr. Line fought back. Dr. Line passed away and expected his children to follow in his footsteps, but the blood skips generations. His grandchildren found his letters. He had written to them in his will and the children started The Morphs. Now, the Morphs are the only shape shifters in the universe. Only every other generation can become a Morph. Then the portal affected people around it, though not as much as the Lines. Now there were other families with morphing power. We started to attack the Kings and Queens of Natsbika.

My sister is part of this weird club. She goes about every day to their meetings. I've never been allowed to go with her. She says it's top secret and I'll go when I turn twelve. That would be

tomorrow. Tomorrow, on my twelfth summer birthday, I'll be a part of Kendra's mysterious club. She said even if I don't want to, I need to join, or I will never learn my life's purpose. Whatever that means. Kendra talks in all these weird riddles whenever her club comes up as a conversation topic and she says I'll understand everything when my time comes. Boy, I couldn't wait for tomorrow to I find out if my sister was a nut or not.

I woke up that morning feeling like I was going to discover something worthwhile—and I was. I raced down the staircase and ran up to my sister, who was, at her usual spot in the morning, sitting on the sofa, reading.

"Happy Birthday, Art," she said, smiling. My name's Arthur, but everyone calls me Art.

"Morning Kendra," I replied, an expectant grin on my face. "Well?" I urged.

"What?" asked Kendra, as if she didn't know what I was talking about.

"You know, the club," I said, hoping she hadn't forgotten. "You promised that on my twelfth birthday you would take me to your mysterious club—"

"*Sshh*," she interrupted me, putting her finger to my lips. "Tonight, after the party."

Just then, Mom and Dad clambered down the staircase. "Happy Birthday, sport!" Dad bellowed. Mom kissed my cheek. Kendra just sat on the couch pretending to read, but I could see she was suppressing a smile. The party and the cake were fun, but I had my mind on what was planned for tonight.

After the guests left, Kendra said that her friend had something planned for me and that we would be staying out late at her house. I went along because I knew she was taking me to the club.

We went out on our bikes and instead of going to someone's house; we stopped in front of an old abandoned building that I'd never noticed. We hid our bikes in trees nearby. Kendra went up to the door and pulled it. It creaked open slowly. I couldn't see inside because of how dark it was. It was eerie. I wanted to turn around, but Kendra pushed me through the door.

"We need to be fast about entering and exiting. We don't anyone to find out about this." She explained in a whisper.

I nodded. She led me down a narrow hallway and placed her hand on the door knob of what looked like a closet door.

"You ready?" she asked.

"Ready," I replied, shakily. What would be on the other side of this door?

Kendra pushed the door open. It was a corridor with gray brick walls, like the ones you would expect to see in a castle. It had a long red carpet with gold edges and patterns that led down to the other side of the corridor. At the other side of the corridor was an altar and above it was a large gold crest with a dragon on it. Above us was a high domed ceiling that glittered like jewels.

"Art, welcome to The Morphs," breathed Kendra. I was dumbstruck. I stayed silent for several minutes.



“What are ‘The Morphs?’” I finally managed.

“I will give you the orientation speech,” Kendra announced. “Please save all questions until the end of the speech.”

“Basically, The Morphs are a group with a certain power to change into different creatures. It was started when our great, great, very great grandfather moved into the abandoned building that we came here from. Our world was created by a powerful planet called Natshika and they want to destroy Earth because the rulers follow the rule from a King that is long gone. They used to create worlds, now they destroy them. Our grandfather came through his closet and got morphing power in his blood. He defeated the big ruler of Natshika, the only true shape shifter Natshikian left. The morphing gene skips generations so his kids couldn’t attack the small kingdoms, but his grandchildren started the Morphs so that they could do that. Ever since then, we’ve been stopping the Natshikian royalty from destroying us. Sorry, this isn’t a very complete description, but we’re short on time and I can explain details later. I’m sure you have tons of questions so fire away.”

“Yes,” I said. “Do you actually think that I believe you?”

Kendra smirked. All of a sudden, her shape melted. It was like ice at 300°F. In her place was a Labrador. Then, the dog melted and became a beetle. The beetle melted to become a snake. Then, the snake was an eagle. It fluttered up to my shoulder.

“Now do you believe me?” it

whispered. It turned back into Kendra. I knew I had too much soda at that party and that I was dreaming.

“Ouch!” I squealed after I pinched myself.

“Any other questions?” asked Kendra, trying not to laugh.

“Why is the Natshika crest a dragon?”

“Only Natshika royalty, and people of the Line bloodline, meaning us, could become dragons.”

“Where are the other club members?”

“Oh.” Kendra smiled sheepishly. “They’re watching us right now. Come on out guys, no more hiding.”

I nearly fainted when a rat that scurried out of a hole in the wall behind me, a mosquito that was hovering above us and many other things turned into people. They were normal people. Not even people, kids. Kids I knew. A whole lot of Kendra’s friends and even kids in my grade. Kids I said hi to in the hallway at school. Even my best friend, Tony, who was at the party, ran up to me.

“Welcome to the Morphs, Art!” he said.

“All right everyone,” said Kendra. The room went silent. “There’s still some research to be done on Queen Elia and Art probably has some questions he wants to be answered privately, so I think we should all get back to work.” Everyone nodded and left.

“What is Tony doing here?” I demanded, “He never told me anything!”

“Tony already turned twelve. He’s

been here for two weeks. I forced him not to say anything," she replied.

"Where is this castle? You said this was a different dimension."

"We're not sure. There are no doors except for the portals. We tried to break through a wall once. The wall just wouldn't break; none of us could even dent it. We use the castle as the HQ for the Morphs basically."

"Why is everyone a kid?"

"Remember how I told you that the blood skips generations? This generation is still young."

"How do you know if the kid has Natshikian blood when you let them join?"

"You know that old doctor in town that runs the blood tests for kids? He's a former Morph. He gave it up to go to medical school. He mails us copies of the blood test data every six months. Only one more question, we've only got a few more hours and I still have stuff to show you."

"Why can't I morph like you?" I asked. "I have Natshikian blood, don't I? I keep trying but nothing happens."

"That's what I was going to get at next," replied Kendra. "You need to go through a ritual to activate the gene. Follow me."

She led me down a hallway and came up to a great glass statue of a dragon. The only thing that wasn't glass was a black stone eye and the red cloth tongue. Kendra grabbed the eye out the socket and the tongue from the mouth. She slid the stone into a pocket in the cloth that I didn't notice. Then, she tied the glistening silky red cloth with the rock in it around my head like some

sort of ninja.

"You must wear this for twenty-four hours straight and sleep with it on during the full moon. Then you will be a Morph," she said proudly.

We said goodbye and I received birthday gifts from the Morphs that night, before we left the castle. Before I fell asleep, I looked at the full moon from my window. "Good luck" it seemed to say.

"I sure hope so," I whispered back.

We returned to the Morph HQ the following night. When time came, everyone watched as Kendra removed my silky piece of cloth. Before it came off, Kendra said something in my ear. "Remember," she said, "When I take this cloth off, you might morph uncontrollably for a while. I not sure how long." Before I could react, the cloth was gone.

I felt renewed. I felt like I could accomplish anything. Everyone stared, as if expecting something. Obviously, they had morphed into something when the first became Morphs and they expected me to. And I did. I'm not sure how it happened. One second, I was a person enjoying my great feeling of being renewed, and the next second, I was a wolf howling to the ceiling. I didn't even try and there I was, howling. Tony and some of my other friends from school turned into wolves and howled along with me. When the howling stopped and I became me again, everybody clapped.

I was speechless. Kendra smiled and said, "I'll tell you what, it's not much fun to be here as an animal unless you're on a mission. We can all spend

the rest of the night horsing around. It'll be a fun celebration."

I could only nod. We all went back through the portal to the abandoned building. Then everyone walked all the way down to the town border line, on the other side were the woods. The sign said, "Stay Away: Wild Animals".

"Should we turn back?" I asked Kendra.

Kendra laughed. "There are no real wild animals except us. We put that sign up so that people would stay away when we decided to have a little fun," she replied. She stepped into the forest and I followed.

It was the wildest night in my life. First, we all pretended to be a wolf pack and ended up playing "Squirrel Tag." Then Kendra and I became eagles, while other kids kept playing, and she taught me how to fly. In midair, I became a person and Kendra had to rescue me. After that, we all sat around a fire that we made and kids took turns telling stories.

At the end, to finish up the night, we became cheetahs and ran very, very deep into the woods to a big rock that, like a ramp, went up to the tops of the trees where there was a ledge at the top of the rock. We all walked up about halfway and stopped. Kendra was the only one who kept walking. She stopped at the very edge of the rock. She turned to face us then turned back around to face the stars. She turned into the most stunning creature I could imagine. A dragon. It was a deep blue with huge scaly wings and a long tail. It had purple eyes that sparkled like diamonds. Its crest was wavy like

Kendra's hair. She raised her head to the sky and blasted a great blue flame from her mouth. It shaped in the clouds saying "Arthur". Everyone applauded. She turned around and bowed with her long neck. Then she became human again and hurried down the slope with everyone else, hoping no one else had seen us. Kendra caught up to me and said, "That's called Fire Sky Writing." Soon after, everyone went home.

Before I went to sleep, Kendra came into my room and whispered, "Tomorrow, after breakfast, we're going to go to the HQ and take you on your first mission. But it will be with my supervision, of course." Then she left and I started dreaming.

I was at the HQ computer room the next day, helping Tony do some research on a forest near Queen Elia's palace, when Kendra pulled me aside.

"Are you ready for your first mission?" she asked with enthusiasm.

"Ready as I'll ever be!" I answered.

Tony then ran up to Kendra with a printed map of a route from a nearby village to the forest we researched.

"Thank you, Tony," she said. "Are you ready as well?"

"Yep," Tony replied.

"Tony's coming with us?" I asked.

"Mmm-hmm," answered Kendra. "Monica is too." Monica is a friend of Kendra's.

I followed Kendra, Monica, and Tony down a corridor to a room with a title above the door that said "Queen Elia's Kingdom". We had a lot of rooms like this. Each one had a few doors inside with crests on them. They were portals that led to different parts

of the kingdom. By now, I had a pretty good map of HQ in my head. But this room was different, because there was only one door. It said 'Viatrix Village'. We all stepped through the portal.

It led to a small closet door of a woodshop. We stepped out into the street and blended in with bustling people of the village. Kendra pointed to a forest outside the village and gestured for us follow her. We slipped silently into the forest.

"What's the plan?" asked Tony.

"There are guards every half mile apart surrounding the castle in every direction for thirty-six miles out. No one can get in or out without them knowing. We could sneak past them as animals, but that would get them suspicious. We are going to go in through the forest as flying squirrels. We will leap through the trees and be under the cover of the forest. The forest ends at the palace and right under a balcony. At the last couple of trees, we'll turn into birds and fly up to the balcony. Then we'll turn into bugs and sneak in. We'll find the Queen's room and look for clues where the mysterious King Wariostay is. We've heard rumors about him in different kingdoms and that he is a shape shifter. The most information we've got on his location is that he knows Queen Elia," Kendra explained.

We morphed into flying squirrels and started bounding through the trees over the guards' heads. At the edge of the forest, we became birds. Kendra was a raven, Tony was an owl, Monica was a swan, and I was a hawk.

We all turned different kinds of

bugs on the balcony. I was a butterfly, thinking that no one would bother something as beautiful as a butterfly and I would have the ability to fly. Ugh. The others copied me, liking my idea. It felt good to be a help on the mission. The Queen's room was just down the hallway and once we were inside, we became people and started searching for clues.

It was a while before I heard Monica call out, "Found something!" and I hurried over there. Monica held up a small key. "It must be to her diary or something!" she exclaimed. Kendra agreed. They searched for a diary. But I knew better. I knew that a Queen wouldn't have a diary. Diaries didn't exist on Natshika. Then it hit me: a chest; a treasure chest. I turned into a Beagle and sniffed the key. I searched for something that smelled like the key. I found a trail to her closet. In the closet was a pile of clothing. I started digging with my Beagle paws and pulled out a large chest.

"Of course!" cried Kendra when she saw it. "How could I've been so stupid? The Queen would've kept special items in a chest, not a diary! Great job, Art." She patted my head. I wagged my tail, proudly. We put the key into the lock on the chest and it clicked open. Inside was a number of letters written from King Wariostay. There were a few items sent from him like hair pieces and gems. There was even a map of his kingdom!

"Bingo!" I cried as I clutched the map.

We hauled the huge chest out to the balcony. "We can't bring the chest back

as birds,” said Tony, “It’s too heavy.” Suddenly, the castle guards stormed out to the balcony.

“Surrender or die!” one of them bellowed. He grabbed Kendra and dragged her into the palace.

“Go! I can get out of this myself!” Kendra yelled before they slammed the door on her.

I had to think fast. My instincts took over and I morphed into a dragon, grabbed the chest and took off. Whoa. My dragon self was a little different than Kendra’s. My body was a flaming red with emerald eyes and a strong, shiny crest.

The chest was in my claws. Tony and Monica followed behind as eagles. I was enjoying being a dragon when I remembered Kendra. I looped around and looked back at the palace in the distance wondering if I’d made a huge mistake taking off like that. The soldiers that were once beneath me had retreated to the castle and were attempting to shoot me with bows and arrows, but I was far out of reach. I sighed in relief when I saw a huge plume of blue flame erupt for the palace and a blue dragon take off in my direction. They shot Kendra with

bows and arrows as well, but her scales acted like armor and the arrows bounced off like peas. She caught up to me.

“You’re alive!” I exclaimed.

“It wasn’t too hard,” she replied confidently. “I just had to scare them with a little fire.”

We kept talking about what we had just witnessed as we flew side by side, Kendra and I in the middle with Tony and Monica on either side. When we got near the village, we saw all the people evacuate and hide in their underground storage outside the walls of the village. Getting back through the portal was a piece of cake.

A year has passed now and I still remember my first mission fondly. King Wariostay is now the biggest enemy of the club and I was promoted to second in command. We’ve had a few more members since then, but Tony is still my best bud. I help Kendra with the Fire Sky Writing, now, when new members arrive. Right now, I’m at a mountaintop nearby Wariostay’s kingdom, spreading my scaly dragon wings, getting ready for my daily routine.

You know, saving the world.

# Mutants

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*Two not-so-normal kids are in school when what they notice a person in a suit of armor appearing in the schoolyard. They go outside to look at it and it's ready for battle, so they fight it using their secrets. What might these secrets be? Read **MUTANTS** by **Justin Moore** to find out!*

**M**y name is Bob. I do have one secret that separates me from other people. I am a mutant. My friend Mark and I are mutants. I can grow wings while Mark is pretty much a human magnet. We usually try to live a normal life and that's gone pretty well... until today.

" $2x+56=y$ ," said my math teacher Ms. Strange. Then there is an explosion outside. I look outside and see a weird guy standing outside. He wears shiny armor and has a huge sword. For some reason I jumped out of the window. I know that was dumb. Have you ever done something without thinking about it? I landed right to his left side. Of course he sees it as a threat and attacks me. I run away and try to escape, but wherever I went he was there. I decide it is time to fight.

"Why are you trying to kill me?" I ask.

"I have come to capture you because my master told me to," the person says.

"Looks like we're both fighting for no reason," I reply.

"Actually I have a good reason," he informs me, "You fell on me and that's all the reason I need. I'm going to enjoy killing you."

"And you're certainly welcome to try," I say. He starts to swing at me with all of his force. Luckily, his attacks are slow so I can easily dodge them. Obviously this was a trap. I know this because I fell right into it. Mark must have seen me get hit by this guy's sword. In about two minutes he's standing right next to me. The reason we both haven't really fought him is because if the whole school knows we are mutants we'll have to change our names and leave.

"Are you okay?" Mark asks.

"I'm fine" I reply. As soon as I get up, I'm hit in the stomach with a gigantic sword. The next time I get up, the same thing happens. The same thing happens the next time and the time after that.

I was extremely angry now. I was about to explode with rage but Mark comes over and grabs me. "Bob, you can't let them see," says Mark.

"I don't care if they know, they must know something is happening from me jumping out of the window," I say. I run right toward the person. A second after that, I grow my wings. I'm also an excellent swordsman. I hit him with my sword as hard as I can. That only knocks him down. He gets straight back up and tries to whack me

with his sword. I easily dodge it. I'm also a pretty great archer. I grab my bow and arrow and fire an arrow straight at him.

"That was a waste of time Bob," Mark shouts.

"I don't see you doing anything," I yell to Mark.

"Fine, I guess one little fight can't hurt," says Mark. Mark floats calmly toward me. He then repels the guy with the huge sword. Mark's power doesn't do much. He's really just a human magnet.

There is one thing that he can do though. "Mark ..." I say. Apparently that was all he needed. I grab him and throw him at the guy. I keep trying to hit the other guy but he easily blocks me. This is part of my plan. Mark easily steers himself at the person and I shoot an arrow bolt at him. Mark rams right in to the person and he explodes.

When the person explodes so does at least half of the school. "Aw come on!" I yell.

"This is what happens when you do things without thinking about them," Mark mutters.

"It's not like you haven't done something without thinking about it," I reply.

"Whatever. We have to leave now. We're most likely wanted right now," Mark says. As much as I hated to admit it, he was right, which is weird.

"Okay. We'll leave," I agree.

That's where our journey begins. Before we leave we do stop by a store and buy some food and water for our journey. We begin to leave Michigan.

This may be the last time we see it.

"I guess we're ready then," I say.

"It's too bad that we blew up the school," Mark says, "I actually liked this state."

### One Month Later

We made it just past the Rocky Mountains today. It's time to get rest. We would need it. I get the feeling that someone is following us. When I wake up I notice that Mark is gone. He must be going to hunt for food. That seems more like a job that I would be doing.

I got tired of waiting for him and fell asleep again. When I wake up, I am trapped in a sack. "Let me out of here!!" I yell. It must have been muffled because the person's shadow didn't move at all. Too bad the sack wasn't see-through. I just remembered something I could do. Slowly I grew my wings. They poked through the bag, enough for me to draw my sword and make the hole bigger. I quickly took my sword and ripped the sack I was in. As soon as I did that I flew up to see who the person was. It was the same person Mark and I had killed earlier. I flew toward him and continuously slashed him with my sword. Apparently Mark and I weren't watching the person carefully enough to see what happens when they die. Black flames started to surround him. "No! I can't be fading already!" the person says.

"What do you mean fading?" I ask. Immediately, the person disappears. "Well at least I won't have

to worry about him for a while”.

“Bob, I got some food,” Mark shouts. I went back to our tent. “Hard to catch, this one was.” “Why are you talking like Yoda?” I ask.

“I have no idea,” Mark replies. “Where were you anyway?” he asks.

“I was back fighting that guy we fought at the school,” I answer. “He wasn’t very tough this time. He seemed weakened”.

“How did it go?” Mark asks.

“You don’t want to know,” I reply.

“Yes I do! I want to know every bloodsucking detail!” Mark said in a scary voice.

“No blood, but he said something about fading when he died,” I replied.

“Well, I guess this place isn’t safe. Come on let’s go find another temporary home,” Mark says.

We head a little more west and decide to eat there. As soon as we arrive, the person that we keep fighting is there. “This time I promised my master I would capture you,” he screams.

“Go ahead and try. There’s no way you’re capturing us,” Mark hollers. I thought he meant run so I bolted away. “You’re not supposed to run!” Mark shouts at me.

I couldn’t hear him. I keep running until I ran into someone. “If this is another person that wants to kill me, I will grab them and fly over a volcano!” I say. It is a small child. Apparently that upset him. He starts to cry. I run away to avoid getting into trouble but behind me the child

is growing and changing shape. *That is one ugly child.* I thought to myself. He is huge and red, almost like Mark’s face when he puts hot sauce on hot dogs. His horns look like he just sharpened them. He smells of dead fish and barf.

I try to run but he grabs me. “Now I can capture you myself instead of my servant doing it,” he says. His voice was deep and it echoed. His skin felt like snake skin.

“Then I’m guessing you’re the person that he calls master,” I say. “Well I guess that means I’m going to have to kill you,” I say.

“Can you do that while you’re asleep?” he asks. Right after that I’m asleep.

I wake up in a giant jar filled halfway to the top with water. He must think I’ll get my wings wet and never get out. To my left, I see Mark hooked up to a giant magnet. *We’re never going to get out* I think to myself. Then I think of an idea. I use the tip of my wings and hit the glass and it cracks. I silently fly to Mark and free him. “I’m guessing the master can’t come back to life.” I say. I have two knives. I give one to Mark. “On three,” I say. “One... Two...” I count and get tackled by the person who tried to capture us. I take out my bow and three arrows. I can fire up to three arrows at a time. I fired thirty-nine arrows when I realize that they aren’t doing any damage.

“Since this is the final battle I’ll show you my weak spot,” he says. He takes off his helmet and no one is on



the inside! He points to a little seal that keeps his soul bound to the suit of armor. I fire as soon he points. "You are unworthy of battle..." he says and falls. While the master doesn't know, I shoot three flaming

arrows at him. He falls down dead. I give a throwing knife to Mark.

"On three: one... two... three!" We throw the knives and they hit the master in the back. He falls down dead.

# The Mystery of Rain

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*Rain is turned into a fairy, and she has to find a way to get back to her normal self. Will she remain forever a fairy or will she change back? Find out in **THE MYSTERY OF RAIN**, by *Elizabeth Austin*.*

One crisp sunny day in London, England, Khallen Austin was walking down the dirt road and she could smell mum cooking her favorite soup, creamy mushroom soup. Khallen said with her mouth watering, “Mmm that smells great. Mum makes the best mushroom soups ever! It’s as good as the soup the royal cook for Princess Annie makes,” she chuckled. Khallen’s mom, Jazmyn, worked at the palace as the royal cook. When Khallen got home for lunch it began to rain and it reminded her of the sound of soft little mice feet scattering on the roof and the thunder sounded like quiet rumbles of a hungry tummy as she again smelled her “royal” mushroom soup. As Khallen sat down to eat her soup, she daydreamed about the day she and her best friends, Kelly Lybeck and Elizabeth Ann, met two new friends Nina and Rain.

As Khallen thought of this memory, she remembered playing with Kelly and Elizabeth in the field behind Kelly’s house one afternoon. Then out of nowhere this girl appeared and she said, “Hello there, what are your names? I’m Nina! I’m from Germany. Sprechen Sie Deutsch?”

“No, we don’t speak Dutch,” they all answered together, confused.

“Do you speak English?” asked

Nina. “And I didn’t ask if you speak Dutch. I asked if you spoke German.”

“No, we don’t speak German and yes, we do speak English,” answered Elizabeth.

*Nina had a thought, Do they ever speak any other language but English? I guess they don’t.*

“Do you guys want to be my friends?” asked Nina.

“Sure, we’ll be your friends,” said Kelly.

“So what are your names?” Nina asked again.

“Oh, sorry, I am Khallen and this is Kelly and Elizabeth my best friends in the whole world,” Khallen answered.

“Would you like to play with us?” asked Elizabeth.

“Sure I would love to play with you,” answered Nina happily.

“Are you coming or not?” asked Kelly as they walked away. Nina ran up and followed them.

As they played around in Kelly’s field the strangest thing happened. Nina went straight in the air like she was flying. Nina froze in mid air while she was jumping up. Her eyes turned blood red and all around her the blue sky was turning gray and dark. There was a piercing scream in Kelly’s house, but there was no one home except for Kelly, Elizabeth, Khallen, and Nina

who were all outside. Then it sounded like thunder and rain began falling.

“Nina, are you ok? What happened to her? Mum won’t be home until midnight, and we can’t reach her to take Nina to the hospital,” Khallen said.

“Oww,” Kelly shouted as Nina fell to the ground shaking like crazy. “That really burned. What are those crazy wing things? They hurt me.”

“Oh no, I thought that was going to happen,” said a strange little flying creature. “Sorry I hurt you. My wings get hot when I fly sometimes. Careful, she’s my sister and she’s a witch.”

“What are you?” asked Kelly.

“I’m a fairy, what do you think?” said the fairy.

“A what? And what did you mean your friend Nina is a witch?” asked Elizabeth.

“Nina is a witch, now she doesn’t know that she’s a witch. She thinks that she’s a normal person like you girls. But we are sisters and I was a witch too,” answered the fairy.

“Well, why didn’t you tell her she wasn’t a normal person?”

“The legend says that once they have head pains like Nina is having now, you can die from because her mum was killed from a very dark witch that was our adopted sister Annie.”

“Is Princess Annie the other witch that the fairy is talking about?” asked Khallen.

“A what?” Nina asked weakly as she passed out from the bad headache.

The fairy answered, “Princesses Annie created a potion, a witchcraft potion to make the head pains. Then

she turned me into a fairy.” The fairy continued in a whisper. “If you need me, just sing a song about rain or say ‘rain’ ten times really fast and oh, that’s my name, Rain, and Nina is my sister, not my friend.” Rain sprinkled fairy powder on Nina. Nina woke up a little confused but with no headache now. Rain suddenly disappeared.

“Do you really think that would be true if mum took me to the royal palace and she worked for Princess Annie? Annie doesn’t seem really mean. What did the fairy mean though?” Khallen asked.

Khallen had finished her soup. The memory made her decide to call her friends. She asked them to come over to watch movies with her. Kelly and Elizabeth came over two hours later.

“I’m hungry who wants Cheez-Its?” asked Elizabeth.

“I sure do. Who wants some popcorn?” said Khallen.

“I want both! Who wants pop?” asked Kelly.

“Me! We all do,” replied Khallen laughing.

“What movies should we watch guys?” asked Elizabeth.

“Here, you get the movies and I’ll get the food, ok?” said Khallen. “Nina is going to be late for the movie night. Kelly and Elizabeth, will you text Nina and tell her that you won’t be here when she gets here later.”

“Wait, does your mum know about the movie and sleep over?” asked Elizabeth.

“Yeah, she’ll be home in an hour,” Khallen answered.

Kelly asked, “Does Nina know

where and when we are having the movie?”

“Yeah she does, she even knows about the sleepover. She should be here soon, so let’s hurry,” Khallen answered.

Elizabeth’s phone started to ring. It was Nina she called 20 times already. She had even texted her a few times already. Nina was calling and texting her about what movie they should watch. Elizabeth called her back and said, “Meet us at the movie store.”

Right when the girls got to the car, this familiar sound happened like thunder and rain falling. Rain was coming to tell them something about Nina, but why? It was the most unexpected thing to happen on their special night just as friends and on the first ever friend’s movie night for Nina.

“Can I come to the movie night too?” asked Rain.

“Sure,” the girls answered.

The girls had a fun movie night. Nina picked the movie. It was *Just 4 Kicks*. Surprisingly, Rain never arrived. The movie was so cute. Nina left after the movie.

The next day it rained hard and Rain came by Nina’s house to tell Nina that she was her sister and that Nina was a witch. Nina had head pains since she was born so it made sense. Rain told her also that Annie was their sister and that Annie turned Rain into a fairy and that their mum was not killed by their sister as they thought. Their mum was actually the Queen of England but under a spell. So that meant Nina and Rain were the real princesses too. Rain missed the movie night because she was at the castle and learned the truth that night.

Nina called Khallen and asked could if she come back over. When

Nina and Rain got there Kelly and Elizabeth were there. Rain told everyone about everything.

“But how can we get Rain back to her normal way as a human and not a witch?” asked Elizabeth.

Rain answered, “If we get Annie out of the way, because she was the cause of me becoming a fairy, then we could get her potions and fix it all.”

“I have an idea. How about I take us into the castle? We can sneak you in because she absolutely hates you Rain. Do you think it would work? My mum can help too. She works there and she can get rid of the guards everywhere at every entrance,” said Khallen.

“It could work, but we don’t want you to get hurt. Here’s the plan. You take us inside and make that special mushroom soup for Annie. Put some sleeping powder in it. Your mum can give it to her. Then we can go get the potions,” Rain said mysteriously.

The girls did this and Jazmyn helped. Elizabeth, Kelly, and Khallen found the potions on the shelf in Annie’s room. They took it and left and Annie was asleep in her bed from the powder in her soup. Nina and Rain were hiding in the kitchen with Jazmyn. Jazmyn cooked more soup and poured the potions inside of it.

Rain ate the soup and said, “Yuk. This tastes disgusting, I hate mushrooms.” But magically Rain started to transform to her normal way, her wings shrunk and turned to dust and she grew taller and bigger. Nina drank her soup too. Then Nina’s headaches stopped completely. Then the Queen remembered her daughters

as she too ate some of the soup. After that all happened, they put Annie in punishment by turning her into the

maid. Then they had all their movie nights in the castle for a very long time and they all lived happily ever after.

# The Neon Blue Pencil

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*In the story THE NEON BLUE PENCIL by Cameron Panley, a middle school boy stumbles upon an unusual pencil one day when he is walking home. With that discovery, his life turns upside down.*

It all started about two days ago when I was walking home from school in the rain. I was just passing a cemetery that was close by where I live. I was drenched. My shoes were filled with water, and my hair was dripping wet. I was about four houses away from mine when I slipped and fell into a puddle.

As I started to stand up I noticed something strange floating in the mucky water. It looked like a pencil. Once I had looked at it more closely I noticed it was a pencil like nothing I'd ever seen before. It was neon blue with a strange gold symbol carved in the center. I picked it out of the slimy mud, and decided it was nothing more than just a pencil, so I tossed it back into the puddle and continued to walk home.

Later, I walked into my warm, snug home, dried off, and made a cup of hot chocolate to take away my damp chill. I stumbled into my room and sat in my chair. I was just about to start my homework when I realized that I had no pencil. So, I unzipped my backpack and reached in till I felt something long and skinny. When I looked at it I saw that it was neon blue and had a symbol just like the one I found by the cemetery. I said to myself, *That's strange; I could have sworn I tossed this back into the puddle.* I needed a pencil, and this one would have to do the job

I pulled out my math worksheet and wrote my name at the top. "Wow," I said, as I noticed my neatly written name. I usually had pretty sloppy writing. I started to do the math problems.

I wasn't looking forward to doing my homework since math has never been my best subject. The first problem was really hard:  $74 \times 196$ . I calculated it on a piece of scrap paper. I came up with 14,775, but when I wrote it in the answer box it said 14,504. I erased it and tried to write my answer again. But the pencil still wrote 14,504. When I checked the answer on my calculator I realized that this strange pencil had actually written the correct answer to my math problem. "Wow!" I shouted. "This could be the answer to all my problems in math class."

The next morning I made sure that that pencil would come to school with me. Before I went downstairs for breakfast I wanted to check if it still worked, so I tried to write a math problem. But instead of a math problem it wrote a note to me that said:

*I am a very smart pencil,  
and I am alive. Treat me  
well, and I will reward you  
with my abilities. Treat me*

*poorly, and you will be sorry.*

I was freaked out but excited to see what it could do for me at school that day. I picked up my backpack and put the pencil in my right pocket. I had a feeling this was going to be a good day.

I was excited for my upcoming math test in second hour. During first hour, I was taking extra care of my pencil. For example, I found a special case to keep my pencil safe.

Finally it was second hour. When I walked into the room I said to my brilliant pencil “This is it.”

When the teacher passed out the test, she explained all the questions. The test seemed really hard. But, I knew that it would be a piece of cake for my pencil.

After the teacher let us begin, I started by writing my name at the top. I noticed my handwriting was perfectly neat. I felt excited about what I would see next. Then, the first problem was  $201894 \cdot 126/9 = ?$  “Wow,” I said, “this is so hard.” But as soon as my pencil hit the paper, I was rolling. All I had to do was press the lead onto the paper and the pencil started to do its magic.

I finished the test in record speed. I looked around the room and noticed everyone else was still on the first page. I felt good with myself and thankful for my little pencil friend.

As I walked up to the teacher’s desk I could feel all the kids staring at me. They were probably wondering how I finished so quickly, or if I had just given up.

For the next two days the pencil did everything for me. School became so easy!

By day three, I quit carrying around the case for my pencil and carelessly carried the pencil in my backpack. One day I even left it in my last class. I found it later under a chair next to some crumpled up paper. I guess I just got lazy and started taking the pencil and its powers for granted. People were so impressed with me that I think I started to believe it was me doing well in school and not the pencil. The next school day he wrote me a note and said:

*Please take better care of me, or you will be sorry.*

After fifth hour the teacher called me up and told me that I had improved in science so much that the school would like to give me an award. Just then the bell rang, so I quickly gathered my supplies. As I went to sixth hour I was beaming with pride.

When I got to my class I remembered there would be a Spanish test that day. *Thank goodness for the pencil*, I thought, with a smirk on my face. As I sat down at my desk I reached for the pencil in my pocket, but only found a dime and a ripped-up piece of paper. “Oh no,” I said out loud. I must have left it on the desk in my last class. I was so caught up in my teacher’s praise and getting that award that I had completely forgotten about the pencil. I knew I was in big trouble because I had not even looked at my Spanish textbook in the last few days.

Once my teacher handed me the test I sat there with my head down in a panic and heard something that sounded like a faint voice in the back of my head. It said, "I told you to respect me and gave you a warning. Now I'm not going to help you."

The next day was Friday. When I woke up that morning the pencil was magically right on top of all my papers on my desk. That day I had a social studies test. I wasn't worried because I was great at social studies. I would be fine even without the pencil's help. I got up and grabbed the pencil and threw it in my backpack.

I walked confidently into first hour. Before the teacher handed out the test I dug for any old pencil but could only find that crazy blue one. *Well*, I thought, *I guess it will have to do*. I was hoping that it would behave like a normal pencil. When the test was done I felt I had done pretty well.

But, the next day when I got my test back, I had an F! When the teacher handed me the white paper with a big red F on the top I noticed that random things were written in place of where I wrote my answers. Things like insults to the teacher and the kids were all over the page. The same thing happened with science. The pencil had somehow rewritten all my answers. Nothing made sense. This pencil was out of control!

That night I locked it in a small cage and tried to think of what I should do about this naughty pencil. I finally came up with a solution. I took the pencil back to the place where I found it. While I was about to chuck it over the

graveyard fence I noticed a strange and familiar symbol on one of the gravestones. It was the same as the one on the pencil. So, I decided to leave it where it must belong, right here next to the gravestone with the matching symbol. And then I got the heck out of there as fast as could!

The next day I woke up in my bed and glanced up and onto my desk. There was no pencil. I sighed with relief. Just then I remembered that all my midyear tests were today. They would count for sixty percent of my overall grade. "Oh no!" I screamed out loud as I realized I was going to fail all of my tests. I really wished I had studied for my tests rather than been so obsessed with that insane magic pencil.

I guess I may never know how the neon pencil had such special powers. But, I did learn that if you find something special you should treat it with care and never take it for granted.

As I walked to school contemplating my dilemma, I shuffled my feet, looking at the ground. Out of nowhere I saw a reflection of a pencil appear in a puddle in front of me. I realized this was the same place and same puddle where I had found the neon blue pencil. But this time, there was a lime green pencil with a silver snake carved into it. As I saw it floating in the murky water I wondered if this could be the ticket to getting all A's on my tests today. Or would it just spell disaster?

I decided to leave the green pencil alone. I now know that I have all the same powers of the pencil. I just need to work hard and believe in myself.



# One Crazy Day

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*In the story **ONE CRAZY DAY** by **Jonathon Green**, two friends go through one epic game—literally. Read the story to see how real gamers handle the controls.*

Jimmy and Bob are in sixth grade together and are very good friends. They've been playing together for years and have done lots of weird things, but today will be the most extraordinary of all of their days.

Unfortunately, the weather was kind of dreary, so they weren't up for an outdoor adventure. After much debate about what to do, they finally settled on playing Bob's brand new video game. That decision would change their lives forever....

Bob grabbed a snack out of the refrigerator and turned on the Xbox machine. All of a sudden a lightning bolt struck the house antenna! Bob felt a huge jolt of electricity going through his body. Jimmy tried to help by grabbing him. As he did so, the jolt became so strong that it propelled both of them toward the television set. But instead of smashing into it, they were immediately absorbed into the screen.

They had no idea where they were. The environment was really weird. The walls looked holographic. Bob and Jimmy could see through everything around them. They were in a narrow hallway that seemed to stretch forever, with lots of twists and turns.

Bob and Jimmy started to shake and vibrate. They felt their legs grab hold of something. They both looked down

at the same time and realized they were on motorcycles. Before they had a chance to think or talk about what had happened, they heard engines roaring. They turned around and saw robot dogs chasing them in this crazy maze.

