

WHO SAYS
ADULTS
HAVE TO WRITE
ALL THE
GOOD STORIES?

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*Seventy-eight Stories by
Sixth-grade Students of
Berkshire Middle School*

Daniel Fisher, Editor

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Title by Jonathan Szcurek.

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Mr. Fisher congratulates each author who contributed to this volume. Five drafts later, you have an achievement that you can be proud to show the world.

AS BIG AS LIFE

Blue

*When an orphan girl goes to live with her uncle, she finds there are some things he doesn't like and doesn't allow in his home. In **BLUE** by **Brittany Smith**, a girl convinces her uncle that change isn't bad.*

The carriage turned a corner and we made it into Shadow Village. I looked out the window to only see a few dandelions. The rest of the Village was like a slow motion black and white film.

“So you’ve come to help out your uncle, huh?”

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“I ‘spect you’re an orphan then?” asked the driver, making small conversation.

“Yep,” I said, wanting to change the subject.

As we turned another corner, I thought about how grateful I was to have my uncle, for he was the only relative who would take me in. We were now on Whisper and 29th. I noticed a large dark brown house with overgrown vines on each side. Startled, I clutched the driver’s arm, for I longed and hoped I wasn’t to stay there. The black curtains in the window were just so slightly opened as if to say “I AM WATCHING.”

“Calm down, my girl,” said the driver, obviously noticing the fear and tension building inside me. “The house is old indeed, but Mrs. Comings, the cook, will be glad to have you.”

We drove up to the front of the old house and the carriage stopped abruptly.

“Thank you, sir,” I said and walked toward the door.

I walked up the steep steps to the porch and suddenly the double doors swung open.

“The child is here!” said a woman.

She seemed to be in her early fifties, with strands of gray peeking through her brown, tightly curled hair. Her hips were rounded and she was quite plump with a height at about five feet. She wore a flowered pink dress with a white apron tied ever so snugly around her waist.

"I'm Mrs. Comings," she said with an inviting smile. "Come on in, dear child. Don't be meek." And she embraced me.

The house had a musty smell to it, and when I walked in my nose was forced to adjust.

"Your uncle will be down to greet you soon."

I heard footsteps and looked to the staircase. Walking down the steps was a tall and thin man. His head was bald and shiny. I showed him a bright smile, but Uncle showed only a slight grin, with eyes that made the rest of him look sad.

"I take it you made it here all right?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, "and I intend to earn my stay here."

"I don't want you to feel like a maid because I'm sure Mrs. Comings will have plenty of little tasks for you to do," Uncle replied.

He then hesitated. "You are free to come and go as you please. Mrs. Comings will show you to your room," he said and walked out of the room.

Mrs. Comings grabbed my suitcase and I carried my duffle. We walked up the staircase until we reached the top. There were seven doors, which I assumed were all bedrooms. Mrs. Comings made a left turn, passed the first two doors, and walked into the third. I followed her into the room.

"This will be your bedroom, Meredith," she said "I'll leave you here to unpack your things, and you can come for dinner in an hour or so."

"Great. Thank you, Mrs. Comings. I'm sure I'll love staying here."

"I'm glad," she said, and she walked swiftly out the door. I was quite satisfied with the room that I would be staying in.

The curtains were green and the quilt on the bed was a pastel green compared to the curtains. The quilt had large lilac purple flowers on it. There was a desk and chair with a green cushion on

top of it. There was also a six-drawer dresser and a medium-sized closet just the right size for my clothes. As I began hanging my dresses in the closet, I thought of the one thing that was forbidden to have in this home, one thing that I was not to disobey. I finished hanging my dresses and was now emptying my duffle, which held only my socks. I was told not to bring one item into this house that was the color blue.

Looking around, I saw nothing in the whole house had one shade of blue in it. I had disobeyed this rule, for lying at the bottom of my duffle was the blue locket my mother had given me just three weeks before she died of cancer. Inside the locket was a picture of my mother and father, arms around each other. My father had died trying to get home for my eighth birthday. His plane crashed. Just looking at the picture, anyone could tell that they loved one another with all of their hearts. It was the only piece of them I had left. I looked around briefly to make sure no one was looking, and put the locket in the bottom of the drawer where my socks were.

Dinner filled my stomach and I was satisfied with the food provided. I had had a long journey and was more than ready for bed.

The morning light woke me early. I sat up and looked around my room. I got out of bed and walked to the drawer to make sure the locket was still there. Thankfully, it was still there under my socks. I had been worried that someone had seen me put it in my drawer yesterday. Creaks in the floor told me that Mrs. Comings was walking up the steps toward my room.

"Well, good morning! How did you sleep?" asked Mrs. Comings.

"Good morning. I slept well," I said.

A breakfast of toast and raspberry jam was like a coating on the lining of my stomach. While eating, the color blue kept slipping into my mind, so I simply asked, "Why is the color blue forbidden in this house?"

A startled look replaced the friendly grin on her face. "I guess you have the right to know since you live here now. I'm sure you've never met your aunt, am I right?"

"Yes. Uncle told me that they were divorced," I said, wanting to get to the point.

"She died of pneumonia, and when she passed she was wearing a beautiful blue locket that Henry gave to her on their first anniversary. She was also wearing a blue nightgown."

"Well, that was the last time your uncle saw your aunt. She was wearing all blue."

"I see," I said. "Blue is not allowed because it reminds Uncle about Aunt Margaret."

"That's exactly right, dear," Mrs. Comings said with a look of relief.

"Thanks for telling me, Mrs. Comings. I feel much better now that I know," I said, and I finished the rest of my orange juice.

"Meredith, one more thing: I have to run to the corner store, and I was wondering if you could dust the seven bedrooms upstairs?"

"Oh, sure, Mrs. Comings, whatever I can do to help out, I will."

"I'll be back in an hour or two!" she said, and I heard the door slam.

Quickly I scampered up the steps and rushed to get the blue locket.

I held the duster in one hand and my blue locket in the other. I was sure neither Uncle nor Mrs. Comings would be back for a while, so I would think about what to do with my blue item. I dusted around beds and the corners of ceilings. What will happen if I keep my locket in this house? I finished dusting all the rooms including mine and flopped on the bed with thoughts cycling through my head like spinning gears. I looked in my hand and there was nothing in it! I was sure I was holding my locket the whole time while I was dusting!

"Meredith, I'm back!" called Mrs. Comings.

"Back so soon?" I shouted down the staircase. Now I would never be able to find my locket. I would have to pray and hope that Uncle or Mrs. Comings would not find it lying anywhere. Unfortunately, I had no idea where it could be.

I decided to skip dinner to give me time to think of ways to get the locket back into my possession. Nothing clicked and after a while my thoughts scattered and I fell asleep. My dress and every other piece of clothing were still on me when I awoke.

Suddenly, Uncle Henry appeared in the doorway of my bedroom.

"Oh, did I oversleep? Good morning, Uncle," I said and I spread out my lips to show white teeth.

"Don't try to explain. Just let me say what I need to, and drop the subject. Is this your locket?" He held up the blue locket. His hand held it by just a tip. I couldn't say a thing. What was I supposed to say?

"Umm...yes. But you see it means so much to..."

"I know what it is, Meredith. Your father and I bought it together for your mother," he said.

"Mrs. Comings told me that she told you the reason that blue is not allowed in my home. But what she doesn't know is that when blue is brought back into this house it brings back so much sorrow and memories to not only me, but this whole little town. Everyone knew Margaret. She was the light of this town and the last time any of us saw her beautiful face was when she was wearing blue."

Before I could explain to Uncle that my locket was the only piece of my parents remaining, he began to sob uncontrollably. His eyes were like faucets as water streamed from them. Oh, how I wished I could say something to him, but thinking over the situation, I could find no words that could mend his broken heart. It felt like a lifetime passed before his weeping died down.

"Can I say something?" I asked, not knowing if Uncle wanted me to stay quiet. Uncle Henry said not a word.

"I know you miss your wife very much. And I understand that she was a huge part of your life. Now that she's gone, I can tell that you are lonely and sad. Can't you understand that I've lost TWO of the most important people in my life? Did it ever occur to you that I didn't bring my blue item in your home to disobey, but that it's special to me? Just like not having blue brought into your home is important to you. Couldn't you make

an exception for your niece? I'll keep it out of your sight, I promise!"

Uncle looked up from his hands. His face was wet and his eyes were bloodshot red.

"It's been so long since I've seen the forbidden color," he said in a shaky voice. "Even Margaret's eyes were blue. When I was with her, that's one of the only colors she wore. Every night I went to bed thinking about that color," he added. "You say you'll keep it out of my sight?"

"Yes, sir, Uncle Henry," I said.

"After I leave this room, we will never talk about this ever again. Is that clear?"

"Crystal," I said.

Wiping his eyes, Uncle walked out of the room, leaving me sitting on my bed. For the rest of the day Uncle and I did not speak to each other, but his kind-eyed glances throughout the day told me that there were no hard feelings.

I continue to wear my locket, tucked away from sight around my neck. No one speaks of the day Uncle found the locket, though I told many people. It's all behind us now.

I have made many new friends in this strange town. I even attend the schoolhouse on the outskirts of the Village.

About one month after Uncle found my locket, we visited Aunt Margaret's graveyard. Since then, Uncle Henry has been a new man. His rule for a blue-less house is still ongoing, but as long as I can wear my locket and know that I will have the memory of my parents around my neck every day, there is nothing more I could ask.

The Cover of Friendship

Never judge a book by its cover. A girl learns the true meaning of this and how it relates to friendship in THE COVER OF FRIENDSHIP, by Clare Cooney.

“Whoa! Brian Arens, 34, has a wooden vase from Africa that is 1,000 years old!”

“Emma!”

“Cara Jones, 16, has 300 glass figures from the year 1870!”

“Emma Kathleen!”

“Scott Murphy, 64, has an aquamarine glass vase from England that is 434 years old!”

“Emma Kathleen Callaghan! Get down here right this instant!”

Emma tore her eyes off *Fascinating Antiques of the Century* and dragged herself down the stairs. At the door, Emma’s mother was speaking to a tall, slender lady with her dark hair pulled back into a tight bun. Nearby stood the woman’s daughter, a young girl with blonde hair pulled into two pigtails, making her look younger than she was. She was wearing a plaid skirt, a lacy blouse, and Mary Janes. “Hello,” she said. “I’m Mary Jane Cummings.” She held out her hand.

Emma looked around self-consciously, as if to make sure none of her friends from her old school were pressing their faces against the window, watching her every move (no one from her old school would have shaken hands).

“Why don’t you take Mary Jane up to your room?” suggested Emma’s mother. It wasn’t really a question.

August 30, 2000

Dear Diary,

As soon as we moved into our new house, people started coming over to welcome us. Well, today was the worst: a plain, prissy, boring, perfectionist of a girl. When I obediently took her up to my room she started acting like we were best friends! Jeez, she's a real chatterbox! She's annoyingly polite and I've had enough! Gotta go. Mom's calling me to dinner.

Emma

“So?” her mother questioned.

“So?” Emma parroted.

“So...what do you think of her?”

“She’s a boring, prissy, stuck-up perfectionist,” Emma promptly recited.

“Emma Kathleen! How dare you! You haven’t even given her a chance!” her mother exclaimed. Emma ignored her mother’s comment.

“I’m going to bed,” she said.

* * *

“Barrett?”

“Here!”

“Callaghan?”

“Here!”

“Cunnings?”

“Present!”

Emma groaned. Even her answer for roll call was prissy.

It was the dreaded first day of school and the sixth-graders at Prudence Middle School were very nervous. This was the day of first impressions...Emma wasn't doing so well. Sasha, a girl that was known to be popular, was talking to Emma.

"So? Do you have any special interests?" Sasha asked.

"Yeah," said Emma excitedly. "I love antiques! Don't you think it's so interesting how..." Sasha's eyes glazed over and she slipped away in mid-sentence. Mary Jane rushed over to Emma. Surprisingly, Emma was happy to see a familiar face--even if it was Mary Jane's.

"Mary Jane, can I call you Jane?" asked Emma.

"Sure!" Jane replied excitedly, happy to have a friendly nickname.

For the rest of the day, Emma and Jane were inseparable. Emma avoided the "in" crowd at all costs. They were rude to her. She was surprised that the groups had been divided so quickly. Within an hour, all the "popular" people were together. Like insects, they seemed to swarm together, buzzing. As Emma sauntered home with Jane by her side chattering incessantly, she wondered why she hadn't been part of the "in-sect" crowd.

September 2, 2000

Dear Diary,

First day of school: D- in social status. At my last school I had lots of friends. Now I only have one--Jane! Yes--Mary Jane. She's not that bad. I was talking to her and she's interesting. I guess not all first impressions are right.... No one seems to be interested in antiques. I appreciate Jane, though. She puts up with all my antique trivia.

Yesterday was the second day of school. A boy named Greg (he's in two of my classes) said "Hi" to me. That's not

normal! Jane keeps saying we should be friends with him but...a boy? A nerdy boy? An annoying boy? No way! Jane keeps on telling me that I shouldn't judge a book by its cover. What did she mean by that? We weren't even talking about books. I don't always understand her. Then she asked him if he wanted to hang out with us. Ugh! He was tagging along all day and being annoying.

Well, today, on the third day of school, guess what I saw Greg pulling into his book bag-- Fascinating Antiques of the Century: Book II! I have been trying to get one for ages! I hoped he might let me borrow it. When I asked him, he said yes. He's really nice--finally I've found someone who is interested in antiques. He's unique, in his own group. He's not a jock--but he wears sports shirts. He's not a nerd--although he's smart. He's not outspoken--but I wouldn't exactly say he's shy. I guess I like that combo. It's just Greg. I never would have dreamed of being friends with a boy! A nerdy boy! An annoying (or so I thought so) boy! I didn't see this coming!

Emma

Saturday--the best day in the week, in Emma's opinion.

"There's nothing to do!" complained Jane, who had five favorite days of the week: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,

Thursday, and Friday. Emma, Jane, and Greg were sprawled on the Lazy Boy sofa, brainstorming for things to do.

“Let’s go to the fort,” suggested Greg. Emma, Jane, and Greg had found an abandoned tree house near Old Man Murphy’s ice cream parlor. They added their unique touches and...voila! They had a dream tree house.

“Nah,” Emma sighed. “We played there yesterday.”

“Homework?” offered Jane.

“Done!” Emma and Greg chorused.

“Reading?” tried Jane.

“Reading and homework! You’re possessed!” laughed Greg.

“I know!” Emma exclaimed. “Let’s go down to Old Man Murphy’s!” Soon the threesome was spinning on the scarlet soda fountain stools at a counter at the ice cream parlor.

“What’ll it be today?” asked Old Man Murphy. Old Man Murphy was a kind old man who was rather shy.

“The regular,” said Greg. Five minutes later a strawberry health smoothie (Jane), vanilla ice cream covered in chocolate (Emma), and chocolate with chocolate chip ice cream covered in chocolate fudge in a chocolate covered cone (Greg) was delivered to their table.

“So you like chocolate, Greg?” said Old Man Murphy with a smile.

“Uh, huh,” said Greg in a muffled voice as he crammed more of the chocolate into his mouth.

“Thank you, Mr. Murphy,” said Jane. Emma rolled her eyes. Jane didn’t approve of calling him Old Man Murphy. She said it was improper.

“So, Old Man Murphy,” Greg managed to say as he swallowed a hunk of chocolate, “any idea how that old tree house got up there?”

“Yeah,” said Old Man Murphy, “my brothers and I played there when we were kids.” Emma’s eyes widened.

“Oops,” muttered Greg.

“Oh, Mr. Murphy. We didn’t know! We’ve been playing there for a week. We’re so sorry!” exclaimed Jane.

"It's fine. As you can see--I haven't been up there in a while," said Old Man Murphy calmly. Emma looked up at him and smiled. Of course he hadn't. His gray hair and mustache made him look older than he was. He was rather stout and his hands were battered and worn with age. Yet his brown eyes looked young and they twinkled with excitement...and mischief. And his face, even though it was wrinkled and gray, was usually creased with a smile.

The young trio resolved to go play in the fort.

"Come on guys--let's go!" said Greg excitedly.

"Um, Emma, why don't you stay and help me clean up," Old Man Murphy suggested shyly--as usual. Emma raised her eyebrows suspiciously.

"Uh, okay." Emma knew the old man was fond of her so she wasn't too surprised when he asked her to stay. As soon as Greg and Jane left the parlor, Old Man Murphy spoke.

"Um. You're interested in antiques, right?" asked Old Man Murphy.

"Y-e-e-s-s," said Emma slowly. Old man Murphy shoved a refrigerator aside, revealing an old brown door with a magnificent gold handle. He then smiled and opened the door. Emma stepped onto the thick, red rose carpeting of the room and looked around her with shining eyes. She was lost for words. The room was filled with antiques. Beautiful African designs and delicate china tea sets were surrounding her.

"They're amazing," Emma sighed, "and this one!" Emma was facing a tall, blue glass vase. "It's beautiful," she said breathlessly. It shimmered in the sunlight as if it was saying, "I know I'm perfect!"

"Funny you should mention that one," he chuckled. "Do you have that antiques book?" Emma nodded. With shaking hands and wide eyes, Emma reached into her book bag and handed the book to him. To Emma's surprise, Old Man Murphy flipped it open to the page Emma had been looking at earlier that week. She had already read the page but was now reading it as if her eyes were new and sensitive and she was newly amazed at everything she read.

“Scott Murphy, 64, has an aquamarine glass vase that is from England and is 434 years old,” she whispered. Her eyes widened. “You’re Scott Murphy?” He smiled.

“Greg’s interested too, right?” asked Old Man Murphy. “Whenever you two get tired of reading about antiques and you want to see some, well...,” he gestured around the room, “you’re welcome anytime.”

That night, when Emma was snuggled under her comforter, listening to the crickets, she thought about her friends: a tall dark-haired boy with a pale complexion and emerald green eyes, who she had thought would be annoying; a girl with blonde hair and “proper” clothes who she had judged to be prissy and stuck-up; and an old man. She thought she would only be close friends with people her own age. Possibly no one at school would be impressed with her or with her friends, but Emma didn’t care. She understood Jane’s saying now. As she thought about her three best friends, she realized that their “covers” might not look all that promising. But inside, there is a story worth telling.

The Day My Parents Got Married

Things don't always go the way we plan them. Experience a day of unexpected circumstances in THE DAY MY PARENTS GOT MARRIED, by Bailey Garrett.

Ring, ring, ring.

“Hello, can I speak to Bailey?”

“Who’s calling?”

“Seybion.”

“One second.... Bailey, come get the phone.”

“Who is it?”

“Your cousin.”

“Oh, coming.”

“Here she is.”

“Hello.”

“Hey. So finish telling me about the day your parents got married.”

“Okay, but let me go in my room. My momma is too ashamed of what happened....”

“Okay, it all started when my momma gained 25 pounds. We had to go get a dress made in three hours. We went across the street so we could sit down and eat while they widened the waist and the arms in the dress.”

“Why would you eat in your dress?” Seybion said.

“Oh, we weren’t dressed for the wedding yet. While they were making the dress, I went to go with my mom to get the pops.

I realized that my mom had on two different shoes. So my granddad and I rushed back to the house to get her white Gucci shoes to go with her white Guess dress. When we got back, we gave her the shoes and went to go pick up the dress.”

“Is that the same dress she wore to my mom’s wedding?” Seybion said.

“No, the dress she wore to your momma’s wedding was DKNY.”

“Oh.”

“So she went in the bathroom, got dressed, and put on lip gloss.

“When we got to the church, my mom was nervous. Being that my sister was the flower girl, she went in and threw flowers on the floor. Then I went down the aisle, holding some flowers, then my other sister came down the aisle.

“It was finally my mom’s turn to walk down the aisle. She was doing well until, BOOM! She fell, and everybody laughed. She was okay, and she got up and walked down the rest of the aisle with a big smile on her face.

“They got married and had the reception. Then we partied and took pictures all night long.

“We finally went home. We took a bath and watched a movie and fell asleep.

“Oh, Seybion, I have to call you back. My mom is coming, and she would be very upset if she found out I told you the story.”

“Okay. Bye.”

Enemies

Sometimes you find friends in the most unexpected places. In ENEMIES by Shannon Eagen, two girls find friendship by default.

“There goes Stephanie, Ms. Perfect,” Jamie Roberts sneered with her friends.

“There goes Jamie, the girl who think she’s the best in the world,” Stephanie Ellsmore said with disgust to her friends. Both groups of girls had been friends until Jamie and Stephanie came along. The two girls always got in fights, so they split up the group. The others still all wanted to be friends, but they also wanted to stay friends with their “leaders” (Stephanie and Jamie).

One day both Jamie and Stephanie were sick. That day the two groups got together and made up a plan.

TWO DAYS LATER

“Jamie, you’ve got mail,” Mrs. Roberts called to her daughter. “Oh, cool! It looks like an invitation!” Jamie exclaimed.

Please Join Mary Ellen Sancher for a party

Location: Laser Quest

Date: Wed., December 18, 2001

Time: 7:40 p.m.

Please do not bring gifts.

“Wow! Mary Ellen’s dad owns Laser Quest! We’ll probably have the place to ourselves!” Jamie couldn’t wait. There were only three days until the party!

On that same day Stephanie received an invitation almost exactly the same as Jamie's, only hers was supposedly from her friend Jane Thomas. "Cool. Mr. Thomas works at Laser Quest! We'll have so much fun!" Jamie and Stephanie were so excited that they didn't even remember to be mean to each other for the next three days at school.

Wednesday after school, Jamie got ready for the party. At 7:20 she and her mom pulled out of the driveway and started off for Laser Quest. At 7:25 Stephanie and her mom did the same. When Jamie got there she didn't see any people inside. Her mom came in with her just to make sure everything was okay.

"Oh, Jamie, you can go on in. The other girls have already started," Ellen's friendly dad informed her.

When Jamie entered the room it was almost pitch black and she couldn't see anyone. *Well, I don't want to get myself caught, so I'll just be quiet and wander around*, she thought.