Bob and Jimmy quickly figured out how to operate their motorcycles. They took a hard left and gunned their engines. They finally lost the robot dogs when they ducked into what looked like an electronic circuit board. They looked at each other and realized that they both had the same thought. They had been sucked into the video game. The only way out was to beat the game. But this was a brand new game, which meant they had no clue how to beat it.

Fortunately Bob was an experienced video game player and had won his share of games in the past. Bob remembered a game that looked similar to the one they were trapped in. In that game he had to defeat the final boss with a special weapon, which turned the boss into a golden door that let him out.

All of a sudden, they heard a booming voice make an announcement that said "LEVEL 2." The voice echoed and they felt a vibration, making the space feel really huge.

Bob and Jimmy suddenly saw wild robot monkeys on hovercrafts speeding

toward them. They felt their bikes vibrate and shake again. Their legs felt that same feeling as their motorcycles turned into hovercrafts, but the weirdest thing was that the handlebars and gears stayed the same.

Bob crazily flipped over and tried to hold on. Jimmy happened to get lucky because he was right near Bob. "Dude, thanks, you saved my back, literally. I lost my balance," Jimmy said.

Bob accidentally ran into one of the enemy hovercrafts as he was figuring out the controls. This caused a golden coin to fly into Bob's pocket, and an announcement said, "1 out of 200 coins collected."

"That's it!" said Bob "We need to collect 200 golden coins to get the key that will unlock the golden door. Bump into as many enemy hovercrafts as you can to collect the golden coins!" Bob yelled to Jimmy.

Bob and Jimmy were madly ramming into enemy hovercrafts and collecting coins at the speed of light. A voice announced, "100 out of 200 coins collected. Welcome to LEVEL 3."

Then instantly Jimmy said, "Dude, Bob, to your left, be careful!" Bob got hit and lost his balance and fell into a fiery black hole. The game announcement said, "You have lost your life."

Jimmy was crushed and depressed. His best friend had just died. He didn't know what to do. Jimmy whispered, "My best friend Bob. He's gone now." Then as his rage grew, Jimmy yelled for his best friend. "BOB!"

Jimmy thought about crying. But he knew he must finish the game. With all

of his courage, Jimmy gunned his engine. He zoomed into a blank screen. Then a blank room appeared. He saw something that looked like a hut. He tried to find a way out but had no clue.

Then a big gorilla came into the room. Jimmy saw a target on the gorilla's head. He climbed up the gorilla's back and kicked it in the head. Then the target moved to his stomach. He then cracked the target in half with his bare arms, but the target moved to the gorilla's feet. He dropped down and before anything could happen the target moved again... and again... and over and over. Finally he threw his shoe at the target and struck the center of the target. The game announcement said, "150 out of 200 coins collected, welcome to LEVEL 4."

Then the final enemy boss dropped out of nowhere. He looked like a combination of all different animals with six spider arms, a monkey's head, four dog feet, and a gorilla's body. And he was extremely ugly!

Jimmy, out of nowhere, thought he saw Bob. Sure enough, there he was. "You're safe!" yelled Jimmy. Jimmy turned and saw Bob digitally turn back to life, and also with a weird-looking weapon on his belt.

"It stinks losing a life," said Bob.

"Where did you get the new weapon?" asked Jimmy.

"No clue," said Bob.

This little conversation had distracted both of them, and all of a sudden the boss was upon them. Then the enemy boss tried to spin Bob and Jimmy into a spider's web. Jimmy yelled to Bob, "Quick, use your new

weapon.” Bob grabbed the weapon and fired, which erased the spider web.

But the boss was still alive and now very angry. He spit a fireball at Bob and Jimmy, but missed by an inch. Jimmy noticed that their box of golden coins was floating above them. He grabbed the box and opened it. All of a sudden, their golden coins began to levitate in the air and form into a golden laser gun in the shape of a key....

Bob accelerated his hovercraft toward the weapon and grabbed it, just as the enemy boss was shooting another spider’s web at them. Bob spun around, took aim, and fired. The laser beam missed its target by an inch and blasted a tremendous hole in the wall behind. At the same time, the spider web smacked into Bob’s weapon and the boss grabbed it. But Jimmy, from the side, jumped off his hovercraft and

snared the gun before the boss could collect it. As Jimmy was in mid-air, he fired the weapon and hit the boss right between the eyes.

The boss fell hard onto the ground and disintegrated and transformed into a golden door. Jimmy used the weapon, which was shaped like a key, to open the door. They jumped through the door and landed at home, in their living room, right on the couch where they had started.

“That was the greatest day ever!” they both yelled.

Bob’s mom walked in a minute later and said, “How was your day, kids? Do anything exciting?”

“Nope,” said Bob and Jimmy at the same time, with huge grins on their faces. Then Jimmy whispered to Bob, “The bigger they are, the harder they fall.”

# Past, Present, and a Genie?

*In PAST, PRESENT, AND A GENIE? by Alice Parfenov, a boy finds out his family is in debt to a genie with a very long memory. Will he have to pay the ultimate price because a genie holds a grudge against his long-dead ancestor?*

I sneezed from all the dust. I found what I was looking for. It was a little oak box that had little pictures on it. As I was going to the counter, I was thinking of trying to decipher what the pictures were. All I saw was a crane, a stick, and a beetle on a vase.

Later, when I was walking home, I tripped and fell. The box went flying out of my hands. I half got up, and half jumped. I ended up with the box in my hands and half of my right arm skinned.

“Oh my god! Owwww! Owwww! Owwww! Owwww!”

I looked at the box for any damage. After I rubbed it off with a tissue to get the dirt off, I set it down and it disappeared in a cloud of blue smoke. I wasn't paying much attention because I was seeing if I was bleeding. But it smelled like ozone. As I looked up, I saw the last bits of smoke. Then a pretty African lady was staring at me.

“Who disturbs me?”

I could tell by her accent that she was from around South Africa.

“What?”

“Who distur—”

She stopped in mid-sentence. She grabbed the air in front of my face, as if she were grabbing something solid. She put it to her face and breathed in. Then she opened her eyes and glared at me.

What had I done?

“You,” she said.

“Me?”

“You are Sandy Dummerson's relation?”

“Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandma Sandy?” I asked. Creepy! This lady knew my Great Granny!

“The woman who married James Turnsperls in 1844,” she said, as if Great Sandy was a federal criminal.

“Okay, that was like a billion years ago,” I said as I was trying to do the math. This lady was seriously creeping me out!

“And?”

“Well, ma'am, that was then, and—”

“What makes you think I am not from a different time period? Do you know who I am?”

For some reason, I did, but I had never seen her before in my life.

“A genie,” I said. It sounded stupid, but my brain said “BINGO!” She smiled approvingly.

“Yes. And your Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandmother Sandy Dummerson married my Prince Charming. And for that, your family shall perish.”

This was too much. This lady was in love with Grandpa James? How old was she really? “Wait! Why?”

“Because you are a reminder of the life I didn’t have because I was a slave. Now you will die first.”

“Wait! Dad told me that Great Grandpa James was in love with someone else, and it was an arranged marriage!”

She looked at me. Then she did the same thing with the grabbing of air in front of me and breathing it in.

“You smell of the truth,” she said.

Okay, I don’t think I would lie about something like this.

“I shall go back in time and see for myself. But if you are wrong, you will die.”

Then she was gone in a puff of smoke. Wow, this is SOOO weird. So far, I’m not dead. Maybe I will be when mom finds out that I was gone for so

long. You know, moms are still the same as they were in 2010.

### One year later

It’s the year 2014. And the genie hasn’t come back yet. So this must mean that I’m off the hook. I guess not falling asleep when Grandpa told those stories was worth it.

I’ve decided to burn the box so that this can’t happen to anyone else, though I’m not sure if it will burn. Well, it would be an adventure for my Great Grandkids if the genie came back about me. Well, it would be their problem.

It turns out that the inscriptions read: *Here be the genie*. And I don’t learn hieroglyphics until tenth grade. How great is that?

# Power of the Buckeye

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*Two students at Ohio State University gain superpowers that they want to use to help others. However, it's not easy to do while keeping their identities a secret in*

**POWER OF THE BUCKEYE**, by *Cameron Levy*.

The story started when the OSU varsity baseball team was at The Diner. The pitcher and catcher ordered the Buckeye Special. Once they ate the Buckeye Special, they started feeling a little weird. They felt a tingling sensation all over their bodies. So, they went back to their dorm rooms and decided to turn in for the night.

The next day when they woke up they realized that they had superpowers. Cam all of a sudden was extremely strong. He noticed this when he was turning off his alarm and he smashed it. He was also really fast, and he found this out when he was running to the bathroom.

Moe realized that he had laser eyes when Cam woke him up. When he opened his eyes the lasers shot out of them. And when he got out of the bed, he was floating. But they didn't know what to do with the powers.

Just then Cam said to Moe, "I think that we have become superheroes. But we can not tell our parents."

Moe agreed and replied, "Sweet! If that is so, we will need names and costumes."

They also had to practice using their powers. While Cam figured out a name, he learned all of the different powers that he had, and so did Moe. Moe's powers were laser eyes and he

could fly. Cam's powers were that he had super speed as well as super strength. Cam was running in circles in the room while Moe was timing it to see how fast he actually could run. While timing Cam, Moe was floating around the room.

Moe and Cam used their baseball jerseys as their costumes with a Brutus mask, which is the face of the Ohio state mascot. But they still had to practice using their powers. Moe kept practicing his powers until he finally got it at 3 o'clock in the morning. Their hero names were Red Beam and Buckeye. Cam was Buckeye and Moe was Red Beam.

But then they realized that there were no villains. Cam remembered from a movie that he had seen before that superheroes fight crimes against criminals.

Later on that evening Cam and Moe were eating lunch at Broody Seafood. While eating they heard gunfire. They looked out the window and saw someone robbing the bank. Cam said, "Looks like we got what we have been waiting for, Moe: a crime to fight."

Moe said, "Oh yeah!"

Cam and Moe went into the bathroom and changed into the baseball uniforms and their Brutus masks. They ran back out to chase after the criminal.

The criminal and his clan of ten people were running, but Moe flew in front of them and Cam ran behind them. Moe and Cam had boxed the criminals in. The criminal and the clan were trapped by Moe. Then Cam ripped a steel pipe out of the ground and tied the criminals up. Moe and Cam then fled the scene.

When they were sure no one had followed them they changed back into their regular clothes and went into their dorm and talked about how awesome that was and how great they did as superheroes. They also hoped no one had followed them. After they got done talking about what happened they turned on the television and saw on the

news that the criminals being captured were the top story. But the good thing was that it seemed as if no one saw Red Beam's and Buckeye's faces, so they felt a giant relief.

Cam and Moe continued at OSU as students. They lead the OSU varsity baseball team to a 30 and 0 record. The team also won the championship.

Cam and Moe only used their superpowers to fight crimes. Every time a criminal was captured the community was puzzled as to who was fighting the crimes. But the people in the community were happy because they felt safe. And in a few years they had the reputation as the safest community in the country.

# Santa's Workshop

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*A girl gets stuck in a fantastic place: Santa's workshop! Can you blame her if she doesn't want to leave right away? The rest of the story is revealed in **SANTA'S WORKSHOP**, by Lexie Markowitz.*

It is the night before Christmas. I am so excited. It is getting very late. I am having a hard time falling asleep. My mom comes in for the third time and says, "Lexie, it is time for you to go to bed."

"OK, Mom."

I peek out my window, and it is starting to snow. Suddenly I get this warm, fuzzy feeling in my stomach. I put my head down on my pillow, and I start to drift off. The next thing you know....

*Ab, ab, ab, ab...! This is not my bed. This is not my house. Where am I?* I woke up and I was in a dark room. I saw a light switch, so I turned it on. My eyes went straight to a pink slide.

My mind was spinning because I was wondering if I should go on the slide or try to get out of here. My decision was to go on the slide.

I was going down the slide. It had green and red lights, and Christmas songs were playing.

Once I got down, it looked like a hotel lobby. Everything was so organized. It had a couch, chairs, and flowers. So my thought was, *Am I in a hotel?*

There was an elevator in the lobby. I went closer, and I pushed the elevator door to open, and then it opened. All of a sudden I felt three sets of eyes

staring at me. There was a sign in the elevator that said "Welcome to the North Pole."

We all started to scream at each other because I was not expecting to see this, and I did not belong there. Then I realized that there were tiny people, but better yet, they were elves.

The elves immediately tried to kick me out because I am not supposed to see the toy factory! The elves were whispering to each other. One elf was trying to whisper, but it did not work, so I heard what the conversation was. The elf that can't whisper said, "She is not an elf, so she is not supposed to be in here." I pushed them down and pushed the BIG RED BUTTON in the elevator.

The doors opened and I saw the TOY FACTORY! It was awesome. You would not believe your eyes. There were a lot of sections in the toy factory. The sections were dolls, trucks, board games, stuffed animals, art pictures, magnets, and electronics. When I kept looking, I overheard a lot of people singing, and they turned around the corner. They were elves. They were in a straight line. In the beginning of the line was Santa!

I ran over to the line, and I introduced myself. Santa said, "Hi, how are you today? How did you get here?"



I said, "I have no idea how I got here, but I am doing well today." Santa asked me if I wanted a tour of the toy factory. I said, "Yes, I would love to see the whole toy factory."

We were going to go see the reindeer. Santa called an elf on his phone. He wanted me to go to the kitchen and get vegetables for the reindeer. I went with the elf, whose name was Sophia.

We got to the kitchen, and it was huge! In the kitchen I saw candy makers, a vegetable maker, an ice cream sundae maker, and a section for the food makers. Sophia and I went to the vegetable maker, and we got carrots, celery, and corn.

Sophia and I went to the reindeer

section. I saw all nine of the reindeer. I gave each of the reindeer a vegetable. Then I gave them a bath. I just took care of them.

\* \* \*

I woke up in the guest room. I came out. I saw Santa sitting in the next room checking the list twice. Santa looked up at me and said, "Well, Lexie, time for you to go back with your family, but I want you to come back soon."

Then all of a sudden my mom interrupted my sleep and said, "Lexie, are you going to get up today? It is 10:30."

"Oh, snap! I had a dream. I want to tell you all about it."

# The School Day of the Living Food

*Larry Queen is a sixth-grade nothing. One day, the cafeteria lady gives Larry a little bottle of an Asian spice that turns his world upside down! Larry suddenly finds himself in the wackiest adventure of his life in **THE SCHOOL DAY OF THE LIVING FOOD**, by **Brenden French**.*

*He awoke with a start, driven by the pain of hunger. It was ten days after his ship had sunk and he had landed on a barren island, and he was the only survivor. And so the survivor slowly crept outside looking for something edible. And then he saw the warthog. It was a thing of beauty to see in the wilderness. It looked fairly plump, even though he had never seen one before. So, as quietly as a mouse, as cautious as a cat, he took out the only weapon he managed to get from the sunken cruise ship, a steak knife! He slowly reeled back his arm, aimed, and—*

Larry skipped right over that part. He didn't like gore. So he skimmed few pages ahead and continued reading.

*The survivor then made fire by cutting a bit of his hair off using the steak knife, and with the knife he made sparks by banging it against a rock. As soon as his hair caught fire, he gathered a few logs and let those start burning. After he skinned the pig he made a spit over the fire and slowly roasted the pig. When he tasted the meat, he felt*

*like he had died and gone to heaven. The survivor then remembered his name, John Franklin.*

That was enough for one night. Larry sighed, then leaned over and turned off the light.

While Larry is sleeping, let me tell you all about him, because our story begins tomorrow. Larry Queen loves to read. In fact, this was the sixteenth time he had read *The Chronicles of John Franklin*. Now I know he's just a kid, but he definitely is the world's biggest John Franklin fan. So he lived by his favorite quote (created by John) "If you ever see food, store it, hide it, or just eat it right there on the spot even if your stomach might burst." Now this might sound odd, but Larry, in honor of John, loved how he cherished every single scrap of food he came across. So far, Larry carried three MRE meals in his backpack, kept a portable grill in his room, and I won't even try to explain the harpoon launcher. Unfortunately, most people find this slightly odd so he only had two true real friends; Mrs. Cookit, the school cafeteria lady, and Billy Crosswell, who not only eats everything edible and sometimes the *inedible* stuff too, but set the world record for eating three pizzas in less than twenty minutes. His appearance

is slightly strange though for someone who loves food so much. He is tall, black haired, and his eyes were a dark, piercing blue. He usually wears dark clothes, glasses and a baseball cap. The strangest is that even though he eats so much, he is actually very skinny. But enough explaining, Larry is already waking up on the Friday that will change his life. This is the last school day before Thanksgiving break.

Larry finally made it through his first through fourth hour classes and at last it was lunchtime. While Larry was in the lunch line and he had just dumped the mashed potatoes and meatballs on his plate, he heard someone whispering to him. "*Pssst! Larry, over here!*" Larry whirled around and saw Mrs. Cookit waving him over.

He quickly rushed over to her, "What's going on?" he asked, puzzled. I have a present for you, exclaimed Mrs. Cookit.

"Really?" asked Larry. "Because I don't think I deserve it..."

"Of course you do!" she said. "You've earned me fifty bucks in the past month so this is the least I could do for you! Hold on a minute." She rummaged through a refrigerator for a minute before she pulled out a very small turkey and placed it on Larry's plate.

"I don't know what to say," he said.

"How about, is there anything else?" said Mrs. Cookit.

"Okay," said Larry. "Is there anything else?"

"Well, it's quite a coincidence you said that Larry." She exclaimed with a grin. "It just so happens that I have an

extra special present for you." She then handed him a small bottle with some sort of spice in it.

"Wow, thanks," said Larry.

"Now you just run along and enjoy your lunch," said Mrs. Cookit. Larry waved to her as he ran over to Billy.

"Check out what Mrs. Cookit got me," Larry said.

"Cool," said Billy. "Maybe if I didn't steal those donuts that one time then she would've gotten me something too."

"Hmmm, well do you want to try some of the spice?" said Billy.

"Sure, let's put it in your food, then we could try it in mine." Just as Larry finished putting the spice on his food, a rancid odor spread quickly through the air. Then, with Larry and Billy watching in horror. The food started twitching. And then, in a split second, the food popped up and ran out the cafeteria door. There was a moment of silence, but then everyone laughed and went back to their lunch.

"Uhhh, Larry?" said Billy, "Maybe we should te-"

"I know," said Larry, "We have to stop that food!"

"I was going to say to tell someone," muttered Billy.

Larry simply ignored him and said, "Billy, grab your favorite fork. We're going hunting."

Larry and Billy wandered the halls with a wary eye for something strange. Then suddenly, Larry saw the small turkey and the meatballs at the end of the hallway. But as Larry started toward them, the mini-turkey pulled out a small plastic spoon and started flicking

meatballs at Larry. This was very unfortunate because apparently, the meatballs developed mouths, and along with that, teeth. All five of the meatballs clung fast. And it took Larry about ten painful minutes to finally detach them from his body. When he finally did, he ran to his science class and dumped them all in the snapping turtle tank. “*One down two to go.*” He thought. And he walked out into the hallway to look for Billy.

Unfortunately, Billy was not doing well because he had a giant mass of mashed potatoes clinging tightly to his face. When Larry finally rounded the hallway corner and he saw what had become of Billy. He started running toward him, yelling at the potatoes. They came off Billy’s face with a shriek and slithered to the worst possible place in the school for them: the girl’s bathroom.

There was an awkward silence and then Larry and Billy both simultaneously said, “I’m SO not going in there.”

“But you’ve gone in there before!” said Larry.

“And when was that?” asked Billy.

“When your donut rolled in there!”

“But that was an accident,” protested Billy.

“Whatever, just get in there!”

“But I—” Billy blubbered.

“GET IN THERE AND WHACK THOSE POTATOES SENSELESS!” Larry roared.

Billy scrambled into the bathroom, tripping over his feet. Larry stood outside the door, waiting. Every once in a while he would hear an occasional

clunk or splatter but he did *not* want to go in there. Finally, after what seemed like an hour, Billy came out soaked from head to toe.

“What happened?” shouted Larry.

“Well,” said Billy. “I walked in a stall looking around for it. I was about to leave when somehow it pushed my head down into a toilet and I was stuck there until I finally managed to scrape it off my head and flush it down the potty.”

“Hmm, well at least you got it. But I have a plan to get the turkey,” Larry answered.

Larry was running down the hallway, the turkey sprinting right in front of him. When they reached the end of the hallway, Billy came out of nowhere and together they “herded” the turkey into the art room. The miniature turkey looked around, searching for a place to hide. It then saw a metal cupboard and dashed inside. It was safe.

Larry and Billy closed the kiln and turned it on high. Then they both walked away toward their fifth hour classes. Larry then smiled to himself. His work was complete.

Later...

“How was your day?” asked Larry’s mom.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he replied tiredly.

“Well, maybe this chicken noodle soup will help. I put in this new spice, too. It says it will make your food come alive!” That’s when Larry smelled the rancid odor.

# Shrunk

---

*Never underestimate being tall. In **SHRUNK** by **Pauline Portes**, experience the challenges faced in being six inches tall.*

Everything got bigger, and so did poor Cesar that I was holding in my hands! Or was I getting smaller? It occurred to me that bearded dragons, as harmless as they may seem, were in many myths and legends, that they were supposedly descendents of the dragons, and that they possessed magic powers. But none of that could be true...could it?

My mind raced as I realized I could figure this out later. I knew I had to get back to normal size! How long would this last? I panicked, wondering what to do.

The animal left my hand, going back under his heating lamp inside his terrarium. I had to do something, though. I knew I needed to go downstairs and tell my parents, but it seemed impossible.

I walked through the door my sister had, to my relief, left open, and I faced the humongous steps. I walked down over them. I rock-climbed down the first one, gripping in my hands the stubs of the carpet. By the third step, I was tired, and I had sores all over my hands. I went down one more, promising myself a break.

When I got there I spotted a magazine. It was just a *People* magazine. It had flashy subtitles and Angelina Jolie's face blocking the "e" in the title. It was normal, but it grabbed my

attention.

An idea popped into my head. I pulled the magazine toward the middle of the stair, and I sat on the middle of it. I firmly held the sides of the magazine, and I reached back to push off. I slid down the stairs as if I were sledding. The "wind" flew through my hair, giving me a bit of nausea, but it all stopped after a painful, rough finish on the kitchen floor.

My mom walked toward me to see what had caused the thump. When she saw the human-like figure I was, lying on the floor, she bent down to get a better look. Suddenly her eyes widened. I stood to my feet and stared back at her as she picked me up. Pale as can be, she stared at me in disbelief and in her high, squeaky, panicked voice screamed; "Sophie! Sophie, is that you?"

\* \* \*

It had all started when my sister got her pet bearded dragon at PetFo. "What are you going to name it?" I had asked my sister as she took the bearded dragon out of its traveling box.

She had thought a bit, and then answered; "Cesar. His head looks like it has the gold crown the emperor wore, and his posture is like a king's. Don't you think? He's very elegant; his chest puffed up, his front legs dead straight and his back legs folded so that his tail

touches my hand. And look at his head; it has those cute light-grey and yellow spikes on it, like Jules Cesar's leaf-shaped gold crown. He's so cute, too!"

We were in my sister's room installing the new terrarium for the creature. Once everything was ready, my mom called us down for dinner. I asked my sister if I could hold Cesar a little bit more, just to see if he liked being in my hands. She agreed it would be funny to see who he liked better, and she headed downstairs to the table.

I held him, and I looked into his small beady eyes. *So cute!* I thought. I heard another yell from my mom. "Sophie, hurry up! Dinner is getting cold, and we are waiting for you!" I reached to kiss the little guy on the nose. But at precisely that moment, he lifted his head and bit my nose. That's when I shrank.

And that's why I was now so small. The doctors had no idea what I had. They were all speechless. Every single one of the 26 we had visited had the same blank face and the same words come out of his or her mouth: "I'm sorry; I really don't know what to tell you." But they had measured me and determined that I was six-and-a-half inches tall.

At home I looked through my library, and I found a book called *Myths and Legends* in my bookshelf. I searched in it for a bearded dragon story. Here it was! On page 62 was a Korean story named "*Jag-eun Yong-i*," or "Small Dragon."

I read the story over and over again. It was about this dragon who was

punished for ripping open the sky while flying, and who lied when he was accused of it. A magician turns him smaller to punish him for lying, and she removes his wings for having ripped open the sky. At last, to humiliate him in front of the gods, she gives him a ridiculous looking beard that will inflate when he is scared. The story also says that the dragon is sad, and to do a good deed, he sews the sky back up, and to be excused, he pins up wonderful, shiny nails (stars) to keep it from ripping again. To thank him for doing this, the magician decides to make him less vulnerable and gives him the power to shrink humans and animals by biting the nose. It all fit in perfectly. But what was I going to do?

This morning I got a call from my friend Annabelle. She wanted me to come over. I juggled the huge phone off its charger to explain the situation. She just laughed into the phone and said, "Yeah, and did you know, last week, the queen of England announced I was her daughter." I laughed, but still insisted on my story being true.

I decided not to let this shrinking thing interrupt my life. With reluctance, my parents accepted. They drove me to her house, and I ran onto my mom's shoulder so that she could carry me to the door. I finished my breakfast on this short, bumpy ride. It had been three frosted flakes and a spoonful of milk. I would normally have about 30 to 40 in a bowl, with milk, but I got full very easily at this size.

We arrived at her house. At the wall close to my mom, I jumped off her shoulder, and onto that rectangular little

box called the doorbell. I sat down so that my legs were dangling down, and kicked the button. *Ding, Dong.*

Anna's dad opened the door. He just stared at me in shock as I climbed back onto my mom's shoulder. Anna came running. "Hi! Soph... So it's true!"

"Told you," I said. She scooped me up into her hands, still flabbergasted.

The parents sat down, now engaged in a conversation over tea. And after sneaking away from the table, we rushed upstairs. In her room, we talked, and we stared at the hamster. But her seven-year-old crazy brother came running in with a plastic gun and a cowboy hat. He screamed to his imaginary teammate, "So, we kill 'em here or we take 'em as prisoners?"

She screamed, "Hey! Go away, David!"

He nodded to his imaginary partner. "Okay, you're the boss!" He shot a plastic yellow bullet at Annabelle, in the arm, and then shot me.

I saw the yellow ball rushing toward me at such a speed that I couldn't do anything. I had to move, but I felt paralyzed, and then—*pam!*—it hit me right in the stomach.

He grabbed me in his fist and ran out screaming, with Anna running after him! He pushed me up into the air, and he pretended I was a plane. Then he grabbed me again and took a car out of a box and stuffed me in it. I felt squished, helpless, and small.

I was terrified. He put my vehicle on a plastic ramp, and it sped down. I reached my arms out, sweating more

and more, grabbing the air for a railing, a side bar, ANYTHING! But there was nothing.

I arrived at the end. The car tumbled off of the ramp and flipped forward. I fell out. And as soon as I could, I ran out of there, squeezed under the locked door, and climbed up my desperate, screaming, door-banging friend, into her hand, safe.

We went downstairs, she interrogating me about what he did to me and telling her mother. He soon got in trouble after that.

We walked back into her room, and I went onto her shoulder. That was a big mistake! She bent over to grab something—a book or toy or whatever that was. And I fell, fell, fell, fell down, but I didn't hit the floor. Instead my body slipped through the wide space where her hamster's cage is bent, and I fell inside, landing safely onto the bedding.

Anna saw me just as the ferocious hamster prepared to charge at me. I was against the side of the cage, my sweaty hands gripping as tightly as they could the cage bars, and my heels firmly pressed against the cage, too.

I saw an orange blur rushing toward me, and I tumbled right over the little thing, falling onto its back. Annabelle opened the cage to pull me out, but I was upside down, on her hamster's back, and the hamster charged outside of the cage. I turned myself around and grabbed her ears. I yanked on them. She came to a halt.

After pulling me up and securing the hamster, Anna excused herself about 1000 times.

When I came back home I thought of the huge days in front of me. What a life I would have to live. I thought about everything good about being small, and I decided to make a list:

1. Slip into tiny places.
2. Any warm drink is a hot tub.
3. Doll clothes cost a lot less than human clothes.
4. I just have to eat less food.
5. I can sit on people's shoulders instead of walking.
6. Tiny pencils and tiny workbooks.

7. I can travel on the plane for free.
8. I get to sit on ketchup packet (like water beds) on dinner tables because chairs are too big...
9. Etc.

After 20 years of research on bearded dragons, I am writing you this story at the age of 41. I am jumping on the keys of my keyboard, and this has taken me quite a while to type. I am still small. I am still limited. But yet I still thrive on adventure.



# Snow Day Misadventures

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*Joey, Ari, Nick, and Luke go to Franklin Park to go sledding. They build a jump at the bottom of the hill. When they land there is a giant hole that leads to a dragon in China. Will he eat them? Read **SNOW DAY MISADVENTURES** by **Luke Man**.*

Oh no! We have school again today. It's completely unfair. School just grinds my gears! I wake up every day at seven o'clock. I lug myself out of bed, brush my teeth, and take a shower. When I went downstairs for breakfast, my mom tells me the school is closed because of power failure in the building. Somehow, a teacher, not mentioning any names, "*Cough, cough*" Mrs. B, "*Cough, cough*" left the classroom window open over night and all the snow came in and melted. Then the melted snow froze and turned into ice, making everything very slippery. The frozen snow caused a power outage. What great news! No school, no teachers, no homework. There is a Santa Clause!

My mom has to go to work. She tells me I can invite some friends over after breakfast. This means I have to load up on sugar by eating lots and lots of Captain Crunch Berries. After I finished, I had the most painful stomachache. My friends, Joey Sandwich, Nick Hornburger, and Ari Gold came over. We made hot chocolate out of Swiss Miss and hot milk. Then we set up a table for a hot chocolate stand at the end of my driveway. We had a total of four customers, Nick, Joey, Ari, and I. We

waited a half hour for more costumers, but no one else stopped by. The four of us decided this was a very unsuccessful business and decided to close it. We wanted more adventure.

When we finished, we walked to Franklin Park with our sleds. First, we go down "Suicide Hill". It is the biggest hill that is also really icy. When I go down the hill, I barely ever touch the ground; I go so fast I think I will die on landing. But at the end, I usually hit the ground so hard there is a mark on the place where I landed but I live to do it again. It's a miracle that I survive. Next, we go down another hill just as icy but with a ramp at the bottom. The ramp is so big the last person to go on it went so high I think he is still in outer space. We sent Nick down the hill by giving him a big push and he goes flying literally ten feet in the air. When he finally landed, the loudest thud and scream was heard all over the neighborhood. I think there was a hole that went all the way to China.

So then we go in to the hole that Nick made. We go through a path that twists and turns. Joey starts to complain

"Oh my gosh, it is soooo hot in here," Joey complains.

"Joey, we are all so very hot so stop complaining," yelled Ari.

“Hey guys, there isn’t any snow in here,” Nick announced.

Finally, we walk into an empty cavern. At the end of the cavern we see a sleeping dragon with red wings and bulging muscles. What surprised me the most was the size of this thing. It was bigger and fatter than a T-rex with smoke coming out of its nostrils. Ari screamed so loudly that it woke up the dragon.

The dragon wakes up with a roar. “Who dares to wake me up during my 500 years of hibernation!?” He breathes fire out of its mouth. We all knew that this could be a problem.

“Oh I am so sorry I didn’t mean to,” I said. The dragon was so mad he breathed fire again, so close to us that we could feel the heat.

“How can we make it up to you?” Ari asked.

“Uhhh, you could help me by putting myself back to sleep,” he said. We tried to come up with the best ideas we can think of. First, we made him cookies. We made the batter and put it in the oven. He didn’t look so good and he started to throw up. Oh my gosh, how could I have been so stupid? Dragons are allergic to chocolate.

Then we made him watch the news. We go to CNN and I couldn’t believe our luck! The worst show was on, *Larry King Live*. We watched it for about an hour and Ari was out cold. But the dragon was enjoying it. Larry was interviewing Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders, the directors of the movie *How to Train your Dragon*. The dragon lost interest, however.

We had to rely on our last idea,

singing. Nick started to sing “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” It worked! Joey, Ari, and I joined in. The dragon fell asleep because of our singing or getting bored to death.

He fell to the ground and it seemed like we were going to be in a trap if we didn’t escape. We grabbed all of our stuff and headed out. Right as we got out of the cavern, the rocks started caving in. We sprinted to the end of the cave and were relieved that we weren’t crushed. We arrived safely to the surface, back in Franklin.

Later, we decided to have a huge snowball fight. It was Joey and I against Nick and Ari. Joey and I made a BIG snow fort so that we could both sit in there protected with lots of snowballs. The fort looked like an igloo with the top, almost like a convertible car. Joey threw a snowball at Ari. The snowball exploded on his face and we all laughed. When I got up to throw a ball, I saw a ball right in front of my face. But before I could move, it smashed my nose and my glasses went flying into a pile of yellow snow! However there were no dogs in sight! It was so cold. I was very cold and angry. I set out to get revenge. I was unstoppable. You should have seen Nick and Ari when I was done; they were covered in yellow snow head to toe.

After, we all got tired we wanted to go home. But we forgot our way. I checked all my pockets to see if I had a quarter to use the town phone to call Mom for directions. Ugh, I had zero quarters. But then I remembered that I put them on a snowman for his eyes. So then I ran as fast as I could to get the

quarters. When I got there they were gone. I asked Joey if he had any quarters in his pocket. He checked his side pockets. Nope. His butt pocket? Nope. His coat pocket? Yes! My Mom answered the phone in her “doctor voice.”

“Hello son,” mother answered.

“Mother, I need help to get home,” I replied.

My mom gave me the directions. When we got home, we decided to bake cookies. When they were in the oven we went outside to play football. The teams were Ari and I against Joey and Nick. So we got the ball first. Ari was the quarterback and he threw it to me. Nick tried to tackle me, but I juked him out and he fell into the snow. All I had

to do was get past Joey, but he was too tall and too wide. I crawled through his legs really fast and scored a touchdown. When Joey and Nick got tired of losing, we went inside. We decided to celebrate with the cookies that were in the oven. Shoot! I left them in there for like an hour. When I got to them, they were on fire. I had to put them out with a fire extinguisher. I was lucky that the house didn’t burn down.

What a great day hanging with my friends. We ate, we fought, we almost died on Suicide Hill, and we conquered a dragon in China, played snow football and threw snowballs and baked cookies that nearly burned down my house. I will look forward to attending school tomorrow.

# Snowball

---

*In SNOWBALL by Sarah M., a young wolf finds out how important friendship really is. Will she be able to save her best friend from the greatest danger faced by the pack?*

Snow fell from the sky with beautiful patterns. I was having too much fun playing in the snow to notice the patterns.

I love snow. That is how I got my name. My name is Snowball, and I belong to the Northern wolf pack. Someday I think we will own the whole forest. I have white fur, and my hearing is considered to be among the best in the pack.

I was having so much fun I lost track of time. The sun had almost disappeared completely. My mom gently guided me into the den, and I fell asleep.

The next morning I woke up trembling with excitement. It was my first day of school. I knew that someday I would be the best hunter and fighter in the forest.

My mom and I padded through the forest, when suddenly a rabbit hopped in front of us. My mom quickly killed it and gave me half. "Sometimes it's like they don't have a brain," my mom said. I ate my half and padded to the softest part of our territory, the school.

When I got there I saw my best friend, Raindrop. She loved the rain as much as I loved the snow. She looked at me and said, "We are going to learn how to hunt today; do you want to be partners?" I nodded my head and look

at the teacher who was showing us some hunting moves. I wasn't paying attention. I was too excited. I was thinking of how big the piece of prey that we were going to catch would be, when Raindrop bit my ear softly.

"Come on," she said. Everyone was leaving.

"Sorry. I was just thinking about our first hunt," I said. "I just can't wait."

"Me, too," she whispered. "Let's go before we get too far behind." When we caught up they were watching a herd of caribou.

My teacher said, "See that young caribou over there?" She pointed her tail at it. "When I count to three, run out and surround it; one, two, oh I almost forgot..."

I didn't hear the rest. I heard the rest of my classmates following me as I raced out into the open. I ran as fast as I could. The caribou saw us and started running, but we were faster, and soon we had him surrounded. We were so much smaller than they were. As soon as the mother called to the whole herd they started heading for us!

Soon they were on top of us. My heart was pounding so fast I thought it was going to burst. I tried to get out of the stampede. I dodged about 20 hooves, and I was getting tired. When I

was just about to give up I saw my teacher scare off the herd of caribou. I let out an exhausted sigh and collapsed. The teacher mumbled under her breath, "I never even said three."

After what seemed like five minutes, the teacher said, "Class dismissed." I got up and started to walk back home slowly. Suddenly I felt Raindrop beside me. We went home without saying a word.

The next day at school our teacher said we were going to meet our leader. Everyone gasped in horror. He was the toughest wolf in the pack.

"Don't worry, children; he is very kind and will not harm any of you," the teacher said. "Now find you partners and follow me."

When we came to his cave our teacher called his name. He came out a minute later. I could not stop looking at him. He was not what I expected at all. He was thin, short, and small. I was surprised that no one challenged him in a fight.

He showed us around his den, and then we got dismissed. I wanted to know what the teacher would say to the leader. What secrets were they not telling us? When I got dismissed I went outside and pressed my ear against the cave wall and listened. I knew they were hiding something from us from my leader's trembling voice and quiet whisper.

"Something is not right. The patrols today scented humans," he said.

I remember my mom talking about humans once. She did not like talking about them much. She said, "They live in a strange place, and it is like they

created a world of their own. They are at the top of the food chain and they can kill anything they want. It's horrible. You can't trust anyone." She also said, "They captured my brother when he was a pup. Humans sell animals and take care of them like they belong to them. They are so bored they pretend that green creatures live farther than the moon on another planet."

I thought that that was really silly. The only things I had seen that were green were plants. I kept listening.

"They have to learn how to fight or else they might die if the humans try to attack us," he said as if he believed they would attack us. After that I went straight to bed, because I knew I would have a big day tomorrow.

The next morning I went to school very excited. When I got there I told Raindrop we were going to learn to fight. Before she could ask how I knew that, the teacher spoke.

"We are going to learn how to fight today," she said. Right after she spoke we felt the whole ground shake, and heard loud sounds.

"The HUMANS! Everyone run now!" she screamed.

I ran as fast as I could. The world was exploding around me. I turned my head to see Raindrop. Boom! She fell to the ground. I could not let her die! She was everything to me. I stopped running and turned around and ran to her. I knew that if I had any chance of living I had to run, but my friendship was worth more than my life. I lay down next to her and hoped she would be ok.

I watched the battle around me in

horror. *Boom! Boom!* I was hit! My body couldn't move. I was too scared to look at my wound. So I looked around and saw everyone was hurt. The people were heading to our camp, and the pack was going to be gone soon. Even if I lived I would not have anything. My pack was dead. My friends were dead, and soon I would be. I wanted to die. I did die.

I flowed up to the sky, and landed on a cloud. As I looked around I saw Raindrop and the rest of the pack. No humans were in sight! What was

happening? I looked down, and I froze. There I was lying there motionless. I'm dead!

I can fly across the sky. I make people have horrible nightmares. I am all the bad in the world. **I WILL NOT REST UNTIL I GET REVENGE!**

The people killed us to get us out of their way because they were going to cut down all the trees in the woods. They took my life just to do that. They took my pack just to do that. They took my home.

# Sparks and Lightning

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*A boy finds his whole world turned upside down when he finds out that he has a unique ability. He is able to do amazing things, but he encounters significant problems in the story* **SPARKS AND LIGHTNING**, by **Scott Schaefer**.

I knew as soon as I had opened the door I was going to be in trouble. Why didn't I just walk past it like a normal person? It was probably one of the worse decisions of my life.

It had been just an ordinary Monday. I woke up and went to school. Like usual I was being bored and sleeping in math class. Only one thing different happened, and it was at lunchtime.

A kid named Tommy came up to me. He tried to taunt me with stupid comments. I just ignored him. Then he said something that made me jolt. "Ha, your mom can't even hold onto her job," he said. That made me so mad that I trounced him. I took a couple of hard whacks until a teacher pulled me off. The teacher scolded me and reported me to the principal's office.

I lazily walked down to the office. I walked in not daring to look into the principal's eyes. *I'm so going to get it*, I thought.

The principal stared at me with his evil eyes. His back was straight, and he sat there silently. I started feeling uncomfortable.

"Phil, do you have any idea what you have done?" asked the principal.

I just put my head down with

disappointment. I felt embarrassed.

"I'm going to call your mother and tell her you're staying after school with the janitor." My head shot up as soon as he finished the sentence. I knew I would get a detention, but no one's ever gotten it with the janitor. The principal told me to report to the office after school, and then he sent me away.

I spent the rest of the day half-listening to my teachers. I was worried about spending the day with the janitor.

At the end of the day I went to the office. Mr. Finkle, the janitor, was there. He snarled, "Glad you could make it." I ignored his comment and followed him. He told me I was staying with him for two hours. TWO HOURS! That's unbearable.

He shoved a mop and a bucket at me. "Go to the cafeteria!" he bellowed.

I walked to the cafeteria, and it was a total pigsty. "Is this what the janitors have to deal with every day?" I thought. Juice boxes, fruit roll-ups, and leftovers of cold pizza were everywhere. It was really repulsive. I started to mop the cafeteria.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw flashing lights. I looked up startled.

There was a big heavy door and loud crashes everywhere behind it. I ran toward it stupidly. I opened it, and I immediately was pushed backward and blacked out.

I woke up, and I couldn't see anything. I started to panic. I felt my face, because it felt like something was on it. It was covered in bandages. A sigh of slight relief came over me. Then I realized that I wasn't at school anymore. Then all my worries went away when my mom's hand touched my arm.

"It's ok, honey," my mom said calmly.

"Wh-wh-where am I?" I stuttered.

"You're at Beaumont Hospital," she replied.

"Why?" I asked.

"You were hit by sparks in the mechanical room, and we found you just in time. You could have been blinded, or even worse," she said more seriously.

I could hear footsteps walking in.

"Hello, Phil!" I heard a voice say, probably the doctor's.

"Hi," I responded weakly.

"We are going to take off the bandages now," the man's voice said.

He slowly took off the bandages. I finally saw my first glimpse of light. I then saw the doctor and my mom. The doctor took some quick notes and left. My mom's face looked like she was seeing a ghost. She handed me a small mirror.

I had burns all over my face. I put the mirror down. I was scared by my own reflection.

A couple of days passed in the

hospital until I was able to leave. My mom drove us both back to our tiny house. I was wearing sunglasses and a hat that hung over my face. I was ashamed of how I looked.

We walked in the house. I felt tired. I trudged into my room. I turned on my light. A shock came off my fingers. I thought nothing of it.

The next morning I decided to make coffee for my mother. I wrestled through the newspaper and week-old cereal bowl. I found the coffee pot and tried to put the plug in. I touched the outlet and another spark zapped at it. I began to wonder what was happening. I had a bunch of crazy thoughts. I tried to touch the outlet again. Once again sparks flew. I tried again and again, and got the same answer.

"I'm some sort of freak," I thought out loud.

I tried to make a spark with my finger without the outlet. A sensation came, and a spark appeared out of my finger. I fell back in amazement. I started to look at my finger in awe and horror. This was so unreal! This only happens in comics! I knew this was a turn in my life. I thought of what I could do. I could be a superhero.

I started to do amazing things like fixing broken electronic toys. I sped up the digital clock! I then did more complex things like turning off my house lights. Then I wanted to help people. I first fixed burnt-out light bulbs. I tried to fix an old telephone, but I ended up breaking the whole wire.

I then thought of the negatives of



having electrical powers. I would also be thought of as a freak. I began to worry. I didn't dare tell my mom. I decided not to do anything else for the day, because I didn't want to do any serious damage.

The next week my burns started healing, but not much better. I went to school but tried my best to hide my face. I was walking down the hallway. I was dragging my hands across the wall. Bad choice. I accidentally pulled down on the fire alarm. The whole school immediately went crazy. The teachers were guiding students with perplexed faces, and I was there with my hand on the fire alarm. I cringed every time that obnoxious bell rang. I ran away and left the scene.

After school I had swim practice. I just then realized I would shock the other people in the water. I began to think of ways not to go in the water. I ran and pretended to slip on the water. I then pretended to have damaged my leg. My swim coach came over and inspected it. He told me to sit out practice. When I came home my mother had a concerned look on her face.

"How's your leg? Your swim coach called me and told me what had happened."

"Oh, it's fi—"

My mother cut me off. "No, we're going to the emergency room now," she stated.

She practically picked me up and threw me in the car. We went to the hospital, and I got the same doctor as the last time. He took scans of my leg, and told us it was good to go.

"Um, Mom, can I talk to the doctor privately?" I asked. She nodded. As soon as she stepped out the door I told him everything.

"I have never heard of such thing," he said as he scratched his chin. He quickly grabbed a piece of paper and a pen to write down my symptoms. He sat there baffled as I tried to explain how it felt to have sparks coming out of my fingers.

The doctor jolted into his office, with me behind him. He sat in his swivel chair and thought. Suddenly the doctor had an idea.

"You said you can fix light bulbs?" he asked.

"Yeah," I replied.

"Well, maybe if you touch a working one, it might, just might, drain your electricity," he stated.

Over the past few days, I had begun to believe anything was possible. I jumped on the table, and touched the light bulb. It had been on for such a long time that it burnt my fingers. I pulled my hand away.

"You have to fight the pain," the doctor said.

I closed my eyes and put my hand to the light bulb. I moaned in pain. I started to feel the heat. My eyes sizzled, and my hand began to bleed. I screamed, but yet still had my hand there. Sweat was sizzling down my face.

All of a sudden the glass exploded because they was so much energy. The light bulb exploded by my hand, and yet again, I blacked out.

I woke up in the hospital. I had bandages in my hand. I looked

around, and the doctor was there. He had a concerned look on his face. He looked delighted when I woke up.

“Try to make a spark with your non-injured hand,” he said. I weakly

held up my hand, and tried. I couldn’t get anything. I fell back in total disbelief. These past days were so crazy.

“I’m so glad that’s over,” I thought as I drifted back to sleep.

# The Tale with a Very Difficult-to-Pronounce Name

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*Do you ever wonder what happens to people when they are trapped in a pizza truck? Let's hope not. But find out anyway in **THE TALE WITH A VERY DIFFICULT-TO-PRONOUNCE NAME**, by *Liam Callahan*. It's a tale of excitement, suspense, action, and nonsense.*

“I used to think that I was sane, but that was before food attacked me. It all started when I was in a moving pizza truck, an unconventional place for me to be. God knows how I got there. I sure as Peru don’t.

“I sat up and grumbled something that probably sounded inaudible to the outside world. I heard an out-of-breath voice, from somewhere I couldn’t identify. The voice yelled at me to shut up if I wanted to keep breathing. I obeyed and sat there in silence until the delivery vehicle halted.

“The owner of the voice opened the trunk; he was a mountain of a man, nearly ten feet tall. The man was obese and completely devoid of hair. The grotesque creature didn’t even have an eyebrow over his one eye. In the place of his missing eye, his missing nose, and half of his mouth, was horribly burned and twisted flesh. There was something upsetting about his face, but I couldn’t put my finger on it.

“The disfigured tyrant pulled me out of the pizza truck by the collar of my shirt and dragged me to a strange, white building. The building had a magnetic pull. I figured this out, because the pet magnets in my pocket

were attracted to the door. The assailant opened a panel in the building and began randomly pressing the colorful buttons. He stopped when it emitted a loud beeping sound. Suddenly, the gigantic door swung open. It took up all but a third of the building. The temperature suddenly became cold, and a chill went through my body. The egregious man proceeded to throw me inside.

“I could see the building had several rooms throughout the central plaza. The rooms appeared to be made of clear plastic. I could see rectangular depressions in the door. I turned to flee from the magnetic penitentiary. Suddenly, the door slammed shut. I then heard the pizza truck flee the scene.

“When the door closed, I was astonished to see a miniature tree appear before my eyes. The tree-like creature advanced and pounced at me when it was about twenty-three and one-half feet away. The malevolent monster was screaming something that cannot be recreated by the human tongue. The foreign word sounded like ‘gougebouqth.’

“Acting quickly, I grabbed a gigantic

silver shovel, conveniently left in the basement. Using brute strength and martial arts I learned from watching Bruce Lee movies, I expertly whacked the creature with the shovel. I hit the terrible tree on what seemed like its face. The wound I administered was bleeding some sort of thick, yellow substance similar to cheese.

“Instantly I realized where I was. I was in a refrigerator and being attacked by cheese-bleeding broccoli. There was only one way out. I had to wake up. As result of this experience, I am traumatized and can no longer eat broccoli.”

My grandma uttered, “Nice try. I’m from Missouri.”

# The Talking Pens

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*A girl has to find a way to stop her writing instruments from getting her in trouble in **THE TALKING PENS**, by **Lizzy Crorey**. But pens don't talk...do they?*

“**O**UT!” yelled Ziggy’s fourth-hour teacher, Mr. Table.

“It wasn’t me, though!” Ziggy responded with her pencil case held up. “It was my pens talking!”

The whole class started laughing so loud that the teacher threatened the next person who laughed would join Ziggy in the hallway. That caused immediate silence. After five minutes in the hallway, the teacher came out to talk to Ziggy.

“Would you like to give me a real excuse now?”

“I gave you a real excuse in the classroom!” Ziggy responded with a sassy tone.

“Well, maybe if you had brought some pens to class the first day, you would have realized this problem and gotten new pens!” the teacher sassed back as if Ziggy’s pens really did talk.

“You guys are getting me in trouble.” Ziggy whispered to her pens while walking to her locker.

“You know we’re funny,” a pen responded.

“Okay, okay, I’ll admit that you are, but you can’t say what you think is funny all the ti—”

“Who are you talking to?” asked Patricia, the girl whose locker is next to Ziggy’s.

“Oh, um, nobody,” Ziggy said before realizing that was the wrong thing to say.

“She was talking to us!” yelled a pen.

“Whoa!” Patricia exclaimed. “What was that?”

“Ziggy, I think it’s time to tell somebody about us,” a pen whispered while trying not to laugh.

“Shut up!” Ziggy angrily whispered.

“Chill, Ziggy. I didn’t mean to be rude or something.”

“No, I wasn’t talking to you.”

“Then who were you talking to?”

*Oh, no. What should I say?* Ziggy thought.

“Haha,” a pen laughed, “You’re busted!”

“I gotta go,” Ziggy said, embarrassed.

“Okay, weirdo” Patricia responded with a rude tone.

During lunch, Ziggy couldn’t forget about what happened with Patricia. “How could I possibly explain myself?” Ziggy asked herself. After thinking that thought, Ziggy saw Patricia staring at her and grinning. “I need proof or everybody will think I’m crazy. Stupid pens!”

For fifth and sixth hours, Ziggy decided to leave her pens in her locker

and borrow other people's pencils. Luckily, Ziggy got people to let her borrow their pencils.

After school, Ziggy decided to go to the counselor's office instead of going to swimming practice. Ziggy was very relieved after being told that the counselor was still there.

"Umm, Mrs. Bird."

"Yes, Ziggy."

"I think I'm crazy," Ziggy said nervously. "My pens are talking to me. But maybe I'm not, because Patricia heard them. But my real problem is that my fourth-hour teacher, Mr. Table, thinks *I'm* talking, but I'm not. It's my pens."

"They aren't pre-recorded voices, are they?" Mrs. Bird asked trying not to let out a grin.

"No! They have, like, their own minds or something!"

Mrs. Bird said, as if Ziggy were crazy, "I've never had a problem like this before..."

"See, you think I'm crazy, too! Just like everybody else! I don't know what to do because it really isn't me talking! What should I do?"

"Hmmm. Can I see your pens?" Mrs. Bird asked.

"Sure, but they might not talk because they want to get me in trouble. You know, if they talk, then it will be proof," Ziggy said. "Okay, I'll go get them now," Ziggy said in a fast voice and left the office.

Ziggy speed-walked through the hallways to her locker and returned as fast as she could.

"I'm back."

"Okay," Mrs. Bird whispered. "I'll

act like somebody you know."

"We can hear you!" a pen yelled.

"Well, you're supposed to hear me, Ziggy."

"That was my pens!"

"What!"

"See! I told you they talk!"

"Are you sure that wasn't you? Because I swear I saw those word come out of your mouth."

"Yes, I'm sure! My lips didn't move at all!"

"Try to make them talk again, then. I'm going to look at your lips this time," Mrs. Bird said with a grin.

"SHH! GUYS, DON'T TALK!" a pen yelled sarcastically.

"See! Did you see my lips move this time?"

"No, no I didn't. That is so weird!"

"I know, right!"

"Um, well, I guess I'm a witness now. I'll tell Mr. Table what happened."

"Wait!" Ziggy yelled louder than she wanted to, "I thought of the best idea!" Ziggy stopped talking, causing an awkward silence.

"TALK, ZIGGY, TALK!" a pen yelled.

"Let's make an eBay account!" Ziggy said happily.

"Please, no!" yelled a pen. "I thought you loved us!"

"Yeah, I totally love you guys," Ziggy said sarcastically. "That must be why I had to yell at you talkative beasts after class."

"Sorry, you talking pens, but you're going on eBay!" Mrs. Bird said.

\* \* \*

After two weeks, Mrs. Bird called Ziggy down to the office.

“Did they sell?” Ziggy asked.

“They sure did!” Mrs. Bird said happily.

“Yes,” Ziggy said with a smile, “Thanks, Mrs. Bird!”

“No problem, Hun,” Mrs. Bird responded.

When Ziggy came home she was greeted by her mother. “Hey, Ziggy. Guess what!”

“What, Mom?” Ziggy asked.

“You said you need pens, right?”

“Yeah.”

“I got you some pens from eBay! They are supposed to talk, too!”

“NO!” Ziggy yelled.

# Temo McStone and the Wish!

*In TEMO McSTONE AND THE WISH! by Logan Harvill, Temo gets banned from his orphanage to a desert! As he wanders the sands alone, survival becomes questionable. Will he survive?*

Once, there was an 11-year-old boy named Temo McStone. He was a very honest kid. If someone asked him a question, he would always answer truthfully. He never lied or stretched the truth. He was a homeless kid who got banned from his orphanage. Although he was very honest, he was always getting into trouble. He got kicked out because he got in a bad fight with a kid three times. Now, he wanders the Mexican deserts, alone.

One day, when Temo was wandering the deserts, he found a cave. He walked inside, looking for anything that could help him survive. The cave was dark, full of spiders, and smelled an awful smell. Temo continued walking, about a half of a mile, when his foot hit some granite. “Ouch!!” cried Temo, who was struggling in pain and began to weep a little.

He took a step back and looked at the rock. He then looked around and saw a hole! He got down on his hands and knees and crawled through the hole. He crawled for an hour and then, in the distance, he saw a faint gold light! He crawled further and further until the light got stronger. He thought it was an exit. The light felt warm and it was nice to get light in the cave. He kept moving and got out of the tunnel. When he

got up, in front of him, there was a maple wood door.

Temo reached for the handle and opened the door. He looked inside and on top of a rock, was a genie’s lamp! Temo grabbed it and examined it. On the side, in fancy writing, it said, “Special Genie.”

Temo wasn’t sure what it meant so he decided to find out. He rubbed the lamp, and out came a humongous genie! The Genie started to talk to him. He said, “Since I am a special genie, I will grant you one wish instead of three. After I give you the wish, you will be transported outside and the cave will be gone.”

At first, Temo was stunned. He couldn’t believe he found a real genie. The genie said, “I shall now put your one wish inside your heart. Whenever you truly want to use your wish, it will happen. Suddenly, a big, purple cloud came at Temo! Then, he heard a big WHOOSH!!! At that moment, Temo’s mind went completely blank and Temo passed out.

Temo woke up in the middle of the desert. At first, he didn’t know what had happened and where exactly where he was. He was confused for a moment until he remembered the genie and the wish. He started to think about it.



*Should I use my wish on myself, for wealth, or food,* thought Temo. *No, it would wear off too fast. I should use it on something that lasts.*

He looked around and saw two strange figures. He thought they were illusions until they came toward him. They were robbers. The robbers were a little chubby and roundish. When they got there, Temo was standing up waiting. When they came face to face, the robbers tackled Temo! The first robber then said, "Give us your money kid."

Temo then replied calmly, "I don't have any money. The only things I have are the clothes on my back and one wish from a golden genie." said Temo in his most honest voice.

The robbers got off him and the second robber said, "We will let you go if you use your wish on us, we will let you go without hurting you."

Temo replied, "No, I need this wish and I will use it on something that lasts."

The second robber said, "Are you sure?"

Temo replied, "Yes"

The first robber then said, "Fine then. Get him!"

Temo ran away. The robbers followed him. Luckily, the robbers were chubby and slow. Temo ran as fast as his 11 year old legs could carry him. He ran and ran until he saw a small cave behind a small hill. He crawled in the cave and said in a whisper, "I'm safe in here."

Temo looked out a hole in the wall and saw the robbers jog by. They thought they were still chasing him. After about 15 minutes, he decided they

were gone and crawled out of the cave. He looked around. He couldn't see anything in the distance. He then decided to climb the hill the cave was hidden in. He climbed all the way to the top and looked around. In the very distance, he saw a town!

Temo was so excited! He had never seen a town out here! He jumped off the hill and ran as fast as he could. His legs felt like they were just flying! He ran and ran about a mile before he saw the cliff! He quickly slid to a stop. When he got up, he realized the town was directly below him. He climbed down the cliff slow and steady until he reached the bottom. When he reached the bottom, he walked about half of a mile before he reached the town.

When he reached the town, Temo realized it wasn't as great as he thought. It was a place with no water, barely any food, and full of begging people. When he saw all the people, he thought about his wish.

After some long thinking, Temo decided that his wish would last the longest if he used it on the town. Temo walked into the town and to their dried up well. People gathered around him. They were wondering what he was doing. Then, Temo said, "I wish this town to be fixed up."

Then, all of a sudden, the hills burst into bloom, the well was filled with water, and it started raining animals and gold coins! Temo was a hero! The people were so happy! Then, an amazing thing happened! A crown fell from the sky and landed on Temo's head! Temo became the king of the town!

Later...

Temo ruled for a very long time, because of all the food, water, and wealth

he gave the people. Eventually, the town became a city. The city was eventually named "Wish City." Temo ruled for 90 years and then died of old age.

# Ties

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*An average day at school turns into a life-threatening adventure for Jason, a new student at Berkshire Middle School. See if Jason can survive the first day of school in **TIES**, by **Jack Dolan**.*

“Come on, Mom!” Jason complained to his nit-picky mother. “My hair is fine! I don’t have to look *perfect*.”

“I’m just trying to make sure you look nice on the first day of school,” she replied while fluffing his hair.

“If you don’t let me leave soon, I’ll miss the bus,” Jason said impatiently.

“Humph. Well, forgive me for trying to help you make a good impression with your teachers.” Jason assured her that he would be fine as he walked out the door.

Jason wasn’t that worried about school. Everyone knew that the first day of school was a breeze. The teachers never actually had the kids do *work*. All they had to do was pretend to pay attention, and that was that.

Jason checked his schedule one last time before he got to the bus. “All right, first things first,” he said to himself. “Go to your locker, and then head to first hour, which is...” He racked his memory to remember his first hour.

He arrived at the bus stop, and waited for the bus. “Oh yeah,” he exclaimed, “My first hour is Mr. Fisher.” Just then the bus pulled up. Jason stepped on and looked around. “Oh great,” he muttered under his breath. The bus was packed with

seventh- and eighth-graders, all of whom he would like to avoid.

Fortunately, he found an open seat next to a short sixth-grader. He plopped down next to him and took his backpack off. The kid looked in a daze, unaware of his surroundings. He had a Boston Red Sox baseball cap pulled down low so that you had to bend down to get a good look at his face. “Uuum, hi,” Jason said timidly, “my name’s Jason.”

He didn’t seem to hear him at first, but then he replied, “David.” Jason paused, trying to think of what to say next.

“What’s your first hour?” he asked. Again the boy paused before answering the question.

“Mr. Fisher,” he responded blankly. Jason jumped.

“Hey! That’s my first hour, too!” Jason exclaimed.

“Really?” David asked. “That’s good. At least I’ll know *someone* in my first hour.”

The bus pulled up to the school. David and Jason stared out the window. Students were streaming out of buses and cars, moving in giant packs toward the school. Jason and David walked off the bus and were carried away with the other students. The school had two stories and was

built out of red bricks. Although he didn't like it, Jason knew he would have to get used to it. He was going to be there for the next three years.

Mr. Fisher's class looked a little different from Jason's elementary school. The desks and chairs were attached to each other, and there was a Promethean board at the front of the classroom. *Bum, bum, bum*, the bell rang. The kids took their seats.

Jason saw some of his elementary school friends and waved. He also saw David sit in the corner alone. Jason walked over and sat down next to him. David didn't look up, but nodded as Jason sat down.

"Good morning, class," Mr. Fisher said brightly as he walked in the classroom. A few kids mumbled replies. "Before we start class today, I am going to tell you all one, just one rule: Never touch my tie." A few kids snickered. "I'm not joking. I expect all of you to follow this rule." David and Jason exchanged glances. *Was Mr. Fisher crazy?* they both wondered.

The rest of the hour went by just like Jason had predicted. That is, until ten minutes before the end of class.

"Hey, Jason." It was Patrick, one of Jason's elementary friends.

"What?" Jason whispered back.

"I double-dog-dare ya to touch Mr. Fisher's tie."

Jason shrugged him off. He knew he didn't have to do a dare, just as long as Patrick didn't go to the...

"I triple-dog-dare ya!"

*Uh oh!* Jason thought. *Nobody denies a triple-dog-dare!*

"All right, I'll do it." Jason walked up to Mr. Fisher's desk as if to ask a question. Mr. Fisher was doing the attendance on the computer, so he didn't see Jason until it was too late. Jason reached out, and touched Mr. Fisher's Rudolph tie!

Jason was there, and then in a flash of light, he was gone. "Whoa," Patrick breathed. Not all of the kids saw what happened, but those that did screamed.

Mr. Fisher sighed inwardly. This was going to be difficult. "Settle down, class!" Mr. Fisher hollered over the escalating panic. "There is nothing to worry about," he assured them as he took off his tie and set it down on the table.

"Are you kidding?" a girl exclaimed. "He disappeared!"

"That's because he touched my tie," Mr. Fisher explained.

Meanwhile, Jason was all of a sudden in a snowstorm. "What? Where am I?" He looked around. He saw a mountain chain, with a narrow pass through it. Then, Jason recognized the scene. It was from the movie *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*, when the abominable snowman was chasing Rudolph. *Uh oh*, Jason thought. He heard a rumble. Then, the abominable snowman appeared from behind the mountain, and headed toward Jason.

Jason turned to run, and saw something in the sky. It was his classmates and Mr. Fisher in a window-like portal looking at him. He saw that the kids had looks of horror on their faces, but Mr. Fisher looked quite calm.

Their mouths were moving, but he couldn't hear them talking.

David couldn't stand to watch his new friend just stay trapped in the tie alone. David made his decision. He reached out and touched the tie.

"No!" Mr. Fisher shouted, but, yet again, it was too late, and David, too, was sucked into the tie. "All right, that's it! Everybody back in their seats, or you get a Saturday detention!" Mr. Fisher shouted angrily. The kids looked taken aback by his outburst, but they did as he said without a word of protest. Even so, they kneeled on their seats so they could see what was happening in the tie.

Jason looked back toward the pass and saw Rudolph and Cornelius come running through. The abominable snowman turned his attention to them. Just then there was a flash of light, and David appeared next to Jason. "David, what are you doing here?"

"Saving your butt; what does it look like?" he replied.

Cornelius and Rudolph ran to meet them. Something looked odd about them. They looked like 2-D Claymation. They didn't look like real people. *That's probably because they're not*, Jason thought. Their movements were jerky and awkward, as if they had to think about each step they took. "We have to get out of here!" Cornelius shouted.

"How do we get them out?" Patrick demanded. Mr. Fisher responded to him with what sounded like a sincere reply.

"*We* don't do anything. When the portion of *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer* that my tie shows, the part where Rudolph escapes the abominable snowman, is over, David and Jason will come back out." Some of the kids still looked uncertain. "Don't worry about Jason and David," he reassured them, but then muttered under his breath, "Well, at least as long as the abominable snowman doesn't get them."

"What do we do?" Jason shouted.

"Isn't it obvious?" David asked. Jason looked puzzled. "We do what happens in the movie. We go to the lake." A look of understanding dawned on Jason's face.

"Come on!" Cornelius urged gruffly. "I have a plan!" They ran to the lake, and stopped at the edge of the ice. The abominable snowman was gaining on them, and fast. Quickly, Cornelius pulled out his pickaxe and started smashing it into the ice. The abominable snowman was right on top of them now, and as the snowman made an attempt to swipe at them, the ice broke off, and they floated away.

The whole class let out a breath of relief that they didn't realize they were holding the whole time. "Stay back," Mr. Fisher said. There was a flash of white, and there were David and Jason. At first, the class did nothing, but then they erupted into a frenzy of questions and conversations. Kids were shouting, "How did you know how to escape?" and "Could I come next time?" *Bum, bum, bum*, the bell rang.

"Class dismissed!" Mr. Fisher

shouted over the class. Kids rushed out of the class talking in excited tones. "Jason, David, would you two come see me, please?" They approached the desk nervously.

"Yes?" they asked simultaneously.

"Do you know the importance of first impressions?" Mr. Fisher asked.

"Yeah," Jason replied meekly. David said nothing. He just nodded his head slowly.

"That is one reason I told you that

rule, to see who would listen. Just something to think about next hour. As for you, David, while what you did was brave, let the teacher handle it next time," Mr. Fisher said with a trace of a grin. "Now get out of here. You'll be late for class."

Jason headed out the door with David following him, digesting what Mr. Fisher had said. Next hour, he would think twice before breaking a rule on a dare.

# The Tragic Story of Chocolate and Lollipop

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*In THE TRAGIC STORY OF CHOCOLATE AND LOLLIPOP by Owen Miller, Chocolate and Lollipop find out the humans are going to eat them. Can they get away from the candy shop in time?*

As I looked at the huge jaws and slobber, I was trying to concentrate but it was hard when spit was coming out in massive downpours. I could smell a mixture of onions and bitter mustard and I could almost taste the hamburger he must have just eaten. It was also really gross because I could hear the slobber splashing around in his mouth. The man's sweaty hands gripped me. As you can tell it was quite hard to think. Yet, I let my mind drift. Was it Lollipop and my destiny to be eaten, I wondered? What got me to this point? Maybe I need to start from the beginning when I lived in the candy store to figure it out.

It all began one day when I watched some kids buy my friends, Willy and Billy Licorice, and I began to question where we went when we were sold. Apparently, Lollipop was wondering the same thing. He whispered into my ear, "Chocolate, I wonder where we go once we get bought?" Lollipop and I had lived in the candy store forever and we were BFF's.

We decided to watch out the window. We probably should not have. First, the kids stripped Willy and Billy's clothes off. I felt bad for them. The humans bit their heads off so they

could not even try to scream. If the humans did not bite their heads, nobody would have heard them anyhow because of the low intelligence of the human ear. We had to turn away.

I was overcome with shock. Lollipop and I had eaten plenty of things, but we did not know that people ate us. "We have to get out of here," I told Lollipop. Lollipop did not have the energy to speak. He just kept on staring until I slapped him. Lollipop is like that sometimes. He just stares off into space. It gets very annoying because he does that at least once every single day. I really do not understand him. Because the humans were going to eat us, I decided I had to make an escape plan. From 12:00 until 4:00 in the morning, the shop is closed and it is our time of peace where no humans can get us. Of course, Lollipop and I move. We move whenever we feel like moving. I worked all night figuring out the plan.

So now, I will tell you the full part of my genius plan to escape. First, Lollipop and I would jump out the window like ninjas. If anybody tried to catch us we would use our awesome ninja moves. Lollipop and I always practiced our awesome ninja kicks and I

was sure they would make any person faint. That is how good we are. Then we would run off to the beautiful lands you see on *The Nature Channel*. Lollipop and I have always wanted to go to that beautiful land. Then we could live happily ever after.

So on August 17, 2009, Lollipop and I made our move. However, the first part did not work so well. We jumped out the window, as planned. But as soon as we hit the window, it collapsed and an alarm went off.

Lollipop ran in circles, waving his arms and shouting stuff like, "They are on to us!" and "We surrender!"

I told him to shush up because we needed to be silent like ninjas. Then he went into one of his staring moments. I was very mad so I slapped that boy silly. His face was beet red after I was done with him. Of course, it is always beet red because he is a cherry flavored Lollipop. In all the commotion we made, a few kids saw us. They chased us into an alley way. The advantage of being a rectangle is that I have sharp edges. I stuck out my corners and got ready to do my ninja kicks when one of the boys muttered, "What's the point." The boys left after that.

I looked around and scouted out my surroundings. There were alley dogs fighting and trash lying around all over the place. I realized Lollipop was not with me. I looked through the trash and called his name, but he was nowhere to be seen. That is when I knew why the boys left. The boys had Lollipop. Some people just do not appreciate good candy. I had to chase after them.

Unfortunately, I am not very fast. The dogs were still running around trying to kill each other and that gave me an idea. When I was a young fun size candy bar at the factory, I used to stay up at night and listen to the guard dog's talk, and soon I got dog language down. So, I spoke dog and I told them to give me a ride or else. One thing about alley dogs is that they are not very smart. It is as if the wheel is spinning but the hamster is dead. Those dogs are so dumb they thought the boys said that and started chasing the boys while I clung to their fur.

Eventually, we caught up to the boys. Lollipop was in his staring moments again. He is such a sucker. I had to save him all by myself. I started twirling in the air and jutting my points in to the boys, but it had very little effect because I am so weak. So then, I saw the dogs and I remembered something else. Dogs bite humans. So, I told the dogs to bite the boys and it worked. The problem was that I could not reach Lollipop. The boys decided to run again. I told the dogs to charge and they did. However, I slipped from the dog's back. Luckily, at that moment a police man ran by yelling, "Stop in the name of law, dogs!"

The dogs, of course, did not stop. I jumped on the officer's pants when he ran by. By the time we went a block I saw Lollipop laying on the sidewalk. The police man did not see him. I jumped off as we passed Lollipop and lugged him into an alley. It was almost the end of the day now and we had not gone very far. Not as far as I had hoped. We were about a



block away from the candy shop. I knew because we could still see the flashing lights of the police cars very clearly. Lollipop and I slept in the green garbage dumpster they always have in the alleys. I slept right next to Lollipop in a soft doll bed I found. He tried to get me to move over, but I would not budge. He was stuck sleeping in a banana peel. Slowly, I drifted off to sleep.

I woke up to grunting and sighing as we got thrown in this truck type thing. I must have hit something hard because I was out cold. The next thing I know there was a big sign over our heads that said "Dump." Unfortunately, I happen to know what a dump is. This did not fit our awesome escape plan. I realized we must have gotten picked up by a garbage truck.

"Hey Chocolate look, this place is a dump," said Lollipop.

"Hey you're right. It says so right over there," I told Lollipop as I pointed

to the sign.

"Let's search for help, Chocolate."

Suddenly, I smelled garbage and man. It was a garbage man. Sure enough, a garbage man walked out from behind a pile of garbage. "Chocolate, I think they pay him the same way they do with a candy store man," whispered Lollipop. "Money plus an all-you-can-eat buffet." Suddenly, the man grabbed us in a firm, steady grip.

"Time for lunch," he mumbled. "Such a waste someone would throw this out."

This is how we got to where we are now—about to be gone forever. I have learned that it is our complete destiny to be eaten. Every candy must get eaten and no candy has ever escaped. But, I am sure if you pass this on to people and they pass it on to candy, the candy will not have to have the same tragic story as Lollipop and me. They can be eaten without feeling like a failure.

*Chomp, chomp.*

# A Typical Day in Fantasy Land

*When disaster strikes, who can you call on to save the day? When all looks lost, who can find the way? When darkness takes over, who will bring back the light? Who has the strength and courage to stand up to the most fearsome creatures? These burning questions are answered in **A TYPICAL DAY IN FANTASY LAND**, by Adam Marszałek.*

It was a normal day in Fantasy Land. But suddenly the earth cracked, the wind howled, and the volcanoes erupted.

The mayor was sitting in his office when Chaos struck. He quickly picked up the red phone on his desk that was a direct line to the Adventure Team. The Adventure Team is made up of Bob, the magic expert; Cindy, the weapons specialist, and Adam, their brave leader.

Adam said, "Mayor, what's wrong?"

The mayor replied, "Chaos has struck. He's on Mt. Fisher."

As the mayor hung up the phone he was sucked into a tornado, never to be seen again.

Right then and there Adam realized what he had to do. He had to stop the world from ending.