She couldn't help but notice that it was almost completely silent. The smoke made her feel dizzy. Everywhere she looked she saw the usual many ramps and pathways speckled with glow-in-the-dark paint. She'd been to this place a bunch of times and almost everything seemed the same. The only thing missing was the people. There were no shouts of excited people, or the thuds of shoes, and the usually annoying sound of the "laser guns" would've sounded like music to Jamie's ears. She slumped down, frightened, and waited.

A couple of minutes after Jamie arrived, Stephanie came in with her mom. "Hey, Stephanie, you can go in, all the other girls are already in there," Ellen's dad said with a smile.

"Great, I love Laser Quest!"

When Stephanie went in she saw no movement. Something was wrong and she could sense it. She felt the same as Jamie had. She wandered along cautiously looking for signs of people. Finally she heard a shot. "Hello!" she called out frightened. "I know we aren't supposed to talk to each other, but who is out there? I think it's just us two; I think this is a trap!" Stephanie continued, hoping someone would come out.

"Oh great, Stephanie, you're here. Just who I need right now," Jamie said with sarcasm.

"Jamie? Why did Jane invite *you* to her party?" questioned Stephanie.

"Jane's party? This is Mary Ellen's party!"

Just then they realized they had been tricked. When they were sure that they were the only people in there they started for the doors. "Let us out!" they banged. Jamie ran and flung her whole body at the door, only to hurt herself because it didn't budge. They were stuck in here, with just each other until someone let them out.

The girls each tried to open the door plenty of times, but it just wouldn't open. The smoke was getting thicker and thicker. It felt like darkness was closing in on them. Many times they thought that they heard noise, but now instead of feeling relieved they got more scared! They were both wondering how long they were going to have to stay there.

"I guess we had better try and get along," Stephanie said cautiously.

"Yeah, I guess," Jamie, answered glumly. The girls attempted small talk but finally they started talking about their interests, favorite subjects in school, and so on. They were surprised how much they had in common. Soon they were both talking and laughing like old friends.

Stephanie wasn't that bad once you talked to her and got past that prissy girl look, Jamie thought silently.

I guess I could live with being Jamie's friend. She is pretty nice after you talk to her, Stephanie thought at the same time. "So, are we like friends now?"

"Yeah, I think we are!" Jamie said happily. "Who would've thought? Us, friends!" Then they both laughed again. "So how about we try to open that door again, together this time?" Jamie exclaimed.

"Sounds like a plan to me!" Stephanie answered back. This time when they both pushed together with all their might, they actually got the door open!

"Yes!" they said, and they both slapped high fives.

When they got back to the entrance, they saw all their friends talking and laughing nervously, wondering if their plan had worked. As Jamie and Stephanie drew nearer together their friends stopped, but then got louder, trying to act as if nothing happened.

“Hey guys! Did you have fun? What happened? I can’t *believe* you fell for that!” the more outgoing girls said. The shier girls stood back, wondering if they ever should’ve done this in the first place. All of a sudden it got very quiet.

“Well?” one of the girls finally ventured.

Then Jamie and Stephanie told them the whole story.

Now they are all friends, but after what the other girls put Jamie and Stephanie through together, they are the best friends of all, *forever*.

Find Your Real Family

Andrew's twelfth birthday is one he will never forget. FIND YOUR REAL FAMILY, by Carissa Lenhoff, reminds us not to take those we love for granted.

"Happy Birthday, Son!" said Andrew's father. Andrew told him thanks and started opening his gift.

"You're almost a teen," said his big brother, Mike.

Mom and Dad went in their bedroom upstairs, in the middle of Andrew's opening his gift. Andrew thought they were bringing more gifts. He quietly tiptoed to the door. He opened the door just a crack.

Andrew heard them talking about him. "Should we tell Andrew that he's adopted? He is twelve now. We did say we were going to tell him on his twelfth birthday."

"No, later?" Mom said

"I suppose," mumbled Dad.

Andrew thought to himself, *I'm adopted? Then who's my real family? This family isn't real. It was all a fake!*

He tried to quietly go down the stairs, but every step made another crack or creak. He finally reached the bottom. He raced to his mom and dad's files, searching, flipping through papers as fast as his fingers would go. "Here it is!" Andrew said. "Andrew Tim Kelsey. Mother--Lynn Kelsey; Father--Derek Kelsey."

He took his birth certificate. He ran in his room, packed some clothes, got some water and food, and left without anyone knowing he was gone. He ran and ran, faster and faster. Finally, he slowed down, trying to catch his breath.

He had grabbed a map from his room before he left, and now he started looking at it.

He pulled out his birth certificate. “Hospital--Columbia in South Carolina. Well, that will only take about a month!”

Andrew decided to walk halfway and take a taxi halfway. He was walking there, thinking about what would change and what wouldn’t when he got there.

“Taxi!” He opened the door, and went in. When he was looking out the window, it just hit him. Why was he going halfway across the country for people he didn’t even know? *What if they don’t tuck me in at night? What if my new dad won’t like to wrestle? Why did they leave me in the first place? It’s obvious they don’t want me.* He told the driver to turn back.

When he got back, he slammed the door closed and started sprinting home.

He pushed the door open. “Mom, Dad, Mike!” he shouted with glee. He ran towards them and gave them all hugs. When he caught his breath, Andrew said, “I just wanted to find my real family. But I found out I was with them the whole time.”

Finder's Keeper's

*Don't take what isn't yours. That is the simple--yet important--message of
FINDER'S KEEPERS, by Shelley Valentine.*

Shelby and John were walking home from school on the busy streets of New York City when John stumbled upon a piece of paper. Shelby was a few steps in front of him when John yelled, "Shelby! Shelby!" Shelby ran back frantically to see what all the commotion was.

As soon as Shelby caught up to John, a big gust of wind came out of nowhere. The wind swept up the rectangular piece of paper, with John running after it. John snatched the piece of paper with his fingertips and got a closer look. There, in the palm of his hand, was a signed check. And that's not all; it was made out to "Cash"! They looked at the signature. It read "Steve Handitback," the wealthiest man in town. John said to Shelby, "Do you have any idea what this means?"

Shelby and John walked into Bruno's Coffee Shop, John smiling a great smile. Shelby walked in with her face down. They sat down at a cold, empty table, one that looked as if no one had sat there for a long time. You could tell by the milky white cobwebs draping from it under the table. Without even asking Shelby, John almost filled out the check, but Shelby stopped him.

Shelby took John outside to see what the heck he was doing. "That's someone else's money," Shelby exclaimed.

They went somewhere private so Shelby and John could talk about how bad this was to be taking from someone else. They went home. They walked up their stairs, making sure no one saw the check. They rushed into their TV room and locked the door.

They talked and they talked about ideas of how much money

they could write the check for. They didn't want to fill it out for too much or for too little. They bounced ideas back and forth. They finally decided that two million dollars would do the job.

John woke very early. He got dressed and rushed out of the house. All John left was a note saying he had left to go shopping. He went to the mall and by the end of the day he had already spent one million dollars.

They had just realized how fast money could go! They would have to spend their money wisely. Shelby thought, "Let's not be greedy. Let's give the other half to the homeless."

"I guess that wouldn't be that bad, but I really want to spend that money," John said.

A few weeks went by and they received a letter in the mail saying they needed to pay a one million dollar bill for their big shopping fest. Shelby galloped down the stairs to ask her mom, "Why do you have to pay a bill for your house when you already own the house?"

"Well, you see, every month...what is that paper in your hand, Shelby?"

"Just a test." Her face blushed with redness.

"Hand it to me, Shelby." She handed the paper to her mom.

"This has got to be the worst day of my life," Shelby murmured to herself. The man who signed the check wanted his money back.

John and Shelby crept down the dark maple spiraled stairs, going to break the horrible news to their parents about taking something that wasn't theirs. Right as they got down the stairs, they saw a very serious-looking man in a business suit sitting on the couch in the living room. That was never a good sign when Mom and Dad were sitting in the living room. The living room was just for emergencies or big discussions. Their mom turned and eyed Shelby and John. A tear rolled down her freckled cheek. "Shelby and John, go upstairs," sobbed mom. Shelby scampered into her room and slammed the door shut. She leaped onto her bed facedown, smack-dab in the middle of her fluffy white pillow.

Minutes later her crying put her to sleep. She woke up and ran rapidly down the stairs. She saw her mom making dinner in the kitchen. Shelby fell into her mom, bursting into tears. Her mom asked her, “What’s wrong, Honey?”

“Oh, Mom, I don’t want to lose the house and live in a cardboard box and...!” Shelby stopped. If we lost our house and moved into cardboard boxes, why are we standing here right now?

Just then Shelby remembered the signature “Steve Handitback.” She thought that sounded very familiar, but she just couldn’t put her finger on it. “Man, where have I heard that name before?” Suddenly she remembered. She turned to her mother and looked deep into her eyes. At that moment, she knew their lives would never be the same.

I Am Still Just Like Everyone Else

I AM STILL JUST LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, by *Katie Levin*, is the story of a girl who must fight a personal battle to do what she loves most.

Michelle loved basketball more than anything in the world! She always wanted to play whether it was with boys, girls, or with anyone. She was also the best player that anyone knew, even thought she was ten years old. Not one person could beat her in basketball. She was very popular, and everyone loved her. Michelle had a great life, but she didn't know what was about to happen next.

One day Michelle was playing when she came face to face with the girl she hated most: Lindsey Roberts. She was the big bully at the school, and since Michelle was so small she was often picked on. Lindsey picked up Michelle's basketball and she kicked the ball across the street. Michelle decided she would just go get the ball because she didn't want to just let it go.

Michelle started to walk across the street, when BAM! A car hit her. The car immediately stopped and the man got out and went to go see what had happened. He ran up to Michelle's front door to get her mother.

Lindsey couldn't believe what she had done, and why she had done it. Lindsey was so upset. What would her mother think? She got so scared that she just left. She ran, and ran far away.

When Michelle's mother found out what had happened, she started to scream and ran out to get Michelle. They rushed Michelle to the hospital, only to find out that she was paralyzed

from the waist down. Michelle's mother asked what she had gone into the street for. Michelle just said, "I was playing with Lindsey when she kicked my ball across the street." Michelle's mom said that she didn't really care about Lindsey. She was just thankful that her daughter was still living.

The next day when Michelle was lying hopeless in her hospital bed, Lindsey came to visit. She said she had been very wrong, and had now ruined Michelle's life, and was very, very sorry! Then without another word, Lindsey left, but was stopped by a little voice that said, "WAIT! It is okay, as long as now you can respect me. That is all I ever wanted."

"Okay," said Lindsey, and she left the room crying.

Michelle's mom said she was sorry to say that Michelle would never play basketball again. After those words, Michelle knew that she would have to be strong to do what she loved most. So that is what she did for the next week. She tried to be strong, but all her friends said she couldn't play with them now because she was in a wheelchair.

"What do you mean I can't play?" Michelle said. "I can play just as well as you can, you watch!" Michelle picked up the ball and scored a perfect basket. SWOOSH! "How about that?" Michelle said.

Michelle could tell that her friends were embarrassed that they had treated her like that. "Gosh, I never thought I could do that," she said to herself. "I guess I can do anything if I can think positively and try hard.

"I have been so happy after I proved those kids wrong," says Michelle. "Even though I have been paralyzed from the waist down, I have learned a valuable lesson. Most kids judge the people from the outside because they think that they are so cool, but they are not because now they are embarrassed to find out that I am still just like everyone else."

Maggie and Her Dog Murphy

*A young girl knows only too well what it means to lose someone close to her. In **MAGGIE AND HER DOG MURPHY** by Riva Sharrak, that knowledge helps her when misfortune strikes again.*

Maggie and Murphy were good friends. Murphy was a dog. He was Maggie's dog, of course. Maggie is about ten years old. She lives in Miami, Florida.

Murphy had been with Maggie ever since Maggie's father died, which was about five years before. She loved this dog very, very much. Murphy went everywhere with Maggie. Murphy was a really good dog and he was treated with good care.

Murphy loved playing with children. Every time Maggie's friends came over, they always ended up playing with Murphy. That's how lovable Murphy was.

Murphy was very fat and very fluffy. He had big brown eyes and, of course, he was a boy. Murphy was just a cute, lovable dog that anyone would want to have, even someone that was scared of a dog.

Murphy was helpful also. He helped Maggie with her chores, homework, and things like that. But for homework he just gave her ideas.

One day Maggie and Murphy went to a nearby store. Maggie saw her friend Natalie and didn't pay any attention to Murphy. Murphy just went off and out of the store.

Finally, Maggie realized that Murphy was gone. She started to call out his name. When Murphy didn't answer, she ran outside

the store. Murphy was running across the street. She called out, “Murphy! Murphy!”

Murphy heard Maggie. He stopped and turned around, then started to run towards Maggie. Then, BOOM! Murphy was hit by a speeding car. Maggie called, “Murphy, watch out!” But it was too late.

Maggie started to cry and her friend came out and wondered what happened. Her friend tried to make Maggie feel better, but Maggie wouldn’t stop crying.

They took him to the vet and the vet tried and tried to help. But Murphy wasn’t strong enough.

It was something that was really sad. It was Maggie’s second loss in the short amount of time that she had lived. Maggie couldn’t believe what happened, so she just tried to forget about it. However, Maggie knew how to sort of take care of it because her father had already died.

Maggie has a hard but good life. Sooner or later Maggie will get over the loss. I HOPE!

FAMILIAR FACES

Abe's Dream

As far as we know, Abraham Lincoln was not in the habit of writing down his dreams. So who's to say that he didn't have an experience like the one in ABE'S DREAM, by Tami Gammage?

CHARACTERS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, *also known as ABE*
MARY LINCOLN, *Abe's wife*
MARTHA, *the Tooth Fairy*
BOUNCY, *the Easter Bunny*

SCENE

The Lincoln home

TIME

The year 1860

ABE (*to his wife*): Good night, Mary. Z...z...z.... (*A huge light flashes.*) Whoa, where am I?

MARTHA: In the United States, in Washington, D.C.

ABE: How did I get here?

MARTHA: Don't ask me. I was just walking and you just popped out of nowhere. I'm Martha the Tooth Fairy. Who are you?

ABE: Abraham Lincoln. Nice to meet you, Martha. Wait a minute, aren't you an imaginary figure?

MARTHA: Yes and no.

ABE: Okay.

MARTHA: Everyone is a free soul because of you.

ABE: Tha--

BOUNCY (*with a smirk on his face*): Hi, Martha, who's your friend?

MARTHA: (*Whispering to Abe*) Abe, this is Bouncy. He is always butting into other people's business, even if it doesn't concern him, and he's always popping out when he isn't wanted. So let me warn you that he is very annoying. (*Not whispering to Abe*) Hi, Bouncy. For your information, this happens to be Abraham Lincoln.

ABE: Who are you?

BOUNCY: Bouncy the Easter Bunny.

MARTHA: Well, you can just go away because I'm trying to help Abe right now, so bye.

BOUNCY: Well, Abe, can I help?

ABE: Su--

MARTHA: No, you can't help him, because I'm helping him!

ABE: Bouncy, you can help, too. Okay, Martha?

MARTHA: Fine.

BOUNCY: Thanks, Abe.

ABE: Oh, by the way, do ya'll want to hear my speech?

MARTHA/BOUNCY: Cool, that'll be wonderful.

ABE: Okay, here goes: Two score and eleven years ago, I, Abraham Lincoln, was born. I went through a hard lifetime. I watched people get killed and abused. I cried my heart out. That's why I want to be president. I want to stop the abuse and let everyone be free: Free to roam, talk, do what you want, even read and write. So please vote for me, Abraham Lincoln, to be president. Thank you.

BOUNCY/MARTHA: That was the best speech we ever heard.

MARTHA: Speaking of we, I'm sorry, Bouncy.

BOUNCY: Me, too, Martha.

ABE: So, did ya'll finally solve your problem?

BOUNCY/MARTHA: Yes, we did, Abe.

ABE: Good. I have a question. Can ya'll show me the White House?

MARTHA/BOUNCY: Sure.

ABE: Thanks. Wow, it's so different. I wish I lived her--

VOICE (*offstage*): ...Abe...Abe...ABE!

MARY LINCOLN: ABE, wake up, Abe.

ABE: Wha...wha...what happened?

MARY LINCOLN: You were having a dream, Honey.

ABE: What year is it, Mary?

MARY LINCOLN: 1860, one week away from your speech.

ABE: I just had the strangest dream. There was the Tooth Fairy and the--

MARY LINCOLN: Abe, Honey, you need to work on your speech, okay?

Abe: Okay.

An Adventure They Won't Forget

Fame and fortune arrive in many ways. Four characters find a unique way to make their dreams come true in AN ADVENTURE THEY WON'T FORGET, by Stetson A. Robinson.

It all started a long time ago in the depths of the Black Forest, a very large place containing many forests where just about anything can happen.

There were four very brave warriors: Kermit the Frog, Samurai Jack, Bill Clinton, and Bill Cosby. They had all come together from a great battle many years ago.

They had all decided that their lives were worthless and they might as well drop dead and go wherever they go after death. They felt like shriveled-up old prunes, ready to be thrown away and never seen again. Since they decided their lives were worthless, they went to a fortuneteller to see if they had any purpose to still being alive. They knew about her from an old friend, Fonzy, from past battles.

They all went to a small cottage in the Green Forest where many plants and animals lived, prancing about as if they could live forever and nothing was ever going to happen to them. There, only the prettiest flowers bloomed, like the crack of dawn.

There they found a wise old lady named Agathaa, a wise old lady with lots of experience of just about everything in the world you could think of. But, she was now a bitter old lady who seldom spoke to anyone. They went to her to find out what their lives were about. Little did they know what was coming after them.

As soon as they rolled in, the old lady spoke their names at once. "Kermit! Jack! Bill! Bill!" They were all so terrified that they felt as though a dragon was going to gobble them up whole. The old lady told them to sit down at once. She told them to say why they had come, but before they could even answer, she told them herself. The four's eyes were glowing with amazement when she said that.

Kermit said everything so fast that she didn't have the chance to interrupt him this time. "What will life be like from here on out for us and are we still useful to this world?"

The lady opened her mouth slowly and cautiously. She said, "You four are still needed like everyone else in this world. However, if you feel unneeded, there is a quest you can take. Deep into the Evil Forest, there is a gigantic throne. Mounds of gold and diamonds surround it and a very powerful wizard sits there all day. He can grant you any wish that your little minds can imagine; he can even give you eternal life or all the riches off the world."

Bill Cosby's eyes glowed a bright yellow and had gotten as big as bowling balls. He had a smile as big as a quarter moon.

She told them that if they were going to go that they would need to be fully prepared and ready for any obstacle that came their way. They ran out of the door and out of the cottage as fast as lightning and ran to the Evil Forest.

When they finally got there about half an hour later of running, huffing, and puffing, they stood looking in front of it, as scared as cats ready to be put in a bath full of water. They were so scared that Bill Clinton wet his pants just listening to the howling of the animals and wind screaming from the forest. They walked slowly into the forest, insisting someone go before each of them.

When they got into the forest, they all took out a match and lit a torch. A little troll hopped out of a thorn bush and screamed, "Beware, young ones!" He looked as though half of his body had been chewed away. They ran so fast that even Michael Johnson couldn't have caught up with them.

It wasn't long before they ran into their first obstacle, which everyone thought would have been their last. They heard a

growling deep in the forest coming closer and closer. Their torches went out and it was pitch black. The snorting and growling came closer. They glared into the darkened sky and saw fire drawing upward like a volcano exploding into the black night.

Right before their eyes was a 50-foot dragon staring down at them, snarling with thick, dark smoke rushing through its nose like a train running off railroad tracks. It was a dark red color and had snot drizzling from its nose. It gave a light growl and looked down at the four, giving them an unforgiving look.

The dragon ran after them headfirst. They all jumped aside and fell into each other. Jack was on the bottom, and he crashed into a thorn bush, cutting up his arms and legs. They hurried up and got out of the way before the dragon could gobble them up like turkeys.

No one had any idea of what to do. Then something came to Bill Cosby's mind. He would make the monster laugh so hard that he couldn't take it anymore, and then Bill would tear the dragon's head off and head for the wizard.

Bill charged after the dragon as if he was actually going to do something. He told all his best insults and "yo mamma" jokes. The dragon stood there looking at him, acting as if a worm had just tried to tackle him to the ground. At Bill's stupidity, the dragon laughed so hard he fell to the ground wheezing, trying to catch a breath.

Samurai Jack, thinking quickly, ran after the dragon and sliced off his head with a whack of his sword. A bunch of colorful lumps came out of his neck. They thought it was blood, but it wasn't. When Jack got closer to the mighty dragon, he saw it was candy!

As soon as the morsels touched their tongues, they vanished into thin air like a magician doing a magic act. It was bright and sunny outside. They heard a deep voice behind them say, "Hullo there. I have been expecting you."

They turned around, and to their astonishment, there he was: the one and only wizard himself. He had a long white beard, was somewhat chubby, and had a white mustache with a blue cloak

and blue hat on with stars on them. He said he would grant them anything they desired.

Bill Cosby hopped into the wizard's lap as thought he was Santa Claus and said, "I want solid gold underwear!" Kermit elbowed Bill Cosby in the stomach. "Oh, yeah, I forgot. I want to have super powers like Superman!" A swish of blue light wrapped around Bill Cosby and poof! He was gone.

Bill Clinton walked up and happily rejoiced, "I want to be President of the United States of America." So poof! Bill was gone with a flick off a wand.

Next was Kermit. He said, "I want to be the bravest warrior ever." So poof! Kermit was gone with the nod of a head.

Finally, there was Samurai Jack. He told the wizard that he wanted to be the wisest person in the world and have knowledge of everything. Therefore, with a swish of the wand, Samurai Jack was gone.

Bill Clinton became President of the United States. Bill Cosby had powers like Superman. Kermit was the bravest warrior known. And Samurai Jack was the wisest person in the world. The four figured out that everyone is needed in the world and agreed never to go on another journey again.

Boldstrun Ville, of Course...