Adam said, "Team, we must stop the end of the world, and let's do it NOW!"

The team replied, "Yea!"

As the team ran through the town, they saw dead bodies, destroyed houses, and the statue of the Adventure Team buried in dirt.

They finally reached the base of Mt. Fisher. Adam knew a shortcut to the top, but it was risky. He had heard of a terrible beast that would block their

way, but he took them there anyway.

Bob and Adam said, "Look, there's the cave we have to go through."

Cindy asked, "Why do we have to go through there?"

Adam replied, "It gets us to the summit faster."

Bob said, "It's true. It gets us to the summit faster."

Just then the ground under them rumbled, and they knew they had to get moving. When they entered the cave, stalactites hung from the ceiling. On the walls were diamonds.

"Oh my gosh, this cave's huge!" Cindy said.

"Hey, that boulder's blocking our path," Bob said. It would take a little bit of time for Bob to move the boulder out of the way.

Adam said, "Do you guys hear that?"

"Hear what?" they said.

Adam yelled, "Cindy – duck!"

The cave troll's spiked club barely missed Cindy. There it was, a huge cave troll standing in front of them. Adam drew his sword and charged.

Adam called out, "Squad, maneuver 'Super Awesome.'"

Cindy took out her spear and charged. Bob was trying his hardest to

move the boulder while they were fighting. Adam dodged the first attack, slid under the troll, and slashed its legs. He was followed by Cindy, stabbing upward with her spear. But the cave troll grabbed her.

Bob called out, "Stab him in the stomach!"

As the cave troll turned around, Adam cut its arm. The troll released Cindy. Adam and Cindy grabbed their swords and dodged the attacks. Bob finished moving the boulder and used his magic to throw it at the troll. The troll was crushed under the weight of the boulder.

The Adventure Team hurried through the cave. They saw many other diamonds in the cave as they moved through it. When they reached the top of Mt. Fisher, they saw him, the dark wizard, standing on top of the Tower of Element. Just before Bob shot him with a magical thunder arrow, Chaos turned around and saw them. The Adventure Team raced to the top of the tower to stop him.

When they reached the top the dark wizard exclaimed, "You're too late. The world is almost destroyed."

"Not if we can help it" Adam said.

Adam was the first to attack, but

they realized they were no match for the wizard. The wizard was too quick for Adam and launched a fireball before he could attack. As the fireball drew closer Adam saw the day flash before his eyes. But luckily, Bob stopped the fireball with an ice blast before it hit Adam.

Quickly after that, Bob shot a stun spell that weakened Chaos. They were now a match for the dark wizard. During the battle, the dark wizard froze Cindy. This made Adam furious.

Time stood still as Adam stabbed his sword into the heart of the dark wizard. Chaos fell backwards off the mountain. Using the last of his magic Bob reversed the damage done by Chaos and thawed out Cindy.

Drained of magic, Bob began to show his true age of 122. His last words to Cindy and Adam were, "Don't find a replacement."

Cindy and Adam were just heartbroken. They had to leave him there because the tower was collapsing beneath them. They got out of the tower just before it collapsed.

There was no funeral for Bob, but everyone remembered him in their hearts. Once again the world was saved thanks to the Adventure Team.

# Visiting La-La Land

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*A troubled girl falls into a magical world. Perhaps this is the answer to her problems. Perhaps it will make everything worse. Ashley Lenington sorts things out in VISITING LA-LA LAND.*

Alexia was a regular girl until January 29, 2010. The day had started out completely normally for her. She had no problems on the bus, but when she got to school there was some trouble. This girl named Jessica started to pick on Alexia.

Jessica was your typical bully. She always picked on Alexia by taking her homework and hanging it over her head and laughing her butt off. Alexia wanted this to stop, but she thought that if she told on her, Jessica would pick on her even more. What she needed was some courage.

For the rest of the day Jessica didn't bother Alexia. On the way home Alexia thought about the lack of courage she had, and wanted to get away from her life and all of its troubles.

When she got home she went into the bathroom to wash her hands. In the bathroom mirror she saw a blue swirl instead of her reflection. When she reached out to touch it, the swirl began to expand until it started to suck her in. She screamed with fright until her world went black.

Alexia spun through the air until she landed in a lake of green and purple Jell-O. On the edge of the lake was a broken piece of wood that said "Welcome to La-La Land." In the distance there stood a black and white

cow.

Alexia bounced over to the edge of the lake of Jell-O and saw mountains and mountains of garbage. She walked over to the cow and said, "What's with all of the garbage around here?"

The cow replied, "It is trashed because every time you humans throw something away that can be recycled it comes right here to us!"

She realized that this place was deserted. The cow saw her looking around and said, "Don't worry. Everyone just ran in their houses because they saw you coming. But I didn't care about some random human."

Alexia started to walk down the empty streets of La-La Land. She peered into windows and saw little animals looking at her in a strange way. It began to rain, so she ran into a cave so she could stay dry. In the cave there was a beautiful witch that called Alexia over to her. Alexia hesitated but slowly walked over to the witch.

The witch said, "Let me look into your eyes so I can see your troubles." Alexia gazed into the witch's eyes. She felt very relaxed in front of her and knew she had nothing to fear. "You have some troubles at school I see."

She replied, "There is a girl named Jessica. She always picks on me, and I want it to stop, but...but I

am too afraid.”

The witch turned around and reached into a small chest. She turned to Alexia and said, “This magic potion will give you one wish.” Alexia thought if she could wish for courage, she could tell Jessica to stop picking on her!

The witch handed her the bottle. Alexia grabbed it and drank it without hesitation. She whispered under her breath and said, “I wish I had courage.” Her world went black again.

When she woke up she was back on the bus heading to school. Everything

started happening again. She thought, *Maybe the witch gave me a second chance with Jessica.*

When the moment came when Jessica had picked on her, Alexia stood up and said, “I want Y-O-U to stop picking on me forever!”

Jessica looked puzzled, and said, “Sorry. I didn’t know you were that upset about it.”

Alexia was happy she had the courage to stop the bullying, and would live the rest of her life with the gift the witch had given her.

# The Weirdest Day Ever

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*Experience Sam Johnson's everyday life through his eyes, and you will go through parallel universes and battles with monsters. It's all here in **THE WEIRDEST DAY EVER**, by **Seth Allen**.*

I woke up to the nice smell of fresh gym socks. My head came out of bed as my feet followed. The floor slowly dissolved as a gigantic blue bunny sucked me up, and I hit the kitchen. "Hi, Dad; hi, Mom. Breakfast smells good," I said.

My parents replied, "Thanks, Sam."

"Did I tell you guys about Janitor 101?" I mumbled over the chewing of my gym socks.

My parents replied, "You know that class is useless, and being a janitor is dumb."

From outside I heard the screech of the school gigantic flying monkey. The roar of his screaming rose over the sound of my saying goodbye to my parents. I flew to the monkey slowly (I have butterfly wings). The giant mouth opened and let me in.

Let me introduce you to everybody.

First there is That Guy. No one knows his name for sure, or where he lives, where he is from, and what he looks like (he wears a green hat with holes over his face). That doesn't matter, because he has been my best friend since third grade. Then there is the queen of evil, Sarah. She has been my worst enemy since forever. She also dresses like a dork in pink bow, pink shoes, pink shirt, pink pants and pink everything. What a nerd. Lastly there is

me, Sam Johnson. To tell you the truth, I am a nerd. None of the girls notice me; I do ok in school and only have one friend. Oh, yeah, my family is sort of poor, so I have to wear rags.

I feel the slowing down of the giant monkey as it stops at planet bdhfbgjdkjskjfdghfkggkjhgfkjgdfkgh. That's where school is located.

I walk out of the school ship while talking to That Guy as the principal Mr.bjfkjfsdkjdfhgkxjvncjkbvncxvjknbvj xncjkb gives me a mean glare. We call him "Mr. B" for short. I hear the bell ring. I think to myself, *Oh, no, I'm late*. I run into my class and get a tardy slip.

My first class is science. My teacher is Albert Einstein. I think you know who he is. "Sam, you get a tardy slip. That's strike one," Mr. Einstein says to me fast.

I sit down in my sleep as Mr. Einstein continues with telling the class and me what we are going to do today. I start drooling as my eyes slowly close. "That is strike number two!" Mr. Einstein yells as my head bounces up from my desk.

We put on white lab coats and test glasses. Mr. Einstein presses a big red button. Then a portal opens. The class and I step through a giant portal that swirls with a variety of colors. On the other side I see millions and millions of

orange stars, and there is a purple ball with blue spots in the distance. I notice that's Earth. We went through a portal to a different dimension. Then there is a white flash, and I see my neighborhood. The people are humans, but they are green and have white hair, and everyone is 30 feet tall. Then Mr. Einstein said it was time to leave we left, but I was mad.

I speed to my next class, almost zooming by it as I smacked into the door. This class is Janitor 101. I know what you're thinking: *Boring*. This class is actually pretty fun. The janitor starts talking, and he is interrupted by the intercom. "Code 933255 in sector g32 goal is code 443 clear."

"What does that mean?" I blurted.

The janitor replied, "There's some giant bugs in the downstairs boys' bathroom, and we need to exterminate

them."

The class and I were all equipped with laser bug zappers, a mop of a thousand spikes, and, lastly, a pole. The class and I speed down on the soap boards through the halls leaving a sparkling clean trail behind us. We turned and saw the enormous purple and black 23-legged-with-four-mouths-and-three-eyes bugs staring right at us. Did I mention there were four of them? We blasted the bugs with a laser, blasting a green beam that weakened the bugs. We spun are mops in the air, making the thorns spiral off and damage the bugs greatly. Lastly we hit the gigantic bugs rapidly with poles, and they are defeated.

Let me just tell you after this some extremely scary and weirder stuff happened that is blocked.

# What Happened Before

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*In the story **WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE** by Kayla Kathawa, Sara has these strange feelings that someone's watching her and that she's being followed. Will she be able to find out where it's all coming from? Read this story to find out.*

Walking home from school was an everyday routine. And it's never been a problem until my mysterious, invisible follower came along. My name's Sara and this is what happened.

It all started when one day it got really windy. It's November, but it hasn't snowed even though it's cold. When the wind started blowing, it was very hard to even see straight. Then it stopped. It just stopped completely. It was still cold, though.

But that wasn't the problem. I had this sudden, awful feeling that someone was watching and following me. I was on the sidewalk, and I looked to my left, my right, and behind me, but no one was there. But I still felt like it, and it was bugging me, so I ran all the way home without stopping.

I decided to tell my mother. She was asking me all sorts of questions like, "Well did you see anyone?" or "Was it just a joke from one of your friends?" When my father got home from work, she told him what happened. He suggested that my mother drive me home so that if there is someone there, he or she will see that I have a ride, and they'll leave me alone, if there even is someone.

And that's what we did. At the end of the school day, my mother was

waiting for me. As we walked to the car, she muttered, "We'll see what happens now." I waited for myself to feel comfortable, to feel relaxed and happy, but for some reason my whole body was tensing up. And I knew why right away.

I still felt like I was being followed and I was in the back seat of my mother's car! "How do you feel?" my mother asked me.

I decided to tell her the truth. "To be honest, mom, I think we're being followed."

She sped up a bit. "Honey, there's no cars behind us, and no one can keep up with our car, not even on a bike. What's up with you lately?"

I sighed and shook my head. "Mom, I can, like, sense it. You don't even know what it's like." She stared straight ahead and was biting her lip. I knew what she was thinking.

She thought I was going crazy. I mean, in a car, I knew I shouldn't have thought that we were being watched and followed but I couldn't help it. And now she was going to tell my father, and they'd try to get me a psychiatrist or something. How would I convince them?

When we got home, I ran to my room and slammed the door. I hoped



she understood I was mad at her for not believing me when I was so serious. Then something distracted me. The horrible feeling went away when I walked in the house. I could tell because it felt like a heavy weight was lifted from my shoulders, but when I got into my room, there was the feeling again. So I walked into the hallway, shut the door to my room, and felt nothing. When I walked back in, the force of...of whatever my mind was sensing was there again.

After a few days, I was irritated and terrified at the same time. How much longer could this go on? I didn't understand. *My problem*, I thought, *is that no one believes me*. But thinking these thoughts, I couldn't say that it was coincidental, that the feeling was even stronger when I walked into my room. Not so much as being followed, but being watched, or being stared at. I looked around my room, expecting to find nothing, as usual. But instead I got something much worse.

There was a person. He was male, and if I focused my eyes enough, I could see through him. I somehow just knew that if I tried to shove him my hands would go straight through his body, like nothing, but not quite, because he was a fog that was most definitely there, just like a ghost.

I tried to scream. My voice was gone, and as I stared at him in terror, my heart picked up its pace. His hair was long, and completely flat, going about half way down his back. His eyes were black, but they were scrunched up and you could tell he was scowling at me. His mouth opened to speak, and

his teeth were white like the rest of him but, standing out from the rest, were two huge, sharp-looking fangs.

His voice sent another wave of terror through me. No doubt my mom did not hear me screaming, because my voice came out so softly I could barely hear it myself.

"What are you doing in my house?" he demanded.

I swallowed loudly, and couldn't find it in me to get defensive. "This...this is my house," I choked out. His glare made me want to take five steps back, but I was pressed up against my closed window. I had staggered back when I saw him, and now I felt like it wasn't enough.

"I don't think so," he growled. "It's my house, and it's my room. I was born here, I lived here, and I died here. Died! I didn't deserve to die, not at all, but it happened. And no one told you or your filthy family you could live here. When I finally came home, I find all of these *living* people here. You would always walk back here, no matter how much I hoped you wouldn't. And now you've caught me. This means you have to leave, and leave soon, or terrible things will happen to you and your family. I'll give you four days. On the fourth, I expect this house, or at least my room, empty." As he said the last sentence, he began to fade, until he was gone. And I was alone.

I ran screaming down the stairs. My father had just gotten home. "Sara, what is it? What—?" My mother said. She and my father were in the living room, and they both stood up at the sight of me, completely horrified and

hyperventilating.

“I saw him, in my room. He was there! He told me we had to leave, and in four days or else...”

My parents walked toward me and stood in front of me. “Sara, Sara, slow down,” my father commanded me. “*Who* was in your room?”

I took a deep breath. “A ghost, sort of person, but not really here, the way we are. He told me! He told me what happened before. He told me it was HIS house, he was born here, lived his life here, and then went on and on about how he didn’t deserve to die, but he did, and he died here. And he said we have to leave or...or terrible things will happen to us. He gave us four days. Mom, we have to go. Please,” I begged. Then I remembered something. “Or just me. He said that the house or at least his room had to be empty. When he said his room he meant mine. It used to be his.”

My parents looked at each other, looking very concerned and worried. “Well...” she said. She could probably see the terrified look on my face because she said, “Sara, how about...you go live with your grandparents. I think this has gone on long enough. What do you think about that?”

She looked directly at my father. He sighed. “But she’s imagining things. Can you not tell?” he argued.

She seemed to think for a moment. “Yeah, well, I don’t want her to suffer, no matter what she’s imagining. It’s obviously this house.”

My father reluctantly and sadly agreed, but it took some convincing.

That night they helped me pack and my parents told me I had to sleep in my room. I didn’t sleep though. All night I stayed up, looking around my room, making sure I was safe enough to just be there. And I had decided that my parents would be safe, because they weren’t in my room. They promised they’d lock themselves out.

Grandma and Grandpa were all too welcoming, and the next day, I was gone. It was quick, and I stayed at the same school, and when I walked home the first day, I was nervous. But I realized I didn’t feel like I was being followed. I sighed and let the relief flood through me. Things were a little better.

One day, though, a worker came over to fix something for Grandpa in the bathroom. It happened to be something major, so he came by every week for a few weeks. Then, one day when he wasn’t here, I went up to the attic to get Grandma’s sewing kit, and I was a little afraid, because I had always been a little scared whenever I went up there.

Then I heard sound. I heard whispers. And they were coming from the walls. I grabbed the kit and ran downstairs. Grandma and Grandpa were sitting on the couch, and they asked me to come over to speak with them.

Grandpa told me that yesterday when I was at school, the worker had a heart attack in the bathroom, and they found him dead hours later, while I was in my room doing homework. He told me that they didn’t want me to see anything that would disturb me, so they

had Grandma come up and talk to me, and made sure I didn't leave my room while they removed the body.

As they were telling me this, I sat there, and made a horrible realization. That worker: He died in the bathroom in our house. And I just heard whispers in the attic when no one but me was up there. And there was that all-too-familiar feeling.

I took in the scene around me. I saw Grandma and Grandpa staring intently at me, waiting for my reaction. I

could smell the cookies that Grandma had made, probably for when they broke the news to me. Biting my lip nervously, I could just barely taste my lip balm, which was gross. *Stop!* I thought to myself. But I couldn't. I could hear my grandparents trying to see what was wrong with me. But I couldn't force myself out of this horrible thought.

The ghost of that man was haunting this house, I was positive of this.

"Oh no," I whispered. "Oh no!"

# The Whisperers

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In **THE WHISPERERS** by *David Sherwood*, a boy named Tom is innocently walking to school when he discovers he has powers beyond belief. Creatures called *The Whisperers* are hunting him down. Will he survive?

One day a boy named Tom was walking to school. He came to a crosswalk with the red hand. He waited for the white walking guy to appear and started to cross the street. He was halfway across when a drunk driver came up going twenty over and wasn't stopping. Tom obviously noticed this and stopped dead in his tracks, frozen from fear, and he closed his eyes. With less than a foot left between him and the car, Tom vanished into thin air and reappeared behind the car. The driver was too drunk to even see this, much less care about it. He just kept on driving. Tom just stood there with his eyes closed in the silence thinking he was dead. After a few seconds he opened his eyes and found that he was alive! Tom, still bewildered, continued his walk to school.

Right outside the school he could have sworn he saw a black blur race across his path, and he felt a tingling in his brain, but he quickly dismissed the thought. He got a detention for being late without parental permission. During that detention Tom got a lot of time to think over what had happened. He replayed the near-death situation over and over in his mind. He could remember seeing the car approach and seeing it drive off, but the time in between was all so fuzzy.

When school let out he started to trudging home still pondering the thought of what had happened earlier that day. All of the sudden he heard a whisper in his head telling him to go back to the school. He recognized it as his own thought but it didn't seem logical, it didn't have reason. Even though the conscious part of his brain did not agree with the thought and was trying to tell the unconscious part of his brain that it didn't make any sense, the unconscious part just did what it was told and turned back for the school.

Once he reached the doors of the school it happened again but this time the voice was telling him to stop. Then he just stood there and looked around trying to figure out what was happening. It was a cool, crisp afternoon; he could feel the breeze on his face; there was a slight howling as it passed through the trees. He could smell something, not a familiar smell, no, definitely not familiar, this was dark and evil. Then, suddenly, a black wispy cloud raced up to him and a black hooded figure materialized in front of him. The hood cast a shadow over the face so he could not see it clearly but he knew that something weird was obviously going on. "Who are you!" asked Tom. He was quite frightened.

*"I am a Whisperer."* It was the voice

again but these times more shrill and less like his, and it was obvious that the whole time the voice had been “The Whisperers.”

“*Who are you?*” inquired The Whisperer.

“I am Tom Smith,” he quaked. “What do you want from me!”

“*I want nothing from you,*” said the Whisperer. “*What I want is you.*”

The Whisperer swiftly moved forward as Tom stumbled back. Then the Whisperer leaped to consume Tom in the dark shadows of his robe. When the Whisperer rose and sang out, “*I got you now!*” He realized that the boy was gone! Vanished into thin air! Not a trace left behind!

Tom appeared in front of a man’s desk. “Where am I, who are you, what is this?” Tom exclaimed.

“Calm down, Tom. I am John, this is

my office, and what this is, nobody knows,” the man said in a soothing voice.

“Why am I here?” Tom asked.

“You are here for me to teach you.”

“So I’m sure you’re quite confused about all this,” John admitted.

“Yeah, tell me about it,” Tom replied in kind of a hissy tone.

“Well, let me enlighten you. Five years ago a man named Zarzac made these creatures called Whisperers. That is what attacked you today. The Whisperers go out looking for kids like you who haven’t mastered their powers for good. They can still be turned into savage beasts, which is why I am here right now. I am here to help kids like you so they can protect themselves from the Whisperers. Over the next few years, if you are up to it, I will train you to harness your powers and new ones, here in the brotherhood.”

# White Monster

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*In WHITE MONSTER by Steven Broussard, a teacher named Mr. Milkshake holds a big secret and thinks no one knows. But there is a boy named Marcus who knows the secret. Will Marcus tell anyone or keep it to himself?*

One sunny Friday morning, a boy by the name of Marcus Whitfield was at school and got a pass to go to the restroom. On his way to the bathroom, he walked past the teacher's lounge and heard mysterious noises. He slowly opened the door and saw a white, slimy monster. The monster put on skin that looked like a funny teacher by the name of Mr. Milkshake. He didn't know what to say because he was scared. He jolted down the hall in fear that the monster would catch him and eat his face off.

Marcus was totally out of breath from running but he didn't stop until he got to Mr. Excuseme, the principal. When he saw Mr. Excuseme, he sang like a bird, telling him all he witnessed in the bathroom. Marcus knew Mr. Excuseme was Mr. Milkshake's friend since childhood and they were like brothers. For that reason alone, Mr. Excuseme didn't believe his story. Although Marcus was upset that he didn't believe him, he had given up the story for a day because it was almost time to go home.

Marcus tried to convince his mother that Mr. Milkshake was a white slimy monster but she found his story too hard to believe. No one believed Marcus because he was a top notch

prankster at his school. Marcus tried to convince his ninety-eight-year-old grandpa and he said, "You are acting like a big sack of roasted nuts!" But he didn't believe him either. He even told his two-year-old brother and he didn't believe Marcus!

Marcus went back to school with an evil smile and determined face because he was going to somehow reveal Mr. Milkshake's secret. Upon returning to school, Marcus tried to convince everyone that Mr. Milkshake was a white, slimy monster. Nobody believed him because Mr. Milkshake was the nicest teacher at George Washington Middle School and everybody loved him, even the parents. Marcus continued to talk about his discovery so much so that he got a detention for talking about it during social studies class.

Marcus was sent to Mr. Excuseme's office. Mr. Excuseme said, "So you are trying to still pull this off?"

Marcus said, "Yes, I am because Mr. Milkshake is a big, white, slimy monster!"

When Marcus returned home, he hurried straight to his room, sat on the bed, and began bawling loudly because no one would believe his story. His mom came to the room and saw

Marcus crying.

She questioned, “What’s wrong, Son?”

Marcus replied, “Why doesn’t anybody believe me, Mom?”

The crazy mom answered, “Because you are acting like a sack of crazy nuts.” After that conversation he was frustrated because nobody believed him. Even after seeing Marcus upset, his mom still didn’t believe his story. After his mom left the room, Marcus called his mom a big sack of crazy nuts. After he packed up some chocolate because he knew Mr. Milkshake does not like chocolate. He thought, if Mr. Milkshake does not like chocolate, the monster won’t.

Marcus returned to school with a plan. When sixth hour comes, and it’s time for Mr. Milkshake’s class, he will have a plan already set up. Marcus completed his test in Mr. Milkshake’s class and went up to Mr. Milkshake’s

desk to ask him a question. As Marcus approached the desk, Mr. Milkshake smelled the scent of chocolate on Marcus. Mr. Milkshake quickly turned red and shed his skin. He grew so large it looked like he was going to explode. When the class saw this, they began to scream and run out of the classroom. His skin then turned white, slimy, and pale. After everybody left the classroom Marcus was chased by the white slimy monster. As the monster was chasing Marcus, he had his mouth opened and it looked like some green nasty mushy stuff was in the monster’s mouth. Marcus pulled out the chocolate and threw it into his mouth. The inside of the monster’s mouth had green slime sticking and hanging everywhere. The monster bit down on the chocolate bar and immediately began to melt.

The monster at George Washington Middle School was defeated and Marcus Whitfield became a hero!

# Who Said Anything About Being Ugly?

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*What would you do if you found out your step sister Cinderella had married the prince of your dreams and you were her replacement? In **WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT BEING UGLY?** by Amy Klezek, see what Stella does in this situation.*

**Y**ou've all heard of the story *Cinderella*, right? Well, you haven't heard the whole thing. There's really another stepsister not in the story. But I don't think she's ugly at all. She's actually quite beautiful, but not in the girly way. She's not girly at all. Her name is Stellalona. But you can call me Stell or Stella. That's right; I am Cinderella's third stepsister.

The reason you've never heard of me is that I have been in boarding school (or as I like to call it, boredom school) for the past five years, since I was five. But for some reason my mother, Lady Christell Tremaine, has suddenly sent for me to come home. I am not too terribly excited. What I remember of my sisters is they are mean, ugly, and just plain out evil! But maybe they're throwing me a birthday party! Tomorrow, May 15, is my birthday. They're probably throwing me the party because I haven't gotten any presents for the past five years. They didn't care about me.

Oh, I can see the castle now! Maybe the prince is at my party! I am going to marry him, in case you are wondering.

When I walk in I expect a big warm welcome, but instead, the whole castle

seems to be empty and a mess. Don't we have my stepsister as our maid? What's her name? Cinderella!

Suddenly my mother comes rushing down the hallway. I hold out my arms for a big hug. Mother just grabs my wrist in a tight fist, and starts pulling me.

"Where are we going?" I ask.

My mother replies, "To unpack your bags, of course."

"But my room is that way!" I inform, pointing in the opposite direction that we were going.

Mother doesn't say anything after that. When we get to the end of the attic room staircase she finally lets go of my wrist.

"What is going on?" I practically scream.

"You know our servant-stepsister Cinderella?" Mother asks. I nod. "She has... married the prince and gone off to live with him on the other side of the forest. He got banned from his house after his parents found out he married a maid, and we do not want them here, but with her gone there is no one to clean the castle. That is why I brought you home. By the way, we turned your old room into a closet for Anastasia and



Drizella, so you will sleep in the attic and do all the chores.” Impressive; she said that all in one breath.

“Wait, what?” I finally say after I take in all that information.

“I am not repeating myself!” she screams, and then storms off.

I trudge up the stairs into my dusty old room, and plop down on the hard bed. Dust goes flying everywhere. I just don’t understand. I was supposed to marry Prince Charming. And do all of the chores? Cinderella gets the sweet life! And I feel like Christell isn’t my mother anymore. I’ll just call her Christell from now on. I feel like sobbing, but crying is for wimps.

I spend a few hours in my room when I hear Christell call, “Anastasia, Drizella, supper time!”

Boy, am I hungry! I go downstairs to the feast hall, and I go past my old room. I peek in and see a bunch of pink, frilly dresses. A nightmare!

When I get to the feast hall I see Stais, Driz, and Mo—close one—Christell already eating. Man, my sisters are uglier than I remember!

“Stellalona” (my name is Stella), “you are not invited to this supper. Go over there and get some mush and eat in your room. Then when we are done eating you will clean this room until it is spotless. Okay?” Stais says in a snobby voice.

“Do I have a choice?” I snap back.

“No attitude, missy!” yells Driz.

I grab some mush and go in my room. I look at the disgusting meal before me when a little mouse catches my eye. I put the mush in front of him. He sniffs it, and then takes a bite. He

hesitates for a moment. I hope it’s not poison! But he likes it. He starts eating it as fast as he can. How cute! I could always use a little friend, so I name him Roger.

About two hours later I go downstairs to clean the feast hall. When I go in, I feel Cinderella’s pain. It’s like they purposely leave it a mess. It took them one and a half hours to eat, and it takes me four hours to clean it all up. By then it is very late and I am exhausted. When I go up to my room, I see Roger sleeping on my pillow. I don’t want to wake him, so I sleep on just my mattress. It is very uncomfortable, but eventually I fall asleep.

“Stellalona!” Christell yelled at me. “Get down here!”

“Coming!” I sleepily called back.

What time is it? I look at my clock. It’s 4:00 in the morning! Christell is crazy! Then I look at my calendar: May 14. I cannot believe it has been a whole year since I left boredom school. I miss that place.

“How many times have I told you to make, then unmake my bed before I go to sleep?” Christell was still yelling even though I was right next to her.

“I did do that,” I tried to explain, “but you cannot tell if I unmake it.”

“Lousy excuse. Double chores!” Christell said, still yelling, and then raged off.

“At least it’s not my birthday,” I muttered to myself. I had better get started.

As I was cleaning the floors, I thought about how Cinderella made her own future. I could do that, too. In a

flash I decided that I was going to live with Cinderella and Prince Charming on the other side of the forest. It's almost as good as marrying him.

I ran upstairs to pack my bags before I could even put the sponge and water away. After I packed and grabbed Roger, I stole some food from the feast hall. I've gotten good at this since I have been feeding my mush to Roger, and I need something to eat.

I started out the door when I realized that Christell could be watching me. So I waited until safety of night to leave. It was too dark to travel, so I slept on the outskirts of the forest.

I woke up to birds chirping and the sun rising. Then it hit me: It was my birthday! I'd better start walking. I was worrying about what might be in the forest when I heard a snap!

"Who's there?" I called out with fear in my voice.

No one answered. Just then, like in one of the books that my teacher at boredom school read, the leaves of a bush started to rustle, and just a bunny hopped out. All I did was laugh and went walking again. I heard some footsteps behind me, so I turned around quick. Oh, it's just the bunny. I guess she likes me. She deserves a name; um, Annie!

I got hungry, so I ate some of the bread that I had salvaged from the feast hall. Since I was so hungry, it tasted so good.

It was about the middle of the day when I heard a gunshot. I ducked down to keep from getting hit. It was probably just a harmless hunter. I thought that if he saw me I would have

to go back to my house, and get in a lot of trouble, so I began to run toward the speck of light in front of me.

After a few seconds of running, I tripped and fell on a root. I screamed because it hurt so badly. The hunter ran up to me. My ankle hurt terribly, but I refused to talk to the man.

He asked me, "Where are you heading?"

I had to tell him, "To the other side of the forest."

"Oh, I can take you in my carriage."

I wanted to do this on my own, but I couldn't walk very well, so I nodded in approval. I picked up Roger and Annie, and limped to his carriage. He looked at me strangely, like he thought he knew me or something. All I did was shrug.

Once we got to the other side of the forest, there was a house, and I wasn't sure if there were any more for miles. After we passed that one house I said, "It's just a little ways up, so I'll walk from here. Thank you."

I hopped out of the carriage and waited until the hunter was gone to limp back to the house. When I got to the house, there were shining, silver cups and plates everywhere with *Cinderella* engraved on them. It was definitely the right house. As I was admiring the silver, Cinderella walked into the room.

"Who are you?" she shrieked.

"I am Stellalona, your stepsister. When you left, Mother—I mean Christell—made me do all of the chores, and I was sick and tired of it, so I came here to live with you and Prince Charming. I hope you're not mad at me," I explained. I guess I get my high

lung capacity from Christell.

“Of course I’m not mad,” Cinderella said sincerely. “I have always wanted a nice little sister. We’ll make it a surprise to my husband. He is out hunting.”

Hunting? All of a sudden the hunter walked in. I can’t believe I didn’t recognize him!

“What’s she doing here?” Prince Charming was clearly confused.

Cinderella explained to him about how I was going to be living with them, and then Annie and Roger hopped out from hiding in my suitcase.

“I love animals!” Cinderella said. That made everybody laugh.

Then we finally had my coming-home-from-boredom-school family hug, including Roger and Annie. That was the best birthday present ever.

# The Wizards' Quest

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*Twins Justin and Joel have no reason to think they are anything but ordinary kids. However, when they reach their thirteenth birthday, they are in for a fantastic surprise in **THE WIZARDS' QUEST**, by **Harmonie Willis**.*

February 29 had finally arrived. It was Justin and Joel's birthday. They were identical twins who were very close.

Mom had put a lot of work into their 13th birthday party. It was time to sing "Happy Birthday" and to blow the candles out. The sheet cake was large enough to feed 60 people. One half was vanilla, and the other half was chocolate. Justin and Joel had very different tastes. Justin preferred chocolate. Joel preferred vanilla.

Fifty-two of the fifty-four invited guests were present. There was a knock at the door. Mom ran to the front door. After she had opened it up, she angrily said, "Mark, it is about time you got here."

Dad replied, "Crystal, please don't start. Let's not forget it is a birthday celebration."

Just then Granddad Miller pushed past Dad and walked into the house. "Where are the birthday boys?" he said.

Justin and Joel shouted, "Granddad!" together as they ran toward him. They gave him a hug as he gave them a wrapped gift. They then gave their dad a hug. He, too, handed them several wrapped gifts. Justin and Joel placed the gifts on the gift table.

"Mark, could you please light the candles?" Mom said.

"Sure," he replied.

After the candles were lit, "Happy Birthday" was sung. Justin and Joel made a wish. They then proceeded to blow out the candles.

As they were blowing out the candles, the strangest thing happened. The fire from the individual candles united into one and swirled into a two-foot tall mini tornado. Then a large banging noise was heard. The fire disappeared. Everyone shouted, "Wow, what kind of candles were those?"

Dad said, "Crystal, where did you get those candles? They could have caused a fire."

"I got them from the Disney store. They were supposed to be ordinary candles."

Justin and Joel then began to open their gifts at the gift table. When they opened the gift from Granddad Miller, they discovered it was a Nintendo Wii. They were so excited about having the Wii they gave Granddad Miller another hug. Then they opened the gifts their dad had given them. Dad had given them an extra controller and Nunchuks so they could play at the same time. He had also given them five games. After the party, Dad and Granddad left. Dad had lived with Granddad since the divorce.

Justin and Joel couldn't wait to play

with their Nintendo Wii. After the party was over, they assembled the game. They each strapped a controller to their wrist. Then Justin motioned his hand toward the 73-inch TV. A sonic wave went from his hand causing the screen to blow out and shatter.

“What are you boys doing?” Mom screamed as she ran into the living room. Her face was beet red. Her eyes were large peering from their sockets as she went on saying, “Every time I look around, you boys are tearing something up! As soon as I fix something you boys break something else. Justin and Joel, I worked very hard to get that TV. Do you boys know the value of things?”

Justin said, “Mom, we didn’t do anything. Honestly, I just pointed the controller toward the screen, and the screen just blew out.”

“Did you throw something at it?” she replied.

“No, Mom, we were just sitting here,” Joel replied. “Can we try the other TV in the basement?” Joel asked.

Mom replied, “How do I know you will not break it, too?”

“Mom, we didn’t touch the TV. Maybe it has a defective part.”

“You can use the TV downstairs. But you must first clean up the glass. Please be careful. I can’t afford another accident like this.”

Justin and Joel attached the game to the basement TV. Justin said, “You go first this time. I don’t know what I did wrong. Maybe you will have better luck.”

Joel motioned the controller toward the TV. A lightning bolt proceeded

from his hand, blowing out the screen and knocking the TV off of the stand onto the floor. The loud, thunderous noise from the impact of the lightning bolt was very loud, causing both of the twins’ ears to ring.

“What are you boys doing?” Mom shouted. “I work too hard for you boys to tear up everything!”

“Mom, you wouldn’t believe this. A lightning bolt came from my hand and knocked the TV on the floor,” Joel said.

“Don’t lie to me. You boys had to be horsing around. Lightning bolts don’t come from your hands. Go to your room until you can tell me the truth.”

Justin and Joel went to their room. “How can Mom think we’re lying? I just gestured like this,” Joel said. Before he could finish speaking, suddenly another lightning bolt shot out and made a hole in the wall.

“How did you do that?” Justin shouted frantically.

“I don’t know!” he shouted.

“You’d better put the dresser in front of the hole in the wall before Mom really gets angry.”

Shortly after they moved the dresser, Mom ran in, saying, “What was that noise I heard? Oh, you moved the dresser. Why?”

“It looks better here,” Joel replied.

“Are you boys ready to tell me the real story of how the TVs got damaged?”

“Mom, we told you the truth, but you don’t believe us,” they said in unison.

“All right,” she shouted angrily. “I

am going to call your dad. We need to get you boys in counseling. You just have not been behaving right ever since your father and I split up. I'm calling you dad right now!"

Mom picked up the phone to call Dad. The first time she called she got his answering machine. Being frustrated, she instantly hung up and hit the redial button. When he picked up the phone she unleashed her frustration, saying, "Mark, you have to talk to your sons. They have broken both TVs, and now they are saying lightning bolts came from their hands and knocked the TV off the stand. I could have made a better excuse than that. They are lying. I gave them a chance to admit they had been horsing around, but they are holding to their lame lightning excuse."