*Flying dragons and fairies only come alive in people's dreams--unless you happen to be Maac. In **BOLDSTRUN VILLE, OF COURSE...**by Michael Brown, Maac is taken to a fairy tale land to rescue a magic wand for the people who live there.*

“Ahhhh, what a night,” yawned Maac, and what a night it had been. Actually, Maac still wasn’t sure if his night was real or not. When he stopped to think about it, his night, whether real or imagined, was certainly one of the weirdest he had ever experienced. Thinking over what had happened that night, Maac decided that the adventure was real after all.

One evening after his parents tucked him into his nice, warm, and safe bed, Maac started to fall into a deep sleep. While he was dozing his windows popped open and let in a strong gust of wind. The bed sheet was pulled off Maac and it flew to the other side of the room. Maac awoke suddenly, only to find himself on a ship. It was not just any ship, but one that could only be described as magical, mystical, and magnificent.

Maac slowly got up from his sleeping spot and looked nervously around the room. The room was spectacular. The wood glistened, the chairs were stuffed, and velvet curtains covered the portholes.

Maac walked up the steps to the deck of the ship. Standing out at the front of the ship, to his surprise, were two people: Dopey (one of the seven dwarfs) and Snow White. Maac looked at them, a little woozy. After all, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* had

been one of Maac's favorite fairy tales when he was a very young boy.

"Well, I was wondering when you were getting up. The King said you would soon grace us with your presence."

Confused, Maac asked, "Am I dreaming?"

Snow White said, "Well, let's see." She walked up to his arm and pinched him.

Maac screamed, "Youch! What was that for?"

"Usually that's what people do to see if they're dreaming," said Snow White.

Maac rolled his eyes. "May I ask where I am?" said Maac.

"You're in Boldstrun Ville, of course," said Snow White.

Maac gazed around the boat some more and then looked excitedly over the deck of the ship. There in the water were fish, but there were also mermaids fluttering their tails at him. Their rainbow scales flashed, making Maac squint. Through the reflection of the water Maac could swear he saw Hansel and Gretel chasing the gingerbread man, while Peter Pan and Hook were fighting over an apple. On land, there were beautiful forests and flowers of every imaginable color. There were birds chirping while flying through the fluffy, thick, white clouds. Fairies were flitting around with their wings spread, letting the sun's light gleam off of them.

The river they were on twisted and turned and flowed down into a moat. The moat surrounded a beautiful castle. The castle had two large turrets, a large tower with a stained glass window, a grand entranceway, and a tall wall all the way around it.

Continuing to look out from the ship, Maac recognized many other different creatures and characters, ones you would find only in fairy tales. The entire time, Maac looked on in awe.

Finally Maac asked, "Are we going to that castle?"

Snow White answered, "Where else do you think this river leads to?"

"Who lives there, the prince who woke you with a kiss?" Macc said sarcastically.

Snow White answered angrily, "No, little boy, King Olnum lives there, the king of Boldstrun Ville!"

"What kind of fairy tale creature is he?" asked Maac.

Snow White said, "A whangdoodle."

Maac actually knew about this creature from one of his favorite books, *The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles*. After a few more minutes of conversation, Snow White, Maac, and Dopey finally reached the castle.

As they all approached the castle, Maac looked up as far as his neck could take him, but he could still not see the top. It was the largest castle he had ever laid eyes on. Not that he laid eyes on many castles before!

Everyone got off the ship and headed up to the castle. Snow White led Maac up a great deal of stairs until they reached a long narrow hall. On the ground stood a long velvet carpet leading to a set of big iron doors. Sunlight shone through the stained glass windows, making the paintings on the walls glisten. It was quite a sight. Cinderella was hustling past them, while Goldilocks was finding a chair to sit on that was just right.

At the foot of the doors stood two giants. "Good day, me lady," said one of them.

The other one asked, "Have you got the boy?" Maac peered out from behind Snow White's blue skirt. They were led out once more to another very large room.

Maac couldn't believe what he was seeing. Surrounding him were many of the fairy tale characters that he so often read about. A commotion was taking place and he could see that the guards were busy taking the big bad wolf away in handcuffs. In another part of the room, the three bears were beginning to prepare a new recipe for porridge. In the back of the room Maac saw a very tall throne. Kneeling before the throne were three blind mice asking for forgiveness, for they had just knocked over a very valuable vase. The guards took them away anyway. But then Maac saw King Olnum, sitting smugly on his throne, looking very short but very proud!

King Olnum looked just like the whangdoodle Maac read about in his book. A whangdoodle is like a moose with slippers. King Olnum was a plump whangdoodle with very large antlers. Whangdoodles have little bedroom slippers on their back legs;

they also shed and change color. King Olnum was wearing two blue slippers with little silver crowns.

King Olnum said to Snow White, "Ah, I see you've brought the boy. You may leave now." He studied Maac very carefully and finally said, "What is your name, my boy?"

Maac answered slowly, "Roger, but my friends call me Maac because I always eat the Big Macs at McDonald's."

"I see," said Olnum laughing, "We have a McDonald's here, too."

"My mom and dad always told me there was a McDonald's on every corner. Boy, were they right?" muttered Maac.

"I'll bet you're wondering why I have brought you here, Maac," said Olnum. Maac nodded his head. "There is a magic wand in the Black Forest guarded by an ogre and a dragon. They are using it for evil and I must get it back!" said Olnum abruptly. "I have been watching over many people to do this task. I have been watching you for some time now and you seem to be just the one to get the job done. You look brave, but not enough to be a bully and brag about it. So do you accept?" Maac, liking this remark and thinking it would be fun to go on an adventure, nodded his head, but rather hesitantly. "Great," said Olnum. "Here come the others who will be joining you."

The first to appear were the three little pigs, Alec, Alex, and Andrew. Robert Frog, otherwise known as the Frog Prince, joined them, as well as the lovely Liosa, the unicorn. Bringing up the very rear was Johning, the faithful and oh so clever mouse.

So off they went with a big farewell from the King and the new recipe of porridge from the three bears. Their journey was about to begin. Maac thought there was only one river leading to the castle, but it seemed there were more. They all went on to the river leading right toward the Black Forest. It was a rather pleasant ride. Maac began to get to know his companions better and where they were from. Maac learned that everyone in Boldstrun Ville arrived shortly after they had appeared written in a fairy tale. Liosa was from one of Grimm's fairy tales and so was Robert Frog. Johning was one of the mice from *Cinderella*. Last, the three little pigs were from, obviously, *The Three Little Pigs*.

When they reached the edge of the forest, it didn't look scary at all. In fact, Maac thought this might not be so bad. But Liosa told Maac that it would not be this pleasant for long.

As the group proceeded further into the forest, Maac talked and talked to keep himself from getting scared. He told all the characters about the world he came from. Robert, the Frog Prince, also enjoyed talking. He loved to tell the story about himself and the princess. Aside from being a great conversationalist, Robert Frog also thought of himself as quite the comedian. Being the frog that he was, he went up to a female frog and said rather stupidly, "Hey, groovy chick, why don't you hop over here with me?" The female frog spat out a big fly at him! "I take that as a yes," he said. She hopped away annoyed. Everyone started laughing.

Their laughter soon turned to silence. The group came upon a large cave with signs posted saying "Keep Out." Johnning said rapidly, "Well, I guess this isn't the place, so let's get going now." He started to scramble away rather quickly, but Alec caught him.

"Not so fast," he said. "Not even by the hair on my chinny, chin, chin are you going anywhere." They were all in this together.

The group walked into the cave very quietly and soon spotted the ogre and dragon. The ogre was very large with big brown teeth and slime dripping from his greasy, green lips. The dragon was enormous, with a long spiked tail and blood-red scales running over the entire length of his body.

They hid behind a large pair of rocks to devise a plan. When they came up with their plan, the three little pigs were the first to act on it right away.

Alec, Alex, and Andrew ran out and started to build a big wall around the ogre and the dragon. One-third was made of straw, built by Andrew; Alex made one-third of sticks; and Alec made the last third of bricks. The dragon burned down the part made of sticks and straw, and the ogre smashed down the brick wall. The three little pigs ran back behind the rocks and Alec said, "Hey, the house of bricks worked in the other story." Now it was time for plan B.

The three little pigs ran out again with Robert, the Frog Prince. The three little pigs went up to the dragon and Robert

hopped over to the ogre. Alec said to the dragon, “You know what you need? A breath mint.”

Then Andrew said, “No, he needs Advil. He looks like he has a headache.”

Last, Alex said, “No, you’re both wrong. He needs Tylenol; he has a huge headache.”

They all threw the pills and breath mint into the dragon’s mouth. The dragon started to choke and fell over dead.

In the meantime, Robert, the Frog Prince, started telling the ogre the story of how sad he felt when the princess ignored him and left him out in the cold. Robert went on and on and on telling his miserable tale, and the ogre started to weep. He cried so much he almost flooded the cave. If it wasn’t for Liosa’s quick thinking, they would have drowned. Liosa sang a sweet song that put the ogre to sleep.

This was the chance Maac and Johning had been waiting for. Quickly Johning scrambled through and snatched the wand while Maac stood guard. They ran out of the cave as soon as Maac had the wand in his hand. Everyone else joined them and ran as fast as they could out of the cave and all the way back to the river. They all jumped back in the boat and rowed away from the forest as fast as they could.

When they finally reached the castle, they lay in the boat panting. Maac finally said, “We did it, guys. Great work! It just goes to show you that with true teamwork you can accomplish anything!”

After everyone regained their normal breathing, they stepped out of the boat. They walked up to the great castle and entered the huge, ornate doors one more time to the throne room. They all stood smiling. They were led in one by one and were greeted by King Olnum.

Maac, with the wand in his hand, bowed and said proudly, “We have retrieved your wand, King Olnum.”

“Thank you very much, all of you, not just from me but from the whole kingdom! Everyone,” he said clapping his hands together, “prepare a great feast and a party for the whole town and our guest.”

That night was the huge feast. The whole town was laughing and talking joyously. King Olnum tapped his glass and said, "I would like to make a toast to the wonderful heroes. Thank you all very much!" Everyone started applauding and gave a standing ovation. Afterwards there was music and dancing that lasted the whole night through.

The three little pigs did break dancing, while Little Red Riding Hood played the organ. The seven dwarfs started to sing a rap and all the princes were laughing and getting drunk. Every fairy tale character was there having the best time of their lives.

Each of the heroes got a reward for bravery. Alec, Alex and Andrew got to be free of any harm from the big bad wolf. Robert got to spend a month with the lovely princess in the Bahamas. Liosa got to have her own private property in the forest. Johning got cheese to last him a year. Lastly, Maac got a pass to come back whenever he wanted.

After Maac waved good-bye to everyone, he found himself lying in his own bed with a very stuffed tummy. Maac wondered to himself, "Had it been real? Nah, it couldn't have, could it?"

Maac heard a small tapping at his window. When he looked up he saw Johning holding a letter. "Here you go; see ya!" He scrambled away, leaving Maac with the letter in his hand. It read:

Dear Rog I mean Maac,

*Thank you very much for your heroic deed.
We welcome you back at any time. Good-bye for
now!*

*Sincerely,
King Olnum*

Smiling to himself, Maac carefully folded the letter and put it under his pillow. He was soon fast asleep once again.

Just like the fairy tale creatures he so often read about, Maac lived happily ever after, and was always ready for his next adventure.

Santa's Worst Nightmare

Santa Claus has a tough enough job getting to billions of houses in one night. Have you ever thought about the challenges he faces within each home? Find out in SANTA'S WORST NIGHTMARE, by Jonathan Szczurek.

The winter of 1939 was the longest and coldest winter ever. A boy named Chris Cringle was born. He was a strong boy and loved to eat. As years passed, his family could not afford to keep him because they weren't getting enough food, so they put him in an orphanage.

One day, a family came along and said he was a handsome boy and they would adopt him. A few days passed and they finally figured out his new name: Santa Claus. His parents were elves for a master named Santa Paws.

Chris was so happy because he had loved Santa Paws his entire life. Then he said, "Thank you so much. I love you guys."

Chris wondered why his name was Santa Claus, so he asked his elf parents, "Why is my name Santa Claus?"

They said, "We didn't want to tell you this earlier, but we guess we can tell you. You are the next generation's Santa Paws."

The next Christmas, Chris helped Santa Paws get all the presents together so he could deliver them to all the children around the world. He helped also so he could get a feel for what it would mean to be Santa Claus, because he would be doing it the next year.

The next year, he kept eating until November 23. He stopped then because if he ate any more food, he couldn't deliver the presents to all the good boys and girls in the world.

The night before Christmas, Chris had butterflies in his stomach. He asked one of his parents to come with him and help him through the night. As the night went on, he never got a response from his parents, so he had to go alone.

When he stepped onto his sleigh, he felt like the whole world was in his hands. After he took off, he looked back and saw his parents with tears in their eyes as he left. He tried to stop, but he had given his reindeer too much magic corn. He was happy, mad, and proud at the same time.

After he was far from the North Pole, the reindeer led him to all the houses. They would land on the driveways where he needed to get into the houses to deliver the presents.

He was anxious to deliver the presents, until the first house he went to. There, a gigantic pit bull dog attacked him. This pit bull loved biting Santa Paws, so he started to bite Santa Claus. By the time Chris was done delivering all the presents, he must have had 1000 dog bites, and out of those bites, 100 of them must have had rabies.

He went to the hospital and told the nurse who he was and what had happened. She said that the only way to cure that disease was to bite all the dogs that bit him with rabies, because the shot was not invented yet. There was only one problem: He didn't know which dogs bit him and which ones didn't bite him. He was going to have to bite all the dogs that had bitten him, and that was a lot of dogs to bite.

Santa could not believe what had happened to him, so he tried to figure out a way to bite all the dogs. After thinking, he figured that he would surprise the dogs by landing on the roofs and coming down the chimney.

As he came down the chimney, he would tiptoe through the house, not making a sound. When he found the dog, he would pounce on him and bite him. The dog wouldn't get hurt because he would bite him in the leg. After Santa bit the dog, he would quickly drop off the presents, get up the chimney, and go to the next house.

After biting all the dogs, Santa still wasn't cured of his rabies. He thought he had bitten every dog, but he really hadn't. One of

the dogs might not have been home, or had died. Santa got his elves together to make him a radar to find the dog he never bit. But after using the radar, he still couldn't find the dog.

Finally he said to his parents, "Dress up like me because I have a good idea." After they were dressed like him they went off and started his plan that took him one whole year to come up with. His plan was to grab all the dogs when they bit his parents, then put them into a bag. His parents wouldn't get rabies because the suits were made out of thick rubber and the dogs could not break it. After all of that they still couldn't find the dog.

Instead of going out for Christmas that year, Santa had one of his elves do it for him. When Santa stayed home, his wife gave him a dog for Christmas. That dog was the dog he hadn't bitten! So he bit the dog that his wife had given him.

He still wasn't feeling any better. He returned to the hospital, where they found out that he had been sick with pneumonia. So Santa was fixed up and healthy for the longest time, *until....*

Trouble in Monstropolis

What happens within your closet at bedtime? Find out in TROUBLE IN MONSTROPOLIS, by Courtney James Blocker.

Mike and Sully are monsters that live in a world called Monstropolis. They work in a place called Monster Inc. There they go into doors and end up in children's closets. They scare the children because they need the screams. The screams are their source of power like electricity is to us. The doors end up in a huge room once the monsters are done with them.

"Sully, wake up," said Mike. After two hours of stalling, Sully finally got out of his bed.

Realizing that they would be late, they rushed to the sink, washed their faces, and brushed their teeth.

Quickly, Sully had to practice scaring kids. He roared and growled and screamed as they were sprinting to work.

When they got to the room where they scare kids, it was empty. They punched in the codes on the computer and a door appeared. As Sully twisted the doorknob to go inside the closet, a twelve-year old boy named Pan heard it.

Pan lived alone on his own island called Neverland. As long as he lived on that island he would not be able to get older than twenty. He never wanted to grow up. Pan could also fly.

When the door was opened, Sully looked inside. Confused, he thought, "There must be a glitch because they aren't supposed to give us these rooms until they have children in them." Pan was on top of his ceiling. Mike and Sully looked at the ground in disappointment.

Then Pan made his move. He flew out of his room and onto the ceiling of Monster Inc.

Sully closed the door and Mike pushed in the keys for automatic door return. Automatic door return is when machines take the door into a large storage room full of doors. Pan's door went into that room.

The next door came and Sully started slowly opening it in distress.

Boby, on the other side of the door, had the ability to increase his speed, strength, and mind 123 times.

When the door was opened, Sully walked inside. Looking and seeing no children, Sully became frustrated.

Boby was so fast, he ran past Sully and Mike without them seeing him.

Next was the door of Shrek, a 15-year old ogre. He lives alone in a swamp.

As Sully walked inside of Shrek's closet and opened the door, there was Shrek.

The ogre scared Sully, which filled up 60 scream filters.

Shrek walked into Monster Inc. with Sully backing up in front of him. The ogre asked, "What is going on?"

Boby ran and stopped next to Shrek. As Boby stopped next to Shrek, Shrek was startled and gave out a huge growl. Boby ran and knocked Sully over onto Mike.

Pan's ears started to stop hearing and his eyes started to black out. Falling onto Shrek, Pan hit his head hard on the ground and stopped breathing.

Shrek, Sully and Mike stopped moving, dead in their tracks. They all stopped because they were thinking about Pan. Tears filled their eyes.

Once Pan woke up from his slumber, he said, "What happened, guys?"

"You fell and--" Mike started, in pain for Pan.

"Y-y-you fell and hit your head. Sorry," said Boby in a soft voice.

Mike worried and said, “We must find your doors NOW!”

After hours of hiding and searching they found the doors. They said “Goodbye” and “It was fun,” and went home. It was good for Mike and Sully that no other Montropolis monster saw them. They also filled 200 scream filters from the yelling and screaming. Sixty filters were filled from Shrek scaring Sully and 140 from the madness that went on.

Ya Gotta Go, Go, Go, for the Dough Boy

*When the Pillsbury Dough Boy is dough-napped, guess who comes to the rescue? **YA GOTTA GO, GO, GO FOR THE DOUGH BOY**, by Michael Edwards, shows that not every legendary character is soft in the middle.*

It was Christmas Eve, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, except for the Pillsbury Dough Boy. He had a feeling he was being watched, spied on, and other synonyms for being looked at unexpectedly. He then heard a thud on the roof.

“Was it Saint Nick?” pondered the little muffin man. Instead of the “Ho, ho, ho!” Santa would say, Dough Boy heard a “Fee, fi, fo, fum! I’m gonna take this little Dough Boy hostage!”

Dough Boy thought to himself, “Santa’s attitude has changed.”

“Come out and fight, Santa, or I’ll order bakers with butcher knives to chop up your reindeer!”

The Swifer pulled out a loaded slingshot and shot with dead accuracy, aiming at Dough Boy’s temples.

“Oof!” All was going black. “I can’t moooooo...”

“Now you’re mine. You belong to the Swifer,” exclaimed the Swifer hungrily. With a loud BANG and a puff of smoke, the Swifer and Dough Boy disappeared.

The next morning, yellow police tape surrounded the house. News reporters were everywhere, telling viewers about the Swifer’s appearance. Police inside the house were searching for clues while Santa was sick in bed watching TV. A news flash came on.

"I must help (cough) the poor little Dough Boy!" cried Santa.

"But you're sick. You are staying in bed," countered Mrs. Claus. "I'll help the little Dough Boy."

When Mrs. Claus entered the garage, she tried to decide whether to use the Space Mach 5 jet or the Gator F-7 jet to get to the Pillsbury household. "I think I will take the Space Mach 5," decided Santa's wife. In six seconds, she was at the crime scene of the Dough-nap.

"Officers, what clues can you give me?" asked Mrs. Claus. Officer George started to explain the clues through a mouthful of powdered doughnuts.

"Well, our first clue is some shoe prints we found in the carpet with the signature 'Swifer' on them. Our second clue is a small black stone fitted for a slingshot. The last clue that we found is a ransom note for \$1,600."

"What? These clues have no meaning. Oh well, who committed the crime?" asked Mrs. Claus.

"The Swifer did!" cried a random bystander.

"Hey, I know him. We went to college together," realized Mrs. Claus.

"I'll see that Mr. Swifer gives Dough Boy back peacefully," promised Mrs. Claus with her fingers crossed behind her back. Then, she zoomed away.

"Computer, I need a location on the Swifer's hideout." All of a sudden a holographic map appeared on the windshield showing the location of the Swifer's hideout.

BANG! The door crashed to the floor as Mrs. Claus burst into Swifer's hideout.

"So, Mrs. Claus, long time, no see, eh?" said the Swifer calmly. "Would you like to join me for a cookie snack?"

"Help me!" cried the Dough Boy, yelling from the oven.

"Don't worry, Dough Boy. I brought some friends with me." Mrs. Claus pulled out a black whistle and blew. "HONK!"

All of a sudden, fifty-three mad penguins came rushing in and started mauling the Swifer to pieces.

“Ahhh....” yelled the Swifer as Mrs. Claus opened the oven just in time.

“Nice tan, Dough Boy,” laughed Mrs. Claus. “You penguins can stay here until I call upon your power again.”

“Where’s my hat!” exclaimed Dough Boy.

“Don’t worry about that. I will make you a new one when I get home. We have got to go,” said Mrs. Claus as she and the Dough Boy walked out the door and into the Space Mach 5.

IMAGINATION
RUNS WILD

The Big Plan

A girl is trapped in a terrible life. THE BIG PLAN, by Carmen Johnson, tells how she tries to change her situation.

It was my birthday. I didn't get anything, not even a "Happy Birthday." All I got was a mop and a broom. All he said was, "Clean this, clean that." The only things I do are clean and cook. I shouldn't be cooking. He should be cooking and cleaning for me. I'm the kid. He's the adult. He should be cooking and cleaning for me.

What kind of stepfather would keep his child as a slave? He has the demon in him. Only demons keep children as slaves.

Someday I'll make a plan to run away. I'll never come back. The first thing I'll do is make a map. Where would the map lead to, though...? Nowhere. I wouldn't have anywhere to go. Think, think, think, Carmel.

A-ha! Grandma Jones. I remember my mom telling me how to get there. "Over the hills, across the water, through the forest is Grandma Jones." To make the map I will use a quilt. I will start tomorrow at my lunch break.

Stepfather would never know that I was making a map out of a quilt. He's too stupid. Today is the day when I make my big plan. When I'm done cleaning, I will start. Mrs. Pearl will let me borrow some thread. Then I'll stitch the night away. Every day I will do this until I'm done and packed.

It was 1:00 and I was ready to run. It was dark and I couldn't see where I was going. The only thing I was saying was, "Over the hills, across the water, through the fields is Grandma Jones."

I was tired and needed a rest, so I found a cave to sleep in. It was really scary and uncomfortable. It was better than being with Stepfather, though.

The next day it was freezing cold, but I had a coat to keep me warm. I ate breakfast and started the trail to Grandma Jones's house.

It was getting dark and my feet were killing me. I had to rest. There were caves all over this forest. I found another cave to sleep in. This time I heard footsteps and they were coming right towards me. I was so scared and worried. I fell asleep worried and afraid.

Then all of a sudden, BOOM! I was shot right in the leg. "Help, help," I shouted out, "help me!" I felt like I was dying, but very slowly. It hurt so bad.

"Oh, no, are you okay? I thought you were a bear!"

"Do I look like a bear to you?"

"It was dark. I couldn't see anything. Are you okay? Where do you live?"

"Nowhere."

"What do you mean 'nowhere'? You're a child. You need a home."

"I ran away from my stepdad."

"Why?"

"He kept me as a slave. I couldn't take it anymore, so I ran away."

"Where's your mom?"

"She died."

"Oh, I'm sorry. What was her name?"

"Carmen Jones."

"Carmen Jones? That's my daughter's name. She died along time ago."

"Is your last name Jones, and do you have a granddaughter?"

"Yes, but I lost her along time ago."

"Grandma, it's me, Carmel! I've missed you so much. Don't ever let me go. We have to stay together forever!"

"You're not my granddaughter. I lost her along time ago, when my daughter got married and died."

“I know! I ran away to find you and be with you forever.”

“It’s you? It really is you? How did you know how to find me?”

“My mother used to sing me a song about how to get to your house. I will never forget this day when I found you, Grandma.”

“Me neither, Carmel.”

Different Worlds

Often when people think they have nothing in common, they are very wrong. In DIFFERENT WORLDS by Jordan Braun, a peasant meets a princess, and both their lives are changed forever.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo!” crowed the old rooster. “Get up, get up,” he seemed to say. I sprang out of bed, accidentally throwing the old quilt off the bed I shared with my sister Annie. I was going to the marketplace to sell the wild blackberries I had picked in the woods the day before. After dressing, I wolfed down a quick breakfast of bread and potatoes. Then grabbing the basket of blackberries, I ran out into the crowded street.

I was shoved and jostled by all the people bustling around. Suddenly, everyone stopped moving. They were all looking at something in the middle of the road. “All hail Princess Samantha,” said a voice.

All over the street, blonde, brunette and black-haired heads were bowed. Even my curly red one. Though their noses were inches from the ground, the townsfolk continued to gossip. “The Princess!” exclaimed a rather large woman next to me. “What a surprise to see her here. Why, if I had known about her coming, I would at least be wearing my Sunday dress! We need to at least look decent, whether we really are or not!”

“I heard the Princess is so ugly that it is forbidden to look at her,” whispered a lady holding a crying baby. “That is why we must bow when she comes by and may rise only when she is back in the safety of her carriage.” I just stood there dumbfounded, not saying a word. I couldn’t see the princess, but I wanted to. After crawling through people’s legs, I straightened back up in the front

row of people. I sneaked a peek at the princess, just to see if what the lady had said was true.

I can tell you right now--it wasn't. She was beautiful! Her straight blonde hair fell almost to her slender waist. The green of her eyes matched that of her skirt. They were both the emerald color that was (and still is) my favorite. Her clothes were clearly the finest in the land. If my mother could sew half as well as whoever made the princess's clothes, we would be rich! Her bodice was made out of silk. Think! A bodice made out of silk with silver laces to match the crown on her head.

"Excuse me?" said a sweet voice.

I realized that I was the only person in the square who was not on his or her knees. And that wasn't the half of it, either. When I realized the princess was speaking to me, I felt my stomach disappear. I was going to get in trouble, I was going to--

"Those berries look delicious," said the princess, interrupting my thoughts. I sighed with relief. So that was all she wanted!

"Thank you," I said shyly. "I was going to sell them to the Prancing Ponies Inn, but you can have them."

"If you were planning on selling them, you still can, but to me!" the princess said, laughing. "Come into my coach and I'll get you the money," she said before hiking up her skirt and climbing through the door. I looked around nervously, took a deep breath, and followed the princess inside.

I gasped. Never before had I seen such riches, from the velvet seat cushions to the jewel-studded walls to the real glass windows. I was in awe.

"Drive, on James," said Princess Samantha primly.

The princess was, of course, quite at home. She began rummaging around in the coach, looking for money as the coach rattled down the dirt rode. I watched as the people in the crowd got up and continued their errands.

Soon the princess straightened up, holding the money. After handing it to me she asked, "What is your name?"

"Sara." I answered.

"Why do you wear that dress?" she asked.

"What else am I supposed to wear?" I questioned her in return.

"Well...maybe something a little less patched and worn," she answered with a careless wave of her hand.

"That would be nice, if I had one," I answered, blushing bright red. "You see, I'm a bit poor."

Now it was her turn to blush. "Oh. I'm sorry," she exclaimed.

After assuring her it was okay, I remembered I still had chores to do. I leaped up. "I'm sorry!" I exclaimed. "I have to go home. They will be waiting for me! Would you stop the coach?" I cried as I reach for the door.

"Wait!" said Samantha urgently. I turned around slowly. "May I come with you? Just for awhile," she pleaded.

"Pardon?" I said. I wasn't sure if I'd heard her correctly.

"Can I go home with you?" she asked again.

"Are you sure you want to?" I asked in disbelief.

"Yes, I'm sure. I'll tell my coachman to wait for me here at the end of the day. James, stop please," she called to the coachman. Then she stepped out of the coach to talk to the coachman.

I couldn't believe this was going to happen. The princess at my house? This would be a great honor. Still, mother might be mad. I was going to be late.

Just then, Samantha came to the door of the coach, interrupting my thoughts. "Okay, which way do we go?" she asked, almost impatiently.

"This way," I said, pointing right and still puzzling over how the princess could be coming to my house.

It was a beautiful sunny morning and as we walked down the little country road, we could hear birds singing in the trees. In front of me, the princess was skipping down the road and every now and then, asking me questions. "Do you have any brothers or sisters?" "How old are you?"

Through her questions and my answers, we discovered that we were both eleven and the oldest of five children in the family.

Suddenly it occurred to me that the princess wasn't all that different from me. We had just grown up in different worlds.

"Hello, Sara," said a voice. I turned to see Farmer Gray. He was a kind old man who, although poor, was one of the wisest, smartest and kindest in the village.

"Who might your friend be?" he inquired.

"Oh, this is Princess Samantha. Samantha, this is Farmer Gray."

"Pleased to meet you," said Samantha.

"Nice to meet you, too; it's a pleasure to have you in our town. I hope you enjoy your visit," Farmer Gray said to Samantha with a deep sweeping bow that, for a moment, made him seem almost royal. If he was surprised about Samantha's visit, he didn't show it. "How is your father, Samantha?" he asked.

"Oh, he is very well, but also very busy," she said.

"You know the king?" I asked incredulously.

"I certainly do...known him ever since I was a boy. He ran away when he was young and traveled all the way to town before he decided he wanted his mother. He wasn't sure of the way back to the castle, so he knocked on our door and asked for help. In the short time we were together, he taught me how to read and I showed him how to ride a horse bareback. We have been friends ever since."

I was going to voice my amazement about Farmer Gray's story, but realized that Samantha, impatient, had begun walking down the road again.

"Goodbye," I called to Farmer Gray over my shoulder as I ran to catch up. Not long after, we came to my house. It had a cobblestone path leading to it, which was uneven because of the stones that had dropped out. On the thatched roof, the short fat little chimney was puffing smoke into the crisp morning air.

"Mother has started tea," I commented as I pushed the gate open, being careful not to break its remaining hinge. The old rooster came flapping toward us. I felt Samantha recoil next to me. "Are you scared of him?" I asked as I picked him up. "He won't hurt you, I promise." This seemed to reassure Samantha. I

set the rooster down, and she walked by him as though he wasn't there and followed me into the house.

"Mommy, Mommy, Sarie's home," screamed Annie, my little sister. I grabbed her and introduced her to Samantha. "Annie, this is my friend Samantha. Samantha, this is Annie," I said. But that was as far as I got. Annie squirmed out of my arms, screaming, "Mommy, Mommy, Sarie's got a new friend and I want you to make me a new dress just like hers, Mommy, just like hers."

Mother called from the kitchen. "Okay, Honey, but be polite. And ask Sara's friend if she would like to stay for tea."

"Come on, Samantha, let's go into the kitchen for tea," I said. "Is blackberry all right? 'Tis homemade."

"Yes, that would be lovely," she said uncertainly. I think she was amazed that any family of seven people could live in a three-room house.

I led her into the kitchen where the table was laden with a chipped teapot of tea, as well as a loaf of bread. I told Samantha to sit down and make herself at home. "Mother, this is Samantha. Samantha, this is my mother."

My mother turned around to smile at Samantha. "Welcome, Dear," she said kindly, but gave me a look that clearly asked: Who is she really?

After tea I told Samantha I would have to do my chores. She followed me around as I milked the cow and fed the chickens. After I was done with my chores and we were walking back to my house, I asked her a question I had been pondering.

"If you could have one thing in the world that you don't have right now, what would it be?" I asked.

Samantha looked at me carefully. "A friend," she said slowly. "Like you. Only no one wants to be friends with me. What do you desire most?"

I thought for a moment. "Schooling," I said after some time.

"You don't go to school?" Samantha asked incredulously.

"No." I said. "I have to support my family."

"Oh," she said quietly.

"Look. 'Tis getting dark," I said. "You ought to be going back to your carriage. I will take you there."

“Oh, thank you!” she exclaimed. “Let’s go!” she said excitedly. She grabbed my hand and we skipped down the road together. When we reached the carriage, Samantha embraced me. “You are the greatest friend I will ever have,” she said. “I wanted a friend more than anything. Now that I have one, I want to be with her. I guess I will never be satisfied,” she continued. “Well...goodbye, Sara,” she said, giving me a quick squeeze before climbing into the carriage. “I’ll never forget you.”

“Goodbye, Samantha,” I said, tears welling up in my eyes. Then the coachman came and shut the carriage door and drove away.

It was then that I let the tears come. I ran home sobbing and told mother everything, about how I had met the Princess in the square and sold my blackberries to her and that Samantha *was* the princess. Mother held me tight and comforted me as best she could.

* * *

Weeks went by, then months. I was very busy. We had so much to do, I nearly forgot about Samantha. When I did think about her, it was like a dream. Sometimes I doubted I had met the princess. Maybe it really was all a dream?

I was thinking this when there was a knock on the door. I jumped up and opened it. There was a young man standing there. He held a letter.

“From her majesty Princess Samantha, sent with love for Sara Smith,” he said formally before handing me the letter, bowing, and departing. I excitedly broke the seal of the envelope and pulled the paper out. In my excitement, I forgot that the letter would be written. Nobody in my family could read.

This bothered me for only a few seconds, however. “I can take it to Farmer Gray. The King taught him to read! He can read it for me.” And with that, I snatched up the letter, and ran down the dirt path to the old farmhouse just down the road that belonged to Farmer Gray. I knocked at the door and stood panting for a few seconds before he opened the door.

"Ah, Sara, what a pleasant surprise!" the kind old farmer exclaimed. "Do come in and have a cup of tea," he said, opening the door wider to let me walk in. I wiped my feet on the rug before stepping into the house. I was very anxious to ask him what the letter said, but I didn't want to be rude, so I waited while he poured tea and settled down at the crude wooden table for a chat.

"So Sara, how can I help?" he asked.

"I would like you to read me this letter, please," I said, holding it out to him.

He took the letter from me and examined it carefully. "Ah, I see," he said. "A letter from the princess." Then he took a deep breath and began:

Dear Sara:

I miss you so. However, I talked to my father, the King, and he seemed very interested in you. He gave me permission to invite you, your family and Farmer Gray to stay at the castle for a week. Just imagine, an entire week, all to ourselves!

Also, he was disappointed to learn that you did not know how to read or write and had never been to school. He hired a teacher to come to your town and teach the children and adults three times a week. The teacher will be arriving in June.

One of my messengers will come to your house next Tuesday to get your reply. I hope it is yes.

*Love,
Samantha*

Yes? Of course my reply would be yes. What did she think it would be? I could hardly contain my excitement. I barely remembered to say thank you to Farmer Gray as I jumped up and ran home to tell Mother the good news.

What a wonderful time lies ahead for all of us.

Emily's Adventure

EMILY'S ADVENTURE, by **Haneen Elias**, is the story of a girl who ends up in a situation that takes her by surprise. It tells us something about the importance of understanding our surroundings.

There once lived a girl named Emily. She loved adventure. She was 11 years old with dark blond hair and brown eyes.

There are woods in her backyard. One day she built a fort where no one would look. No one knew about her fort or the secret place. She gathered pine needles, wood, nails and a hammer.

She worked day and night on the fort. One week later it was finished. "All done," said Emily.

She went back home to eat dinner and also to do her homework. She kept wanting to go back to the fort, but she had more important things to do. When the time finally came, she forgot where the fort was. Then she forgot all about the fort until school was out and summer vacation had come.

Emily remembered the fort. She said, "I wonder what happened to that fort?" She went back into the woods and she searched for the secret place but she still couldn't find it. She thought she saw it in the corner, so she ran to the corner where she had thought she saw it, but it was not there.

Emily said, "Where is my fort? I cannot believe I forgot where the secret place is." Emily said to herself, "I will look in one more place, then I am going home."

She went into the deep, dark forest. She looked all over for the fort, but still she couldn't find it. She said, "Oh, well, I will look more tomorrow."

She started going home. She was almost out of the deep, dark forest when she saw dark black shadows. It was a pack of wolves.

She screamed and ran up the tree. She said in a very scared voice, "I guess I am sleeping in this tree tonight, because I do not think these wolves will move."

She slept in the tree that night. She said, "I am sure glad I brought my backpack with me and brought three sandwiches and two juice boxes."

In the morning, the wolves were still there. She screamed and yelled, but nobody came.

Back at the house, the parents were panicking. They had called their friends but no one knew where Emily was. They called the police and said, "Our child is lost in the woods."

The police came and said, "Calm down. We will find her."

"We will come, too."

The police said, "No, we are experienced, and you are not. We will come and bring her right away to you." The police went into the woods to find her. They searched everywhere but couldn't find her.

Back where Emily was stuck, she had so many things running through her mind. "Will I ever get out? I really miss my parents. I wish I stayed home," said Emily.

Back at the house, the parents, who are still very frightened, have not slept. That night, they waited by the door for the police to come with their daughter, but they never did.

When the police reached the deep, dark forest, they didn't dare go in, because the deep dark forest was full of deadly wolves, and it was getting extremely dark. They said that she couldn't have gone in the deep dark forest because no one survives there. The police said, "Let's go home. It is getting very dark. We will come back in the morning."

The next day, the police went with Emily's mother and father into the deep, dark forest. They scared the wolves away and brought Emily down from the tree. Emily's parents watched her very closely. She never thought about going into the woods ever again.

No one knows what happened to the fort. Some people say it disappeared. Others say the wolves ate the fort, but only Emily knows what happened and she doesn't dare tell anyone. She only told one person that the fort was magical and it disappeared.

Freedom

*A daring escape from a zoo, the dangers of the road, trying to find a home only dreamed of.... These and other challenges are included in the adventure of **FREEDOM**, by Jac Ayres.*

“If only I could get home,” thought Freedom, a great wolf whose coat had a black streak running from his nose to his mouth. “If only they would change this boring exhibit.”

“Hey! Come on, Freedom, let’s play,” called his first and greatest friend, Broy, whose coat was a brilliant white with brown like a speed stripe.

“No,” said Freedom, “I’ve gone everywhere and seen everything in this boring, boring exhibit.”

Next around the corner, scuttling along, came Weed. His coat was pitch-black in color. Weed was the type of wolf who thought he was the best at everything. “Whata doing, beef heads?” cried Weed (“Beef heads” is what he calls everyone in the exhibit).

“Nothing,” sighed Broy.

“Bet ya a meat bone I can run faster than you around this place twice,” dared Weed.

“Oh, shut up,” said Freedom. “Where is your little brother?” he asked Weed.

“I left him by the pond,” said Weed, then he scuttled off on his little legs.

“This is sooooo boring,” said Freedom. Then, just like lightning, an idea hit his nose. “Why don’t we run home?” he cried to Broy. “Go and get the others. We are going to have a meeting.”

"Well, if we are going to run away, let's do it when the door is open when the people are feeding us," suggested Willi, Weed's younger brother, whose coat was brownish black.

"Okay," said everyone.

That night, when the zookeepers were doing the feeding, the friends ran through the door and outside. "Find a red sign. It should point us to the exit," shouted Freedom.

"Which red sign, Freedom?" cried Broy. "We're color blind!"

It took a few minutes, but they eventually found their way out of the zoo.

Not long after, they came to a highway, which they loped along with until the sky was pitch black. They then slept in a small, well-concealed little place in the forest by the highway.

Freedom was up early the next morning. He killed a rabbit for his breakfast. Then he woke everybody up. "Come on, you sleepy heads," he cried. They were up in an instant. After eating, they traveled in the bushes along the highway.

After two days, they saw a large forest on the opposite side of the highway where cars sped dangerously across, but they were too tired to cross over to the forest. After a rest Weed said to Freedom, "I bet you a rabbit that I can make it across to the forest."

"No," cried Freedom, "I'm not going to risk the life of a friend."

After some more resting by the wolves, all the cars on the highway jammed and had to move more slowly. Freedom and his friends then carefully made their way across the highway. Once all the friends were safely inside the forest, they looked around for a place to sleep. It was Willi who found one.

"Hey guys, I found a hole," he said. They all went inside for a look and found another wolf.

"What is your name?" asked Weed of the new female wolf.

"Nashta," she said.

"Can we sleep in your den?" asked Freedom, who was starting to get fond of her.

"Sure, it will be nice to have some friends for company," said Nashta. After some more talking, Freedom found out she was pushed out of a pack because she was too weak, and was looking for a new pack to join.

In the morning, Freedom asked Nashta if she would like to join them to find their way home. Nashta said, "Yes, of course." Nashta and Freedom then shared a meal of three fairly big hares, and then they were off, still following the same highway as before.

A couple of days later, the friends heard a BAM! BAM! BAM! Those in front heard a yelp from behind, and then saw that Weed had been shot in the thigh and was bleeding badly. Nashta leapt into action and carefully removed the bullet from the still-bleeding wound. All around them they heard bullets whizzing through the air. Everybody was freaked out, but Freedom rose up and carefully led them away from the shower of killer bullets.

For the next couple of weeks, they traveled slowly, and after a month they were high in the mountains of Canada. Weed's wound had healed and he was as good as ever. Weed asked Nashta to be his mate and she accepted.

They eventually found a place to settle in a huge clearing surrounded by rocks to keep the wind out. In this clearing lived a female wolf called Coron who became Freedom's mate. Broy found a mate not far away who was called Kinsaw. As time went on, Willi became the father of three cubs called Faran, Haran, and Caran.

Each and every one of the families all had great and happy lives. That is, until one day a pack of bad wolves came....

Hippos

When you see hippos at an amusement park, please don't stare. As we find in HIPPOS by Chris Lacroix, they wouldn't stare at you.

“We are finally going to CEDAR POINT for the first time in hippo history. Let’s go on the twists--no, the drops--wait, the loops. Let’s go on the Millennium Force.

“Up, up, up, and ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ahhh ahhh ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh! My face is blowing back so far it is hitting the person behind--ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! I will never ride that face-blown-into-the-person-behind-you ride ever again.”

“Sure, never again.”

“Let’s go on the Mantis.”

“Okay, but I’m scared of heights.”

“Here comes the loop. Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! I fell out of the cart at the top of the loop but at the bottom of it the cart caught me.”

“How about we go on the Raptor, then get some lunch?”

“Okay.”

“The ride is starting; we are going up, and down. Wow--that was so cool! Let’s get lunch.”

“Okay, great. Now that we are done eating, let’s go ride the loop-t-loop.”

“ANNOUNCEMENT: The park is now closing. Thank you.”

“Okay, let’s leave.”

“No, we can stay. The rides still run when it is closed.”

“Well, okay. Just don’t get caught.”

“Let’s go on the loop-t-loop, ten straight loops.”

“Wow! Wow! Wow! Uhhh-ohhh!”

“What?”

“I lost my wallet. It fell on the loops.”

“GREAT.”

“Well, let’s go and get it.”

“Hmmmmmm, where could it be? HEY! That janitor has it.
Go get it.”

“It is not *my* wallet.”

“Um, excuse me. Um, that is my wallet.”

“Oh, I didn’t even see it there. Well, here you go.”

“Thanks.”

“Wait a second! The park is closed. You can’t be here.”

“Well, I’m the police.”

“Sure, that’s what they all say.”

“Who’s ‘they all’? You are under arrest for trespassing.”

Man, that’s the first and last time a hippo goes to a theme park.

Lost and Found

*Two girls spend at least one day a week visiting their mother in the hospital. How, then, do they find themselves so hopelessly lost there? Share their adventure in **LOST AND FOUND**, by Cassie Mills.*

Danielle and Tali were more than sisters; they were best friends. Their father had passed away many years before. Their mother had cancer and was living in the hospital. Danielle and Tali lived with their fantastic Aunt Julie.

It was Saturday, the day the girls spend in the hospital with their mom, Jan Marko. They had been following this tradition ever since they could remember. “Okay, here we are,” Aunt Julie said as they stopped at the doors of the hospital’s circle drive. “I’ll pick you up at 7:00. That’s when visiting hours are over.”