"Did you say a lightning bolt?" Mark replied. "Well that is great news! They are normal."

"What do you mean 'they are normal'?"

"I never told you that my father is a full-blood wizard. That makes me a half-blood wizard. The magical powers of being a half-blood wizard skipped me, so I just assumed it would skip the boys, too. But it has not."

"They're half-blood wizards? What is a half-blood wizard?" said Crystal.

"A half-blood wizard is the offspring of a wizard and a human."

"Well, why didn't you tell me this before?"

"I told you since the wizard gene had skipped me I assumed it would skip the boys, too, and I didn't want to scare you."

"Mark, this is freaking me out. Wizards aren't real. Wizards are fictional characters you read about in books and see in movies."

"Crystal, wizards are real. I've seen my father do things you would not believe."

"You're telling me my sons can do paranormal things?" Crystal said.

"Crystal, you've got to believe me! Are you in the room with the boys?"

"Yes," she replied.

"If the boys are indeed wizards, they are in grave danger. Listen carefully, Crystal, and do exactly as I tell you. We need to find out if the boys are wizards. What I am telling you may seem stupid. It is not. What I am about to tell you to have them say could put their lives at risk. So if it works, tell me immediately so dad and I can get there immediately. Have them chant 'To escape, levitate' three times."

"What is that going to do?"

"Crystal, work with me here. Have them say it!"

"Oooo-kay... Boys, say 'To escape, levitate' three times."

"Why?" the boys replied.

"Just do what I say!" she shouted.

In the background Dad could hear Justin and Joel saying, "To escape, levitate – To escape, levitate – To escape, levitate." Then suddenly Mom screamed into the phone, "Mark they are floating in the air!"

"That's great news. Our sons are wizards! We have two days to get them to the King of Blood Wizards so they can be accepted by him. I will bring my dad, since he knows where the King of Blood Wizard's throne is. He will help

protect and guide us toward the Wizard's Kingdom. Keep the boys in your sight. They are in great danger. Now that they have performed their first intentional wizardly act, their aura can be sensed by other wizards, good or evil."

"Justin and Joel, your dad and granddad are coming by to get you. Get yourself one change of clothes each. By now you should know there is something special about you. I am sorry I accused you of lying. It turns out you are half-blood wizards. The things you experienced are because of that. You are in serious danger until you are accepted by the King of Blood Wizards."

"Mom, will we need dress shoes?"

"No, just wear your gym shoes. You will have to travel quickly."

Just then a knock could be heard at the door. Dad and granddad were here. Mom ran to the door and let them in.

"Are the boys ready?" they asked.

Just then Justin and Joel entered the room, saying, "We are ready."

"Tell your mom good-bye," Dad said. "Crystal, they are in good hands. We will be back in a couple of days." Then they left in a hurry.

Dad was driving Granddad Miller's BMW. He was driving at about 80 miles per hour.

"Dad, why are you going so fast?"

"We have to get you to the King of Blood Wizards as soon as we can. As we speak, there are evil forces seeking your destruction."

Then suddenly the sky became dark. When they looked up, they

noticed flying creatures swarming in the sky, converging down toward the vehicle. They were red and had razor-sharp teeth. Their wings resembled the wings of a bat. Their feet and hands had three-inch claws. They were very aggressive, sometime attacking each other. Grayish green saliva dripped from their mouths. They made a high-pitched squeal as they attacked.

They flew straight toward the windows. A screeching noise was made as their claws scraped the glass. The noise resembled the sound of someone scraping fingernails on a chalkboard. Tears could be seen in the sheet metal of the hood where the claws of the red winged demons had penetrated. There were more than 100 of these red-winged demons.

The twins were very scared. They had never seen creatures like this before. There were so many demons on the car that Dad was forced to stop because he could not see.

Grandfather mumbled, "Sonic boom sends them to doom" three times. Then he paused, and energy built up in his hand. He gestured his hands toward the front of the car. The demons in front of the car shattered into small pieces. The demons on the sides of the car took their places.

"Justin and Joel, I can not defeat this many demons by myself. I need your help," Grandpa said. "Do as I just did, and together we can destroy the demons. Justin, you point toward your left, and Joel, point toward the right. I will point toward the front." They all chanted together. The force of the blast obliterated all of the red-winged

demons into little glass shards. The car's bulletproof windows did not shatter.

Justin said, "That was close. Where did they come from?"

"The Prince of Lost Wizards sent them out because he seeks your life. He is going to be very angry when he finds out you destroyed his demons."

As they drove over the remains of the red blood demons, the sound of crunching glass could be heard. Soon the crunching ceased, and they were again traveling at eighty miles per hour.

At about 3:30 A.M., Granddad Miller said, "Slow down. We should be coming upon the entrance of the shadow world soon.... There it is. Drive through the mountainside."

Mark drove toward the mountainside and stopped.

"Mark, I said drive *through* the mountainside, not *to* the mountainside."

Mark, trusting his dad, did as his dad told him. As the car touched the side of the mountain, the exterior of the mountain rippled like water, and the car went through.

Inside the wall they continued on the road for about a half hour. As soon as they reached the shadow world of the King of Blood Wizards, Granddad Miller said, "We are safe now. I suggest we get some sleep. We will need to be alert when we speak with the King of Blood Wizards. We will have to go to the acceptance hall first thing."

"Wake up, Justin and Joel! Wake up, Mark. It is time. We must register before it is too late."

Justin and Joel moaned in protest. They had just entered level three sleep

and were abruptly taken out of it.

On the walk toward the hall, the sights were amazing. There were talking trees. There were people appearing and disappearing. The place was magical.

"Did you see that?" Justin said.

"Wizards don't travel as mere mortal men. This is not efficient for wizards," replied Granddad Miller.

When they entered the hall, one of the hosts said, "You barely made it. The King of Blood Wizards will see you in a moment."

Just then another host opened the door to the coronation hall and said, "You may enter."

The hall was splendid. In the front of the hall sat the King of Blood Wizards. His throne was made of pure gold with armrests of pure silver. The King of Blood Wizards was 16 feet tall. His face, hands, and feet shone brightly. The rest of his body was covered by a purple robe. His subjects were as tall as he.

Upon entering the hall, Granddad Miller said, "Follow me," and he walked toward the throne in the front.

On both sides of the hall were guards armed with swords. Their faces were stern, with only one eyeball in the center of each side. Dad could not enter the hall because he did not have any magical powers.

Once Granddad reached the front he walked to the side and told the boys to go on before him. He then bowed down, so Justin and Joel bowed down, too.

The King of Blood Wizards stood and drew his sword. He passed it over



the boys' heads, starting on the right side and going to the left.

Then he said, "I know Wizard Miller. He is a great man. I don't need to ask who will mentor you. I know

you are in great hands. Listen to him carefully and follow his example. He will guide you correctly. I hereby anoint each of you a certified Blood Wizard."

# The Yell

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*A good neighbor will help other neighbors in need. And if he knows karate, that's even better! If only we all had neighbors like the main character in **THE YELL**, by **Abdur-Saamad Ali**.*

It was a hot summer's day. All of a sudden I heard the yell.

My first thought was either someone was murdered or someone was watching *Remedial Golf*. *Remedial Golf* was the worst and most boring show found on ESPN. Murder was the scariest thing found in natural life. I just ignored it and went back to my playing of video games.

I got bored and decided to go out to investigate. But first I took off my usual clothes and put on this spy-like jumpsuit. I took along ten dog biscuits, my kung fu skills, and two of my nunchuks. I told my father I was going out, and he said, "Ok, just come back alive." I jumped out of my window and went toward the house where I thought the scream came from.

When I got there, there were these men with big sticks. There were too many goons to handle. So I had to go undercover. This was do-or-die stuff.

I threw a rock behind them. I couldn't believe my eyes—they actually fell for it. They looked behind them.

I knew I didn't have much time, so I made a run for it to get under a car. I did my best impression of a mean old lady. "Boys, I want you to go shopping," I said. They all left for the store.

I stood up, and guess what? I saw a huge dog beast, so I threw a large dog biscuit at it. The dog beast stopped

barking.

I went inside to investigate the murder or torture. I didn't find anything suspicious. I was just about to call it quits, but then a stroke of light shone in a room. All of a sudden a voice talked to me. It said, "Go to the shine of light. It will give you power."

I walked over to the shine of light, and it actually gave me power!

As soon as I walked out, I was ambushed. The person pulled my shirt down, so I immediately punched him in the stomach and flipped him with a loud roar. But sadly, I had wakened some sleeping guards that should have been watching the entrance. They came into the house, but this time with new weapons. They had gotten wooden and metal staffs and nunchuks.

They had seen me, so I took off my shirt and used my nunchuks. I started swinging the nunchuks around. They started making a swooshing sound. Then at the end the metal chain was in my armpit, and I made a "bah can" sound.

They all came at me. I hit them in the head. They were unconscious.

I looked in the TV room, and you'll never guess what I saw. I saw five women tied into one chair watching *Remedial Golf*. It had been *Remedial Golf* after all.

Why did they do that? Well, it was prank day.

# Zombie Mountain

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*Jake wakes up one morning expecting to start his day like any other normal day. He suddenly realizes he is wrong—dead wrong. Will he survive in*

**ZOMBIE MOUNTAIN, by Jake G.?**

One beautiful morning I woke up and obviously I was looking through a window on an airplane. This Horde (a Horde is an alien who is aggressive and hot-tempered) took a knife and tried to stab me. I dodged the knife, and then went to the back door of the airplane. The door was open. Then there was this jetpack with wings hooked on to the airplane. I jumped and my heart sank because I thought I was going to die, so I closed my eyes. How dumb of me to think that, but the airplane was coming after me!

I flew backwards and landed on the airplane. I finally figured out that I had a ninja suit on. It was black and white. There was a red headband on my head. I landed on a mountain called Zombie Mountain. I got sucked under the mountain. I don't know why I was under the mountain, but I could hear footsteps. I looked up and there was a vent. I jumped up and broke the vent as soon as I got in the science lab. I put the vent right where it was. So that was over, luckily! When I went in the lab, I got pushed into a machine by a scientist. I fell asleep because the scientist injected me with a serum.

When I woke up I was in a lava tank. But I wasn't dying because it looked hot, but the tank wasn't hot so I got out of the tank with a burst. I had

super kung fu moves and claws! I was so fast you couldn't even see what I was doing. I had to go for the cure to the serum that was on the table. Teaser, my arch nemesis, stopped me and threw me out of the building. So I was falling and I just remembered I had the jet pack. Next, I turned it on and right when I was about to hit the floor I flew back up and flew as fast as I could and busted Teaser into the wall. He was hurt so bad that he couldn't even get back up. I got the serum and put it in myself. I became dizzy and fell and then this beast came along and said, "If you defeat me you get the crystal."

So I pounded the monster into the building. Then, as soon as Teaser was about to get up, I threw the monster and smashed him into the building. The building fell and pounded Teaser. He said, "I'll never ever fight you again!" and he gave me the crystal. Right before everything turned back to normal I had a flash back about myself. I realized I was a secret agent. As soon as everything went back to normal a bad guy took the crystal from me and flew up to a spaceship that was going to the moon. But before it could even get to the moon, I threw a rock at it and it fell. The crystal fell and I caught it because I started flying. I fell and I was on my

bed. Did that really happen? I tried to use my claws and they worked! But I promised myself not to tell anyone I could do that...

I'M BACK! I'm here to say more about the story because I know you're all wondering why the Hordes were trying to get me. They were trying to get me because I did something very bad to their planet; I blew it up, because I am a part of a secret agency. But the Hordes restored their planet. So this is the second part of my story. I now need to blow up the planet again, but I have to kill their serum first. If it touches

anything, it gets stronger and stronger and stronger. Since it only touched my hands my claws got longer. But I also got fangs, and grew bigger. When I get punched a lot, I'll back up into the darkness and come back as a big monster. I can yell so loud that you can hear it from very far away.

After I woke up I remembered everything about myself. But as soon as I knew it, I was on top of a building! I fainted because it was the biggest skyscraper. I fell on the ground because it was so horrific. The next thing I knew, I was in my bed again!

UP FOR THE CHALLENGE



# The Cave of No Return

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*A group of kids wander to the basement of an old, deserted house. They are trapped in the secret cave. To see if they ever see daylight again, read **THE CAVE OF NO RETURN**, by **Brandon Bradshaw**.*

One day, when Jack and Alex found an old abandoned house on the outskirts of their town, Kale, they thought it would be the perfect club house to share with their friends, Lindsey and Emily. Seeing as how it was already furnished and had hard wood flooring, old chairs and sofas, it was all set. After Jack and Alex got back to their house they called Lindsey and Emily to tell them the good news.

The following Friday afternoon, Jack, Alex, Lindsey and Emily looked around the old house. They discovered it had working electricity so they turned all of the switches on in the middle floor of the old house and all of the lights turned on. Emily found a door and was scared to open it. Emily yelled, “Jack can you help me with something?”

Jack came in the room and asked, “Ok Emily what do you need help with?”

Emily whispered, “Well, I’m kind of afraid to open this door. Can you open it for me?”

Jack said, “Fine I will open the door.” So Jack opened the door slowly and inside the door there was a stairway leading down. Jack was very tempted to go down there, but he thought it would be the right thing to go down with everybody. He yelled for Alex and

Lindsey to come and check it out.

After Alex and Lindsey came to the stairway, they both wanted to go and check it out. They all went down the stairs one at a time. First Alex; then Lindsey; then Jack; and finally Emily came down and found a little light switch and turned it on.

In the blink of an eye, the whole basement was full of light and there saw many old, strange items. There were cardboard boxes with mildew stains scattered everywhere. Old furniture had dust covers on them so they were most likely clean, and then it happened. Jack found a little handle sticking out of the floor. Jack thought about pulling it open. When no one was looking, Jack bent down and pulled the handle and a small square of dust covered wood opened in to a small cavern under the floor. Jack was confused. He thought to himself how could there be an underground cavern under an old house like this? When Jack closed the trapdoor he told the others about his discovery. They did not believe him one bit, so he went over to the same spot and lifted the handle. Of course it opened and everybody gasped, except Jack because he had already seen it. When the silence was broken, Jack had decided to go down and check it out, but he did not go alone. He asked

around to see if anyone wanted to come down with him and the only person who wanted to go was Lindsey.

After getting a small lantern they were ready to go down. First Alex threw a piece of cement to see how far down it was. The sound was only three feet away so Jack jumped down and told Lindsey to jump so he could catch her. Lindsey jumped and landed in Jack's arms. When the small lantern was hoisted down and turned on, it was so bright it lit up the whole room, which was really a cave, and a big one, too. There was a wooden chest at the corner of one side of the cave and a key on the

other, so Jack went to investigate the chest, and Lindsey went to get the key. She gave it to Jack. Jack unlocked the old wooden chest. He found that it was not empty or full but it had a ladder in it leading to who knows where. After testing the ladder and making sure that it was sturdy, Jack started down and Lindsey followed. After Jack got to the bottom it was another cave and it was larger than the last one. The light from the lantern lit up the walls. Suddenly the ladder fell and the noise of the chest loudly meant that Jack and Lindsey were trapped deep underground with no way out.



# Daddy?

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*In DADDY? by Rebekah Hafen, Johnny and his family live near Pearl Harbor in 1941. Johnny's dad, Thomas, works at the military base there when it is bombed by the Japanese. Johnny and his mom desperately wait for the news. Will Thomas come home alive?*

“Check mate,” Dad said.  
“Awwww, no fair,” I whined.

Dad said it was time for bed, but I didn't feel like sleeping. I was too nervous. Dad got a new job at the military base at Pearl Harbor on the U.S.S. Oklahoma. He was taking a break and had to go back to work tomorrow morning. Every night, me and my mom worry that one day, we'll wake up and Dad won't be there. I went to bed anyway.

“Night, Dad, love you,” I said as I kissed his cheek.

“Love you too, Johnny.”

When I woke up, Dad was long gone. He wakes up really early! In fact, he's up before the sun is! I went to eat breakfast. Mom made me some really good oatmeal (I added sugar to make it better). I was almost late for school because I was thinking of my dad. He did so many things for me like, build toys, play with me, be happy, and best of all, take me to his work when I didn't have school. Those were my favorite days! Anyway, I left just in time. I hate school and church. They're so boring and I always get antsy to go home after school and see my dad. The only good thing about school was seeing my friends and recess. I love recess. First

grade is about the worst thing that's ever happened to me.

When I walked into the driveway, Dad was waiting for me. He was home early! We had mashed potatoes and ham for dinner, my favorite! Then we played tag for two whole hours—awesome! Then the normal bedtime routine... my least favorite part of the day, besides school and church. When I woke up I knew I wouldn't see my dad again for a week because he was going out to sea to do some tests on the boat he works on, the U.S.S. Oklahoma. He couldn't tell me and my mom exactly what he was working on though because he says it is classified (what ever that means). I didn't want to go to school at all the next day- I was too sad.

I cried the whole day. My mom tried to make me feel better but then she started crying too. My friend Billy saw me crying at school and told his mom (they, the Jensens, were our family's closet friends). After a while, they brought us dinner and lots of brownies. I didn't eat anything. That night, when I was crying myself to sleep, I heard my mom and Mrs. Jensen talking.

“Everything will be fine, Emily. Thomas will be home at the end of the week, just like he said,” Mrs. Jensen

exclaimed soothingly.

“I know, but this is the longest he’s ever been away from home. Johnny and I are worried sick something will go wrong,” Mom said as she cried.

“You and Thomas discussed this before he took this job; you knew that there were risks involved and that there was a small chance of them actually happening. And you knew that there would be some times when he would be away from home. Thomas loves his job, is good at it, and you know that. Now go to bed and get some sleep, you can call me in the morning.”

“Thank you, Martha. Good night.” Mom put the phone down as she sighed and tried to calm herself down.

“Good night, Emily.”

Then mom started crying again. She finally stopped a while later. She cried herself to sleep; just like I did. The next day, I told my mom I wanted to sleep in instead of go to school; she let me. Mom made me go to school for the rest of the week.

Mom once told me that the U.S. was trying to make peace with Japan and that it was a long process but she thought that the papers would be signed soon. Some countries were at war with each other in World War II. My dad signed up for the navy to protect the U.S. from going to war too. That is why my mom was nervous when Dad signed up for the navy. She thought that if the U.S. did go to war then my dad would be injured. My dad tried to explain that nothing would happen, but she wasn’t convinced.

My mom woke me up at 7:00 every day except Saturdays. I don’t know why

she wakes me up early on Sundays but she does. The week was torture! Finally, Saturday came. I slept in for a long time! When I went down to eat breakfast, mom was listening to the radio. I was always half asleep when I ate breakfast. I was slouched over my oatmeal when I heard the news come on. I jerked awake when I heard a special come on about the effort to make peace with Japan. I heard that they were currently figuring out what a message from Japan said. I was jumping up crying and yelling when they said that they thought Japan might be planning an attack. Then my mom tried soothing me by telling me that it could be anywhere, not just Hawaii. It worked, I was officially soothed.

*The next day, my mom woke me up at 7:00. I started to get ready when I heard a big boom and what sounded like a big wave. From my front window, I had an awesome view of the Pacific Ocean. I ran to the window in the living room as fast as I could. When I looked out, I was terrified! Instead of seeing the sun rise, there was smoke, lots of black smoke, and orange, fire. The fire was on the ships! I was so scared! Then, I saw a black oval thing falling from a plane. It landed on the ship with a bang, then, more fire. Under all the noise, I heard mom listening to the radio, again. Suddenly, I heard a scream and the radio get louder.*

The voice said, “We have just received a message from the Military base at Pearl Harbor.....IT’S UNDER ATTACK! All military personnel are to report to their stations at once!” The voice got louder and more frantic as he continued. “Stay tuned for more information.”

At first I didn't realize that that was where my dad worked, neither did my mom. Then my mom and I realized that my dad was under attack! My mom called the Jensens and told them to, come over immediately. We both started crying and praying that Dad would be all right. Just as the Jensens walked in, the radio announcer came back on.

"We now have information on the wave that just left. There were 183 Japanese planes! No report on how many injured or killed yet. The worst of it is probably over now"

Later that day I realized, how wrong that announcer was. We cried and prayed the rest of the day with the Jensens. Near the end of the day we got a "full" report on what had happened that day.

"As we know, the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor at the military base." The announcer said, "The first wave contained of 184 Japanese planes. The second wave contained 167 Japanese planes. There is still no exact count of anything else. We will hopefully know more tomorrow. This is Nathan Smith signing off."

Mom and I didn't get any sleep that night. We hadn't heard anything from Dad saying that he was okay...or hurt. The Jensens stayed overnight with us just in case. I am too proud of my dad for him to die now. And he was way too proud of me to die too. I just wish that death and enemies didn't exist. The world would be soooo much better. I wish I could help somehow. *What am I thinking! I'm only 7 years old! What could a 7 year old possibly do to help?!* I sobbed.

We listened to the radio today. We finally got a number report!

"This is Nathan Smith signing on. Okay, A number report." He took a deep breath, "There were 51 'Val' dive bombers, 40 'Kate' torpedo bombers, 50 high level bombers, and 43 'Zero' fighters in the Japanese first wave. Eight U.S. battleships were damaged including 5 sunk. Three cruisers, destroyers, and vessels were lost along with 188 aircraft. As for survivors...There were 2,335 servicemen killed, 63 civilians killed, and 1,178 injured. 1,104 of these were all from the U.S.S. Arizona. Pray for those who are injured and any families of those people. This is Nathan Smith signing off." He sounded sadder as he went.

A week later, my mom and I received a letter from the base hospital. We had Mrs. Jensen read it for us. It said that Dad survived the attack and was able to swim to shore and find shelter. We were all happy.... until she kept reading. It said that he was severely injured and that there was a chance he could die but they would try their best. Everyone cried with that news.

Three weeks later we were getting worried because we hadn't received a letter in quite some time. The next day, we got a letter. It said that Dad was a strong man and was recovering well, but they would have to keep him for at least another week.

One and a half weeks later, we got another letter saying that Dad could come home tomorrow! We were all so excited that he could come home! When he came home, I cried-so did mom. I was crying for joy- and sadness. He had bruises and scars all over his

face and everywhere else. He also had a broken arm which disappointed me. He couldn't lift me anymore. But at least he was alive, others weren't as lucky as me. He was so happy and relieved to see us!

His arm got better by the next week, but he was coming down with a cough. We knew this wasn't good because of the hypothermia he hadn't fully recovered from yet and what he had been through the past two months. We called the nurse and when she came over... you don't want to know- I didn't want to know! She said that we might not be as lucky as before. A week later, he was gone. My own dad who loved his family so much

and whose family loved him...dead! I didn't go back to school for weeks. It was hard enough having him gone for 1 ½ months, but forever! I couldn't take it! I cried so much I couldn't breathe.

After a month I finally pulled it all together and went to school. I knew Daddy was happy where he was. He could finally be with God, watching over us. He always said if anything happened to be happy because he was happy where he was watching over us. Those words always made me feel so happy! I know whatever happens in life I always need to stay happy because he's always watching over me.

# Dance Tournament

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*Tiffany loves to dance, but when it begins to interfere with her school work, her mother demands that she quit. Tiffany now has to prove to her mom that she can keep her grades up and still continue dancing. Can she do it in **DANCE TOURNAMENT** by *Delphine Maddox*.*

**H**i, my name is Tiffany Glenn. I have been dancing since I was three and half years old. I'm in a dance group at the Zone Dance Studio. I'm finally old enough to be a competitive dancer at age ten. When I tried out they said I was better than most kids who are two levels ahead of me. Most kids my age don't get to learn Pointe, but I do. Now I will need to do way more work. Since I have regular classes and competition dance classes, I go to dance everyday.

Our first competition was against my old dance school so I saw a lot of my old friends. They were as happy to see me as I was to see them. My dance instructor said I couldn't talk to them because I had to stretch. I was so fascinated with all of the dancers! Some dancers did back flips to stretch. I couldn't quite do a back flip. I came close by doing a back walkover. Some dancers did cartwheels with no hands as stretching. I began to worry about the competition. Then my teacher said not to worry. She reminded me that those dancers were doing gymnastics and we were here for dance. I began to feel better. My friends and I stretched by doing the splits, back walkovers, and other things. Some of the dancers on my team could do what the other teams

were doing and even more!

My whole family was there. I was so happy that my family came to see me! Seeing my family there gave me a lot of courage. Some people were being mean to me by saying that I was too little. But when we had our huddle, I felt so much better. We performed a lot of dances. My favorite dance was the jazz dance. We did all of our dances and we won! We got a big trophy! My teammates said my groups dance is what won it for us.

After that night of competition, the whole team went out for dinner at T.G.I Fridays. It was fun to see how all of my teammates acted outside of the dance environment. Later, I went to one of the dancer's house, Kendall, for a sleepover. We had somas and candy. We stayed up all night.

Right after breakfast we were suppose to go to dance. We loved dance but sometimes we just wanted to hang out.

"I just want to go to the movies sometimes," sighed Kendall.

"We always have to go practice. Sometimes I just want to hang out like other kids at my school," agreed Naya.

"Well, your dance school just called. They said you have to come to practice today. You don't want to be kicked off the team, do you?" argued Kendall's mom.

“I guess we’d better go. It won’t hurt anything. Plus we don’t want to be kicked of the team do we?” I sighed.

We ate breakfast at IHOP. Naya and I both had delicious strawberry pancakes with whipped cream and cream cheese. Kendall had the same thing except she had blueberries instead of strawberries. After we finished breakfast, we went shopping which made us late for practice. The other dancers had finished stretching already. Since we were late, we had to do twenty pushups, thirty jumping jacks, and twenty sit ups.

When we finished all of our exercises we had to learn our new routines. We practiced for hours. We started at 11:30 and didn’t end until 5:30 pm. We were exhausted by the time we finished. The instructor gave us a snack before we left for home. We were so happy to arrive home. My mom said that since we had worked so hard, we could go to the movies. She even let us order any snack we chose while we were there. I ordered some large popcorn. We saw *Avatar*. We had fun at the movies. We all told my mom thank you. Kendall lived the furthest away from us so on the way home, we dropped her off first. Then we took Naya home.

The next day we had another competition. I think that’s why we practiced so long the day before. I was so tired that I didn’t think that I could dance. I felt sick, but I didn’t want to let my team down. I knew that I had to compete. If I didn’t compete our team would have been short one person and ineligible to compete. When it was my turn, I just hoped that I could perform

well. I got up there and suddenly I felt so embarrassed. I had a drink of water to calm my nerves. Still I didn’t feel like dancing right now! All I want to do was go home and go to sleep. Since my coaches could tell that I was feeling shy and bashful, they used some encouraging words to make me feel better. I did my dance. I had begun to feel much better. It was my time to shine. But, I danced horribly. I had the worst score. I think my score was so low because I was still not feeling my best. I knew I didn’t perform well, although my team still complimented me on my performance.

My mom doesn’t want me to dance anymore because in addition I assist the teachers at dance every day. My mom said I might have to quit competition because it interferes with my homework. She said that I spend more time at dance than I spend on my homework. I still get it done. However, my mom thinks that, I don’t put forth as much effort on my homework as I do on dance. I could still dance it but might have to give up the competition classes. I think she doesn’t get that. Competition is my favorite part of dance! I love dance. My mom said that I can finish this year of dance and competition. Although, next year I have to just either dance or compete.

I told my friends and they were all sad for me. I am actually sad for myself. I love dance. I don’t want to quit it. One day, my mom said I might not have to quit. I would just have to double up on everything depending on how much I improved in school. That meant I probably would only get to see

my friends at school and dance. It was better than nothing; at least I would get to see them some time.

My friend Naya is having a big party next month and my mom said I might not get to go. She is having it right after the dance tournament. So it is going to be kind of embarrassing because everyone is going to talk about how they are going to have so much fun and I am going to be the only one who is not going to be there. My friends said

that they were going to try to convince my mom to let me go to the party. My friends said that if I didn't get to go they might not want to go either. That's how good my friends are. Naya even said she might not even host it anymore because she wants me to go. So now, I have to prove to mom that I can still be in dance and keep up with my school work. Dance has taught me how to work hard and believe in myself so I know I can do this...and I will.

# Deer Hunting

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*The chance for the perfect shot is fleeting. Take a deep breath for **DEER HUNTING**, by **Zac Ziegler**.*

It was a snowy day in the woods up north when I woke up. Everyone was awake. I knew it was my responsibility to get up, and the time was early. It was like waking up for a school day.

When I smelt the fresh coffee, I leaped out of bed like a frog. I saw Jamez, Kevin, Mike, and my dad. I dressed in my pants, boots, shirt, and coat in a hurry.

We finally got outside of the house. It had only snowed an inch, but it felt like three feet in the morning. I was so tired.

We got to the woods, and we headed in. It was silent as we slowly crept to our tree stands. My dad, Jamez, and I were in one tree stand. Mike and Kevin went to the other one.

I saw many kinds of wildlife, like fox and birds, but I still had not seen any deer yet. I was waiting for the perfect one. I knew it was going to be my year.

Two hours had passed when I heard a twig snap. I thought, *Could that be my deer?* I looked, and I saw it was a little deer, but then out of nowhere a

bigger deer came out. It was a big ten-point. I tapped Jamez's shoulder very silently because I didn't want to frighten the deer. I said in a whisper, "Jamez, I got one."

He said, "Nice. Let me look." That's when I looked again, and the biggest deer I've ever seen walked out. It was bigger than the ten-point I saw.

My bow is always pulled back for this reason. You never know when that deer comes out. I pulled back my bow like it was a slingshot. It was frozen. I was so nervous that I was shaking like I had no jacket.

My sight on my bow focused onto the deer's heart like it was magnetic. I let down my bow and I took three big breaths. I lifted back up my bow and shot the arrow.

When I shot, I was as scared as if I was feeding the family with this chance. I didn't want to miss.

It's a good thing I didn't miss because that is a keeper. The next thing I knew, I was getting in the world record book for the biggest deer shot by a kid.



# Flight to Freedom

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*In FLIGHT TO FREEDOM by Nick Hornburg, five boys have stepped out of reality and into a never-ending vortex of weird events to get to Paris. And one question always remains: Will their dream become reality?*

Paris, the city of lights, the most beautiful city in the world, Paris seemed so close but so far for the five of us. We had been determined for months onward to make it but last week, our determination exploded but we didn't know how, and that was when it hit me, "We can make our own airplanes," I said, I expected to get negative responses, but Alex, Joey, Luke, and Owen all agreed it must be done. We all knew what this operation meant, lunch hours in the hallways, teachers guarding every hallway, but we knew it must be done. Two days later, Owen (he's the one with the magic touch) hacked into Power teacher and typed in that we were on vacation, so we were covered. We knew it would take forever to do so we didn't plan it all in one day. We planned it over three days. We thought we would have no problem with flying. We were wrong.

**February 24, 2010 - 12:15 P.M.:**

## **Joey's watch**

Joey gulped. He was never this nervous, except on tests. He crawled through the vent system, trying his best not to be heard. Every so often he would peer through the vents to check where he was. After about seven minutes, he found what he was looking for: the math classroom. The math

classroom objectives made Joey nervous; it made all five of them nervous, due to the fact that the classroom was always guarded by Mr. Cooke, the math teacher. Joey grabbed the grating, pulled it up and lowered himself into the room without making a sound. He hung upside down, reached out and grabbed the box of protractors off of Mr. Cooke's desk. Once Joey had gotten back into the vent, he gave a sigh of relief. Unfortunately, Mr. Cooke heard. He spun around only to see nothing; Joey had left the classroom in the vent and was already on his way to their storage depot.

**February 27, 2010 -12:29 P.M.:**

## **Owen's watch**

Owen sat quietly in their storage depot waiting for transmissions and supplies. He already had gotten a box of protractors from the math classroom delivered by Joey, and Alex had gotten a handful of alphas from the LRC. The depot was a large, open space big enough for supplies for five airplanes with a hatch opening up to the roof. They chose this particular place due to the fact that no one knew about it and no one could get up there except through the vent system. They had the depot perfectly organized, controls at one corner, armor plating at another,

wings in a third and finally, in the last corner, the cockpits with loose stuff in the middle. Owen sat quietly when his radio went on and he listened to the message. "I'm on my way to the cafeteria." Luke's voice came through the radio,

"Okay, I'll be waiting," Owen said. He sat back and waited for Luke to arrive.

**February 27, 2010 - 12:35 P.M.:**

**Luke's watch**

Luke walked through the hallways of the school trying to look casual, but not too casual. Luke found the cafeteria and walked in, trying not to be seen, he strolled over to the lunch line. He found a cup of silverware, grabbed it, and put it in the pocket of his hoody. "Are you getting anything?" the cook asked.

"No, I'm just checkin' the food." Luke said. He walked through the line and left the cafeteria. He didn't have to walk that far to the depot but he was cautious all the way up there.

**March 8, 2010 - 7:00 A.M.:**

**Nick's watch**

Alex and I crept through the hallways trying not to be heard. We knew we could only do this in the morning and we had one shot at this. We had gotten the map of the lockers in the school from Owen so we knew which lockers to take. We went down one hallway and we found five vacant lockers. Alex took out his drill and undid the screws. Then we called for the others to help lift the lockers up to the depot. We were on our way.

**March 15, 2010 - 9:38 A.M.:**

**Owen's watch**

Owen crouched down as not to be seen. He left his post at the depot to go to the janitor's closet, and he had Joey in the vent system for backup, but he was still nervous. He found the closet and went in. He found ten brooms, all of which they would need. He called Joey on the radio telling him to get into position. Owen watched the grating move aside and Joey poked his head out. "What did I miss?" Joey asked.

"Absolutely nothing," Owen responded.

But Joey lost his balance and yelled, "Whoa Whoa Whoa, OH NOOOOO!" And he fell out of the grating and landed face-first into a garbage can. "I'm OKAYYYY!" Once he got out, he grabbed his radio and said, "Luke, get me a ladder, and make it quick!" Thirty seconds later, Owen was about to make a second call to Luke when a ladder came down and landed right in front of him.

"Here's yer ladder, see y'all later," Luke said. So then Joey went up to the grating and extracted the brooms. After five minutes, they had gotten all ten of those brooms into the vent system and on their way to the storage depot. Owen walked unseen out of the janitor's closet and blended into the crowd.

**April 20 2010 – 15:08:**

**Dylan's watch**

Dylan walked out of school and to the side. He had tailed Nick, Alex, Owen, Luke, and Joey for weeks. Now, he finally had all the parts they had and he had built his plane like they had but

with extra touches. He had mounted guns, remote-controlled by him to spray out silverware as ammunition at his mark. He was truly ready for them to take off. He was ready to shoot them down, all five of them.

**April 25 2010 - 1:30 P.M.:**

### **School Clock**

I held my breath as Joey put the propeller in place on his plane. We had been crawling around for pieces for two months, and we were finally done and ready to launch at 1:35 P.M. It was 1:30. We primed the engines and took a break.

"I guess we're done," Alex said.

"We've got time, maybe we can install Internet on the controls," said Owen. We all laughed.

"Good idea," Luke said. "We can watch YouTube during the flight. Paris is a long way from here." What we didn't know was that there was a fire drill at 1:30. Suddenly the alarm went off, and we all heard it. Then Luke yelled, "We've been busted, it's now or never boys!"

Owen turned his propeller on while Joey fired up his engines and Alex yelled, "Wait, I'm not finished!" as Luke pushed him off the ladder. We all shot our planes forward off the edge of the roof and glided easily through the air with the engines on.

Then Joey yelled, "We're free boys, to Paris!"

The five of us, each in individual planes, celebrated our success when I got a call from Alex and something red flashed on my radar.

Alex yelled, "Nick, I'm getting an

unwanted plane on the radar."

I yelled, "Me too!" That was when I looked back and saw Dylan in the cockpit of a plane with mounted guns.

He fired on Alex's plane, got up close to it, drew a blade, and sliced the back of Alex's plane off. I was about to call him when Alex's engine exploded and his plane tumbled down to the ground. As a last resort to get off school property, he activated his eject seat sequence so he was launched into the air. He dove from the seat and flew over the fence and landed face-first. I saw him get up and yell, "I'm okay."

I looked at the controls when I felt an explosion right behind me and smoke filled the cockpit. I saw the plane hit the ground still moving, but it was coming apart quickly. The final part of the plane launched me over the fence, and I landed on the ground.

**April 25 2010 - 13:35:**

### **Dylan's Watch**

Dylan had a feeling of success. He nailed Nick and Alex, and they dropped like anvils, but the others were too far away for him. He turned around and landed. He had had enough fun to last him for years. He flew toward the runway and touched down.

**April 25 2010 - 1:35 P.M.:**

### **Nick's Watch**

I saw Luke, Joey, and Owen fly over us. I gave a sigh of relief. We had made it. We left school property on self-built aircraft, and Luke, Joey, and Owen made it to Paris. The next year, we did it again. Truly, nothing whatsoever can compare to the limitless possibilities of the sky.

# The Great Transfer?

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*Transferring to a new school mid-year, Dorian thinks he is going to just “coast” for the first few weeks. Imagine his surprise when he runs into Miss Mean, the toughest teacher at his new school. Dorian has to figure out how to survive her class in **THE GREAT TRANSFER?** by **Dorian Madden**.*

**H**ave you ever had to change schools? A boy named Dorian Madden did. He thought for the first couple of weeks he could just slide by. But he thought wrong. At the school he just transferred to, he had to get to work soon as he arrived. What I mean by that is he started doing things the class was ahead of him on! At first, he was just trying to wait for the next assignment. The teacher told him to start soon as he walked in. Her name is Miss Mean; she doesn't let anything slide by.

Dorian couldn't even get his name out before she said, "Start the story."

Dorian is one of those kids that believe in fairness AND he is a class clown. So, he said, "Me write you a story? You must be 'outta your mind crazy lady. Nope, nope, as a matter of fact, how about you write me a story? How do you feel about that?"

Everyone in the class started to laugh. Miss Mean was never so embarrassed in her life. "You sit down and close your mouth you little caveman," she said. The class went quiet, except for Dorian's friend, Kevin. They knew they would be friends because Kevin didn't stop laughing.

Then Dorian said, "Really? That's the best come back you? You have been

on earth for how long and that's the best comeback. I'm ashamed of you being my teacher."

After class on the way to lunch Dorian asked Kevin, "Why didn't you stop laughing like everyone else did?"

"Because someone needs to put her in her place and you're the only one that has the guts to," said Kevin.

"Berkshire has a good lunch," continued Kevin.

"Well so does Derby," said Dorian. "Derby's fries are so good, they are the best school fries in the world," said Dorian.

"Well, we will just have to make you like the ones we have here at Berkshire! Now, won't we?" said Kevin. When they got in the lunchroom it was 12:05pm and the lunch lines were already full.

"Class just ended one minute ago. I wonder do these kids get fed at home because most of them ran down and there are still kids running from left and right, left and right to lunch," said Dorian.

"Well, this is like a jungle you got to get down here faster," said Kevin.

"But kids at Derby almost never get there on time. But, no, no, no these kids just got to get here on time don't they?" said Dorian. Kevin just laughed.

So, they got their lunch and sat down at this one table by the snack bar line. Dorian couldn't believe his eyes because he saw a lot of people he knew sitting at the table. They were from his football team - Birmingham Patriots. And on top of that he saw his two cousins that are twins, Dick and Jane. I would have said "Jane and Dick" but the other way sounds better.

After lunch was "Rec". I don't know why they just don't call it recess for middle school students that are going to high school soon. So, when "REC." came, Dorian just played basketball with a few friends.

Once that was over, everyone just went back to the classroom that they were at before or better yet known as S.S.R. (sustained silent reading). We laughed the whole time in S.S.R. but a couple of times Miss Mean started to get mad so she made everyone go back to their seats because of us. Everyone then got furious with us, but we didn't care so we kept laughing. Then S.S.R. was over.

I headed to my locker then I went to my next class which was gym and Kevin was there. "Is this your next

class?" said Kevin.

"Naw," said Dorian. "Of course doe, doe," said Dorian. Dorian's two twin cousins were there too.

"Sup?" said both of them at the same time. It was kind of weird.

"Dorian still said, "What's up?" Then Ms. Nice came into the gym.

"Sit down," said Ms. Nice. Then we began to play kickball. They played kickball for the whole time. But, in the middle of the game, people started arguing about who was winning. It turns out it was a tie at the end of all of that.

"Hit the showers guys and gals," said Ms. Nice. Dorian, Kevin and the rest of the boys in the gym class headed to the locker room. Dorian grabbed his towel and things and headed to the shower. Everyone began to laugh.

"Why are you laughing at me?"

"Because no one takes showers with four minutes left of class," said Dick.

"Oh."

Now Dorian was off to sixth hour or better yet known as, science. It was boring. Dorian didn't know anyone in there. It went by fast. So, then the day was over and Dorian went home.

# The Hollywood Scare

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**THE HOLLYWOOD SCARE** by *Cameron Patrick* is the story of a terrifying trip to Hollywood taken by two friends. They think it's safe, but things don't always turn out the way we think they will.

“Come on, everyone. Let's go,” I said, “or we will have to wait extra long!” My mom, my dad, my friend Bob, and I all went to Hollywood, California to go to *the* coolest amusement park ever! It was called Blue Lake Amusement Park. It was called this because it had a big blue lake for fishing and water sports. It also had a full arcade, three swimming pools, and a full 3,000-room hotel!

But Bob and I were looking forward to the really cool amusement park rides, so we started there. One ride that caught my attention the most was the “Hollywood's Worst” ride. I knew it had to be sickening when I saw people leaning over trashcans hurling out their guts, but that made me want it more. Bob felt the same way. I thought, *That won't be me; they probably just ate.*

As Bob and I were boarding the ride, I noticed that it was being controlled by a new employee. I thought nothing of it and continued on. Bob and I didn't know it, but our lives were in danger as soon as we got on that ride.

When we got on I noticed that the guy didn't fasten Bob's seat correctly. I told him, but he said, “Shut up, I'm doin' my job, dude!” He sounded like

a hillbilly.

I tried to reach over and fix Bob's seat, but I couldn't reach. I told Bob, but he didn't hear me because he was yelling with excitement already!

The ride started. I tried to get someone to stop it, but Bob was yelling too loud. I couldn't do anything.

Once we got high enough, I saw how loopy the course was. Bob was going to fall right out! When he saw the loops, Bob yelled even louder.

We were at the front, and there was one other person all the way in the back. We dropped, and I heard a little shriek of metal as Bob's seat came loose, but we made it around the first loop. As we were upside-down I saw how many more loops there were: seven more. I had never, ever been so scared for Bob in my life. He could die.

I looked down. *Yup, he is going to die,* I thought as I looked back up.

Bob was yelling so loud himself I couldn't hear me yelling!

We went down and up two more times, but on the next time the coaster stopped because the hillbilly dude had fallen asleep at the controls and hit the emergency stop button! When it stopped we were upside-down, and then the worst happened: Bob's seat started opening! Thinking quickly, he

grabbed the edge of his seat guard and didn't fall.

After about 15 minutes the main worker of the controls came and started the ride again. Bob fell back in his seat and fastened his seat so he

wouldn't fall again.

After we got off the ride we went and talked with the manager. The hillbilly guy got fired, and we got all of the other stuff for free! So we stayed a very long while.

# Journey to Nigeria

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*A young woman, Nakara King, living in New York City, learns her parents are kidnapped. This sets Nakara off on the adventure of her life. Will she save her parents in time? Find out in **JOURNEY TO NIGERIA**, by **Bijon Catchings**.*

One day a young woman named Nakara King was on her way to work knowing that she probably shouldn't leave her elderly parents at home alone, but she was in a rush to get to work. As she made her way in to work, wherever she looked, she saw people in red coats with the words SNAKE EYES on the back. When she arrived at the front door of her office, she got a call from an unknown number. It was a man with a deep voice who said, "Follow that red car now!"

Nakara said, "Who is this." Then the phone went blank. All of a sudden she sees a red Lamborghini speeding down the street going maybe 60 miles per hour. She was curious so she ran to her car and followed him, not losing sight of the Lamborghini. The Lamborghini stopped at her house and when she pulled up, the driver of the Lamborghini was running away leaving the sports car (with the keys) behind. Nakara felt lucky but she was still wondering why that man was leading her to her own house.

She went into her home and yelled for her parents but nobody yelled back. She looked everywhere she was so scared she dropped to the floor but then she heard a ringing sound so she picked up her phone and answered it. It

was the man with the deep voice! He said, "His name was Victor King." Nakara had heard that name before. She finally remembered who that name belonged to - it was her cousin. He never came to family parties or picnics and birthdays. She had only seen him twice when she was little. She remembered him because when she did see him he didn't do anything; he just sat there with a blank stare so they called him SNAKE EYES.

Nakara said, "What did you do with my parents?"

He snickered then he said, "I can tell you what I did to them and where there at, but if you ever want to see your parents again you will bring me half a million dollars by next month. If I don't get my money, you won't like the photos I send you."

"Why are you doing this?" she asked.

"Twenty years ago your dad was a cop. I worked for a group that had a mission to steal half a million dollars. But your father had to get all heroic and call for back up when he saw us loading the money into the truck. So we got busted." He continued, "I rotted in prison for ten years. I have to thank your father for giving me all that time to think about what I was going to do to



him and his wife. So think, do you want to be heroic or give me the money? The clock is ticking Nakara. Meet me in Nigeria.” Then he hung up.

She started crying. After a while she pulled herself together. She got on to the computer to buy plane tickets to Nigeria. She cried out, “How am I going to get half a million dollars by next month?” Suddenly, she remembered that on her eighth birthday her parents started a bank account, but she had never withdrawn any money, she had just put money into the account. So she got in the Lamborghini and drove off to the bank. She thought she was going in reverse but she went forward. So now the perfect car was not so perfect anymore, but it could still drive. So she drove away in the wrecked sports car. She pulled into the parking lot and turned the car off. But she was in such a panic she had forgotten to put the car into park. So the car was totally wrecked now. But that was the least of her problems.

She walked into the bank. The lady at the counter said, “How may I help you?”

“Can I have a cashier’s check from my bank account? By the way, what is the balance on my account anyway?” Nakara said.

The lady at the counter said, “Ok, but I need to see some ID.”

So Nakara showed some ID. Then the lady at the counter said, “Miss, you have over two million dollars in your account. How much do you need?” Nakara smiled.

The next day she was on her way to Nigeria. She found where her parents were but she had to make a choice, get her parents and try to keep the money or give him the money and get her parents. She chose to keep the money, but when they were almost out of Nigeria they heard gunshots. They ran and ran for miles until something bad happened, something really bad. Nakara’s father was shot, right in the rib cage. “He said just leave me.” That is what he intended so that’s what they did. They escaped but they never saw Nakara’s father again. Once they got home, they had a good life from then on and never heard of Victor King again.

# Julie Runs Away

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*Julie has no family left alive, according to her evil godmother. But Julie has reason to believe that her godmother is keeping secrets from her in **JULIE RUNS AWAY**, by Athena Gutierrez.*

“No!” I shouted to Mrs. Ratchets. “I refuse to take orders from you!” I said. “Just because I am an orphan and you adopted me does not mean you can treat me like your slave,” I said with my voice rising.

*WHAM!* I fell to the floor. Before I could figure out what she had done to me I heard her voice. “If you ever say something to me like that again I won’t give you food or water for two days!” she said in a nasty, mean voice. “Now go up to your room,” she said.

“I never got supper, though,” I said.

“Too bad,” she said, not seeming to care.

When I was walking up to my room I thought about Mrs. Ratchet. Why do I even live with her? She says that she is my godmother, but I highly doubt that. My parents would have never made such a mean lady be my godmother. At least Mrs. Ratchet *says* she is my godmother. For all I know she could be lying. But the worst of all about living with her is the work she makes me do. I do all of her chores day and night. All I get for it is, well, nothing! When she is not making me do chores she is insulting me. I don’t even know why she does it. She calls me ugly and friendless. It is true, though, that I do not have any friends. It is only because

she forbids me to go outside. Once I asked if I could go to school, but she said that they would kick me out for being too stupid.

When I got to my room, which was really the attic, I thought of a great plan. “What if I ran away?” I said to myself. But where would I go? I have no relatives or family, I would probably just starve or freeze to death. I knew it would not work.

“Julie!” I started and then got up. “Julie, get down here right now!” yelled Mrs. Ratchet. I ran down the stairs as fast as I could.

“There you are. I need you to get me something,” she said. “Go into my room and get me my hairbrush,” she said. “Do not touch anything!” she said. She gave me the key to her bedroom and told me to hurry back.

When I got to the top of the steps I saw the many doors that had always been there. One door said “Bedroom,” and other doors had no markings on them. One other door had caught my eye. It said “Do Not Enter.”

I went into her bedroom and grabbed her hairbrush. Then something in my mind told me that I should go in the forbidden room. It was a crazy idea, but a little voice in my head said to just do it!

I shut the door to her bedroom behind me with the hairbrush in my hand. I looked at the “Do Not Enter” sign, and thought, “Here it goes.” I took the keys and went through them one by one until I found the one that fit the lock. I put it into the lock, and turned the doorknob. The door opened with a loud CREAK. It was so loud that I think Mrs. Ratchet might have heard me from down the stairs. I went inside and shut the door quietly behind me.

The room had a very dim light shining from the ceiling. It was kind of cold, and was a very small room. There was a small desk with some papers on it, a picture on the wall, and something that caught my eye. It was a small box that sort of looked like a treasure chest.

I walked up to it and knelt down beside it. There was no lock that I needed to use to open; I just had to open it. I took the top and leaned it back so that it would open. When I opened it, to my surprise there was a newspaper article.

I picked it up, and right before I started to read it, Mrs. Ratchet called my name. “Julie what is taking you so long?” she said. The words could not come to my mouth. “JULIE!” She yelled at the top of her lungs.

“Uh, coming,” I said. I quickly read the heading. It read “Family in car crash, parents found dead and baby missing.” I dropped the article and tears came into my eyes.

“Julie, why aren’t you down here with my hairbrush?” said Mrs. Ratchet.

I took the article and put it in my pocket. I shut the box along with the door behind me on my way out. I ran

down the stairs with the hairbrush in my hand. “Here you go, Mr. Ratchet,” I said.

“What took you so long?” she asked. “You better not have been fooling around up there,” she said.

“I wasn’t,” I said.

“Oh, yeah? Then what were you doing?” she said.

“I...I could not find your hairbrush,” I said.

“Well, enough of this. Go to bed,” she said and shooed me away.

When I got up to the attic I immediately took out the article again. I unfolded it and started to read the rest of it. It said how there was a car crash, and that the baby had gone missing. Below that there was more of the article talking about the witness at the scene. “Did you happen to see any survivors from the crash?” said the reporter. “Yes, I did see the baby,” said the lady. “Is she still here?” said the reporter. “No,” she said. “How do you know?” said the reporter. “Well, I saw that the baby was ok after the crash, so I got out of my car to go get her off the street,” she said. “Then what happened?” said the reporter. “When I turned around she was not there anymore,” said the lady.

I was almost done with the article when I saw a little clip on the side. It said, “How do you feel about your only family dying?” said the reporter. “I feel awful because that was my only family, and now that my daughter, her husband, and my granddaughter are dead I have no more family.” “Do you know what their names were?” said the reporter. “Of course. My daughter’s name was

Mary, her husband's name was John, and my granddaughters name was Julie."

Tears ran down my face. "I am supposed to live with my grandmother. Not mean old Mrs. Ratchet," I said to myself. Now I knew where I was running, and I was going to do it that night.

"I don't know where she lives," I said to myself. I looked back at the article to see if they said anything about where she lives. Luckily for me her address was attached to the article. Why would Mrs. Ratchet have kept it a secret from me? "36150 Pine Road," the address read. "Hey, that is not far from here. That is only a few blocks away!" I said. "Well, if I have any chance of leaving, I have to go right now."

I grabbed my jacket and my book. I crept down the stairs and out the front door. I was off, and I was never coming back. "36120, 36130, 36140, 36150...there it is!" I said to myself.

The house was white with a garden of roses in the front. I went up to the

front door and rang the doorbell. What if she does not remember me or does not believe me?

A woman with gray hair answered the door. "Hello, little girl. Why are you out here in the middle of the night?" she asked. "Are you lost?" she asked.

"I was, but now I am found," I said with tears filling in my eyes. "It's me, Grandma; it's me, Julie!" I said.

"It can't be!" she said with tears filling her eyes, too.

"Yes, Grandma, it is me!" I said.

"I thought you were dead!" she said, her eyes flooding now. She took me in her arms, and we hugged and sobbed for a long time. "Where have you been?" she said.

I told her all about Mrs. Ratchet and how she made me do her chores, teased me, threatened me, and how she hardly ever gave me food. "I'm going to call the police and have them arrest her," said my grandmother. When she said that it was like music to my ears. I knew from that moment on I would be safe.

# Money Madness— A Survival Story

*Five kids battle it out on prime time television for one trillion dollars. Find out the lengths they will go to in order to win the big prize in **MONEY MADNESS—A SURVIVAL STORY**, by *Gabriel Zeidner*.*

Some people may think survival shows are not real, and shot on a set or something. That is not true for this one. It takes five real kids, not paid actors, to the dead center of the Bermuda Triangle for four days to battle for one hundred million dollars, all on the show *Money Madness*.

The first kid is Billy. He lives the sweet life in Beverly Hills. His parents are actors, and he is soon to be one. The second is Amber. She has the best life you can think of, or she can think of: Her parents own a major shipping company off of the coast of Seattle. The third is Mike, a middle-class kid; he does chores, and goes to public school, like you and me. The fourth is Mattie. She is like Mike: an average kid. The last kid is Chris. He is from the streets. He always gets what he wants, until today.

One day the five kids got a call saying to meet Joe at LAX, the airport in Los Angeles, at 7:00. There, everything would be explained about the call. They were told to bring five days' worth of clothing and items.

When they got there, Billy had ten bags, Amber had five bags, Mike and Mattie had one bag, and Chris had only a little bag. They were directed to a jet. A guy came out and said, "I am Joe, the producer of a new television series that

takes place in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle called *Money Madness*. You have been chosen to be the first contestants."

On the five-hour flight, they saw a movie explaining all the challenges they would have to do to win the money. On the first day was a heist challenge, on the second day was a rock star challenge, on the third day was a hero challenge, and on the fourth day was an action challenge for the winner. One kid would be eliminated each day.

On the island, they went to a five-star hotel for the nights. Joe said good night and went to bed. Billy, Amber, Mike, and Mattie met at the snack buffet and talked about an alliance to get Chris off the show because they hated his attitude.

Billy said, "I hate Chris. He is so mean. He called me a punk."

Mattie said, "We should get him off the show."

They all said ok and went to bed.

In the morning Joe said, "When you get a call at 11:00 A.M. for the heist challenge, you will have to rob the pretend bank at the edge of the island, find the perfect getaway car, and give the money to me."

At 11:00 A.M. they got the call. Mike robbed the bank, found a car, and gave Joe the money in half an hour. Mattie

got there in an hour. Billy got there in an hour and a half. Chris got there in two hours. Amber got there in three hours. Then they were given a slip of paper to vote someone off. The vote was four votes for Chris, one vote for Billy.

After Chris left they were split into two teams. Mike and Mattie formed "Team M," and Billy and Amber formed the "\$ Team." The next morning they were told that the teams would have to perform the hardest thing that rock stars face: avoiding the fans. They would have to blend in with the regular people, walk around the whole island, and come back not recognized.

Team M was off to a good start. They dressed up like brother and sister and got back to the hotel before \$ Team started, because Billy and Amber were fighting. Joe couldn't take the fighting, so he canceled the hero challenge, told the \$ Team that they were disqualified for giving him a headache, and said that the next day the teams would be over and they could do whatever they wanted. But before \$ Team left, Mike said, "You shouldn't have fought."

The next day Mattie went to the spa and Mike went to the gigantic pool. The spa had saunas and a hot tub the size of

a house. The pool had five one-hundred-foot waterslides, five low diving boards, five high diving boards, and ten hot tubs.

The final day arrived, and Mike and Mattie were ready. Joe said, "First, run to the roof and skydive off. Second, catapult yourself to the ocean and get picked up by the helicopter and run back here."

They were off. Mike got to the roof first, skydived off, and started looking for the catapult, while Mattie thought she could cheat. She skydived down and ran up the stairs to Joe, who had the whole thing on tape.

When she got there, Joe was looking at the tape. She asked, "Am I disqualified?" and Joe said yes.

Right then Mike walked in, and Joe said, "Congratulations to both of you. I forgot to tell you the second-place contestant gets one million dollars." But Mattie refused and said, "Cheaters never prosper."

Mike got the money, went home, and all five of the kids watched the show, in separate houses, of course. The first words of the show were these: "Some people may think survival shows are not real, and shot on a set or something. That is not true for this one. It takes five real kids...."

# Nightmare

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*In NIGHTMARE by Shelby Pitts, a young woman named Shelby travels to Hawaii, but after a horrible accident, the fight to survive begins. Will the plane land in time or crash into the Pacific Ocean?*

I woke up one morning excited to go to Hawaii for the second time in my life. I once went when I was a kid with my parents and little brother. The flight was great and Hawaii was my favorite place to go for vacations. I vowed to go there one last time when I was older. Today is the day I go. I have my suitcase packed and ready to go the airport with my ticket ready to fly first class.

“Excuse me, miss?” the ticket handler said, “I am so sorry for the bad news but the plane has been delayed for two hours, something to do with the fuel.”

The plane ride was seven smooth hours. It was daylight. As I looked out my window I could see the beautiful Pacific Ocean. I was scanning the ocean to find whales, but there was no luck. The plane I was riding on was abnormally large. I estimated about two hundred to two hundred fifty people. The food was exquisite. There was sushi, lobster, and even crème brulee, but my favorite was the very tasteful Italian specialty: pizza.

The pilot and co-pilot were taking a break to eat dinner. I had met them before I got on the plane when I saw them in a restaurant in the airport; they’re both very nice people. They told me they were both very experienced.

They said all of their flights together always went smoothly. I trusted them. At the same time, however, a feeling in the pit of my stomach warned me that something wasn’t right. I felt something was going to happen, but what? I decided to ignore the feeling. I was probably just nervous from being over the ocean for so long. As I went back to my seat, I looked out the window and noticed something peculiar: The sky had darkened dramatically. It looked like a terrible storm was coming. I decided to take a nap. I was tired. I would probably feel better in Hawaii.

When I awoke from my nap, I still felt a little sleepy. I wanted to distract myself from the bad feeling in my stomach. I started to bore myself, hoping I would wander to sleep. It seemed impossible to go to sleep. It was like I had insomnia or something.

The door leading to the cockpit was opened so for curiosity’s sake I peeked inside. To my amazement, I saw the two pilots leaning over in pain. “What happened to the pilots?” I questioned.

“They got food poisoning from the sushi,” the flight attendant whispered. “Also there is no one else to fly the plane to Hawaii.” All of a sudden I saw them both collapse on the ground dazed and unconscious. Somebody needed to fly the plane; somebody

needed to fly the plane now.

The flight attendants were frantic, so they did something pretty dumb and asked anybody if they knew how to fly a plane. I had this weird joke in my head because I used to play video games about flying planes. They were accurately simulated, with loads of action. I knew all the controls by heart. The plane was on autopilot. The only thing wrong with that is if someone doesn't turn it off, we would fly right over Hawaii. The plane was also running out of fuel. So without thinking, I raised my hand. I would have to fly a real plane to Hawaii. I knew it wasn't going to be easy.

The flight attendants threw me into the cockpit. I was the only one on the plane that knew that I really didn't know how to fly a plane. "Dear God..." a man said with a frantic tone.

Everybody was depending on me. Babies, kids, and some adults were crying. The frantic tone in everyone's voices was giving me a headache. I wanted to cry myself, but I had a plane to fly. I remembered that I needed to contact the airport. Fortunately, I was able to establish communication. The air-traffic controllers at the airport were trying to help me keep the plane at a steady rate in the sky. The controls on my video game were exactly the same as the ones on the plane. *It's okay, Shelby; calm down. Everything is going to be all right. You are going to land the plane safe and sound in Hawaii. This part will be easy. All you have to do is listen to the people and you will be fine.* The people in the back were starting to calm down and sleep. It was so late at night. I was also tired,

exhausted from packing the night before the flight. I wanted to sleep. The only thing that kept me awake was the determination to get the plane to Hawaii. Then I saw something that was truly terrifying, something that every pilot wishes not to happen, the violent storm was approaching the plane.

The controller's voice was starting to crackle. I tried to tell him that we were heading into a storm. Then silence. The ride started to get very bumpy. Children and baggage were being tossed around. Yelps, screeches, crying, it was all so horrible. The plane was being yanked and pulled by the winds and forces from the storm. I thought we were all going to die. I heard a flight attendant scream. It was an abnormal scream; I had to know what happened. A piece of the right wing of the plane had fallen into the deep ocean. The plane began to go lopsided. I quickly ran into the cockpit once again. This time I had to put a lot of work into keeping the plane from leaning to the left.

The storm was still very harsh and really never let up. I could tell we were in the middle of it. It was complete darkness; I didn't really know where I was. I was confused and in a daze. I kept wondering why this had to happen to me. I was a good person, smart, kind, athletic, and I gave to charity. Of all the flights in the world it just had to be this one. Maybe it was fate. Maybe this just had to happen to me. Right now I couldn't think like that. But one question still lingered in my head. At airports they have those weather reports which tell you that a storm was coming.



Wouldn't someone know to tell the pilots and other people? I've heard those reports could predict weather from hundreds of miles away.

I was struggling but managing the plane. Again people were starting to calm down. I felt guilty lying to all those people. If it would help the plane get to Hawaii, I'm sure it would be worth the trouble. Then all of a sudden, I saw a glimmer of hope. I could see land and a big airport. Controllers had sent emergency vehicles onto the airfield. I was able to land the plane with ease. I was always best at that on my game. The pilots finally gained consciousness. They are never going to allow sushi on planes ever again. (They are also going to check the expiration dates on the food.)

When the plane landed people cheered and screamed with joy. "People, I have something to tell you," sounding apologetic as I possibly could. "I pretended to know how to fly the plane because, because—well, I don't know. I just wanted everybody to be

safe." They all gasped.

"It's all right, honey," a sweet elderly lady said to me in an encouraging voice, "we all know you were just trying to do the right thing."

I was able to make it into the newspaper and get an award. I gave a speech that thanked my video games and the company for making the games so accurate. That day things didn't go the way I expected it.

After that, I was finally able to enjoy the true beauty of Hawaii. There was always a sweet smelling scent coming from somewhere. Also, you could see the coconut trees swaying from the perfect breeze, and everywhere I went I was called hero. Hawaii looks like one of those awesome screen savers. I was able to enjoy my trip to Hawaii even better than I thought I would. When I arrived at my hotel I was able to get in free due to my bravery. The workers at the hotel upgraded my accommodations and placed me in the presidential suite. ALOHA!

# The Past Button

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In **THE PAST BUTTON** by *Alexandra Bastian*, a boy's misunderstanding leads him on an adventure that serves him well in the end.

My friends always tell me the same thing every day: “You can’t do anything.” But I can. Sure, it won’t be easy, but I’ll try.

When I was walking home in my too-big shoes and ugly hand-me-downs, I noticed a sign. The sign said, “Kid goes to moon!” The only thing is I did not read was the part that said “MOVIE.”

When I got home I told my mom that I wanted to go to the moon! She wondered what I was talking about at first. Then I explained everything. I even told her that the only reason I wanted to go is because of what my friends always say to me. Finally she said yes.

I packed all my stuff and told her where to go, and then we left.

When we were there I thought it was a weird place to blast a rocket, but oh well. When I was almost in the gates to get to the rocket a man stopped me.

The man had long, frizzy, brown hair. He had clown clothes and a BIG red nose. I looked at the man and he looked at me. The man asked me if I knew what to do when I got on the rocket. I said yeah, and the man let me on.

When I was on the rocket, another man said “ACTION!”

I thought, *I didn’t think this was a movie, but oh well.*

When another man said, “BLAST OFF!” I hit a big red button, not *really* knowing what to do. Finally, when I heard a big *BOOM*, I figured we must have landed.

When I got off the rocket, I saw some really cool things. When I went to touch one, I heard a loud siren. I backed away and went to another thing. When I heard another loud siren, I jumped back and saw people chasing me.

I didn’t know what was happening, so I started to run. When I was close to the rocket I hopped in. I closed the door and locked myself in.

The people started to bang on the door. When that happened I pressed random buttons. Then I heard a loud *BOOM!* The people were gone. But I don’t know if I was.

I saw my friends right in front of me when I got off. They told me that I was in a movie. They also thought I could do something now. I was so happy! That movie made my day!

For the rest of my week my friends didn’t tell me once that I couldn’t do anything. Instead they bragged that I was in the movie and not them.

# Problems

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*Vanessa is a twelve-year-old girl from Buffalo, New York. So far her day isn't going so well. She has to make it through all of these obstacles t without being too embarrassed. Will her social life end today or is she just overreacting? Read **PROBLEMS** by *Jasmine Jordan* to find out.*

**M**Y LIFE IS COMPLICATED! I can't tell you everything but I can tell you most of it. I'm Vanessa. I live in New York. Not New York City, but New York State. I live in Buffalo. It's not the most exciting city in the world, but trust me; there is a lot of drama that goes around here.

I am the middle child of three. That means that everything is two times *MORE* complicated than it should be for a twelve-year-old girl. My little sister Emma gets most of the attention in this family. "Get Emma this," and "Get Emma that," my mom would command. And of course I cannot forget mentioning my *magnificent* brother Chris. He thinks he's all big and bad because he got his boater's license before me. Big whoop! He's only a year and a half older than me.

My friends at school are something else too, but I'm not going to get into a lot of that right now. If I did, I would have another story to tell. My real problem started at the movie last Saturday when I went to go see *Yes, Man* with my humongous group of two friends Santana and Allison. I was beat after the movie ended. I guess laughing for two hours really wore me out. So I decided to hit the sack a little early that night. I went to bed at 11:25 P.M.

*Ring Ring, Ring Ring.* My phone beckoned me. It was vibrating all over my nightstand, almost landing on the floor. I don't have a case. So if it hits the floor, it will shatter into a million pieces.

But instead of my phone landing on the floor, I did. "Ahh!" I shrieked as I was awakened by my phone. I landed facedown on my purple shag rug on the floor. My bushy "bed head" afro broke my fall. I hesitantly lifted my head up from the floor to see who was calling me at.... 6:15 in the morning! Of course, it was my friend Selena. Her smiling face appeared on the screen of my phone. "I'd rather look at the inside of my eyelids IN my bed than look at Selena's face on the floor," I muttered.

"Hey girlie!" she said all bubbly, "watcha doin'?"

"Looking at the floor talking to you," I remarked.

"Well, I'll let you get back to that. Bye!" she said.

"Wait, wait, wait!" I said all confused. "Why did you call?" I asked.

"I got bored silly. Bye."

*Click.* She was gone. That was fifteen minutes of my life wasted. I was already up. I couldn't go back to sleep now. I just spent the rest of the morning watching *Full House* in my

*Brrrrrr* penguins' nightgown. Turns out, I went back to sleep after all and got up at 7:41. My bus comes at 7:36! I had missed the bus! I didn't have enough time to take a shower (thank goodness I had taken one last night!) or pack my book bag so I just put on a different shirt and took the books off my granite kitchen counter. So far, I thought everything was going to be okay. But I realized they were Emma's math books that I snatched off the counter. That means that she took a seventh-grade algebra book and I am stuck with a first-grade Mickey Mouse coloring book. That was just the beginning to the luckiest day of my life.

I was in second period advanced math sitting next to Santana and Allison at my table. I was in Vanessa's World: drooling over the cutest boy in the seventh grade, Taylor L. I pictured the two of us alone, walking down a beach in Miami. The sun was just setting. The birds were chirping and cool salty ocean air hit my face. The mood was just right. He wanted to ask me something. He got down on one knee and....

"Vanessa, you're drooling!" Allison whispered in an uncomfortable voice.

I snapped out of it quickly, looking around the classroom. Everybody was looking over at me giggling and whispering. And I know it wasn't about Miss Small's "bore me to tears" lecture. I looked down and saw a puddle of drool. It was easy to see since the tables were made of black slate. The bottoms of my arms were white with dry Vanessa slobber. Me? I could care less about what people think, but I looked to my right over my striped shoulder

and saw Taylor looking at me. He grinned so I gave a little grin back to him. I wanted to shrink down to the size of a paper clip at that very moment and run away. Actually, I wish I were a paper clip! Second period was finally over. I sprinted out the door like a track star going for gold at the Olympics. I had my head down the whole way with my arms crossed so of course I ran into people and things because I couldn't see.

There wasn't anything else that could go wrong. *I've run out of bad luck*, I thought. I grabbed my emergency hoodie and purple hat from my locker, not realizing what time it was. Thirty seconds before the bell rang. I was late for class. Of course I got a tardy.

I have the perfect ending to the most unlucky day of my life, sixth period, the last period of the day. I could finally go home after this! We were getting our science tests back. I couldn't wait. I knew I aced it. I couldn't wait to get it signed by my mom. "This is going to lighten up my day," I said. I sat up all nice and tall waiting to see my beautiful A. I turned it over to find... a D+! How could I get a D+? I'm a straight A student. I studied really hard for this test. On the top of my paper it said, "See me for help after school".

"Ohh brother," I sighed.

When I got home, I smelled my mom's famous (terrible) stupendous (horrible) meatloaf. I told her I was full. But she *reminded* me that I *loved* her meatloaf. Let's just say I was in the bathroom for hours over the toilet. Chris, Emma, and my dad were right

outside the door waiting for their turns. My mom was still sitting down at the table scarfing down the rest of our plates that we didn't finish. That was the perfect end to the most unlucky day of my life.

Actually, it wasn't. I forgot that after everybody spewing chunks all over the place, Mom told me that she was taking me to get new roller skates tomorrow at the mall. *ZINGERS!* I totally blanked on that because I was too busy moping about my bad day. I

had gotten an A+ on my previous science test (before I got the D+). Mom was rewarding my earlier success.

If I really look back, it really wasn't the worst day of my life. Everybody has their off or bad days and today was mine. I'm sure I'll have tons and tons more. I remember a month ago when my friend Allison cut the cheese right in the middle of class while Mr. Maliso was handing back our projects. She was so embarrassed. I guess that was her off day.

# Snickers the Spectacular

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*In SNICKERS THE SPECTACULAR by Olivia Kelly, an ordinary girl with a not-so-ordinary dog, learns that a dog show is coming to her school. She and her dog seem to have different ideas. Anna may love the idea, but Snickers does not. How far will Snickers go to make sure he stays out of the dog show?*

Anna was a ten-year-old girl with a big heart for everyone, especially her dog, Snickers. They shared everything together. At least that was what Anna thought. She didn't know that Snickers was keeping one little secret. Something Snickers thought would change her life forever.

Now, Snicker was smart. She was very smart actually, and she thought if she showed Anna her secret she would never have a normal dog's life. She hated lying to Anna, but she thought it was the only way to keep her life the way it was.

"A dog show here at MY school! This is a chance of a lifetime. It will have all sorts of courses the dogs will have to go through. I have to start training Snickers right away. Speaking of Snickers, I have to tell her. Just think if we can win the dog show, my life will be so exciting. I will never be able to sleep again and Snickers will get all the attention she ever wanted. It's a win-win situation."

Anna thought that everyone would be happy with this situation, but everyone was not. Snickers wanted to let everyone know how smart she was. Secrets to her meant lies and she hated lying. She knew this lie would soon be

over because she heard some dogs talking at the dog park about the dog show. Also, knowing Anna, she would come through that door any second bragging about how "we are going to win the dog show."

As soon as Anna got home she commanded Snickers to sit. "Good," cheered Anna. "I have the greatest news," said Anna with a lot of pep in her voice. "There is going to be a dog show at my school and I am entering you in it!" Snickers actually knew what Anna was going to say before Anna said it. Snickers was not thrilled but she wagged her tail to please her master. Anna was happy and she ran to tell her mom the good news.

That night Anna was dreaming about winning the dog competition and becoming the most popular kid in school. It was the best dream ever. That was certainly not the same situation for Snickers. Snickers had a dream where she won the dog show and she could not go a minute without a camera in her face. After that dream, Snickers could not sleep for the rest of the night. Snickers knew if she did win the dog show, her dream would become a nightmare with no way out.

The next day while Anna was at

school and Anna's mom was at work, Snickers put her plan into action. Snickers figured that since Anna thought she was such a good dog that maybe if she acted like a bad dog Anna would forget about the whole dog show idea. First, Snickers chewed up all the pillows. Next, Snickers dug up all the houseplants she could lay her paws on. By the time she was done with the rest of her destruction, she was very tired. She still had three hours until Anna got home so she took a nap hoping she would have good dreams this time.