Danielle and Tali walked to the doors as their aunt honked goodbye. When they walked in, Tali said, “It looks a little busy today. Don’t you think?”

“I suppose. Now let’s sign in, then head over to see Mom,” Danielle said. Danielle didn’t seem to care as much about sick people as Tali did, but they both felt sorry for their mom.

They marched through the doors as they always do, straight to their mom’s room. They had never gone further than that because it was never necessary. They passed through the waiting room, not stopping, and straight into their mom’s private room.

As soon as they walked in, they saw their mom on the bed reading her favorite story: *The Faults of Life* by Michael Felder. Her face lit up with excitement when she saw the girls.

“How are my two favorite daughters?” she said in a perky but calm voice.

“We’re great,” Danielle answered. “Anything new happen?”

"No," she said in a sad tone. "The doctors said that I need to have some testing today. I might not be here later, so don't get worried."

Tali and Danielle weren't paying attention to what their mother said because they were busy settling down. "I really have to go the bathroom," Tali squealed as she jumped up and down, her face turning purple.

"All right. Danielle, you go with her. I'll wait until you get back," their mom said.

"Come on. Let's get this over with," Danielle sighed.

They walked out the door and charged to the bathroom before Tali wet her pants. They came back out quickly and headed straight for their mom's room.

They walked in and said, "Mom, we're back." But when they looked up, they saw that the room was empty. Their mom wasn't there. They thought she had gone to get an x-ray, so they thought nothing of it. They sat down, pulled their history homework out of their bags, and began working.

After an hour of boring history homework, they began wondering where their mom was.

"Danni, I think we should find out where mom went," Tali suggested.

"All right, let's go search for her," Danielle said as she stood up.

"No wait! I said 'find out,' not 'go find'!" Tali wailed, her face covered with a look of aggravation.

But Tali had no choice. Once Danielle made up her mind, she made up her mind, and there was no way to change it.

Since they had never been anywhere in the hospital except to their mom's room, they didn't really know where to go. They wandered around for a while until they came to the gift shop. Tali loved gifts! Danielle did, too, but she refused to let Tali shop because she wanted to find her mom. Then suddenly she had an idea. A grin crept on Danni's face.

"Tali, we're never going to get past the doors beyond the visiting area," Danielle explained, "unless we have a diversion! Here's what we'll do. Let's buy some flowers addressed to Mrs.

Marko. If anyone asks, we tell them we are delivering the flowers.”

“That’s brilliant. Let’s go.” There was excitement in her high-pitched voice. Her face turned bright with excitement. When they walked into the shop they held their heads high like they owned the place.

“Hello, how may I help you?” the florist behind the counter said. She was wearing a long dress with flowers of all different colors popping up everywhere with extreme detail on every petal.

“May we please order a dozen daisies for our mother? We’d like the card addressed, ‘To: Mrs. Marko. From: Her two favorite daughters, Danielle and Tali,’” Danielle said hurriedly.

“We’ll give them to her ourselves if that’s all right,” Tali added.

“That’s fine. Here you are.” The dress lady gave Danielle and Tali a beautiful package with the daisies very nicely laid out with a pink bow with dainty lace around the edge.

Once they had the flowers, they headed toward the doors beyond the visiting area. As soon as they entered, they hurried and hid behind a desk. No one suspected a thing. The doctors walked around normally as they strode to the patients’ rooms.

They chose their next move carefully. They came upon a room that had all sorts of lab equipment. It was the kind of room where, when you walk past different beakers and glasses, your face changes shape. They saw thousands of things, with file cabinets everywhere, but there were no humans in sight. They decided to leave.

As soon as they walked into the hall, they ran into a big man.

“What do you think you’re doing?” the big man boomed. “No children allowed! Can’t you read?” He pointed to a sign on the wall.

“We-we-we-we are delivering flowers. SEE!” Tali showed him the flowers as her face turned purple and she started shaking with fright.

Danielle shoved Tali aside and jumped in saying, “Yes, as a matter of fact we can read! Don’t you dare think you can talk to my sister and me like that. That was extremely ru--”

Tali gasped and closed her hand over Danielle's mouth, "I'm sooo sorry, sir. Sometimes my sister can't control herself."

"Oh, yes I can--"

Tali grabbed Danielle and moved her away with her hand over her mouth and said, "Keep walking," under her breath.

"I can, too, control myself," Danielle murmured as she walked away.

The man hesitated, then said, "All right, but all you do is deliver the flowers, then go back to the visiting area," he demanded. "Understood?"

"Yes, sir," Tali nodded as they turned and walked away, frightened.

They decided to take the stairs. They didn't want to stop searching, though. They came upon an elevator and decided that maybe their mom was on another floor, so they got in.

Back in the elevator, they noticed that the button with a ten on it had the words "X-ray Department" next to it. They thought that maybe their mom would be there because that was the only room they knew besides the Emergency Room.

On the tenth floor, they walked and walked. All the doors were closed and there were a million of them. They wandered forever, searching, but there was no hope. They realized they would never find their mother in their situation. They sat down and cried. Danielle hugged Tali and said, "It will be all right," although there was very little confidence in her voice.

Danielle woke up next to Tali...both were in separate beds. Danielle's head tossed from side to side, searching, wondering where and what they were doing there. She leaped off the bed and ran to Tali's bed. She shook her all around, trying and hoping that she would wake up. There was no hope. Tali was sleeping like a rock.

Danielle ran up and down the hallway, sweating and looking for someone to help her. She fell to the floor, slamming down on the cold tile. She didn't get up. There was no point. She wept openly on the floor and she wanted more than anything in life to

find her mother. She ran until she found a nurse--by running smack into her.

"I need help," she pleaded.

"What's wrong?"

"I need to find my mom!"

"Okay, okay, what happened?" the nurse asked.

Danielle explained the whole story.

"Oh, Sweetie, don't worry. She's probably getting a C.A.T. scan," she assured her, "Everything will be all right."

Tears ran down Danielle's face as she walked with the nurse to the elevator.

"Here we are," the nurse proclaimed, "back on the visitors' floor. Where is your mom's room?"

Danielle pointed to a door down the hall. "Thank you," she murmured. "Oh, there's one more thing," Danielle added, squinting her eyes, "How did Tali and I get in the hospital room?"

"I'll let you decide. That's not important."

Danielle ran to her mom's room with great excitement. She was no longer sad. She leaped into her mom's room and saw her sitting on her bed. She ran and hugged her mom even though it was more of a squeeze. She was overjoyed.

"Oh, Mom, I've missed you so much," Danielle sobbed. Tears trickled from her eyes as she sat on her mom's bed, hugging her with love.

"It's okay, Sweetie," she said. "Wait a minute. Where is Tali?"

Danielle murmured, "She's sleeping upstairs." Her face was red all over and she was very tired.

"Okay," her mom said in confusion. "Go ask the nurse to take you to get her."

"All right, Mom."

"I'll phone your Aunt Julie and ask her to pick you up. I'll bet she's worried sick."

Danielle walked out of the door saying, "I'll see you next Saturday." She turned and walked with the nurse, smiling.

The Lost Boy

*When a boy survives a plane crash in the wilderness, will he make it on his own? Find out in **THE LOST BOY**, by Austin Seymour.*

Frank was at the airport on his plane, ready to take off. They were just waiting for the signal to take off. He was on his way to his dad's house. His mom had sent him to the airport thinking that he would be safe on the plane ride.

He was in the airplane; the pilot was nice and taught him to fly. The pilot's name was Mike. Now and then he would let Frank fly. The plane was an old, rusted two-seater and was very comfortable. It flew nice and handled turbulence very well.

They talked a lot over the five-hour plane ride. They got to know each other very well. He was almost like his best friend because his mom had just moved to a different state. Since he had moved he hadn't met anyone yet.

They were flying when all of a sudden Mike started to go down slightly. Frank went to the pilot seat and saw Mike just lying there. He felt Mike's neck. Mike didn't have a pulse. He was dead from a heart attack.

He got the pilot and threw him in the back seat so he could drive. He went up higher because he was low and near the trees. He had a hard time leveling the plane. Once he got it leveled he started looking at all of the controls. One control was the gas gauge; there was an arrow pointing down at an "L" for low. He tried calling the airport to tell them what happened but nobody responded. Frank radioed the airport guy to tell him that the pilot had an accident and the gas was running low. It was no use.

He went to the closest pond or small lake. He found one and tried circling around the lake until he was really slow. At the last

second he turned the front end up and it went down slowly. He was in the water and took his seat belt off. He could get out but he wanted the survival pack. He couldn't live without it. He went back down underwater and he tried to get it but it was stuck. He pulled and he pulled, then he finally got it. Then he came up and he burst for air.

He had the survival pack. It included a waterproof lighter, waterproof matches, sleeping bag, pots and pans, baked food in plastic bags, a .22 caliber gun with 30 shells, and some extra shells.

The food was cooked; he was heating it up. A wolf snuck up to him. It kind of reminded him of when he was with his mom and his mom used to sneak up on him when he had the hiccups.

The wolf came every time he cooked his food. One time he followed him when he went hunting. He followed him again the next time he went hunting.

"If he is there again I would name him Two-Socks because of his two white socks."

At first he was scared of him, but he sits with Frank and Frank pets him. He gives him food. They are good friends.

Frank had a fire going since the last week. There is plenty of firewood to keep it going for weeks.

Another long week passed and no human was in sight. After two weeks passed, he put a lot of leaves on the fire. He went hunting and heard a loud buzzing sound. He ran back to camp.

It was a helicopter; it came down and he got inside of it. It was like his lucky day; or maybe it was his birthday and he had forgotten.

A Moose's Love

*A boy is lucky to be alive after a horrible plane crash in a forest. His only hope for survival rests with a wild moose in **A MOOSE'S LOVE**, by Jamie Buckley.*

The room was closing in on me. As the cabin of the plane shrank, the windows shattered. The ceiling was touching my nose, and faintly I heard a voice saying, “Sir; excuse me, sir, but would you like your dinner?”

I was sitting in a seat; the voice was that of a flight attendant. I accepted the food and looked around. I was in a plane and must have had a bad dream. You see, I’ve always been afraid to fly, ever since I was a kid. My name’s Scott and I am sixteen years old. I’m on my way back to my home in Minnesota. I have just been up in the Northwest Territories of Canada. Man, is it cold up there. My mom had said I needed to spend some quality time with my grandma.

I heard the pilot over the speakerphone say, “We’ll be flying through some turbulence, so please stay calm and buckle your seatbelt.” Then there was a sudden rustle for seatbelts. When the pilot said turbulence, he meant it; the whole cabin was shaking.

After a few minutes I heard a huge boom and the air masks dropped out of the ceiling. I looked outside to see what was the matter, and there it was: where there was supposed to be a wing, there was nothing but smoke and fire. I heard the pilot once again. He said that the wing had exploded, and told all of us to brace ourselves.

I felt my stomach lurch as if I were on a roller coaster; we were falling, and fast. There was mass hysteria, children crying, and mothers holding their kids crying, too. I felt a burning in my

head so strong it could have been a seizure. It was actually my head hitting the seat in front of me. The plane then hit the ground with such force that I was thrashed about. The roof tore off. For a few seconds we slid, tearing up the ground as we went.

We came to a stop and there were bodies lying everywhere around the crash site. It made me feel so horrible to see this that I fell to my knees. I was in the center aisle, five rows of seats ahead from where my seat was. As I got up I felt freezing, though I was sweating like a pig.

I climbed over the wreckage outside. What I saw was as if I had walked into a new and different world; the ground and trees were covered in loads and loads of snow. I yelled at the top of my lungs, “Is anybody alive out there?” There was some rustling coming from the front of the plane. I moved a big sheet of metal and saw the pilot; I went to help him up when he let out a painful yell. “AAAAAH! It’s my leg, I think it’s broken,” he said. I then reached for two pieces of metal and a seatbelt to make a splint.

When he was up, he reached for two bags labeled “Survival Kit.” We managed to make some shelter and a fire. The kits contained two sleeping bags, a box of 200 waterproof matches, three flares, and a two-week supply of provisions.

The next day I woke up to the sound of a moose’s call. I woke the pilot and told him I was going to look for firewood. I walked into the forest and stumbled upon a small lake. On the other side was a moose. It saw me and was startled to see me; maybe it had never seen a human before. I had seen some moose in the zoo in Minnesota, but they weren’t like this one. It looked gentle and caring. I felt as if I had known this moose before. I blinked for a split second and the moose was gone.

When I got back I found the pilot on the ground, unconscious, with half of his face completely gone. Standing over him was a ten-foot brown bear, ready to take another swipe at the pilot’s face. The bear heard me take an awestruck breath of horror and turned around, towering over me. I looked up to see the bear raising his gigantic paw, when out of nowhere a brown streak shot through the air with antlers pointed strait for the bear’s chest. The

amazing blow hit with such force that the bear was thrown against the tree behind him. The bear got up as I crawled out of the way.

I turned around to see the moose pushing the dirt back with her hoof like a bull. The bear immediately charged for the moose in anger and she took a step to the side, making the bear charge straight into a tree. I heard the unmistakable sound of the bear's skull cracking.

At the sound of this I ran over to see if the pilot was all right. His face was completely torn and mutilated. Judging by looking at his neck, it broke at impact.

When I looked at the moose, she bowed her head and shrugged towards her back as if to say, "Hop on." She carried me along through the forest, but I did not know where we were going. We were passing through a dark, sad-looking part of the forest that sent an ice-cold chill down my spine. I heard wolves howling as I looked around. The howling seemed to be getting louder. At one time I thought that I actually saw a wolf sticking his head out from a tree. I was starting to shake because it was so cold.

The moose suddenly stopped. A pack of wild red-eyed wolves appeared almost out of nowhere as if to just "appear out of thin air." They drew closer, drooling in hunger. The moose leaped over the circle of starving wolves. I fell off the moose as the wolves darted for me.

The wolves reached me and started ripping up my shoes. They got to my foot and made ten gashes that were bleeding. I got up and tried to run away but one of the wolves jumped onto my back and tore off my shirt.

I heard some very loud hoof beats. It was the moose charging for the wolves with tremendous speed and anger. The wolves went literally flying through the air. I crawled back onto the moose's back and she took me what I thought was further into the forest.

We actually came out of the forest where there was a small cabin. I walked up to the door and opened it. There sitting at a table was a park ranger. He was amazed to see my condition. He treated my wounds and I told him my story about the crash, the bear, and the wolves. He got me on a train home. I still remember

that as I left the cabin, the moose was gone. I don't know why she helped me, but I wish that I could have had the chance to say goodbye.

It is still difficult to think about the whole ordeal. When I do consider what happened, I think, "Why me? Why was I the only person to survive this horrible plane crash?"

Odyssey

Some challenges are too great to be overcome alone. Accordingly, three brothers team up to take on the greatest risks of their lives in ODYSSEY, by Justin Storey.

A.J., Justin, and Andrew were brothers who joined the Army during World War II. A.J. was the oldest. He was 20 years old. He had blond hair and was very tall. Justin was 18 years old. He had black hair and was also very tall. Andrew was the youngest brother; he was 17 years old. He had blond hair like A.J., but wasn't as tall.

One Sunday morning, after hearing the bugle that always woke them up at basic training, they started to talk about a mission that Andrew saw on the company bulletin board. The notice said, "Wanted: Volunteers for a secret mission." A.J. decided to call their commanding officer to find out about the mission. The three brothers were part of the Easy Company, in the United States Army.

When A.J. said that the brothers would be interested in volunteering for the special mission, the commanding officer said, "You need to complete your basic training first."

The brothers attended eight weeks of basic training camp. During this time, they ran for miles, learned how to live in the wilderness, and learned how to go over walls and barbed wire fences. They graduated from boot camp.

They told their mom and dad at graduation that they might be chosen for a special mission. Their parents were worried about them. Andrew and Justin were scared about going into action. A.J. was the only one who was looking for action. He convinced his brothers it would be great.

They checked the bulletin board every day to find out if they had been chosen. Finally one day, their commanding officer called them in and told them they had been picked and that they would start their special training in one week.

During the first week of their special training, they learned how to swim under special conditions. A.J. loved it! He thought the best part was going under like seals and moving stealthily like a shark. Justin was more cautious. He tolerated the swimming, knowing he needed it for the mission. Andrew was like A.J. He loved it. They all passed with flying colors.

There were many weeks of running through rain and mud, working non-stop. They learned how to fire basic weapons. Next, they practiced on stationary targets. They heard the same noise every day, bang-bang-click-click. They learned how to hit moving targets, too.

Target shooting was fun and hard, but there was more to do. The last thing they learned was to fly a plane. It was two weeks of intense practice. Afterwards, they had lots of fun. They graduated with top honors. The brothers learned there is no “me” or “I” in a team.

The commanding officer called them to tell them about the mission. He told them that they would try to fly in unnoticed across German territory. They would have to go to the fortress and rescue three POWs. They would then have to get everyone out safely.

“What are POWs?” Andrew asked.

“POWs are prisoners of war,” said the general. The general said, “Your lives might never be the same again.”

“Sure,” Andrew said. He didn’t believe the general. The commanding officer took them to the hall to get suited up.

The brothers suited up and headed towards the runway. They jumped into the plane, anxious to start the mission. A. J. was pilot, Andrew was copilot, and Justin was gunner.

A.J. started the plane. ARGH-COUGH. It sputtered to life. “For freedom!” A.J. yelled.

In minutes they were over the Atlantic. It was like a blue blanket. They were excited to finally be on their way. They saw

dolphins, sharks and whales. As they flew on, they flew into a dark, thick, dewy mist. When the mist cleared, they saw a dark country. It was Germany. They saw an airport with radar. Then it hit them. They had been spotted.

A.J. saw two planes leave. He knew they were coming after them. The brothers started to get ready to fight. They heard guns and engines making sounds. BANG-PSSS-BANG-BANG. The Germans hit their gas tank. “We’re out of gas!” said A.J. They got hit again.

They started to lose altitude. They ejected out of the plane just in time. They were scared that their parachutes wouldn’t open, or they would be shot down. Luckily, they got out in time before the crash. On their radio they intercepted a call from the Germans that said they had been shot down and were dead. A.J. said, “Great, now we can go undercover because they think we’re dead.” They radioed the USA and informed them that they had made it behind enemy lines.

They got their gear ready and headed for Berlin to get to the fortress. “We’ll have to take a different route, because we were knocked off course when our plane got shot down,” said Justin. They walked for four days and nights. They were exhausted and most of all afraid they would be captured.

They saw some German soldiers, and they lured them over and knocked them out. They took the German soldiers’ clothing and changed into them so they could get into the fortress unnoticed. They followed the soldiers’ brigade until they were at the fortress.

They tried to act normally. The officers were saying “good morning” as “gutten morgan,” but the brothers said nothing. The Germans looked at them suspiciously.

The brothers snuck away and saw a sign with a picture of Hitler on it. They got into the fortress through a small hole in the fence. They found some M60 rifles in a storeroom.

They blew up the prison door and the alarm sounded. They freed the POWs and ran for their lives. They hid behind some metal boxes and fired back at the Germans.

Andrew threw a grenade. The brothers moved up to another metal box after the grenade exploded. They fired again and they threw another grenade.

They made their final move and ran for the hole in the fence. A.J. fell behind. A German attacked him. A.J. stabbed his bayonet through him. A.J. was injured when he got to the fence. They threw a smoke bomb and ran for a bunker. They weren't sure if the Germans had sent a brigade after them.

A.J. was bleeding but the three POW's were okay. They decided to leave the bunker. The Germans saw them. They fought back. Andrew and Justin were hit. Justin heard a boom. A grenade was launched at Andrew. It blew up near him.

Andrew fell. He could not speak to them. The Germans caught up with him and shot him to death. Justin saw a tear in A.J.'s eyes.

They decided to keep running. They took the rocket launcher from the soldier that killed Andrew after they killed him. They blew the brigade up.

They decided to head toward the airport. They saw tanks and men heavily protecting it.

A.J. started crying as they knelt in the shadows, hidden from the Germans. The general had been right. Their lives were changed.

They decided to move. A.J. said, "I will set up a diversion and you sneak the POWs in. If I'm not there in ten minutes, leave without me." A.J. moved in and made a covering fire. He threw grenades, and got ready for hand-to-hand combat.

The German soldiers' guns were blown up. A.J. was hit in the head by the butt of a gun, but stabbed the soldier with his bayonet.

Justin and the POWs moved in past the German tank towards their plane. After they were all on board he started the motor and hid in the cockpit, waiting.

A.J. was fighting fiercely. He had blood all over himself. After he killed all of the Germans he ran toward the plane. Because Justin saw that the tank was about to fire, he started down the runway. A.J. grabbed onto a rope ladder that was sticking out

from the back of the plane. He was barely holding on as the tank started firing away. Justin was flying and dodging. A.J. was hanging on, climbing slowly up the ladder. Suddenly, ZING, a bullet hit his leg. He screamed, “Ahhh!” but he kept climbing. Finally he made it in.

Then they heard it. “Odyssey, are you there? This is the Angel planes. If you're there, we can help you.”

A.J. said, “This is Odyssey and we need help.” Then a ship sent two planes that destroyed the tank.

When they got back they were awarded the Medal of Honor. Andrew's body was never recovered. The family had a great memorial service for their brother Andrew. He was considered a hero. His parents weren't the same for years.

A.J. later became a pilot and Justin became a teacher.

The boys' lives were changed dramatically because of the war. They never forgot their long-lost brother and the service they did for their country.

The Perfect Puppy

Have you ever gone looking for that one special pet? The Smiths go all around the world in search of THE PERFECT PUPPY, by Liz Jacobs.

"Mom, when are we going to get a dog?" asked Rachel.

"Next year, Honey," Mrs. Smith said.

One Year Later

"Mom, when are we going to get a dog?" asked Rachel.

"Next year, Honey," said Mrs. Smith.

Eleven-year-old Rachel Smith and four-year-old Benny had always wanted a dog.

They often played with the neighbors' dog, Pepper. And when the neighbors went on a vacation, the Smiths would take care of Pepper.

One More Year Later

"How come you always say 'next year,' Mom? It's been next year twice!" whined Rachel.