The house was a complete mess. There were feathers and stuffing everywhere. Dirt was spread over everything including the white couch. Snickers had opened the refrigerator (which she still hadn't closed) and spilled the orange juice all over the kitchen's grey tile. Finally, just to make sure the family knew it was her, she dipped her paws in spilled ink and left dog prints everywhere, even on the walls.

Snickers woke up to the opening and shutting of the door, but she did not hear a scream. Instead she heard her Anna talking to her. She was saying that she had horrible news. She was saying that there were many dog show categories, but she could only enter her into one of them. She was so depressed that she didn't even bother to look up. This made Snickers furious. She had gone through all that trouble and Anna didn't even bother to look up. Now, she found out that she did all this for nothing. This made her a little happy, and yet so mad at the same time.

Snickers was still fuming, but she

decided to go back to sleep and Anna went up to her room. Two hours later Snickers woke up to a loud scream. Snickers scampered to the door to see Anna's mom's eyes as wide as the moon. Anna came running downstairs next to see what Snickers had done. Stunned, she started to scream as loud as her mom. Snickers tried to make them stop by howling, but that only made things louder. After a minute or two, all the noise wore down and Anna and her mom discussed what was going on.

"Mom, I had no idea that Snickers did this and I would have never expected it from her," Anna said. "I was so upset about the dog show I didn't look up," continued Anna. "But now I know what category I am going to enter her in," Anna said very cheerfully. Anna signaled her mom to come really close then yelled in her ear, "The best looking category!" Anna's mom just shook her head from disbelief and smiled at Anna. Snickers, who was listening the whole time, thought to herself that this was a win-win situation.

The dog show was in just two days. All that Anna had to do now was get Snickers fur done. When they got to the dog salon there was almost every dog from the dog park was there. At first Snickers thought that Anna might change her mind about the category. Fortunately, Anna stuck with her decision.

It was finally the day of the dog show. Both Anna and Snickers were both extremely nervous. Anna and Snickers had gone through too much to quit now though. After they watched

about ten other dogs go out, it was finally their turn. Snickers scanned all the other dogs as she passed. Many dogs made Snickers lose hope. When they finally got to their spot, Anna bent down next to Snickers and whispered, "You can do it, Snickers, and I just know you can." Snickers still was not sure, but she had to do her best.

Snickers sat up straight and put the cutest look on that she knew would help her win for Anna. When the judges passed Snickers they fell in love. At least that's what they said when they announced Snickers and Anna the winners. They were so happy. Anna screamed and Snickers howled, but this time in a good way.



# Snow Day!

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*A boy named Jon Nacaballi woke up one day on a Thursday morning. He was hoping for a snow day at school that morning. Jon turned on the TV, and he saw on the morning news report that his school was closed. Later that day, he would have an encounter with the school bully, his worst enemy. Find out what happens in **SNOW DAY!** by **Marvin E. Cooke.***

One day there was a boy who lived in Vale, a city in the state of Tagurit. His name was Jon Nacahalli, and he was a sixth-grader at Arnold C. Cranberry Middle School. He was a nice kid, but he was bullied for no reason at school and on a regular basis. He earned good grades. Jon lived mostly with his mom. His dad and mom are divorced; he wished he could spend more time with his dad. He was going to stay at his dad's house for one week later in winter break.

Jon woke up on a Thursday with a huge *YAAAAWNN!* He popped up and smacked his lips to taste the "morning mouth." He slid off of his bed and put on his slippers. He went to the bathroom to wash up. Jon threw his pajamas on the floor and plopped into the bath. Jon turned on the hot bath water. "Ahhhhh! This feels good." After he bathed, he put his clothes on, brushed his teeth, and brushed his hair at the same time. When Jon left the bathroom, he went into the kitchen. He walked up to the cabinet on the left and got out the cereal, and then he got the milk. *Hmm...something is weird. I thought winter break would come a lot faster than this,* he thought.

Then, while crunching on cereal, he

turned on the kitchen television. The TV is visible from the kitchen table. "Hello, this is Katie Magrady and this is News Live on channel 138. The time now is 6:00a.m. and we have the morning reports to discuss. Attention all market club store shoppers; today the Market Club Corporation has new fish called *Aspirytes*. The Market Club also has new food items from the warm markets in southern Australia." Jon sighed. He wanted them to talk about the weather first, but he glanced at the television and saw that the woman was handed a paper and she started talking again. "I've just received more news about schools. Here it is, Andy Academy is remaining open despite the harsh weather and Oak Tree Learning Center is closed. The Arnold C. Cranberry Middle School is...closed." Jon's eyes opened like bombs exploding and he jumped up in the air. He was filled with excitement. He turned off the television and ran into the closet to get his snow gear on.

He zipped out of the door as swiftly as a cheetah running at top speed into the deep snow and felt the joyful feeling of trudging through the deep cold snow. The second Jon looks up, he noticed a big boy with a giant coat. He

recognized the boys face. "Uh oh, it's 'Buzz the Bully' from school. He's trouble. I'd better hide . . . quickly!" Jon started running and the bully behind him started running also. When Buzz caught Jon, he picked him up off of the ground and body slammed him hard onto a snow bank and held him down. Then Jon said, "Get off of me Buzz!!"

Buzz replied, "Why should I punk?" Jon was determined not to take it lying down this time and decided that he would defend himself even if he knew it was useless. He punched Buzz repeatedly on the arm, and then Buzz got up holding his arm and rubbing it and crying. And then he ran away fast crying out "Mommy, Mommy!"

Jon realized this was the beginning of an awesome new life and then began to walk home with a new feeling of pride and self-respect. Jon began to think that he doesn't have to get pushed around by the bully anymore. Jon was so excited to go to his dad's house later that day and tell him what happened. He dashed back into the house and he woke up his mom to tell her that it was a snow day and he wanted to go to his

dad's house.

"Hold it, sweetie pie, I have to get out of my pajamas first, and then I can drive you up to where your dad is," Mom said.

"Ok, Mom, take your time. I won't rush you," Jon said.

Ten minutes later at 7:15, Jon and his mom go to the breakfast place called Sally's. There Jon and his mom eat a delicious meal, and then they head north where Jon's dad lives. He lives in Canada, so it will only take three hours because Tagurit is near Michigan, but you have to cross three long bridges that all take an hour to get over. When they arrive, his mom says "Here we are in Canada; let's go inside your father's house."

*CREAK!* The wooden door to the big brown house opens and Jon's dad walk's up with two warm ciders in his hands.

"Hello, son, long time no see, eh?"

"DAD!" screamed Jon. Jon ran up to his dad and gave him the biggest hug he had given in a long time. Jon stayed at his dad's house like he wanted and told him all about his snow day adventure.

# The Struggle

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*Sadness comes in many forms. Carmelita has to accept an unhappy inevitability in THE STRUGGLE, by Jady.*

There was a girl name Carmelita. She would go to her Grandma's house because her mom worked late hours. Carmelita is a shy girl; Carmelita didn't have many friends. Carmelita usually sits alone at school.

One day Carmelita went to her Grandma's house after school. Her grandma said, "In my will I am giving you my valuable stone."

Carmelita said, "Why are you telling me this?"

Grandma said with her head bowed, "Because."

Carmelita said, "Because what?" Carmelita shouted again, "Because what?" Carmelita asked Grandma, "Why are you scaring me?"

Grandma took a big breath, and then she said, "My doctor told me that my body is dying." Carmelita's face looked puzzled. Grandma asked Carmelita if she understood what she was saying to her. Grandma said again to Carmelita, "I am dying!"

Carmelita started to cry.

Grandma said "I only have four more days to live."

Carmelita grabbed her grandma, tightly hugging her, while her tears ran down both their cheeks. Grandma said, "Well I should be getting some rest. My body is very tired."

The next day Carmelita took a fruit basket over to Grandma's house.

Carmelita decided that every day she would make different food baskets for Grandma. Carmelita thought she would create the baskets just like Grandma had taught her. The second day Carmelita created a cheese basket, and the third day Carmelita brought Grandma a bread basket.

On the fourth day that Carmelita went to Grandma's house, Carmelita thought that Grandma and she could create a basket together. Carmelita wanted to spend quality time with her Grandma. Carmelita remembered the beautiful baskets that Grandma would make.

Carmelita walked on the porch. The door to Grandma's house was closed, and all the drapes were closed.

Carmelita knocked on Grandma's door, but there was no answer. Carmelita knew that the key to Grandma's house was under the flowerpot. Carmelita shouted out to Grandma as she opened the door and entered the house.

Carmelita started to look around the house for Grandma. Carmelita looked down stairs in the basement; Grandma was not there. So, she checked the kitchen, and finally she checked Grandma's bedroom, which was located upstairs in the far back of the house.

Carmelita saw Grandma lying across her bed. She thought that she was

sleeping. Carmelita thought, *I might as well let her Grandma know that I am here.*

Carmelita approached Grandma's bed. She started to shake Grandma. Grandma did not move. Carmelita realized that her Grandma was dead.

Carmelita cried and cried until she didn't have any more tears to cry. Carmelita called her dad and mom to come over to Grandma's house.

Carmelita thought back to the day before when she was over at Grandma's house, and how she enjoyed talking to Grandma. She was going to miss her. Carmelita had known that the days were growing shorter, and that one day Grandma would not be here. Carmelita had wanted to spend every waking hour with Grandma.

One day not long ago when Carmelita had gone by Grandma's house, there had been a man who was dressed in a business suit sitting in Grandma's house. Grandma was laughing and talking to the man. The man was asking Grandma many questions. Grandma had asked Carmelita to go into the kitchen while she finished her business with the man. Later, Grandma told Carmelita that the man was there to prepare her will.

Several weeks later, Carmelita again

saw that man who had been at Grandma's house. He walked toward her and gave her a box with a stone inside. The man said, "Your grandma wanted you to have this special stone."

Carmelita grabbed the stone from the box and said "Thanks" to the man. Carmelita looked up at the man and asked if the stone belonged to her now.

The man said, "Your grandma wanted me to make sure that you received the stone that she had promised to you." The man then turned to Carmelita's mother and father. He gave them a dull but interestingly carved treasure chest.

Carmelita went to the box and tried opening it. The man explained that Grandma had left this box to her mother and father.

Inside the box were Grandma's worldly possessions. Grandma had left enough money for mom and dad to cruise around the world, and to pay for Carmelita's college education.

Mom and Dad's first trip was to travel to Grandma's home where she had been born. Carmelita spread Grandma's ashes in the land where she was born. Carmelita said, "Grandma, may you rest in peace forever and always with my love...R.I.P."

YOU WIN SOME,  
YOU LOSE SOME



# Amber's Revenge

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*In AMBER'S REVENGE, by Ben Levin, Raymond learns that hard work can pay off even when the competition isn't fair.*

I woke up to the sound of footsteps outside my window. I looked at my watch. It read 3:00 A.M. I parted the curtains and saw a flashlight bobbing in the dark. Hmm, I thought, I wonder who's out this late. I definitely regretted it later, but I was so tired from training for the race that I flopped back down onto my bed and fell back into a deep sleep.

I rubbed my eyes, stretched, and let out a long, loud yawn. The clock read 6:00 A.M. Light streamed through the widespread curtains. I remembered that today was a very important day. Today was the sled dog race between my small Alaskan town, Shungnak, and our neighbors and rivals, the people of Amber.

The first place prize for the race is \$10,000, but I think it's more important to win the pride for my town. The contest starts in our town and goes north into the woodlands outside Amber. It's only 75 miles, but the terrain is rough, and it can take seven or eight hours to complete the course. I'm going to represent the town of Shungnak with my lead dog, Desna. She is faster and stronger than any of the other dogs, and she knows the course better than me. And if I don't win I can only hope that my best friend, Raymond, does the job for me; I'll be happy if anyone from Shungnak wins.

When 9:00 came around, Desna, the rest of the team, and I were lined up behind Raymond and his skillful dogs. The sky was cloudless and sunny, and the snow was soft: It looked like perfect conditions for racing. "Good luck!" I yelled to Raymond. He yelled back the same.

The teams in front of me took off, and then Raymond did the same. "Mush!" he yelled. We were the last to go, but I was fine with that. I just wanted to get out there.

As soon as we passed the starting banner, the team and I could feel the wind buffeting our faces. We pulled out in front with Raymond within minutes. We drove over ruts and branches, ice patches, and snowdrifts. Desna led the dogs by forests and stretches of vast tundra. They *were* perfect racing conditions. In fact, everything was going perfectly—that is, until we came to the fork in the trail.

Raymond was about 100 yards ahead of me, just out of earshot. He had just moved from another town and he barely knew the racecourse at all; he simply followed the signs. The course went right at the sign. Raymond veered left! As soon as he turned I knew something was wrong. I screamed his name, but he didn't hear.

The sign's letters were blurry at first, but they slowly came into focus.

That's when I saw what had gone wrong. The sign was pointing to the left! Then it clicked in my mind. The flashlight and the footsteps in the middle of the night: Some people from Amber had changed the sign!

Poor Raymond, I thought, but I knew I'd have to keep going. If I didn't go on and win the race, nobody from Shungnak would be able to represent our town. "Geel!" I yelled to Desna, indicating for her to go to the right. And we kept going strong.

We sped on for hours in the perfect conditions. At times we glided over vast tundra. Elk darted across the frozen fields in the distance. I was so thankful that we didn't see any moose, because they are a musher's worst nightmare. They attack the dogs, which look like wolves to them. Once we saw a snowy owl flying from a treetop, its beautiful wings outstretched like a parachute.

We would have been as happy as clams if it hadn't been for those cheating Amber natives. They would pay back, and our team would make them. We would do it the right way: We would win fair and square.

Now we drove on strongly through a tight pathway, surrounded on the left and right by towering dark-green pines. When we came to an incline, I hopped off the sled and ran to lighten the load for the dogs. Frozen sap gleamed on their trunks. We came to a sharp turn,

and I put all my weight on the inside runner so the sled didn't slip. The beauty of Alaska never ceases to amaze, I thought.

The team was making incredible time as we sped past the "5 Miles to Shungnak" marker. I looked down and saw the ground speeding past my feet. Twenty more minutes of smooth going and the "1 Mile to Shungnak" sign came into view.

That was when I heard a very subtle rumbling noise. Sounds like an engine, I thought. The noises got louder. Now it sounded like two engines. I thought that they were too loud to be snowmobile engines. Car engines, I thought.

We zoomed onward, gliding across the shining snow. I saw bits of navy blue flashing in the trees, coming straight from where I heard the noises. I heard barking huskies and men shouting. Then I saw a team of dogs from Amber sprinting out of the woods. Suddenly, through a clearing in the woods, I could have sworn I saw two navy blue pickup trucks driving back into the woods.

Fortunately, I had much more speed than the other team as we zoomed around the last snowy corner and the finish banner came into view. We flew by them, Desna barking in delight as she led the rest. We crossed the finish line before them, and I'll tell you one thing: We definitely made them pay.



# The Avalanche

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*Howie and Charlie are having the best snowboarding vacation ever until a fast moving avalanche threatens to bury them alive. Will they survive? Find out what happens in **THE AVALANCHE**, by **Brody Liebler**.*

The sounds of an electronic beeping woke me. I was in a dark room and had no idea where I was. Someone entered the room and said, "Howie, can you remember what happened?" It was Dr. Mornez and I was in the local hospital.

I said that I could remember snowboarding at Glacier Point, Colorado with my cousin, Charlie. The last thing I remembered was seeing an avalanche headed toward me and another skier. I heard Charlie yell "watch out!" and I saw the other skier screaming in fear. I told the doctor that about two seconds later an avalanche hit me. I tried to escape, but I was trapped. Dr. Mornez asked me if I could recall what happened from the beginning of the day until the end.

I told Dr. Mornez that my family had decided to go skiing for a Christmas vacation. We stayed in a cabin near Glacier Point Ski Mountain and Charlie, my cousin who is also eleven years old, and I planned to snowboard every day. Glacier Point had a lot of snow, and when we arrived to snowboard more snow had started to fall. We snowboarded all morning and were feeling amazing about the runs we had taken on the hill. After lunch we decided to go to the terrain park to hit jumps and go

off rails. We hit a seven foot jump at least twelve times and were doing sweet moves like backscratchers, helicopters and flips.

After many hours, we headed inside for hot chocolate. While we were resting we talked about going back-country out-of-bounds snowboarding on the other side of the mountain.

"I've never been back-country," said Charlie.

"It's really exciting. The trails haven't even been surveyed by ski patrol," I said. "Today seems like the perfect day to give it a try."

"Ok," said Charlie. "I'll go, but I want to be really careful."

Charlie and I went to the forbidden part of the mountain. We started snowboarding down when I noticed some teenagers heading for a killer jump. I stopped to watch while my cousin continued down the mountain. The first teenager flew about thirty feet in the air when he hit a jump! The second teenager hit the jump, but didn't land it. He hit the snow hard.

There was an incredibly loud rumbling noise coming from a ledge up higher on the mountain. I noticed that when the skier fell a huge chunk of snow had come loose. As the chunk fell, it began to cause more snow to start sliding down the mountain.

Before I knew it, a full avalanche was headed right at me.

“Watch out!” Charlie yelled from down below.

The avalanche kept getting bigger and stronger. There was no place to hide. I started to snowboard away, but the avalanche came too fast. Before I knew it, I was surrounded by the snow.

As I was pushed down the mountain, I must have hit a tree or something because I was knocked out cold and completely covered by the snow. I was fortunate that Charlie had time to avoid the avalanche. He immediately started to search for me. I was lucky that my boot was uncovered and Charlie was able to find me. He quickly dug me out, so I didn’t suffocate. Charlie also found the teenager buried in the snow near me and helped dig him out, too.

The ski patrol had seen the avalanche from a distance and came to the rescue. The teenager was awake but had a broken arm. I was still unconscious. I did not remember being on the snowmobile to the bottom of the mountain and I did not remember

the helicopter ride to the hospital. I did not remember anything until Dr. Mornez walked into the room.

“I saw the avalanche on the news. I believe it was one of the biggest avalanches of all time in Glacier Point. You are very lucky to be alive,” said Dr. Mornez.

“Thank you Doctor,” I said.

“Thank goodness that you were smart enough to be wearing a helmet. Your helmet is smashed, but it probably saved your life. You will have to stay in the hospital for two days, but you should be fine,” said Dr. Mornez.

“I am just happy to be ok,” I said.

Dr. Mornez then asked me, “do you think that you will ever go back-country snowboarding again?”

I thought about it and said, “Yes, I think I will, but only after I have more snowboarding experience.”

After I got out of the hospital, my cousin and I still had two days of vacation left. We spent our time on the front of the mountain and at the terrain park. We look forward to going back-country snowboarding again, but will be more careful to stay in safe areas.

# Basketball Dream

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*In BASKETBALL DREAM by Joseph G. Rubin, college basketball stud Devon Franklin decides he wants to play in the NBA. The journey he expected to be effortless has proven otherwise.*

In the year of 2011, there was a college student named Devon Franklin. He attended and played basketball for the University of Michigan. He was a bench warmer! All he had going for him was that he was tall, but aren't all centers?

So, it was his senior year at Michigan and he decided to take up basketball as a career, since he thought he was so good. At the end of his senior year, he entered the 2012 NBA draft. He was picked in the 25<sup>th</sup> round, a second pick for the Oklahoma City Thunder.

The Thunder weren't even that good at basketball, but he was so bad, he was sent to the D-league (the minor leagues of basketball) to become a better player. He started for the Fort Orange Oranges but only started because he was, by far, the tallest player on the Oranges.

When Devon got out onto the court, he was so clumsy and uncoordinated, that Coach Chubhabub wanted to have a chat with Franklin.

Coach told Devon, "No offense, but I have no idea why you got drafted into the NBA. But, if you want, I can work in extra hours with you to make you a better player."

Devon, still being a self-absorbed 22 year-old, was quite offended by this

offer.

He shouted, "You think I need more work? That's crazy! Maybe *you* need some more work!" He was outraged! He wanted to quit the team! (He would have if it weren't for the fact that he had no other job offers in basketball.) He decided he would try out the Oranges for one season (even with his "obnoxious" coach) and see how it panned out.

In the off-season entering the 2013-14 season, Devon looked at his stats and saw that he only averaged seven points per game and five rebounds per game. At first he thought his stats were down because of his coach. But, as he thought about it, he decided he just wasn't putting enough effort toward basketball. He began to rethink the offer Coach had made the previous season.

After the off-season, Devon had a talk with Coach to work in extra hours with him.

"Hey Coach?" Franklin asked.

"Yes," was Coach's reply.

"W-would you be willing to work in some extra practices with me?"

"Well of course I would Devon. As a D-league coach I have to make sure you are ready for the NBA at all costs."

At first Franklin did not see improvement. He thought that his

coach wasn't doing his job very well. He told that to Coach.

In the following off-season, Franklin looked at his season stats and saw some improvement. His points per game had gone up to ten and his rebounds per game went up to seven. He was very encouraged by his progress. Franklin began to work much harder toward basketball.

Then, in January of the 2014-15 season, he became the team's leading scorer and rebounder with 25 points per game and 13 rebounds per game. He would make three-point shots and get the boards down low. When he would get offensive rebounds he would put it back in with a two-handed jam. Some times when he didn't have a shot down low when he would get a post-up or a rebound, he would kick it out to his favorite shooter Kevan Mills. This was the stepping stone of his career.

After that great season, the Oklahoma City Thunder called Franklin up to the NBA. Devon was so excited to finally be in the NBA. But he also was disappointed to find out that he rode the bench and had to start back from square one. As an unestablished NBA player, he didn't get much publicity or playing time.

Franklin knew he was good enough to get some minutes on the court, but he had to prove it to coach.

"Coach, I was wondering if at the next practice, we could have the team scrimmage?" asked Devon.

"Sure," was all Coach Kremer could come up with as a reply.

Devon would get playing time because there are ten people on the court at a time and 12 players on the active roster. He knew he would play a lot in the scrimmage.

Franklin was matched up with Robert Lucerne. Bob was a 7'0" center. He was the starting center for the Oklahoma City Thunder. Bob was a decent player, but wasn't very aggressive.

At the scrimmage, Devon won the tip-off. He tipped it back to Kevin Durant, who pushed it up the court. He passed the ball to wing man Frank Jackson, who in turn, passed it into the post to Devon Franklin. He took one crab dribble, made a drop step, and went up for a dunk.

Franklin continued to pull different post moves. The turn around jumper, drop step, up and under, and occasionally the hook shot. He showed the coach how much better he was than Bob Lucerne, not only from an offensive stand-point, but also defensively; where he blocked Bob's shot five times.

After that performance, the Oklahoma City Thunder's coach, Joe Cremer, made Devon the starting center. Franklin thought the NBA would be just like the D-league. Boy was he wrong. Devon started to slack because he thought he was so good he didn't need to try hard to remain a good player.

But, the NBA is not a place to slack off. The players are much better in the NBA than those of D-league caliber. Franklin stopped trying hard in the

NBA. As time went on, he became a worse and worse player.

He fell so far that by the time he was 27, in the 2016-17 season, he was taken off the starting roster where 30 year old Robert Lucerne took over. Devon knew something must be wrong. He thought he was working hard and performing well, but he wasn't.

After the final game of the season, Coach Cremer went into the locker room lobby with Devon Franklin. He showed Franklin some videos of what he was doing wrong, so he could improve upon those aspects of the game.

"Devon, do you see that? Right there," Coach paused the tape, "no box-out? Also, you are going to the rack weakly."

To improve upon those aspects of the game, needed to go back to the old protocol and work with Coach after practices. Franklin didn't want to put in more time, but knew he had to. So he practiced boxing out and going to the hoop hard.

So, after a poor 2016-17 season, Devon entered the 2017-18 season in hopes of becoming a great player. His extra practices with Coach Cremer were paying off. He was headed to the all-star game! Franklin had become a great basketball player! On top of that, the Oklahoma City Thunder had become a good team, and by the end of the season they were headed to the playoffs!

In the first round, the Thunder swept the Cleveland Cavaliers to move to the Eastern Conference semi-finals to face the Boston Celtics. Game one

went to the Celtics, 117-94, but the Thunder won games two (90-89) and three (100-85). The Celtics won game four 95-90. Oklahoma City won game five 98-96. Game six went to the Oklahoma City Thunder 145-144 on a triple-overtime, buzzer-beating three-pointer by Devon Franklin.

Oklahoma City advanced to the Conference finals. They faced the Detroit Pistons. The first two games went to the Pistons. Then, the Thunder won two. The next two games were split, one for the Thunder and one for the Pistons. On to the deal-breaking game seven.

#### *The Final Minutes of Game Seven...*

Thunder takes the ball up the court while the crowd roars in the players ears. Cameras are flashing like fireworks as Kevan Mills takes the ball up the court. By now, you can smell the stink the players are radiating. While the cheerleaders wait on the baseline, the fake smiles painted on their faces, they feel the sweat of the players fall on them as the players dive out of bounds and their smiles quickly turn to disgusted frowns. The sweat drips down the player's faces and into their mouth as they taste the salty liquid.

Kevin Durant exclaims, "Give me the rock! Give me the rock!" As Kevan Mills passes him the ball.

The ball is passed to Kevin Durant who nails a game tying three. Pistons take the ball up the court.

"Ball me!" shouts Victor Frank.

They pass him the ball. He's guarded by Devon Franklin. He goes

for the lay-up, rejected by Franklin!

“Oh no! Franklin’s down! This doesn’t look good. The trainer is on the court and he still isn’t up. It looks like he twisted his ankle or something. He’ll have to be helped off the court. Franklin is a key player, and the Thunder need him. They say he broke his ankle, not just fractured, but broken all the way through. It’s going to be a tough and long recovery for Franklin. An ambulance is taking Franklin to the hospital as the Thunder lose the game. What a heart breaker,” cries the commentator.

At the Hospital, Devon hears from the doctor that it will be an 8-12 month recovery, and that even after that,

Franklin will never regain his basketball skills. Devon will now have to retire from basketball at the peak of his career.

After he healed, Devon looked around to try to find a job coaching basketball. Devon chose coaching because he was inspired by his coaches and how much better a player he became because of them. He also wanted other players to become good at basketball just like what happened to him.

The University of Michigan hired Franklin to coach them. Devon has ridden off of his basketball playing career and now will get as close to the game as possible by coaching for U of M.

# The Best Hit Ever

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**THE BEST HIT EVER** is story by *Daniel C. Williams* about a boy who tries to lead his football team to the Super Bowl.

It was game time. We, the Birmingham Patriots, were facing the Clarkston Chiefs in the first round of the playoffs. I hopped out of my dad's car and said, "See you at game time." Since my dad is a coach, he would be on the sidelines with me.

All of my teammates were huddled up at the entrance of the Groves High School football field. I was one of the four-year players, so I was a team captain.

When we got out onto the field, we got all pumped up and did some stretches. We had a talk with our coach. He said, "We've beaten these guys before, so we can do it again!" He was right; we had beaten them about three games ago by scoring a last-minute touchdown on an interception to win the game.

The chiefs have a key QB who is also a great running back. We have a key running back.

About a week earlier in practice, our coach told us about how much preparation the Chiefs do in order to win in the playoffs. He said, "They rent out a banquet room in a hotel, watch every one of our games, and create a whole new offense and defense to stop us!" We got sort of intimidated by that, but we knew if we practiced hard and played our best, we could come out with a win.

All of the captains lined up for the coin toss. We shook hands with the other team and were elected to receive. During the first quarter, it was pouring down rain, and it was a terrible game. We had some pretty good plays where we would get twenty yards and so would they. That didn't matter. We ended trailing by a score of 14-0 in the first quarter. Our team was devastated.

We knew they were going to be different but not THIS different. One of the new looks they were giving us where they had two defenders in front of the running back. We hadn't seen that before. I had been known to have some really nice hits where I just own a guy, but something was to come that was even better.

I lined up in a four-point stance on defense and watched the ball snap. Right away, I jumped out of my stance, shook off the lineman, sidestepped one of the defenders, and I was one-on-one with their best running back. I lowered my head, wrapped my arms around him, and put my helmet right in his numbers. I completely *flattened* him at full force.

I was about to celebrate when I realized the ball was loose. I got up and ran to the ball. I picked it up and outran their offense. I scored an 86-yard touchdown! I was so happy. It was the hit of a lifetime. My team came over to

celebrate with me in the end zone. That really turned the tide.

At halftime, the score was 14-14 because our running back scored a 22-yard touchdown. We were getting all pumped up for the second half when we heard a screech of pain. Our quarterback was lying on the ground and yelling. He had sprained his ankle. At the beginning of the third quarter, they scored a touchdown right off the bat, and then so did we.

At the end of the third quarter the score was still 21-21. Our coach told us that this was it: the time to shine. It happened like this three games ago when we beat them. We were losing by 14 at the first quarter, and then we tied it up and turned the momentum before we scored a game-winning interception.

We weren't so lucky this time.

They did something that wasn't

expected at all. They brought in their second-string offense on a fourth down and snapped the ball. They formed a punt-formation half circle around the quarterback as he bombed the ball 50 yards down field. There was a man open who we thought was on the sidelines because he was facing the quarterback. It was a trick play. He caught the ball and ran all the way for a touchdown.

Our coach was mesmerized by such a well-thought-out play. We couldn't score for the rest of the fourth quarter. We lost the game 28-21.

I was very sad because next year I would be moving up to Varsity and I might not get to see some of the people I was friends with for a long time.

Still, although we lost the game, at least I had the satisfaction of knowing that I had the best hit ever.



# The Big Election

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*In THE BIG ELECTION by Myles Glover, a boy named Tyler and his friends run a school election. Something fishy happens, and the boys have to prove to their principal that their opponent Paul is cheating, but how?*

**B**erkshire Middle School is a school in Beverly Hills. It is a very nice looking school. All the students are happy to be there.

Berkshire finally opened a new school store. It sells the best stuff from Silly Putty to chewing gum. But don't get the wrong idea. They don't only sell chewing gum, Silly Putty, basketball, footballs, and things like that. They also sell school supplies like pencils, lined paper, drawing paper, erasers, and more.

One day, a group of kids were in love with regular pencils, and they did not like mechanical pencils. They thought they were too dangerous.

"Hey, guys, did you hear about how those kids were protesting about mechanical pencils because they thought they were too dangerous?" said Tyler on his way to school.

"Mechanical pencils are way better than old wooden pencils. Every single day at school all we hear is, 'NO MORE MECHANICAL PENCILS! NO MORE MECHANICAL PENCILS!'"

"That is really annoying. We need to put a stop to this," said Sean.

The next day at school a group of kids were shouting the same thing; they said it so loudly that one would have thought they would have lost

their voices by now. "Do you guys think Principal Drexler knows about this?" asked Sean.

"Of course he knows about this. He's the principal," replied Tyler.

"But you guys also see that he or any of the other teachers aren't doing anything about it," said Charles.

"Yeah, they keep chanting the same thing, 'NO MORE MECHANICAL PENCILS! NO MORE MECHANICAL PENCILS!' They said that over and over again until the bell rang. Then at Rec they chanted it again until Rec was over."

"Hey, can you guys stop chanting? We get the point that you don't like mechanical pencils," said Tyler at the chanting students.

"No, we will not stop. We are just going to keep protesting until they get rid of the mechanical pencils at the store," said this guy named Paul. He is like over the whole thing, Huh?

"Well, how about this?" said Sean. "We will have a vote from the other kids in the school, and if more people like mechanical pencils, we'll get rid of regular pencils. If you guys win, then it will be the other way around. Also, I will take this up with the principal to see if he approves of it."

"Okay, you're on," said Sean.

So the next day they all had to go

to the Principal's office to see if it was okay with him.

"Hi, Principal Drexler," said Tyler. "We all wanted to know if we could vote if most of the kids in our school wanted mechanical pencils or regular wooden pencils."

"Well, sure you can," said Principal Drexler. "As long as you keep it at a certain level and it does not get out of control."

"Thank you, Principal Drexler, I really appreciate that," replied Sean.

The next day all of the kids from both sides came to school early to get ready for the election so that by time school began they could get it running. At the beginning of school they started the election, and many people actually voted.

"Oh gosh, how many people are voting?"

"A whole lot," said Charles."

"Yes, yes, yes, calm down! I have never seen these many ever! I hope we are winning because I really don't want them to get rid of mechanical pencils."

"Yeah, that's all I use," said Sean.

"Hey, you guys, how much time are we supposed to let them vote?" asked Paul.

"I don't know," said Tyler. "About a week."

"That's because there is a lot of people at this school. What if somebody does not come to school today or tomorrow or Thursday? You never know, so you have to give everybody a chance."

"Hey, guys, keep a single file line," said Sean.

"Hold on; it's time to go to class," replied Tyler.

"Oh man," said Charles.

"Hey! Principal Drexler just gave me today's results. Man, we're losing," said Tyler.

"You know what I think is a good idea to help us win? Put up posters and slogans that people will be convinced that we are right and they're not."

"Yeah, that is a good idea," replied Charles.

The next day we came to school early again to make posters and to make up slogans. They were working hard to win this election but Paul and his people still seemed to be winning. "Oh come on I can't believe they are still winning after how hard we have worked and who wants plain pencils over mechanical pencils anyway?" Charles wailed.

"I guess most of the people in school," responded Sean.

"I just got the results back from the Principal Drexler again," said Tyler.

"Hey how come we have the same score as last time but their score went up a lot?" Charles protested.

"There is something fishy about this whole election and we have to get to the bottom of this," said Charles.

The next day the boys talked to Principal Drexler about the whole situation. "Hi Principal Drexler, I wanted -I" said Charles.

"We wanted," interrupted Tyler. "We think that Paul and his group are cheating because when you gave us back our latest score, ours didn't go

up at all, but Paul's score went up over 100. Wouldn't you think between the time of the last results and our current results our score would at least have gone up some votes?" questioned Sean.

"Yes, I could believe that," said the Principal. "I will be on the lookout for any unusual or suspicious actions."

"Thank you, Principal Drexler," they all said in unison.

The next day at school the boys knew he would not admit it but they just wanted to give it a try anyway. "Paul," said Tyler. "Be honest: Have you been cheating?"

"No, I have not been cheating. I am trying to win this fair and square, and just look at the two new signs for the school store. I know I will be seeing that up. I will be able to smell the victory. I will feel the accomplishment of winning."

"This will not be a fair victory after all, now will it!" said Tyler.

"Yes, it will be a fair victory, because I am trying to win this fair and square," said Paul.

Later on that day Tyler told everybody what Paul said and they discussed everything. The next day at school every body was crowding around to either to see the results of the votes or to vote. The boys still knew there was something fishy going on about Paul and his group. The boys still had the thought in their heads that Paul was cheating. While people were voting Principal Drexler was hiding behind the wall peaking out at the kids to see what

was going on and nobody seemed to notice him. Principal Drexler was doing exactly what he told the boys he was going to be doing. Look out for any one acting strange or suspicious. He did catch one of the boys looking suspicious and he was surprised because, Paul's people were supposed to be the bad guys, but he saw one of the boys looking very sneaky. "Hey what are you doing Sean?"

"Nothing," he said in a strange voice. Principal Drexler started thinking about what the boys said and if they were just saying it so he would not worry about them cheating. Later on that same day at rec, some kids were voting and Principal Drexler was not normally around at that time of day, but he showed up anyway to look out for cheaters.

He saw Paul voting and that was completely against the rules. "Hey, what do you think you are doing?" said the Principal.

"Man, I guess you caught me red-handed," replied Paul.

"Yes, I did! What are you doing?"

"I'm voting."

The boys popped out and said, "Yes you caught him. If he did it then what were you doing Sean?" asked the Principal.

"I was just trying to catch him myself."

"So that explains you looking suspicious."

"I told you, you would get caught Paul," said Sean.

"Cheaters always eventually get caught," said Tyler. "So this means we

won, right Principal Drexler?”

“Yes, it does mean you guys win!”

“Yea!” They all shouted.

They cheered so loudly the whole school could hear them.

So that’s what happened between

regular wooden pencils and the cool mechanical pencils. That day, Berkshire students learned never to cheat and always play fair and square; if you don’t, more than likely you’re going to get caught and in trouble.

# The Big Game

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In **THE BIG GAME** by *Mark Emilio Suris*, Mark Emilio will have to try to fight his way through his homework and basketball game and win against a couple of his best friends. Will Mark Emilio be able to fight through the game and beat his best friends?

Today is Saturday, the day that I usually have basketball games to play. But today was more important than usual, because my game this afternoon would be against four of my best friends. Before the excitement began, I had lots of homework to finish. Lucky for me, my game was scheduled for five o'clock. I had two hours to finish two subjects. My final subject was math, one of my better ones.

The game was at Berkshire Middle School, my school, which made it a home game for me! While we drove to Berkshire, I listened to some music to pump me up for the game. When we got to Berkshire, we went inside and watched the rest of the game that was being played before our game. I played for the Spartans. My friends were playing for the Tar Heels.

My team began warming up and taking practice shots. When it was time for the tip off, I looked around to see the other team. They were all dressed up in blue shirts and a variety of shoes. I wore my green Spartans shirt.

Everyone got ready for the tip off. We formed in a circle.

The ref counted down, "Three, two, one." He threw the ball up in the air.

My team recovered the ball. They passed it to me and I dribbled the ball down the court for a jump shot and swished it! It was 2-0! Then it was the Tar Heels turn to bring the ball up the court.

"3-2 zone!" I yelled to my teammates.

Our competitors drove it to the hoop, but missed it. We got the rebound and "pushed it" down the court, as our coach would say.

It was a very competitive game. We kept taking turns taking the lead. At the end of the half, we were tied at 17-17.

I tried to encourage my teammates. "Nice shooting," I shared. "Nice rebounding, too. But we can't let them drive to the hoop."

We started the third quarter and it was my turn to sit on the bench and cheer for my team. Although I waited five minutes, it felt like an hour passed before I got back into the game.

The third quarter flew by as each side kept fighting to score points. When the fourth quarter began, it was still anybody's game. With only two minutes remaining in the game, my Spartans were down by two points.

"Play defense! Don't let them get in the lane!" my coach screamed from

the bench, as we ran hard down the court.

“3-2 zone, guys, 3-2!” I yelled while guarding my friend.

The Tar Heels shot the ball and it hit the rim and bounced out. I grabbed the rebound and quickly called a time out.

“Okay team, there are nine seconds remaining and we need to get a play going,” my coach ordered. You could feel the excitement that he and the fans had.

The ref blew his whistle to begin play. Jack, our center, passed the ball to me with only three seconds left in the game.

I looked down court and only saw one Spartan by our basket. It was

Ethan, but it was going to be a very long throw.

I lifted up my arm and threw the basketball like a baseball, hoping it would reach Ethan.

“Shoot! Shoot, Ethan,” I roared, hoping he would hear me over all the noise.

Ethan caught my pass and made a short jump shot to put the Spartans ahead for the win. With less than a second left, the Tar Heels tried a three-point shot at half court to win it, but they missed.

We all shook hands and congratulated each other on a good game. I even celebrated later with my Tar Heel buddies. It was a great evening!

# The Game

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In **THE GAME** by *Reyn Eichenlaub*, two kids square off in a basketball game to determine the best basketball player in the neighborhood. Mike versus Drew. Who will win?

*Swoosh!* Drew made it again. All the kids were booing because he was the meanest, badest, and best basketball player in the neighborhood. It didn't help Drew's cause that his family was the richest in the whole neighborhood.

"Nobody can beat me. I am too good for you guys!" Drew yelled to anyone listening.

All the kids whimpered back to their houses, mad that Drew had beaten another kid in basketball.

The next day, all the kids were outside playing basketball when a huge truck with a sign that read "Moving" showed up. All the kids wondered why it was there. When the kids started seeing things like children's bikes and toys being unloaded, they figured out some new kids were moving in.

The new kid's name was Mike! Once he and his parents had finished moving in their things, Mike headed outside to play basketball. He could pass the ball effortlessly. He could put it between his legs and his shot was golden, but the best thing was, he could dunk! Mike was tough and cocky when he needed to be, and yet he seemed like a really nice kid.

The next day, Drew saw Mike playing basketball in his driveway.

Drew asked, "Do you want to come over to my house to watch a basketball

game?"

Mike said, "Yes."

When Mike got to Drew's backyard he was welcomed onto the court. He looked around and there seemed to be 100 people looking back at him. Drew introduced everyone to Mike.

Drew said, "I watched you play basketball. You're a pretty good player."

Mike replied quickly, "Yeah thanks, you're pretty good yourself."

Suddenly, Drew's mood changed, "I could beat you in a game any day."

Mike sensed this was getting out of hand. He could feel the tension rising. Mike hid his nervousness but decided to say, "I'd like to see you try," staring Drew right in the eye.

Drew walked away at first but then came back and said, "If you think you're so good, let's have a one-on-one match."

Mike was eager to have a piece of Drew. So he replied, "Sure, but where and when?"

Drew yelled, "Right here on Friday."

It was Tuesday and that gave Mike some time to practice so he said, "Ok." Mike thought the conversation was over so he was about to walk away and go practice his jump shots.

That's when Drew blurted out, "Under one condition, if I win then you

have to stop playing basketball forever.”

Mike turned to face Drew not wanting to say it but he did, “Deal.”

All the kids were shocked at Mike’s choice. When Mike started to walk away, Drew ran up and slapped the ball that Mike was carrying right out of this hand. You could hear the slap. The kids stood in stunned silence. They thought that for sure there was going to be a fight.

Mike looked Drew in the eye and spoke slowly, emphasizing each word, “You’re going down!”

It was now Wednesday and the days were flying by. When Mike was practicing basketball outside he would glance over to see if Drew was practicing outside with his posse. Mike realized that he needed someone to help him practice. He set the ball down in the small green shrubs and went to another neighbor’s house. Mike had noticed the kid playing basketball outside. He seemed pretty good, so he went over to the hoop. The kid looked over and immediately said, “Aren’t you the guy that’s playing basketball against Drew, Friday?”

Mike replied, “Yeah, and I could really use a hand for practice. “Would you help me?” The neighbor put out his hand to shake Mike’s hand and said, “Yes, I would be glad to help! I’m Josh.”

It was Thursday, and Mike and Josh were practicing for the big game. Mike had the basketball in his hand, and said, “What should we do?”

Josh thought for a moment and then said, “I think we should take some

jump shots and work on dribbling skills.”

Mike nodded his head up and down and then started taking some three pointers. Josh was impressed. He had never seen anything like it before, everything was perfect about his shot. His follow-through was great and his hand placement on the ball was magnificent. Next, they moved to dribbling. Mike was skilled, effortless and a talented dribbler, too. He could put it through his legs and around his back.

Finally, Friday was here. Josh and Mike woke up to a beautiful sunny morning. Mike had a toasted bagel with cream cheese and an energy shake. Then he went out to meet Josh. After a short warm-up, they jogged to Drew’s backyard. There were 200 kids already surrounding the court. The kids were excited and noisy each calling out who they thought would win the game. Mike and Josh pushed through the crowd. Josh stayed on the side of the court in front of the crowd and Mike stepped onto the court.

Drew took a microphone that he had rigged and said, “Here are the rules. We are only playing half court. If the ball hits the rim or goes in, then you half to take it back behind the three point line. We are playing to 11.” Mike nodded in agreement as if to say “fine”. A few minutes later, the game was on.

Drew got the ball first. He took a three-point shot right away and made it. Next, Mike stole the ball away from Drew and dribbled down to the basket. He went up for the shot, but Drew



blocked it. Drew quickly snatched the rebound and sank a two-pointer. From that moment on, Mike knew that he had to step up the pace.

The score was 5 to 0. Drew was in the lead. Mike took the ball again and made a powerful drive to the basket and did a one-handed dunk right over Drew's head. At 5-2, Drew was driving to the basket, when Mike flipped Drew's feet out from under him and Drew fell right to the ground. Mike took the ball and sank a three-pointer! Drew got up rubbing his chest as if he was hurt. Then he got the ball and immediately shot it and AIR BALL! Mike grabbed the rebound and shot another three-point basket. He was on fire. The score was now 5 to 8. Mike was in the lead. Drew dribbled down the court quickly

and scored a two-pointer. Mike wanted to end this game, fast. He grabbed the ball, did a spin move on Drew, and stepped out beyond the three-point line and sank the three-pointer. Game over: 7 to 11!

Everyone was cheering and Drew was on the ground crying as Mike stared at him. The final score was Mike 11, Drew 7.

Josh then ran up to Mike and said, "Nice spin move."

Drew finally got up off the ground and headed for the microphone. He blurted out, "I challenge you again."

Mike glanced at the crowd and then at Drew and said, "I have other basketball games to play. No can do, Drew!" The crowd laughed as Josh and Mike high-fived their way back across the street.

# Men in Tights

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*Early in the 1800's Robin Woods is challenged to a dance off by the fairest mate in the land... the Garbage Man. There's only one problem: Robin can't dance. Will Robin be able to win the challenge after he is secretly trained? Find out in **MEN IN TIGHTS**, by **Devin McIntyre**.*

**I**t was late in the year of 1812. When **IR...** *Swish—an arrow swishes in the air toward the narrator.* “Oh my gosh, an arrow almost killed me! Oh my gosh, an arrow almost killed me,” panted the narrator of this story.

“Sorry,” Robin Woods apologized.

“Why did you do that? Do you know who I am? I—I am the narrator of your story. Chuck. Chuck Borris, to be exact.”

“Nice to meet you, Chuck, but I gotta fly. I’m supposed to meet mistress number two,” Robin Woods stated proudly.

“You’re not going anywhere! You have to tell me about your life so I can go on with this story,” stated Chuck.

“Ok, I’ll tell you, but first I will ask a question,” Robin said. “Are you one of those crazy people called um, um... oh yes, ‘Paparazzi.’ You know, the people that Lady RaRa sings about?” asked Robin suspiciously.

“No, I’m not one of those crazy people, but since we’re talking about Lady RaRa, have you heard her new hit single ‘Bad Romance?’” asked Borris.

“No, I haven’t. Let’s stay on topic, please,” moaned Robin. “Here is my life story. I married Elin Nordegren. I have two kids, Sam and Charlie. And yesterday, I was challenged to a dance

off against the fairest mate in the whole land, the Garbage Man. You know, the man who rides on the back of the cart. There is one problem, however. I **CAN’T DANCE!** That’s my life story,” Robin reported.

“I know how to dance! Do you want me to teach you?” asked Chuck.

Step, Step, Twist and Shout, Chuck danced. Step, Step, Twist, Twist, and Fall, repeated Robin in a clumsy way. “Ok, you’re going to need more than just the stupid old narrator. You need a top of the line dance instructor. You need John Travolta. He has slick moves, stylish clothes, and sweet slicked hair.” Chuck said. “I’ll call him now.”

“I’m here, I got your call! I heard there is a dancer in need of dancing lessons,” John Travolta blasted with pride. “Who will I be helping?” John Travolta looked liked he put his clothes on in the dark. He had an unshaved, scruffy beard with pieces of food stuck in it. His blue jeans had grape juice stains on the leg. And he had on an ugly neon green polo shirt that was inside out.

“Me,” admitted Robin.

“All-right then, let’s get started,” John said.

“Let’s start with the basics,” John said. Twist! Turn! Snap! And repeat!

danced Travolta. Twist! Turn! Twist again?!? Turn to the left! And Fall! repeated Robin.

*This guy is hopeless; he can't even do the basics!* John thought.

"I thought you are supposed to be good at this. You are amazing at it in the movie," John told Robin.

"One, it's a movie and they have stunt doubles. And two, I was playing golf, DUMMY," Robin yelled.

Two months later after extreme training, they arrive at the dance stadium. The bright lights were shining down on the announcer; not really, I'm just making the story dramatic. There were millions of people watching, not including Robin's mother, again, dramatic effect. And the filthy restrooms that smelled like pigs that rolled in mud? Not dramatic. Let's not even talk about the refreshments, the rotten hot dogs and the moldy spinach buns.

"Lads and Men...and other...Bill," screeched the announcer "Welcome to Le Dance Off! Let's start!"

A very loud and popular song played as the competitors swaggered into the room.

"Dance!" screamed the announcer.

The two men danced and danced and danced for two hours.

"And the winner is...the Garbage Man! Actually, he didn't win; he is taking all the cream puffs! Get him!" screamed the announcer.

An angry mob chased the cream-puff-stealing Garbage Man out of town. The match was soon disqualified. Neither the Garbage Man nor Robin won the match because you have to be a resident of the town to have a chance to win. And since the Garbage Man was run out of town, and was never seen again...well, you know where this is going.

# My Saturday Night

---

*In the story MY SATURDAY NIGHT by Charles Brown, a boy and his uncle go to a basketball game. They find that nothing is smooth sailing.*

This was a Saturday night game at the Palace of Auburn Hills. It was the first game of the season. The playing teams were the Boston Celtics and the Detroit Pistons. The Boston Celtics were wearing green and black, and the Detroit Pistons were wearing red, white, and blue. The head coaches were Doc Rivers for the Boston Celtics and John Kuester for the Detroit Pistons.

My uncle took me to the basketball game in his old 1901 Cadillac car. On the way to the game we ran out of gas. We could not even make it to the nearest gas station. Suddenly, a strange man appeared in a gasoline truck. He offered to give us gasoline for fifty dollars. We gave him the fifty dollars in exchange for the gasoline.

The strange man in his underwear (NOT BOXERS) and a t-shirt quickly took off with the money and was pulled over by undercover police. We were able to get our fifty dollars back because he was in a stolen gasoline truck. I said to my uncle, "My mom told me not to

talk to strangers."

But he said, "You are not with your mom, so you listen to me."

I said, "You're weird," and he threw me in the car.

We made it to the Palace of Auburn Hills in time for the start of the game. My uncle and I used the fifty dollars to buy fifty one-dollar hot dogs, because it was one-dollar hot dog day. The Detroit Pistons were down 13 points at half time. So we nervously ate all fifty hot dogs and ended up in the bathroom for about fifty minutes. It felt like something was building up inside me. But it was just gas. The sad part was we missed a 50-minute dunk contest during halftime while we were in the bathroom.

In the third quarter the Detroit Pistons stormed back to take the lead going into the fourth quarter. With 55.2 seconds left on the clock, Charlie Villanueva drilled a three-pointer to give the Detroit Pistons a lead of 88 to 81. The Detroit Pistons defeated the Boston Celtics, 92 to 86.

# Rocky Mountains

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*Jimmy and his brother Jake ski in the Rocky Mountains alone for the first time. The adventure tests their limits in **ROCKY MOUNTAINS**, by **Will Lockwood**.*

It was a cold winter night, and there were chills in my blanket. After about an hour I drifted asleep into the winter night. I woke up to a terrifying dream.

It took me a couple of seconds to get out of my bed. When I did, my mom called me in to eat before I could even get dressed, so I ended up eating in my PJ's. I complimented my mom's cooking and went to go get dressed.

I put on some jeans and a blue shirt and walked down the hallway to see if my brother Jimmy was awake yet. He wasn't awake, so I threw a shoe I found on the ground at him. He jumped immediately. "What did you do that for?" he said, and then threw it back at me. Luckily he is a terrible thrower and couldn't hit me if I were two feet away from him.

When my brother was getting up my mom reminded me that we were going snowboarding in the Rocky Mountains today. My brother and I are going to the Rocky Mountains today all by ourselves.

We got ready, and my mom drove us over there. It was packed with people, so it took about five hours to get our lift tickets. By then it was dark, but we still hit the slopes. We went down a couple of small hills. Then we

went to the top of the mountain.

My brother was very nervous, so I went first. I made it down easily, and so did my brother. Then it occurred to me that no one was left in the whole ski resort. Everyone was gone. I still wanted to go down that hill again. But we would have to walk up because the power was out.

We were walking and walking, and Jimmy gave up, but I really wanted to go down this mountain, so I persevered up the mountain. I finally got up and felt like a broke stick with frostbite. I had to lie down for a few minutes before going down the hill.

When I was ready to go down the hill, I forgot that Jimmy was just lying there.

I had to do something about it, so I picked him up and put him on my back.

I started down the hill, but the wind and snow started with me. The blistering winds took me off balance and into a different hill. I hit a small jump and went flying into a snow bank and got stuck. I felt frozen and blacked out.

Hours passed. It felt like a day passed, but when I woke up I was in my bed. Yes! Yes! It was all a dream. But then my mom walked in and told me the whole story again.

# Semi Race

---

*Bill and his friend Mike see a sign for a semi race. They nearly go broke getting ready for the race. Will the race pay off for them? Read **SEMI RACE**, by **Blake Burress**.*

Bill is a semi truck driver. He travels all around the U.S.A. One day Bill saw a sign when his buddy Mike was with him. The sign said, "Attention all semi drivers: Come race your trucks and win major prizes, like money! The race is on the 9<sup>th</sup>; \$20 to enter." Bill and Mike wanted to enter the race.

Bill said to Mike, "What is the date today?"

Mike said, "The fifth."

"The race is four days from today. We need to get ready!" said Bill.

Mike said, "We have good trucks already!"

"But we need racing things like different tires and roll cages."

"It will take forever to put a roll cage in!"

But Bill said, "We will get everything today and work until we get it done."

Mike said, "We can't get some old semis."

Bill said, "If we do they will need to be cheap and in good condition. Then we will need a roll cage, too, so we need to hurry."

Then Bill said to Mike, "I'll leave you with finding semis, and find some roll cages."

Later that day, Mike had found two semis for \$1,000 and they were in good shape so he and Bill went to look at

them. Bill and Mike liked the semis, and thought they would work well for the race, so they bought them.

The next day, Bill found a roll cage for \$50 and bought it. But he still needed one more. He went to the junkyard and asked for a roll cage. The owner said, "We have one over here."

Bill said, "It's just what I need! How much?"

The owner said, "Um, \$60."

"How about \$50?"

"Okay."

Bill called Mike and told him that he had found two roll cages. All they had to do was take off the cabs and put the roll cages on both of the trucks, but they only had two and a half days until the race.

Mike and Bill had to work quickly. They pulled both trucks and roll cages into the garage, and they took the cab off one of the semis and put the roll cage in. It fit just right. After that, they put the cab back on and it barely fit. So, they found some old metal and added it on the cab. Then they put some primer on the new metal.

They tried to take off the other semi's cab and it barely came off. They had to take a blow torch and burn the rest off. Then they put the roll cage on and it was a little small, so they added some metal on the side, and then

screwed it down. Finally, they were ready to put the cab on, but they remembered that they had taken off some metal, so they needed to melt more on before they could put the cab on. Bill had no more metal, so he said to Mike, "Do you have any at your house?"

Mike said, "Probably in the shed." He went to look while Bill waited. Mike called and said, "I have some metal, but I don't think it's enough."

Bill said, "Bring it over; we will see if it works."

Mike came back with the metal and they melted it on but it was not enough, so Bill gave the junkyard a call and they were still open. Bill went to the junkyard and got some metal. When he came back, they melted it on, and it was just the right amount. They got the cab on and then primed the metal they added.

Bill said, "Let's stop for the day and get back to it in the morning."

"Okay," said Mike.

The next day Bill gave Mike a call and said, "I am up, let's go work on the semis."

Mike said, "I'll be right over."

When Mike got there, he and Bill primed and painted the semis. They were finally done. They just needed to dry. They decided that the next day they would test-drive them to make sure everything was working, and then go to the race.

The next day, Bill woke up and ate and called Mike.

"Okay, I'm up. Let's get the day rolling!" Bill said.

Mike and Bill drove the semis

around to test them and they worked well. So then they put the semis on a semi trailer and hooked Bill's work semi up to the trailer that had the two semis on it and went off to the race. An hour later, they pulled up to the racetrack. They paid \$20 to enter, and then parked and got the two semis off the trailer.

They got out on the racetrack to make sure the semis ran well and made adjustments so that the semis were ready for the race. It was almost 3:00pm and someone who was walking around told them that the race started at 3:30. So Bill and Mike did one more lap around the track and decided they were ready.

The announcer came over the loudspeaker, "Racers get to the start line and the race will start."

So every driver pulled up to the start line. And then announcer came back on. "Two minutes gentlemen." Bill and Mike put their gear on and got ready.

The announcer said, "Thirty seconds, racers. Start your engines."

The starter announced "Fifty laps, racers!"

Someone fired a smoke gun in the air and the race started. Thirty minutes later there were 15 laps to go and Bill was in second place and Mike was in fourth place. Ten minutes later there was a lap to go and Bill was in first and Mike was still in fourth. There was a half lap to go, and then 1-2-3 Bill won the race and the prize of \$1,500! Mike finished in third. Bill received a trophy with his name on it. All the effort Bill and Mike put into their semis paid off!

# The Team

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**THE TEAM**, by *Josh Gorodinsky*, is the story of a hockey team that is doing terribly, but is not ready to throw in the towel. This story teaches to never give up and not to lose hope.

“Wow, another loss,” said Max. “That’s our fifth loss, so we are now 0-5.” The Ice Hawks were the worst team in the huge travel league, and it was almost impossible to win any game. They were in the process of recruiting new players and hoped it would possibly change their team. They had only recruited one so far, and his name was John. He was not so good at skating, but he was one of the people who could actually shoot the puck.

The next day they saw a new face in the locker room for practice. The coach said it was the new kid that he had found playing street hockey outside with his friends and asked to join the team.

“His name is Jack,” said the coach. “He will be playing center in our next game, and then we will see what will happen there.” Jack was very big and looked strong.

In the practice the coach wanted them to skate with a puck and try to hit the crossbar or goalpost to train their accuracy. Only one person could hit it, and that was Jack. Every time he went up to shoot he aimed for the top right corner and he hit it.

The next game in the season came, and it is now their sixth game and their first with Jack. They were really mad at how they played in their last five games,

so everybody tried extra hard.

No matter how hard they had tried they still ended up losing 6-1. The only goal they scored was with Jack. “Now if we are going to get anything close to being in the playoffs, we better start winning,” said Jack “I didn’t join this team to lose, so we better start practicing more and playing harder.”

“Hey, Jack, if you’re so good, then why didn’t you play for a team?” said Devin, our starting defenseman.

“Well, I was raised in Alaska and they didn’t organize a league there. Everybody just played outside with their friends, but we had ice ten months a year, ya know,” said Jack.

The next morning the whole team (other than lazy Stuart) came to Jack’s backyard to do a little scrimmage in his own ice rink. Everyone had a lot of fun doing like a two-hour long scrimmage, and after that they all took their hockey equipment to their game that was in 45 minutes.

At the end of the game it was tied 3-3 with 30 seconds left in the game. The Ice Hawks took a timeout to make a new plan. The plan was that the defensemen brings up the puck and then takes a shot from the blue line and the center, Jack, will deflect it into the net. The next thing you know the plan worked in the last seconds, and Ice



Hawks had won the game. The coach was very happy and threw a party.

Three months have passed in the Ice Hawks' season, and they won every game with Jack except two. Both of those games Jack had the flu. They were officially in the playoffs, and it was best of seven, just like the NHL. The first team was really easy, and everyone was amazed that they even got into the playoffs. It was an easy win every single game, and they only lost one in the series.

The next two series were way harder than the first, but the Ice Hawks still ended up winning both. The whole team played better, and not just Jack. Lots of people like our goalie, Travis, Max, Devin, and everybody else, too.

"We all improved when Jack came," said Devin.

"Yeah, that's true," said Travis, our starting goalie.

Now the Ice Hawks are going to the finals and playing a team all the way from New York, and that's a long drive from Birmingham, Michigan. The next day they were going to New York for their first away game with the Knights.

The trip was fun, and their two-game away series ended in a tie. One game they won and another they lost, but both games were very close. The next two games were at home and the result was the same—won once and lost once. After two more games it is still the same result—the series is tied. Everything is now going to be decided by one more game.

Their next game started out really well, and the first period ended 0-

0. They were happy they weren't at least losing. But the worst thing happened... Jack got injured!

"Ohhhhhhh!" the crowd roared as if they had the pain Jack had.

It all happened when he got the puck in open ice and a player from the other team went full speed on him. The entire team was very unhappy with what had happened, and the only good thing is that that guy got a full-game suspension.

The next two periods were nothing, just nothing, without any goals scored or even shots on goal—just nothing. That meant overtime with no goals on the scoreboard. It appeared that the team didn't actually need Jack after all. But after getting a penalty in overtime, then maybe that wasn't true. In fact, they needed him so much that they were actually going back to the locker room to see if he could come back.

"Dude, are you all right?"

"No. I got the wind knocked out of me and my chest is killing me."

"C'mon, guys, we need to hustle!" said Max, hoping that the team still had a chance.

There were two and a half minutes left on the clock, and it depended all on this next line. They needed to score. The coach called the Ice Hawks over to the bench to make a play.

"This team is strong, but we can play harder than them. We can't let them ice the puck out of our zone—"

"Well, that's a first," someone on the team whispered quietly.

"We are trying the power play 'overload,' but need to get a defenseman-to-defenseman slap shot

one-timer and get maybe even more passes so you can make the other team get exhausted.”

The Ice Hawks got back on the ice with joy thinking that they could correctly do the play and win. The next thing you know, they scored on a one-

timer from defenseman to the other defenseman, just like coach said.

Everybody was so amazed that they didn't need Jack after all. Jack had led the Ice Hawks to the finals. Then the team did the winning in the final game themselves.

# Index of Authors and Titles

- Abducted*, 145  
*Adopted*, 69  
*Agent 006*, 183  
ALI, ABDUR-SAAMAD, 362  
*Alien Takes a Stand, The*, 147  
*Aliens Kidnap My Teacher*, 149  
ALLEN, DUMINIE, II, 159  
ALLEN, SETH, 342  
ALLRED, JARET J., 124  
*Alone*, 15  
ALPNER, KYRA, 227  
*Amber Petle*, 47  
*Amber's Revenge*, 407  
ANDERSON, ETHAN, 59  
*Army, The*, 17  
ASSELIN, LOUISE, 65  
*Atheres and the Greeks*, 215  
AUSTIN, ELIZABETH, 290  
*Avalanche, The*, 409
- B., PIERCE, 244  
BACCANARI, MICHAEL, 188  
*Bad Day*, 197  
BARNETT, LEADER, 254  
*Basketball Dream*, 411  
BASTIAN, ALEXANDRA, 394  
BEDELL, ALYSSA, 53  
BEHNAM, CAM, 184
- Best Hit Ever, The*, 415  
*Big Election, The*, 417  
*Big Game, The*, 421  
BLACKWOOD, NICOLE, 200  
BLONDET, LUC, 215  
*Bloody Knife, The*, 49  
BODWIN, ETHAN, 157  
BOUIE, LAVENDER, 69  
BRADSHAW, BRANDON, 367  
BROUSSARD, STEVEN, 350  
BROWN, CHARLES, 428  
*Bully*, 71  
BURRESS, BLAKE, 430
- C., CAITLIN, 102  
CALLAHAN, LIAM, 323  
*Candy City*, 216  
*Caroline*, 222  
CASSIDY, KELLI, 118  
CATCHINGS, BIJON, 384  
*Cave of No Return, The*, 367  
*Chanel Bag, The*, 73  
*Charlotta and "Dork"*, 77  
*Chookabookas Invade!*, 4, 224  
*Christian and the Ring*, 184  
CLAYBROOKS, KOREH, 207  
COMSA, C. DYLAN, 35  
CONCANNON, PATRICK, 24

COOKE, MARVIN E., 401  
COOPER, NATALIE, 168  
CORNET, MATHIAS, 149  
COSTE, ROMAIN, 49  
CROREY, LIZZY, 325

*Daddy?*, 369  
DAGENAIS, ANDREW, 21  
DALEY, KRISTIN, 106  
*Dance Tournament*, 373  
DANIELS, CHARLOTTE, 73  
*Day I Went to the Carnival, The*, 227  
*Day Plastic Trucks Saved the Day, The*,  
229  
*Decision, The*, 18  
*Deer Hunting*, 376  
DENNIS, BRALEN, 183  
*Desert*, 19  
*Destruction, The*, 21  
*Different Worlds*, 24  
DILAURA, ABBY, 145  
*Discovery of Magic, The*, 232  
DOLAN, JACK, 331  
*Doll, The*, 113  
*Dragon Queen*, 235  
*Dreams and Disappointments*, 200  
DUDAS, LEO, 4, 224  
  
EICHENLAUB, REYN, 423  
ERNST, MAXWELL, 190  
*Escaped Murderer, The*, 186

FABBRI, TONY, 164  
*Fairy Gardens*, 240  
*Fight, The*, 80  
FLECHSIG, LILLY, 222  
*Flight to Freedom*, 377  
FRENCH, BRENDEN, 306  
*From a Squirrel's Point of View*, 244  
*From the U.S. to France on a Skateboard*,  
246  
*From Your Friends, Katie and Keke*, 248

*Frozen Global Territory*, 252  
*Future As We Don't Know It, The*, 151

G., JAKE, 363  
*Game, The*, 423  
GLOVER, DAVID, 140  
GLOVER, MYLES, 417  
*Gold*, 4, 187  
GOLDBERG, ARI, 147  
GOLDBERG, JONAH, 277  
GOLDFADEN, JOSHUA, 4, 187  
GOOGASIAN, GEORGE, 18  
GORODINSKY, JOSH, 432  
*Great Depression, The*, 81  
*Great Transfer?, The*, 380  
GREEN, JONATHON, 297  
GUTIERREZ, ATHENA, 386  
GUTMAN, LAUREN, 71

HAFEN, REBEKAH, 369  
HARVILL, LOGAN, 328  
HATCHETT, ROBERT, 206  
*Haunted, The*, 115  
*Hayloft, The*, 118  
HERMÈS, MÉGANE, 47  
*Hollywood Scare, The*, 382  
*Home Alone*, 188  
HOPKINS, JOHANNA, 229  
HORNBURG, NICK, 377  
*House on Willow Creek, The*, 121  
HUNTER, ZOÉ, 63

JADYN, 403  
JAMES, THOMAS, 91  
JELINEK, KATIE, 4, 26  
JOHNSON, CIARA, 80  
JONES, SEBASTIEN, 246  
JORDAN, JASMINE, 395  
*Journey to Nigeria*, 384  
*Julian Powers and the Red-Eyed Snakes*,  
53  
*Julie Runs Away*, 386

*Just Me*, 204  
*Justice-for-All League, The*, 56

KASHAT, ZENA, 88  
KATHAWA, KAYLA, 4, 344  
KELLY, OLIVIA, 398  
KENNEDY, KARA, 258  
*King of the Ocean*, 254  
KING, SEAN, 130  
KLEZEK, AMY, 4, 352

LAMPERTIUS, JEANNE, 210  
LANDGRAF, DYLAN, 113  
*Last Ones Standing, The*, 4, 26  
LENINGTON, ASHLEY, 340  
*Leo's*, 153  
LEV, ANYA, 235  
LEVIN, BEN, 407  
LEVY, CAMERON B., 4, 302  
LIEBLER, BRODY, 409  
LIEGL, BEN, 15  
*Lily in Wonderland*, 258  
*Lily to the Rescue*, 190  
LOCHER, SETH, 34  
*Locked In*, 84  
LOCKWOOD, WILL, 429  
*Lost*, 28  
LOUIS-FERDINAND, SYDNEY, 99  
LU, KATIE, 268  
LURZ, COCO, 262  
LYBBERT, RAIN, 270

M., SARAH, 316  
MADDEN, DORIAN, 380  
MADDOX, DELPHINE, 373  
*Madeline's Present*, 262  
MADISON, MEREDITH, 137  
*Magic Easel, The*, 268  
*Magic Vase, The*, 270  
*Magical Tour of Ancient Greece, A*, 274  
MAGNAN, NICK, 176  
MAN, LUKE, 313

MARKOWITZ, LEXIE, 304  
MARSZALEK, ADAM, 338  
MAZIUS, CLAIRE, 135  
MCINTYRE, DEVIN, 426  
*Men in Tights*, 426  
*Men in White, The*, 157  
*Merry Christmas*, 124  
MESTDAGH, CHRISTINE A., 216  
*Metropolis 220X*, 159  
MILLER, OWEN, 335  
*Missing Diamond, The*, 57  
*Missing Pizza, The*, 87  
*Money Madness – A Survival Story*, 389  
*Monster Hockey!!!!!!!*, 277  
MOORE, ASHLEY, 115  
MOORE, JUSTIN, 286  
MOORE, NATHAN, 87  
MOORE, NICHOLAS, 57  
*Morph Club, The*, 279  
*Movies and Popcorn, Oh My!*, 30  
*Mutants*, 286  
*My Family and Me in Nevada*, 206  
*My New Life*, 88  
*My Saturday Night*, 428  
*Mystery of Rain, The*, 290  
*Mystery of the Blown-Up Float, The*, 59

*Neon Blue Pencil, The*, 294  
*Nightmare*, 391  
*Notes, The*, 127

*Old House, The*, 91  
OLIVER, DEMARCO, 56  
OLMSTEAD, JOSHUA, 17  
*One Crazy Day*, 297  
*One Strange Mystery...*, 63  
OVIZE, HADRIEN, 127

PANLEY, CAMERON, 294  
PARFENOV, ALICE, 300  
*Past Button, The*, 394  
*Past, Present, and a Genie?*, 300

PATRICK, CAMERON, 382  
 PIROG, DAVID, 274  
 PITTS, SHELBY, 391  
 PORTES, PAULINE, 309  
*Power of the Buckeye*, 4, 302  
*Problems*, 395

QUASARANO, SARAH, 153

RICE, IAN, 28  
 RIVERA, JAZMYN, 248  
*Robo Chickens Take Over Mars*, 161  
*Robotic Vampires*, 130  
*Rocky Mountains*, 429  
 ROUAUD, LOÏC, 84  
 ROWINSKI, BRAM, 19  
 RUBIN, JOSEPH G., 411

S.R.L., 93  
*Santa's Workshop*, 304  
 SCHAEFER, SCOTT, 319  
 SCHMIDT, KRISTEN, 81  
*School Day of the Living Food, The*, 306  
 SCOTT, RYAN, 197  
*Secrets*, 133  
*Semi Race*, 430  
 SHADY, SLIM, 178  
 SHAMOUN, ISABELLA, 186  
 SHERWOOD, DAVID, 348  
*Shrunk*, 309  
*Singing with the Wind*, 135  
*Snickers the Spectacular*, 398  
*Snow Day Misadventures*, 313  
*Snow Day!*, 401  
*Snowball*, 316  
 SOARES, DANIEL, 40  
 SORRELL, NAS, 192  
*Space Monkeys Vs. Aliens: Battle for Science!*, 164  
*Sparks and Lightning*, 319  
 STEWART, KATHERINE, 30  
 STRAITH, ALEX, 252

*Struggle, The*, 403  
 SURIS, MARK EMILIO, 421  
*Surprise, The*, 93

TAL, 151  
*Tale with a Very Difficult-to-Pronounce Name, The*, 323  
*Talking Pens, The*, 325

TAYLOR, AMANDA BONILLA, 240  
 TCHIBLAKIAN, ANDREW, 161  
*Team, The*, 432  
*Temo McStone and the Wish!*, 328  
 THIERRY, ROBIN, 232  
 THOMOPOULOS, ARTEMIS, 121  
*Ties*, 331  
*Time Machine, The*, 168  
*Toast to the Alien Nations, A*, 172  
*Tragic Story of Chocolate and Lollipop, The*, 335  
*Trapped on the Ski Slope*, 32  
*Trip to Another Land, The*, 34  
*Trouble*, 96  
*True Meaning of Christmas, The*, 207  
*Typical Day in Fantasy Land, A*, 338

ULEP, GISELLE, 279  
*Under A Bloody Winter Sky*, 35  
*Unexpected Snow Day, The*, 210  
*Unknown, The*, 137  
*Unveiled Mask*, 192  
*Uprise in Evil*, 176

*Visiting La-La Land*, 340  
 VOGEL, EMERSON, 96

WALLACE, KARA, 77  
*Watch It You Die*, 140  
*Watch!*, 65  
*We're Moving*, 102  
*Weirdest Day Ever, The*, 342  
*Weirdest Thing Happened to Me, The*, 99  
 WEST, MADI, 133

WESTERLUND, CLAIRE, 32  
*What Happened Before*, 4, 344  
*When Fat Aliens Attack*, 178  
*Whisperers, The*, 348  
*White Monster*, 350  
*Who Said Anything About Being Ugly?*,  
4, 352  
WILLIAMS, DANIEL C., 415  
WILLIS, HARMONIE, 356  
*Wizards' Quest, The*, 356

*World War 3...*, 40  
*Worst Day, The*, 106

*Yell, The*, 362

YOUNG, CARA J., 204

ZEIDNER, GABRIEL, 389

ZIEGLER, ZAC, 376

*Zombie Mountain*, 363

ZUFELT, ALEX, 172