"I want a doggy," said Benny, "right now."

"Fine, fine, we'll get a dog this year," said Mrs. Smith, giving up the fight.

"Good choice. I kind of wanted a dog myself," said Mr. Smith, embarrassed.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah!" everyone said.

"What kind of dog should we get?" Rachel asked.

"I know," Dad said excitedly, "how about a husky?"

"No," Mom said, "I don't know what country they're from."

"How about a Bison Frise?" Benny wondered.

"I hear Paris, France is great this time of year," Dad said.

"I don't know; let's sleep on it and talk in the morning," Mom said tiredly.

That night Rachel and Benny could not fall asleep because they were so excited about getting a puppy. They were squealing and talking about the puppy and how it should look, and if the dog should be a boy or a girl. Benny wanted a girl and Rachel wanted a boy. They were so loud that Dad had to come up and tell them to keep it down. After a while, they did get tired and finally fell asleep, only to dream of puppies.

The next morning, Mr. Smith would take his family on an adventure to find the perfect puppy. When the rest of the family awoke, Dad said, "Pack your bags, we're going on an adventure to find the perfect puppy!" Dad was a photographer and frequently showed them interesting pictures from around the world.

Everyone scrambled up the stairs to get dressed and pack. When the family was finally finished getting ready, Dad said, "I hear there are nice, small Chihuahuas in Mexico."

In Mexico, the people were very nice and said "Hola." The breeder lived on the outskirts of Chihuahua. "What a coincidence," said Rachel. At the breeder's house, there they saw how small the Chihuahuas were. They could fit right inside a teacup!

"Whoa! If we got a dog this size, we would step on it!" said Mom. "These dogs are too small."

The adventure continued. "Uh...let's try up in the Alps. The St. Bernards aren't small at all," Dad said.

"I remember seeing them last year when we went yodeling," Rachel added.

"I like big dogs!" Benny said. "They're warm and friendly and I could ride it like a horse."

When they got to the Alps, they met a huge St. Bernard. "Do we really want a dog this big?" Mom inquired. "This dog is too big."

And so they left almost as fast as they came.

Dad said, "I heard there are lively beagles in England; let's try there. After all, I've got plenty of frequent flyer miles to share."

"I can see Big Benny there, too!" said Benny excitedly.

When they got to England, the people were just as nice as the Mexican people, except they were saying "Cheerio" instead of "Hola." Dad said, "Hola, buenos dias." People started looking at him funny. "Was it something I said?" Dad said curiously.

"Dad," said Benny, "where are all the doggies?"

"I don't know," said Dad. "Let's go ask the bobby."

"Excuse me," said Mom, "do you know where the beagle breeder of Winchester lives?"

"No, but if you don't have a moby, you could ring him on the 'dog and bone' near the roundabout," said the bobby, always there to help.

"Good idea," said Mom, even though she didn't know what he was talking about.

They finally found the breeder and looked at the beagles. The dogs were jumping, pouncing, and playing with one another. "They sure are lively," Rachel said. Suddenly, they stopped playing and started barking like crazy!

"These dogs are too loud!" Mom yelled.

"Now where do we go?" asked Benny.

"How about China, you guys?" Rachel suggested. "I've always wanted to see a dog from China."

"We could try real Chinese food there," Mom said.

"We could also see the Great Wall of China, too!" Dad exclaimed.

"Cool!" everyone shouted.

The family left very fast because they were so excited. "On to China!" Dad yelled.

As soon as Rachel and the rest of the family arrived, a lot of people were staring at them. They looked so different from the Chinese. The breeder was already there at the airport to greet them. He said "Meho" (hello in Chinese) and told them to follow him. After about five minutes they were at the breeder's house. He had about ten Shih Tzus that had curled tails and long hair.

"Pick one up, Rachel," said Benny. When Rachel got close to the cutest one, it started barking and growling. She jumped back and ran to Mom and Dad.

"That dog sure doesn't like kids," said Rachel, quivering.

"That dog is too mean," Mom said.

Dad ran out of frequent flier miles, so they couldn't go anywhere but home. They traveled far distances to find the perfect puppy and came home empty-handed and hopeless. They were sitting around in their pj's, Dad sipping his coffee, Mom drinking her tea. Rachel and Benny were so depressed that they didn't even want to stare at the blank TV, which was their second favorite thing to do.

Suddenly the doorbell rang. "Who could that be?" asked Mom. Dad opened the door and it was Mrs. Pomer, the neighbor.

"Hi, Mrs. Pomer. What's new?" Dad asked.

"Oh, you didn't hear? Our dog, Pepper, had puppies last week. Would you like one? There are four," Mrs. Pomer said.

Everyone thanked her and scrambled up the stairs, tripping over each other to get dressed. Benny couldn't find two matching socks. He wore a blue one and a red one. He didn't care. Rachel's striped shirt didn't match her polka-dotted pants. Did she care? Definitely not! Mom and Dad couldn't find matching clothes, either. Mom's purple shirt didn't match her red socks. Dad's green shirt didn't match his blue socks. Did they care either? No. In fact, no one did. And all the while they were giggling.

When they finally saw the puppies, no one could choose. They were all so cute! Some had black on the tips of their tails, and some had spots around their noses and also on their paws. Each of them had one big spot on its back, and black ears.

They were not too big and not too small. They were not too mean and not too loud. They especially adored Rachel. Only one had spots around her nose and paws, and also on the tip of her tail. That is the puppy the Smiths chose. They named her Peppy after her mother Pepper.

"We found our perfect puppy!" they sang.

LESSONS LEARNED

Central Bugs

*If people think that bugs don't have problems, they should think again. Find out from **CENTRAL BUGS**, by **Megan Katzenstein**, just how challenging a bug's life can be.*

In a little buggy town at the edge of Central Park, our story unfolds. At about one o'clock on a crisp Friday afternoon, Ms. Ladybug flew over to the houses of Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar to invite them to a little tea party that night at 7:00. Later that afternoon, our problem starts.

When Ms. Ladybug invited them to the tea party, they did not think of one very important thing: HOW TO GET THERE ON TIME! Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar were so excited they did not even care at that moment.

"Mrs. Caterpillar, keep your tail off my leg!" screamed Mr. Spider.

"Well," said Mrs. Caterpillar "how am I supposed to do that if your leg is under my tail?"

While our buggy friends babble on, I'll fill you in on what's happening. Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar are trying to figure out a way to get to the party for Ms. Ladybug. But there is a problem. Ms. Ladybug lives way on the other side of the park. So they are in Mr. Spider's tiny house thinking and thinking.

Now back to our bugs. "We could catch a ride on a human," suggested Mrs. Caterpillar.

"No, too risky," said Mr. Spider.

"We could ride on a leaf that's being blown by the wind," said Mr. Spider.

“No,” said Mrs. Caterpillar “that involves finding just the right leaf.” While our bug friends think of more ideas, we’ll go off to Ms. Ladybug.

Ms. Ladybug was scurrying around the house, dusting here and sweeping there, trying to get everything perfect, thinking to herself, “I want everything perfect for my guests.” When she had flown over to invite Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar to the party just that morning, she did not realize that it would be such a problem.

But back to Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar: They had just figured out a way to get to Ms. Ladybug’s house. They were going to use Mr. Spider’s thread sewn together very tightly to use as a sail, and they are going to make a car out of leaves with a sail instead of a motor.

They got to work, with Mr. Spider making the sail and Mrs. Caterpillar making the car. They worked very fast to make the car and when they finished it was almost time for the party. By then it was the next morning and the party was at 7:00. So they quickly jumped into the car and set sail for the other side of the park.

As they zoomed down the sidewalk, dodging people and trying not to look suspicious or get squished and to stay on the road, they kept silent, just thinking about the wonderful things they were going to do. Since they were thinking and not driving they only went off the road once.

They got there right at 7:00, got out of the car, and went up to knock on the door. They knocked and Ms. Ladybug opened the door.

“We’re here,” panted Mr. Spider as Ms. Ladybug opened the door.

Ms. Ladybug gave them a confused look and said, “Come in. I have to tell you something.”

Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar walked inside the little house and sat down on the pincushion sofa. Ms. Ladybug whispered softly and calmly, “The party was yesterday at 7:00 P.M. I thought you knew.” Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar looked at each other and fell over with still, stunned faces.

Immediately, Ms. Ladybug jumped up and pulled them back up again, then quickly started to fan their faces with her wings. As soon as they came back to their senses, she told them that the party was very dull without them, but “nobody bothered to go over and get you.” Ms. Ladybug said that there were a lot of treats left over and they could help themselves to some.

Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar slowly got up and walked over to where there was a table full of food. There were flies and leaves and a whole bunch of buggy delights. So they ate and ate until their little stomachs were full.

After they were done, Ms. Ladybug walked them to the door. To their surprise when they opened the door, the little car wasn’t there. Mr. Spider and Mrs. Caterpillar and Ms. Ladybug all looked at each other a little queerly and walked back into the house to figure out what to do.

Oh, well, maybe this will make our little bugs think a little more quickly NEXT TIME!

Merry Roast Duck

When you're a duck, the last thing you should try to be is a Santa Claus. In MERRY ROAST DUCK by Omenka Helen Uchendu, a duck learns that you should never accept great amounts of food at Christmas time.

Hi. I'm talking to *you*. Yes, you. I'm right here...on the dinner table. I'm the one decorated in a ring of vegetables. I'm the roast duck in the center of the table, okay? If you are interested (which you aren't as you are eyeing me hungrily), I'll tell you my life story. But if not, you might as well eat me, because I *am* pretty tasty. You've decided not to eat me? Good.

Well, I got into this trap when I first heard about Santa Claus. Mama Sheep had been telling the three little pigs about the story of Santa Claus. I was too old for the juvenile stories that Mama Sheep usually told the piglets, but this particular story hooked my ear, and forced me to listen. "...he brings toys to all the little girls and boys. But if you're bad, you'll be sad, for you'll get nothing but coal. Santa Claus is something humans believe in. You can believe in him, too, if you want to. *Sniff. Sniff.* Is that fresh grass I smell? Sorry, kids! I need a break."

Thoughts rattled around in my minuscule brain. Maybe I should become "Santa Claus"...or maybe not. I pondered this mind-boggling thought for a while, and made my decision: I would become... **Ducky Claus!**

Over the next days, I ran around frantically, trying to gather up the essential ingredients to make duck-pellet casserole. This was the gift that I would give to all the animals. They would be delighted! As I put on the finishing touches, I tasted the goop, which was supposed to be casserole. It tasted revolting! *And it really reeked!* Anyway, it's the thought that counts.

That night, I stealthily crept around, distributing pieces of duck-pellet casserole to animals farm-wide. After I'd gotten to the last creature who lived on the farm, I went to bed with my heart warmed.

I woke up, still glowing from the night before. As I waddled to the front of my pen, I noticed all the animals' beady eyes staring at me. I guess they had tasted *and* smelled my gift. Oh well, so much for that matter.

Soon, the round figure of the farmer's wife appeared. In her arms, she cradled a big bowl of food – animal food. No one in the farm ate *that* much! As her thick legs approached my pen, I realized that all that food was for me! She smiled at me sweetly as she poured the duck pellets into a neat pile at my feet. A reward! All my generosity the night before had not been in vain! I ate up quickly, making sure to save some pellets for tonight's batch of casserole.

That night, it was *deja vu* all over again. I made the gunk, slopped it into the animals' pens, and plopped down to sleep. After a few days, you could tell they were getting tired of it. The swans gave me a couple of black looks...I could feel their blood boiling with rage. But the farmer's wife seemed to like my idea. Every day, the more casserole I gave, the more duck pellets I received. I felt good, and I knew that St. Nicholas himself would've been proud.

Christmas day rolled around at last. At 5:00 in the morning, I woke up. I quacked and quacked until all the animals were up. I guess the farmer heard me, because he came out of his house too. I could see something glistening in the winter sun. Uh-oh. It was an ax. A shiny stainless steel one...someone was going to be an appetizer. The farmer sauntered over to my pen. Maybe... no! He was just going to... take some pellets out of his pocket... and feed me, I thought. But he didn't. He opened the pen slowly, and reached over for me. He clutched my neck tightly, as if I could run away and Christmas dinner would be ruined. I could see the wicked grins of the other animals' faces as he slowly stepped to the slaughterhouse. "The joke's on you Henry! Ha! Ha!" one of them screeched. At this, everyone – all the animals – burst out

laughing. “Merry Christmas!” they cackled. Fingers and claws and webbed feet pointed at me as I was taken to my doom. I will never forget when one of the little piggys, who I thought was so innocent, cried out, “He’s dumb, isn’t he, Mom? I’m sure glad he’s gone... the stuff he brought had an *awful* stench!”

I can still see the solemn face of the farmer as he entered the slaughterhouse. He slammed the door and took one last look at me. He raised the ax above his head, and...**THWACK!**

Well, that’s my story. You can eat me now if you want to. Wait! No! I didn’t really mean that! Noooooooo!

Sadly, Henry the Fat Duck (a.k.a. Ducky Claus) was eaten Tuesday, December 25, 2001.

Perfume Bottles and Princes

PERFUME BOTTLES AND PRINCES, by *Jane Marie Layton*, is a tale in the tradition of Cinderella. In this version, however, skunks star in the story of how someone's little wish comes true.

Part 1: The Love Family

Have you ever dreamed of that one Prince Charming? So did the Love sisters. Only this time, Prince Charming was a real prince. And one day, someone's wish came true.

Stink, Stank, and Stunk Love were three sister skunks that lived in a large mansion in the city of Paris. The mansion was pearly white with four large pillars that held up the enormous balcony on the top of the fourth floor.

In front of their home lay a beautiful marble fountain with a great statue of a lion standing on his hind legs and roaring in despair. In a circle around the lion sat thirteen white doves with golden beaks.

This fountain was Stink, Stank, and Stunk's favorite part of their gorgeous home.

Stink was an incredibly large skunk with thick fur and uneven stripes. As she was not in the slightest pretty, she was often mistaken for a boy. Stank was shorter than Stink, but far plumper, and with feet and a nose fit for an elephant. She, too, was not considered very pretty, with her short, bristly fur. Not once had she been asked to dance at one of the prince's balls. Stunk was Stink and Stank's sister. She, on the other hand, was small and

slim with perfect little feet. Her stripes were long and straight, and her smooth, soft fur glistened in the evening sunlight.

Perfume, who looked very similar to Stunk, was the three girls' mother. She loved them all equally, and often spent her great wealth on them.

The family was all very pleasant and jolly except for one small (actually rather large) glitch: Stink and Stank hated their sister. Stunk was slim and beautiful and got all the attention when they went out or to school.

Part 2: The Terrible Trick

It was a warm summer day in the middle of June, and the girls had just finished a rather fuming chess match. Stunk said she would be back in a moment. She was just going to get some fresh air while she got the mail, and then she'd be ready for more of their arguing when she came back inside.

While Stunk was out, Stink and Stank spoke angrily of her. They made up horrible names to call her and started thinking of arguments to prove that she was wrong about the rules they had been arguing about. Finally, after quite some time, the girls grew tired of this activity and impatient for Stunk to come back.

Looking out the window, Stink and Stank saw that Stunk was sitting on the ridge of the fountain. When Stink opened the window, they could hear that she was singing, richly and beautifully to a real white dove, much like those on the fountain, who was perched upon her finger.

"She's probably bragging to the neighbors with her lovely voice!" said Stink.

"She's always doing things to show off, and trying to make us look bad," grumbled Stank, which was entirely untrue, "and I think that all thoughts of revenge are justified."

So the two decided to play a trick on Stunk. What they would do, exactly, was yet to be decided. It was Stunk's birthday soon, and they could eat her birthday cake before she even saw it, but they would get into tremendous trouble, for there wasn't anyone

to blame that on. That idea was their only one so far, and it was quickly ruled out.

While Stink and Stank were inside plotting, Stunk was still enjoying herself outside. The dove had flown away and she had finished singing. Stunk started sorting through the mail. The first few were addressed to “Miss Perfume Love” but then Stunk came across one that was addressed to “The Love Family.” It was written in fancy calligraphy:

*To The Love Family
20724 Rue Léon Boyer
Paris, France*

Though the writing was beautiful, it wasn’t what gave Stunk the urge to break the seal and reveal the contents, but instead it was the return address:

*His Majesty Pew Wee III
Stinkingham Palace
Paris, France*

Stunk ripped open the wax seal and removed the letter without delay. It read:

To the Love Family:

Dearest ladies and/or gentlemen of the Love family, you are invited to attend Prince Aroma of France’s evening ball. It will take place at 7:00 in the Palace Ball Room this Saturday evening. May all those who wish to attend R.S.V.P. at your earliest convenience.

The Royal Palace

Stunk hurried inside to show the others. Once Stink and Stank read the invitation, they decided immediately that it was the perfect time to do the trick.

The three sisters and their mother went to purchase ball gowns right away. Perfume, knowing that the two girls would be jealous, decided that none would see the others' gowns until the night of the ball.

As soon as they arrived home, Stink and Stank devised a plan: The evening of the ball, they would simply slip into Stunk's room with a pair of scissors, shred her dress, and blame it on Fluffy, the family cat.

A few days later, straight after lunch and just before it was time to prepare for the ball, Stink and Stank slithered upstairs to Stunk's bedroom on the excuse that they had been waiting all through lunch, crossing their legs under the table, to go to the bathroom. On Stunk's bed lay a beautiful white gown.

Stink and Stank whipped out their scissors and Stank whispered, "Let's do it on the count of three. One...two...three!" And they slid the blades of the scissors through the threads of the gown, shredding it to pieces. Proud of their work, they stood back to admire it.

"Wait!" shouted Stink. She shunted Fluffy toward the bed and he leaped ungratefully onto it. "There," she said, and they backed quietly out of the room.

Part 3: Double Trouble

Back downstairs, they joined their mother and Stunk at the dining table where they still sat, Perfume talking in a rather excited voice to Stunk. "Oh, you'll love it!" she was saying. "Come now, girls, I've got a surprise for you!" She swept past them toward the stairs. "Even though Stunk's birthday isn't for a few days, I decided it appropriate to give her her gift today.

"I'm just going to retrieve my dress from Stunk's room, and then I'll show you the gift. I left my dress here this morning to keep it safe, but I think that now is a good time to get it, before I show you what I got for Stunk, that is." Stink and Stank

exchanged surprised, very worried glances. They had no idea that the dress was their mother's. Stink sent Stank a silent message that Stank easily read: "Uh, oh."

Stink and Stank's stomachs churned as Perfume reached for the door handle. But before she could open the door, Perfume heard soft meows and scratches on the other side and her hand retreated. Stink and Stank let out long sighs of relief that their dreaded moment had been delayed. Perfume turned to them with a sort of confused frown. But just then the door creaked open, and she turned back around, shaking her head softly.

Fluffy strutted out from the door, with a knowing look fixed on his face. He gave a sort of smirk in the general direction of Stink and Stank and then turned around, silently sitting on his haunches. He watched, amused, as Perfume entered the room and let out an ear-splitting shriek. Stink and Stank crept nervously in.

Perfume looked around to see who or what might have caused the damage. Fluffy, who was giving Perfume innocent looks, strode up and rubbed against her leg, something he never did when he was frightened of being punished or having his weekly bath.

Then Perfume spotted it. "Scissors?" she screamed. "Half-heartedly thrown under the bed! Which one of you did this?" she yelled again, eyes red with fury, and turning to her children. Stink and Stank, quavering with fear, wrung their paws behind their backs and avoided Perfume's usually soft, but now piercing eyes. They had left the scissors under the bed. How careless!

Stunk, however, stared confidently into her mother's eyes, studying with care the deep shades of her blue-green irises.

"S-sorry, Mother. I must have left those scissors there after I h-had finished w-with my s-sewing," said Stank nervously, smiling weakly at their mother, and stepping toward the scissors. But Perfume laid a firm hand on her shoulder, holding her in place.

Seeing how nervous Stink and Stank were and how Stunk didn't seem in the least afraid, Perfume flicked her head back around and pressured Stink and Stank mercilessly with her unblinking stare.

She gasped suddenly, jerking her hand from Stank's shoulder and eyeing Stink and Stank with disgust. "You came up here after lunch, but you didn't go to the restroom. You came in here with your cursed scissors and you destroyed my great-grandmother's wedding gown, the gown I had planned to wear to the ball today!"

Perfume had told them several stories about that gown, its travels, and its repairs. But never had they seen it. Looking at it now, Stunk saw that it was indeed very beautiful. The bodice was studded with tiny pearls and the long, lacy arms reached almost to the floor. The creamy white skirt was of pure Asian silk. And the large bustle was exposed like a long, silver skeleton. Stunk looked up at Perfume. She had never seen her mother so angry.

Part 4: Consequences

Perfume flopped onto the bed, engulfed in a fit of sobs. Her face looked like it had been painted, it was so white. Stunk hurried to the spot where her mother sat and tried to calm her, but she only wailed louder.

The girls wiped Perfume's face with a cloth and poured some water down her throat. It was not long before their mother was quieted.

Looking extremely groggy and slightly cross-eyed, she croaked, "You! And you!" pointing at Stink and Stank. "In your rooms *now!*" And before Stunk could stop her, she jumped out of bed and stormed after them, face as red as a beet and the veins in her temples pulsing like mad.

Stunk was rather alarmed by the whole situation, but she quietly made the bed and listened intently to what her mother was saying.

"Why on earth would you do such a thing?" Perfume inquired loudly, after quite a long lecture.

Finally, Stink confessed. The immense pressure upon her and Stank had been too much to handle. It had overcome her. She had just finished trying to pleadingly explain hers and Stank's jealousy for Stunk when she was interrupted by Perfume's booming voice.

"You'll-you'll have to be punished! Before you can g-go to th-the ball, you have to wash the dishes, scrub the steps, sweep the fireplace, do the laundry, make the beds, fluff my pillows...."

And do a lot of other chores that Stunk couldn't hear through all the moans and groans the girls were making.

And then there was the slamming of a door and the soft footsteps of Perfume entering her bedroom.

Part 5: The Birthday Gift

Stunk walked silently down the stairs to the kitchen and made a fresh cup of strong earl gray English tea, Perfume's favorite. She brought a full teacup and a saucer upstairs and knocked softly on her mother's door. There was no reply. Pushing softly on the creaking door, she peeked in. Perfume was sitting on her bed with a purring little tabby cat kitten in her arms. Stunk walked silently into the room.

The kitten was adorable. It had paws that were far too large, and small, orange tufts for ears. With its big, round, sapphire eyes, it looked to be about ten weeks old.

When she saw what Stunk was looking at, Perfume smiled weakly and told her to set the tea on her bedside table. Then she lifted the kitten from her lap and placed it in Stunk's arms.

"You see," said Perfume, "I had to keep my dress in your bedroom so that it wouldn't get cat hair all over it before the ball this evening. I didn't want to keep the kitten in there for chance you might see her," she explained, while lightly stroking the kitten.

"She's adorable," Stunk whispered. "Oh mother, how I love you so. I've always wanted a kitten." And she began to play with her new pet. The kitten pranced and leaped and played with Stunk's hair. "What shall I name her?"

Just then, the kitten froze, completely still. Her eyes were fixed on Perfume's pink bunny slippers. She edged cautiously toward them, not daring to blink. Then, with one tremendous leap, she pounced on her prey. But when it made no reaction, she looked puzzled. Then her expression turned curious. Once again, she sidestepped toward them. As if to count to three, she rocked

back and forth three times to gain momentum. Suddenly, she leapt forward and dove headlong into the slipper on the left.

Stunk burst out laughing. "She seems to be a very curious cat," she said, "so I think I'll call her Adventure. What do you think of that, Mother?" But when she turned around, the door stood ajar and Perfume was nowhere in sight. So Stunk got up to leave the room, and soon Adventure emerged from the slipper to follow her.

Part 6: The Ball

When Stunk arrived in her bedroom, she found her mother picking up the remains of the gown from the dresser. "Mother, I—" she began to say, but Perfume put up a paw to hush her.

"I am very sad about losing this gown, but it is all right. I have given Stink and Stank many chores to do, and told them they mayn't go to the ball until they're finished."

Though she was also very angry with them, Stunk's soft heart had not wanted her sisters to be punished. But she did not complain. They had put themselves in their own mess.

"Anyhow, I have another gown to wear and it's almost time to leave for the ball. Hurry along now," she said, giving Stunk a soft push toward her wardrobe, "we don't want to be late."

Of course, Stink and Stank did not finish their chores in time, despite their great efforts. And though they pleaded, Perfume refused to allow them to go along. So, lifting their gowns elegantly and clicking their shoes on the marble steps as they walked down toward their awaiting coach, Stunk and Perfume bade them farewell. The two girls were sobbing in the doorway. "Pitiful," muttered Perfume as the coach began to depart, "simply pitiful."

At the ball, Perfume and her daughter were introduced to the prince, whose name was Aroma. He wished to dance with Stunk immediately; a very pleased Stunk and Aroma got to it right away.

Part 7: Heartbroken

The prince and Stunk danced and danced. Aroma made Stunk giggle with every one of his polite little jokes. He twisted her tight curly hair with great affection. After several hours, the music stopped. Aroma knelt before Stunk and kissed her delicate paw softly.

"Sweet lady," he said in a whisper, so that Stunk could only just hear him, "would you — would you marry me?" Stunk stared carefully into his calm, ocean-blue eyes.

"Oh, Aroma. Of course I wi -" but at just that moment, the grandfather clock at the end of the hall struck twelve midnight: *dong, dong, dong*.

Perfume was rushing over and interrupted them in a hurried voice.

"I've just remembered my dinner with the Bishop! It was indeed a very late dinner, but not this late! Come quickly!" she said, pulling on Stunk's arm and yanking her from Aroma. They rushed to the steps, the prince calling after them, "Wait, stop! Please! I don't even know your name!"

But Perfume fled. Stunk tripped on one of the stairs, and she heard something clink behind them thereafter, but did not get the chance to look back. Perfume was running too fast to even notice.

When they made it outside, the carriage was just pulling up. The two stepped quickly into it, and it pulled away before the prince could even catch up to them.

When finally they made it home, the Bishop was about to leave. Because Perfume was known to be very wealthy and always very kind and punctual, the Bishop was surprised that she had come so late, not to mention that her carriage horses were galloping at full speed down the streets in the middle of the night and getting all dirty. But Perfume managed to persuade him to come inside. She and Stunk quickly changed into clean clothes (they had gotten a bit dirty running around the palace as fast as their feet could carry them) and they all sat down to cheese, crackers, and wine. Stunk kept trying to tell Perfume of the

proposal but was constantly interrupted by the Bishop, who was totally ignoring her and admiring Perfume's great beauty with fuzzy eyes.

When finally Stunk did get the chance, Perfume was very apologetic. But she didn't get the chance to thoroughly discuss it with Stunk before the Bishop interrupted (again) with another droning story.

Finally the Bishop left. Though he seemed rather surprised by Perfume's first appearance, he said he had enjoyed his stay.

Stunk, however, was heartbroken. She had much enjoyed the ball, but she had been torn from the prince at the worst moment. Perfume had interrupted them just when Stunk was about to agree to his proposal. Though Perfume was very upset that she had done such a thing, there was little she could do to help. So how would he find her now? He didn't even know her name, and with so many skunks living in Paris, it could be almost impossible to find her by her looks.

How Stunk wished she could go visit the prince and show that it was really her. But surely they wouldn't believe that the prince wanted to see some girl. There were probably already a million other girls there, all claiming that they were the prince's true brides. Aroma may have even told the guards to close the gates from all the newspaper reporters coming to record his feelings and this unusual occurrence.

Stunk, who had truly wanted the peak of the moment where Perfume had interrupted to be perfect, was devastated.

Part 8: Hope & Happiness

It was now likely she would never see the prince again. Feeling very dramatic, Stunk decided that she could find no hope.

But the next day, hope found Stunk. She realized that the small, initialed perfume bottle she wore around her wrist in case of emergencies was missing. After all, a skunk's a skunk, and if she had been surprised at the ball, some major cover-up could be quite handy. The bottle must have fallen off when she tripped on the stairs!

The prince made an announcement that the owner of the initials that were engraved in the bottle left on the stair would be his bride.

Perfume and Stunk were both very excited at this news. Stink and Stank, on the other paw, were horrified. Their own sister, Princess, wife of Aroma the prince? The two of them went out into the garden to sulk. When finally the prince's assistant rang the doorbell, Stunk ran to open the door.

"My dear young lady," said the man on the other side, "are you the owner of the initials 'S.L.L.'?"

"I am," she replied. The prince's assistant smiled broadly at Stunk, and then at Perfume.

"Your daughter has now the choice to become Princess, bride of Aroma, the prince," he said. Perfume hurried over to Stunk and hugged her tightly. Stink and Stank, who had been watching from the window, now began to shriek. Perfume quickly drew the curtains.

"Dear child," said the assistant once again, "do you wish to be the beloved bride of Aroma, the prince?" Perfume squealed and wished her good luck, and Stunk nervously agreed. She and the assistant climbed into the beautiful carriage that was waiting for them outside, and the horses trotted them away.

A few days later, Stunk's dress had been fitted and sewn. It looked just like her great-great-grandmother's. The jeweler created a matching necklace, bracelet, and a pair of pearl earrings.

Soon, she and the prince were walking down the red velvet aisle, staring unblinkingly into each other's irises. One very large, warm tear seeped from the crinkled corner of one of Stunk's happy eyes. Stink and Stank plodded gloomily along behind them, each gripping a corner of Stunk's long train tightly in her paws.

"I pronounce you husband and wife!"

And they lived happily ever after.

Poor Green Turtle

Although others make fun of him, Herman has more going for him than they recognize. In POOR GREEN TURTLE by Brittany McGowan, we see how illogical it is to cling to prejudice based on appearances.

Once there was a little green turtle named Herman. He lived in a neighborhood of other turtles, but they were blue. The other blue turtles did not like Herman because he was green.

One day, there was a neighborhood kickball game. Herman went to join.

Rocky, a neighborhood turtle, called out, “Here comes ‘her man!’”

Every turtle on the field started to laugh.

Herman, shyly, went up to Rocky and asked to play. Rocky thought for a moment, and then said, “Why not?”

It was Herman’s turn up to bat. He missed the ball. “Strike one!” yelled the umpire. He missed the second ball. “Strike two!” The third ball was coming, and he missed. “Strike three and yer out’a’there!”

Herman was very, very embarrassed. All the other turtles began to laugh. Herman cried as he sprinted home.

Later the next day, the neighborhood turtles were out. He ran up and shouted, “May I play?”

Rocky answered, “Yeah, I guess so.”

It was hide-and-seek. Herman loved that game.

They picked captains. Shelby and Rocky were chosen. When there was just Herman left, Rocky and Shelby each insisted that Herman could be on the other’s team.

Rocky started counting, “1...2...3...4...5...”

Herman rushed to the lagoon, hopped in, and decided it was too cold.

“...10...11...12...13...,” called Rocky.

Herman ran to a pile of seaweed and hopped in.

“Ready or not, here I come!” screeched Rocky.

Time went by, and by, and by. Herman couldn’t believe no one had found him yet.

Suddenly he heard a noise. It sounded like Rocky! It called again, “Olly, olly, oxen free!”

Herman jumped out and shouted, in a teasing voice, “You couldn’t find me, you couldn’t find me!”

After that, all the other turtles wished they were green and wished that Herman would be on their team.

His color, green, matched the environment. The color of the seaweed was green!

Secret Agent Under Cover

*There is a secret world under the sea. Could it be like the world of
SECRET AGENT UNDER COVER, by Jazz Robinson?*

In the deep blue sea there lived a manatee named Gary. He was a very good hunter. He always had a lot of food at his house.

His brother Nosy was not a good hunter. He had no food at all. He wanted to steal some food from his brother Gary. But what Nosy didn't know is that his brother Gary was a secret agent who knew that Nosy was going to steal some food.

As the manatee Nosy was swimming near his brother's room, Gary was getting ready to put up all kinds of traps. He had lasers and trap doors.

When Nosy was at his brother's house he looked at his house and he was shocked with all the lasers. But he knew he could get past them. He jumped up and down because that was how the lasers were going. He got past the lasers with ease. But the worst was yet to come.

Nosy walked into the room. There was some kind of force field where the seaweed was. He looked at the force field. There was an on and off button. He pressed the on button and the force field was broken.

He was going to eat the seaweed but then Gary popped up. He said, "Nice job, Nosy. How would you like to be my secret agent partner?"

Nosy thought and he said, "YES!"

PHANTASM

Cave Girls

Love between sisters is something that should be treasured always. In CAVE GIRLS by Emily Sterling, two sisters learn that very lesson.

“Cara, look what I made for you!” screamed Janey.

“Here she comes,” I sighed. She was always bugging me with her silly pictures and it was getting annoying. If Mom hadn’t had that talk with me yesterday about treating everyone with respect, I would’ve slammed the door in her face.

She came prancing into the room with a big happy smile on her face like she had just painted the Mona Lisa. She handed me her “masterpiece” and her smile grew. “Do you like it?” she asked. “I painted it last night.”

I frowned. It was a very sloppy painting of a large gray cave with what looked to be unicorn-horn shaped icicles dropping from the ceiling. There was a little person in the center but it didn’t really resemble anyone. “I don’t want it!” I yelled.

Her face started to turn red and she ran from the room with her eyes red and full of tears. Although I didn’t know it then, I would soon find out that I would miss those big 100-watt smiles.

That was the last time we saw Janey. We didn’t know what happened to her. All we knew is that she disappeared.

After a month, we still hadn’t really gotten ourselves together. It was the first time after Janey’s disappearance that I had cleaned under my bed. When I got on my hands and knees to start cleaning, I was surprised to see that there wasn’t much down there. There was only a magenta pen which I pocketed, and an old piece of paper. The paper was very colorful. It looked like one of the old paintings that I did. The paper was in the very back

so I slithered to the back and it was everything I could do to keep myself from screaming. For under my bed was the cave picture Janey had painted for me. I immediately crawled back out and went to go sit on my bed. I sat down and started to stroke the picture, remembering that morning.

All of a sudden there was this deep whirring, and it was if I was a rocket spinning on and on into eternity. There were gray and black blurs that I was spiraling past. I felt a strange sensation and I could hear something screaming. Then as soon as it had started, it stopped. I hit the ground with a loud THUD. I looked around and saw unicorn-horn shaped icicles hanging from the ceiling. "This is very familiar," I thought. Then it hit me--Janey's drawing. Of course, this cave looked exactly like the one that Janey drew. It all made some kind of wacky sense.

Just as I was about to get up, I heard a low growl at my right. I whipped around and there was this funny, petite creature. It had tremendous green eyes, a pint-size blue nose, and a small mouth where its teeth were bared. I thought it was supposed to be scary, but the expression just made it look funnier. Its hair was a neon pink color that frizzed out around its head like a lion's mane. It wore big pants that were the color of terracotta. It also had on a large saggy tie-dyed shirt.

I stood there for a few seconds taking it all in. As soon as he saw me he started to look scared and as if he wanted to run away. I needed to know exactly were I was so I called to him. He turned around and looked at me. We both stood and listened to a faraway noise. Since he stayed where he was, I started to tell him about Janey and all the things that I had ever done to Janey and I guess I had been going on for a while because he interrupted me and said, "I know who that voice belongs to."

I was surprised to hear such a strange voice but I replied, "Who?"

"The girl that you were talking about--Janey," he replied.

"Janey's here?" I whispered, because all of a sudden my voice seemed to have left me.

"Yes, she's down in the very last cavern and she can't get back out."

“Why not?” I asked.

“Because there’s a novosa guarding the entrance,” he told me.

“I’m going to get her out, novosa or not,” I said, getting up.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” he said with a stern voice.

“Well, I’m not you, am I?” I said with an even firmer tone.

“The novosa has many weapons, teeth that are huge...,” he went on and on. His voice, surprisingly since it was so high-pitched, started to sound monotonous.

I yelled over his voice, “I’m going whether or not the monster has weapons because I love my sister.”

He stopped and looked up. He stared me right in the eyes and said, “If you feel that strongly, then I will go with you. I know the way, so I will be of some help.”

“Um, I don’t know your name yet. Mine’s Cara,” I said. “What is yours?”

“Neverva.”

“All right then, Neverva, let’s go.”

We walked further and further into the cave in dead silence with Neverva in the lead. Then he stopped.

“Here we are. The tunnel to the left will take you straight to the novosa.”

I sighed, thinking hard. How was I, a young girl, going to get past that thing with weapons?

Neverva looked up at me and I could tell he would be able to help. “What is it?” I asked.

“Well, the novosa that’s in there has to stay in a confined area, but I don’t know how big it is,” Neverva said.

“Why does he have to stay in an area?” I asked.

“Oh, because he’s driven by food and he would run away if he wasn’t imprisoned in there.”

“Who imprisoned him? How did they do it?” I asked.

“Well, I don’t know who imprisoned him, but I know why,” Neverva replied.

“Why?”

“They imprisoned the novosa because, since he was driven by his desire to eat, he was ruining everything that he could get his grimy hands on.”

“I understand now, thanks,” I said.

“Anyway, the cavern is pretty wide so he has a large area to roam in. This means that we have a larger space to run because he only takes up so much space,” Neverva said.

“So, all that we have to do is figure out how to get over that small area and we’re fine. Let me think,” I said. “Wait! I’ve got it! I can get Janey’s attention while you distract the novosa, then I’ll make a break for it and see if I can get past it to Janey.”

“How do I distract him, though?” Neverva questioned.

“You can start running back and forth so he’s watching you and I’ll sneak by. You don’t have to follow me, though, because I have a gut feeling that Janey will know the way out of the cave. Neverva, I guess this means we’re going to have to say goodbye right now.”

“Oh, I’m going to miss you so very much,” cried Neverva, “Goodbye, Cara dear.” With that, he flung his arms across my neck and hugged me tight.

“Goodbye, Neverva,” I said.

We both took one final look at each other and then headed for the left tunnel. Sure enough, there was the novosa slouched over a pot of soup; the prisoner must have had a little heart. I winked at Neverva and he got the novosa’s attention and I started yelling for Janey.

I had been yelling for a while when I finally heard her say, “I’m over here!” As soon as I heard her voice pierce the air, I experienced a new feeling of confidence. I bolted over onto the novosa’s territory without his looking at me. I looked back at him for the last time and I saw Neverva running back and forth right in front of the great creature. As soon as I reached the other side I immediately ran for Janey. I was surprised to see that there was a peach tree and a blueberry bush by the back wall of the cavern.

“No wonder she wanted to get back here,” I thought.

We threw our arms around each other and embraced for what seemed like hours but was really only minutes. “Was that you who was screaming when I got here?” I asked.

“Yes, that was me. I guess I just want to let all the anger out, so I screamed,” she replied.

When we finally let go I looked back at her to see if she had any ideas on how to get out. Sure enough, Janey smiled and whispered, “Do you have a pen?” I nodded. She looked relieved and said, “All I think we have to do is draw another picture of our house, then stroke it. I didn’t have one so I couldn’t draw the picture.”

“I just hope that making the drawing will get us out,” I replied, “We need to get out of here!”

“Let’s start working.”

We worked on the picture quickly, taking turns with the pen. We were drawing on the wall of the cave because neither of us had any paper. When we finally finished we both smiled and I started to stroke the wall gently, just the way I had when I first got in. Once again I felt the whirring and the feeling of spinning madly into eternity. Then we landed on my bed with a soft plop. Almost as if we were robots we ran down the stairs together, in sync with each other, screaming, “Mom, we’re back!”

Since that moment, Janey and I have been best friends. Don’t ask me how it happened because I’m not too sure, but I do know that if you have a little sister that you’re about to close the door on, you should rethink your decision.

Crazy Kelly

*Sometimes, the most exciting people are right under your nose. In **CRAZY KELLY** by **Erin Swor**, a girl finds out just how interesting her once-plain sister can be.*

“Kelly, that’s insane!” I exclaimed when my older sister Kelly, age 15, asked my parents if she could go sledding in the Alps. Strangely enough, my mom and dad encouraged her. I guess they thought it would get her more active, since she’s usually *so* lazy.

“When do you want to go, Sweetie?” Mom asked her.

“Now!”

“Okay, Honey. I’ll see if we can get a plane for this afternoon,” Mom answered her. She did, and soon we were in the air, soaring over our little Virginia town. As we flew over the wide ocean, I realized how beautiful the world really was.

We arrived in Switzerland around 4:00 P.M., and drove immediately to the Alps. Kelly was so keen to get going that she scrambled right up the mountain, leaving the rest of us looking around in awe. When it finally hit us that we should follow Kelly, we set out through the maze of rock.

When we finally succeeded in climbing to the top of the mountains at 6:00 A.M., Mom, Dad, and I were ready to hit the sack. Kelly, though, snuck out of our new pop-up tent to go sledding. As she hopped on her tube and started down the mountain, she noticed the sun starting to rise. The sky was filling with blotches of purple, pink, and orange, forming the most beautiful collage Kelly had ever seen.

Zipping down the mountain, she felt the wind rippling through her hair. To her, everything was perfect. But it wasn’t so perfect at the summit of the mountain, where Mom woke up to

find Kelly gone. Instantly, she remembered that Kelly had told us on the plane that she wanted an early start at sledding. We didn't know she meant 6:30 in the morning!

Mom was absolutely furious that Kelly hadn't asked for permission first. She looked over her little plateau, and sure enough, Kelly was still zipping down the mountain, laughing and having the time of her life. When Mom saw Kelly having so much fun, she softened, wishing that Kelly would spend more time like this rather than being a couch potato. But Kelly's sneaking off still made us troop down the mountain and fly back home right after breakfast.

Mom told Kelly that, from now on, she must always tell her where she was going. Kelly promised to do so, so Mom decided to let Kelly go on another crazy adventure. When Kelly decided to snowboard Mt. Everest, they said yes! I thought my parents had lost their minds! But soon the plans were made. Only Kelly would go to the top (thank goodness) and the rest of us would stay at a hotel at the base.

On January 5, we all boarded flight 683 to Nepal. Since this was only my second time on an airplane, I glued my face to the window to see the land beneath us. As soon as we reached Nepal at 5:00 P.M., we rented a car and drove to our hotel. There, we packed Kelly's backpack full of food, clothing, and hiking gear. With tearful good-byes, we sent her on her way.

Soon after Kelly reached Everest, she realized there was more to Everest than she had thought. She had hiked for two days, and base camp was nowhere in sight. Usually, Kelly was a spectacular climber. She'd thought she'd be at the summit by now. Also, she was short on food. Kelly kept on going, though. She was soon rewarded. On the third day she reached base camp! Kelly rested at base camp for a day, and the other hikers there equipped her with more than enough clothes and food to reach Everest's summit.

Kelly was pretty sure now that the summit would soon be hers. With no more nervous reactions, she started to appreciate her spectacular views. Before she even had gotten to base camp she could see for many miles. Kelly decided to rest for a day when

she had climbed three-quarters of the way up to Everest's summit. She looked around at the shimmering snow, and looked down at the lakes, towns, and miles and miles of ocean.

The next day, Kelly felt exceptionally strong. She climbed about two more miles, and realized she could get the rest of the way up the next day if she had good luck. When the next day came, Kelly found herself surrounded with swirling snow, blown by strong winds. Kelly realized that she wouldn't be reaching the summit that day. Kelly still climbed and climbed, crawling over ditches with her ladder, and doing pull-ups with her ax. By the end of the day, the summit was only a mile away.

The next day, Kelly easily pushed herself that last mile. She had reached the summit of Everest and was ready to burst with joy! Kelly had lots of extra food, so she decided to stay at Everest's top for 24 hours. "I could stay a year," Kelly thought, looking over at the view, "but I'd need more food. Plus, I'm a little homesick. I really don't think I could get Mom up this mountain." Then Kelly laughed, thinking about her gray-haired mom pulling herself up the mountain. Kelly really wished she had her camera, because she had the biggest, most beautiful view in the entire world, one she knew her family would love.

The mountain was covered with glimmering snow, and since the sun was rising, everything was a wonderful pinkish-purple. The mountains around her looked tiny compared to her monstrous one, but they were still beautiful, their little snow-capped tops glistening. The sky was shining red and orange, while the ocean below her was bubbling and waving and filled with jumping whales. Kelly didn't want to go down, but at the same time, she knew the best part of her adventure was yet to come.

After a day, Kelly put on her gear and jumped onto her board. Soon, she was sailing. After a few minutes, Kelly hit a rock, sending her airborne. "Awesome!" Kelly exclaimed. "This is much better than the Terrain Park jumps at home!" Then she felt the same spectacular feeling she got sledding in the Alps, but it was stronger this time. She felt as if she were on top of the world, an angel with no fears. Even though she missed her family, she never wanted this to end.

When Kelly got down the mountain she immediately walked to our hotel. We were all so glad to see her. She apparently wasn't as happy to see us because she immediately asked, "Can I go on another adventure soon? But not alone?" Mom and Dad were just so happy that Kelly had come home that they said yes to her questions. "I'm going to the moon, then, and you're coming with me!" Kelly told me.

I wasn't happy about that at all, but Mom just said, "Okay, Honey." Since I was so mad about having to go to the moon I tried to think of excuses. After a while, I was able to propose two problems:

1. We needed an adult to come with us.
2. We didn't own a space ship.

Kelly had already put thought into this trip. She had decided we didn't need an adult. She was okay alone on Everest, right? As for the spaceship, NASA's new spaceship, Apollo 3000, was preparing to leave, and NASA agreed to take us along. I thought that there would be nothing to do on the moon, but Kelly had even that figured out. She decided we were going to ski!

When we boarded our shuttle on January 13, we were loaded down with boots, skis, and our helmets. When the shuttle was ready for takeoff, I was scared out of my wits. I kept thinking that we were going to die, but once we were out of Earth's atmosphere, I realized that the ride was actually sort of fun. The spaceship had a cool little refrigerator, stocked with my favorite foods, in individual bags. I also liked that we didn't always have to wear seatbelts. It was awesome to be weightless!

Even with all the fun, I was happy to get off the spaceship when the time came. It was hard to be in such cramped quarters for so long. Kelly was very excited to go skiing, so we had our ski equipment on as soon as we were off of the shuttle.

When we found somewhere to ski, we noticed how steep the hills were. To me, it looked like a lot of free falling. Kelly didn't seem to mind, and she trekked right up the hill. Starting to ski down, she yelled to me, "This is a piece of cake!"

For the first ten feet, everything was going fine. When it came time for Kelly's first free-fall, though, weightlessness was too

much. Kelly was sucked into the air! She was floating just six feet above me. I tried to reach for her and....

“Erin! Erin! Come down for breakfast! Hurry or you’ll be late for school!” My mom was calling me from the kitchen. It was all just a dream after all. I wish I had an older sister...

“Kelly!” I screeched. I tore off my skis and jumped, trying to reach my sister. If only I had had my growth spurt already...

“ERIN! GET DOWN HERE THIS INSTANT!” My mom’s voice startled me, jerking me awake again. As I trudged down the stairs, I noticed my sister Kelly (age 9) talking to my mom.

“Mom, can I snowboard down Mt. Everest?” she was asking. Could my crazy dream be coming true? I’ll just have to wait and see.

The Dragon Hunters

The king has a big problem. To solve it, he calls on three brave warriors in THE DRAGON HUNTERS, by Georgios Andreas Thomopoulos.

Once upon a time, there were three dragon hunters. Their names were Billy, Georgie, and P.J. They heard the king was holding a tournament to see who were the three best dragon hunters in the land.

When the tournament rolled around, the three were ready to fight and win. The tournament lasted for two hours. Some of the fighters got knocked out, and others forfeited the tournament. The winners were Billy in third place, P.J. in second place, and Georgie in first place.

After the fight, the king congratulated them. He told them the mission. The mission was he wanted them to slay the dragon and bring back the treasure. He also told them, “You will get a part of the treasure.”

They left at dawn. They rode their horses for four days and four nights. When they arrived, they set up camp.

In the morning, they tried to get into the castle. When they got in the castle, they looked around to find the dragon.

When they found the dragon, they charged at it. The dragon blew fire but they used their shields to block it.

In the battle, P.J lost his hand because the dragon bit it off. Billy got mad and stabbed the dragon in his heart.

They gathered the treasure and rode back home.

Draw!

*Sumo wrestling instead of shootouts? Well, in **DRAW!** by Susan Mines, cowboys Tom and George demonstrate another way to handle a dispute.*

This is the story of two friends, Tom Cruise XI and George Clooney XIII. Georgy was 13 and Tom was 11.

Georgy went to a new age cowboy camp. When Georgy came back, Tom could see that Georgy had changed. "My old friend Tom! Long time, no see! How I wish we could be friends," said Georgy.

"But why can't we, Georgy? Why can't we?" asked Tom.

"My name isn't Georgy anymore, it's George. Besides, your shoes are untied," said George.

"Why does that matter?" asked Tom.

"It's time for me to go, Tom. Goodbye," said George.

"But why do my shoes matter? I mean, come on, George. Shoes? My shoes... hey, I don't even have shoe laces!" said Tom.

"Uh, I've got to go. Bye!" George said quickly, and ran off, in spite of Tom's getting him and beating him up.

Ten years later, George and Tom met up by Old Granola Trail with their posse.

"There ain't enough room for both of us in these here parts," said George.

"Twenty paces, then we draw," said Tom.

"All right. Let's go."

"One, two, three, four..." they both counted.

"Draw!" they both screamed. Just as they said "Draw," they both tore off their clothes. As they stripped their clothes off, they

both got amazingly fat. A huge circle appeared out of nowhere. They stomped their feet three times and charged.

“You’re going down, little man,” said George.

“Not if I can help it! Arrrgh! You’re...not...taking... me...down...George! Not over my dead body!” said Tom.

“I’ll see about that, little man!” said George.

“I’m not little. Ha! You’re out of the ring. It’s over! Now get out.”

“We’ll meet again, Tom, you can count on it!” screamed George.

“If you ever come back here again, I’ll beat you again, and I swear my wife’s head on it!” screamed Tom.

Then George shouted back, “You don’t even have a wife!”

“You want to bet? Get back here! I’m going to catch you and give you a beating! Now get over here...!”

The Evil Whatchamacallit

A city is terrorized by a monster. Fortunately, two powerful children are willing to fight the invader in THE EVIL WHATCHAMACALLIT, by Cliff Jia.

Once upon a time, there were two little children named Wilder and Shark. These children had unusual powers. Their unusual powers were super strength and shape shifting. These two children were twins. They shielded their city from evil such as Piggygirl, by shooting it with perfume, Soda Man, by sucking its powers up with a sponge, and Fan Man, by dulling its fan blades. The city thought of them as superheroes.

One day, a stronger evil took over the city. The evil was the Whatchamacallit. This creature was clear green with spikes on its back. It had spiky teeth, and its breath was as gruesome as a lifeless man. The Whatchamacallit's real name was Johnny Donnie, but he didn't like the name so he changed it to the Whatchamacallit.

The Whatchamacallit had taken over the city by blowing the mayor of the city to an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. This made Wilder and Shark burn with fury. They went to the ruthless monster and punched and kicked it and tried to thrash it, but the Whatchamacallit thought it was a massage.

The next day, the two heroes went to Stevil's Unevil joke shop and Shark asked, "Do you have anything good against a big ugly monster?"

The shopkeeper said, "We do, just wait a second."

After five minutes they bought a magical marker, a ray gun, and a big innocent mousetrap baited with money (wink) just in case the Whatchamacallit showed up.

Then Wilder and Shark went to J-Mart and Wilder asked Customer Service, "Do you have any guard bots?" and Customer Service said, "Down in aisle two you should find them." They bought two guard bots for safety when they slept.

The next day, they went up to the Whatchamacallit and drew a permanent beard on it. This practical joke made the Whatchamacallit outrageously livid, so it tiptoed into Shark and Wilder's room at night. Instead of seeing Wilder and Shark, it saw their guard bots.

First, their guard bots shot pies onto the Whatchamacallit's face, then used kung fu to kick the Whatchamacallit out.

After the guard bot mauled the Whatchamacallit, the Whatchamacallit went to Pevil's Evil Joke shop and said in a cavernous voice, "Give me the most evil items you have here or smell my breath!" He stole a canned mummy, which does mostly nothing, an evil magnet that attracts good items, and, last, he bought baked beans.

The next day the heroes decided to battle the wicked monster. They went up to it and challenged it to a fight. The Whatchamacallit threw out a canned mummy that tried to put a curse on Shark, but Shark compressed it. Then Wilder used a ray gun, but it just cut the Whatchamacallit. The Whatchamacallit ate all of the baked beans, then let out an atrocious sound. Shark and Wilder almost fainted from the gas, but then Wilder threw out a big innocent mousetrap (wink).

The Whatchamacallit saw the money in the mousetrap. It tried to clutch it but got trapped. Wilder and Shark sold the Whatchamacallit to a Mexican circus and the city was saved, except the mayor.

If you were wondering, the mayor was stranded on an island with monkeys, so he trained the monkeys to serve him, and now he is living the life.

Good Things Come in Small Packages

*How can something be so small that it's almost too much to handle? You will understand after reading **GOOD THINGS COME IN SMALL PACKAGES**, by Natalie Klein.*

My name is Laura. I'm fifteen. I have brown hair and blue eyes. I live in St. Louis, Missouri. I live on a farm. That pretty much covers my life.

Oh, you're still here. While you're here, I guess I could tell you a little more about my life. My brothers always pick on me. Usually I escape to the cornstalks in my backyard for some solitude. I walk amongst the rows of corn, gazing at their elegant leaves. Nothing else grows in these cornfields. Row after row of corn, it's all the same.

The slightest bit of change will catch your eye. A small shape of gold caught my gaze. A flow of excitement raged through my body. It might sound silly, but when you live on corn, the tiniest taste of something different will give you a thrill.

Naturally, I picked it up. The smooth, shiny outer skin made me feel jealous looking down at my own coarse hands. The beans seemed to move, not a great amount, just the least bit. I peeled off the thin, delicate outer layer and peered in. The two beans that lay inside had infant-like legs. I screamed.

As I frantically tried to catch my breath, my ears started to play tricks on me. I looked around; no one was in my somewhat delirious sight. Yet I was certain I heard a squealing voice.

“Who are you?” the repeating voice exclaimed.

I looked down, and I swear there were itsy-bitsy lips on the beans. I wobbled to my knees and fell flat on my face.

I woke up in my room about an hour later. I was clutching the beans. My hand went limp and I thought I would faint again.

“Who are you?” the beans said in unison.

“I-I-I’m Lauuura,” I stuttered. The real question was who or what were they, but my lips seemed to malfunction.

“Never seen a pair of talking beans, eh? Well, would you like to see the grandchildren?”

The beans took about a half hour of my “valuable” time to explain themselves. I barely listened, worrying about my own troubles. How would I explain to everyone that I found a pair of talking beans? Surely they wouldn’t believe me. For a six-year-old sister and two seventeen-year-old brothers, not even the best lie would have a long life expectancy. Nevertheless, they were two beans that talked.

I put my focus back on the green duo. There was nothing to do but listen. The beans said they were here to help me, which was pretty much impossible. The two beans gave a loud screech when I threatened to eat them if they didn’t hush up. So I gave in.

Over the years, the beans and I have grown to be close friends. They help me through my life (with advice that would cost more than life itself), mainly to help me find who I am. I found out I am an amazing artist, if I do say so myself.

I hope to become a famous artist, marry, and have six children. If I do, I shall give all the credit to two small pearly green balls called talking beans. That day we met was the most important day of my life. I found friends that, no matter how dumb I acted, always had good advice.

I guess the moral of my true story doesn’t stick out that much, but all in all, my moral is “good things come in small packages”!

If It Were Raining Cats and Dogs

*We all have moments when we have our “heads in the clouds.” In **IF IT WERE RAINING CATS AND DOGS** by **Kristen Frick**, a girl discovers that strange things happen when she doesn’t pay attention in class.*

I was awakened one morning by the delicate tapping of rain on my window. I stared as the raindrops chased each other down to the windowsill. The wind howled fiercely and rustled the leaves on the trees. Above all the noises outside, I heard my mom whisper, “It’s really raining cats and dogs out there.”

I laughed to myself about how strange that sounded, but I had never realized just *how* strange that figure of speech really was. Well, at least not until that day.

I live very close to my school, so I walk there every morning. I arrived at school soaked down to the bone by the rain. Everyone was huddled in a group outside, trying to stay as dry as possible. The bell rang and we all scattered to our classes like the leaves outside when the wind blew.

My first class was English. Our class was chaotic! Everyone was shouting and tossing paper airplanes from one end of the room to the other, but when our teacher entered the room, the class instantly hushed. No one was unaware of her strict reputation.

“All right, class!” she shouted. “Open your books to page 295. Today we will continue our discussion on commonly-used figures of speech, similes, and metaphors.”

At first, I studied her stern face as I listened to her lecture, but my attention was directed elsewhere: to the window, to be exact.

My eyes widened as I told myself in disbelief, “No, this is a dream....” Outside, something was falling from the sky. It wasn’t water, but cats and dogs! I stared for a moment, as if I were frozen.

On the other side of the room, my peers were flat-out BORED! Their faces had no expression. They sat motionless, pretending to pay attention. They were just sitting there while millions of cats and dogs poured out of the sky every minute! They acted as if this sort of thing happened all the time! My head started spinning.

“May I be excused?” I blurted out without thinking. Without an answer, I stormed out of the classroom. My heart was pounding. I zipped through the halls and burst through the front doors. I tripped over the cats and dogs as I struggled to be free of this nightmare! The sight of my school soon vanished as I stumbled through the crowded streets.

These streets are normally quiet and slow, but today they were a maze. Thousands of people were crowding the streets. The noise was so intense! People were screaming, and cats were hissing at the dogs that chased them. Hundreds of little shops were lined up on the sidewalks, and went for miles.

The things people were selling were strange as well. One brightly colored sign caught my eye. It read “White Elephant Sale.” Behind it stood row after row after row of enormous white elephants.

“I’m all ears!” My head whipped around as I looked for the person who had said it. I saw him almost instantly, even with the crowd. It was hard to miss a person whose entire head was covered in ears.

What was happening? I did the only thing I could do: I RAN! My head jerked from left to right, scanning the crowd. When I couldn’t run anymore, I came slowly to a stop. I looked up and almost fell over as I saw someone “walking on air.” I paced steadily backward, staring in astonishment. I stepped on a cat’s tail. It cried out and lunged out from under me. I hit the ground.

“She’s a two-faced liar!” I looked to my left and saw an old woman with two faces!

I jumped up and began to weave my way through people. My ears buzzed with all of the noise. I heard someone snoring and turned to see a man “sleeping on a bed of roses.”

I went into a frenzy and began to panic. I threw my arms over my head to block everything out! I was cornered against a wall...everything was spinning...and then...SLAP!

I jumped at the sound of a loud smack. My eyes opened. I looked around anxiously. For a moment, I had no idea where I was. I sat up and realized that I was in English class. I felt 40 eyes, all hooked, staring at me. The smack that woke me was the teacher slamming a book on my desk. I looked up and saw her angry face scowling down at me.

“DETENTION,” she screamed at the top of her lungs, “FOR ONE MONTH!”

I quickly glanced out the window, to see only raindrops falling from the cloudy sky.

It had all been a dream! I sighed with relief. *Just a dream.*

The teacher’s voice rose again. “Now we all understand why we don’t sit in class with our heads in the clouds,” she said between clenched teeth.

“Yes...,” the class groaned in unison.

“Now turn to page 315!”

Imaginary Forest

Imagination is a powerful thing. But what would happen if everything we imagined came true? IMAGINARY FOREST, by Nicole A. Kueck, considers that question.

“Does anyone want to take a hike in the forbidden forest?” Britt asked.

“Me!” all the girls screamed and shouted.

Britt, Nikki, Hannah, and Marrisa were about to go on the biggest journey of their lives so far. They had to get ready to go into the forbidden forest.

They grabbed flashlights, baseball bats, and baseballs. Britt told her mom that they were going to the park to play baseball. Instead, they were going to the forbidden forest.

Hannah asked, “Why is the forest forbidden?”

Britt replied, “A man once claimed he saw imaginary things. So it’s been forbidden ever since.”

As they walked into the forest, they all begin to get dizzy. They couldn’t remember much anymore. All they could remember was everything they had ever imagined. It felt like they were in a real live dream.

All of a sudden, something that felt like snow fell down on them. The snow-like stuff woke them up. When they got up, they saw a fascinating, small, very colorful creature. They tried for minutes to figure out what it was.

All of a sudden Hannah knew what it was. It was a fairy. Hannah LOVED fairies. She also liked fantasy. The fairy led them deep into the woods. There in front of their own eyes lay their own imagination.

There were four doors. Each door had a girl’s name in silver on it. Each girl went into her own door. In the room, the scenery was where

each girl wanted to go most: tanning, or lying on the beach of Hawaii, or playing in the snow all year long in Alaska.

In the place lay anything and everything that the girls had ever imagined, and anything or everything that you *can* ever imagine. All of the creatures were all there, doing what they liked doing. The three-footed dinosaurs would eat the plants (Marrisa didn't really like meat-eating dinosaurs). The five-winged birds could sing and fly wherever they wanted. Did I mention that they were very colorful birds: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple? The non-fish-eating ocean animals could swim in the ocean just full of salt water. The floating polar bears could swim in the ocean and ice (in cold weather, of course). The seven-eyed Peacocks, the six-footed rabbits, and the un-smelly skunks could play peacefully in the forest. In Hollywood, the allergic-to-water-hippopotamuses could entertain many toothless alligators with their many wonderful routines. The unforgetting kangaroos performed in many, many famous movies.

All of the girls remembered at the same that they had to go home. The fairy explained to them that once the girls walked into the forest, the world stopped around them.

The girls got into a huddle like they saw the cutest football team boys do before they ran a play. The girls decided to stay there until they were tired of staying with their imaginary friends.

The surprise was that they would never grow up until they went outside, and the world would start exactly where it was when they had walked in. But the coolest part of all was that they could still make up new imaginary friends. They made plenty more creatures to go along with their scene. Hannah made up some non-feathered seagulls. Britt made some purple and blue Panda bears. Marrisa made some more black, white and green sled dogs to train as good racing dogs. Nikki made some finless sharks.

The girls thought that the forest would be their new home. The girls loved it in the forest. They could do whatever they wanted in their own little imaginary world. They began their new life in that very forest. They thought that it was a wonderful place to live. So, the girls decided that that forest was going to be their new home. They changed the forest's name to "Imaginary Forest."

The Incredible Dream

*Haven't we all had nights like this? In **THE INCREDIBLE DREAM** by Marisa Kaye, a girl named Carly enters a dream that she struggles to exit.*

"Carly, dinner is almost ready! Finish up your homework!"

"Okay, Mom." Carly was EXTREMELY tired! She could hardly do her homework! Carly's head hit the table.

Carly scampered down the stairs. When she got down, her mom had her back to her. She turned around and, to Carly's extreme surprise, she was an alien!

The alien was blue with yellow spots and its eyes were big and black in an oval shape. The aliens' legs were thin and tall. Its mouth was shaped like a skinny football. Its feet were big and long.

Carly felt horribly terrified. Thoughts were racing through her mind! She didn't understand what was happening! As fast as her poor little feet could carry her, she sprinted out the door. When she arrived outside, she noticed that she wasn't in the area of her normal neighborhood.

At this point, she was so frightened that she fainted. After several minutes, someone shook her and she woke up. "Are you okay?" the girl asked. Carly stared up at the girl and realized it was her best friend, Amanda!

"Oh, Amanda! Thank goodness it's you! It's really you!" Carly yelled. "You wouldn't believe what happened!" The joyful Carly told the whole story of how she went downstairs and her mom was an alien. All of a sudden, Amanda tore off her face and she was an alien, too!

Carly noticed something that looked like a gas station across the street called Fast Gas. She galloped across the street and asked the

man inside what the strange place she was in was called. He replied, "This is topsy turvy world." The look on her face changed from frightened to clueless. "Where do you come from?" he asked. Carly didn't answer. She hastily dashed out the door. The man ran after her. He was suspicious about Carly.

She discovered a wooden door in the middle of the village that looked very old. She had no idea where it came from. There was a sign on it that read:

If you don't have identification, buzzer will ring LOUD.

Suddenly, an earsplitting, shrieking, deafening buzzing sound banged in her ears! From out of nowhere more than 1,000 aliens appeared. They were chanting, "We will get you. We will get you," over and over again.

She scurried back to the house that looked like hers. In the window she saw her mother who wasn't an alien sitting on the couch watching TV. She banged on the door as hard as possible. Carly yelled, "Open the door! Please! Anyone! Help me!" No one opened the door. She was extremely scared.

Then, another door came out of nowhere and it was her door! She tried her best to open it but it was locked!

She gathered some wood to try to knock down the door but it didn't work and she fell down....

"Carly! Are you done with your homework yet?" Carly's mother asked.

Carly slowly opened her eyes. She creaked open the door and rubbed her eyes.

"Where have you been? You're late for dinner!"

Carly said with a grin on her face, "You don't want to know. It's a long story!"

The moral of this story is that you should always get a good night's sleep so when you're in a scary dream, you won't have to get out of it. If you sleep well, then you won't have a dream in the first place.

The Lollipop

In THE LOLLIPOP by Alexa Piszcztowski, a little girl named Elyse has her heart set on one thing. Elyse learns that by being patient and waiting her turn, her wish may come true.

The biggest lollipop in the world existed on 123rd street in West Bloomfield, Michigan. As you may know or may not know, there were many people in the city of West Bloomfield, so if you took even one lick of that lollipop, no one would ever find out who you were.

Elyse was a young girl who was captivated by this lollipop. She thought that it would be a good idea if she went one night to get a lick of that wonderful lollipop. That was impossible, though, because there were guards guarding the lollipop.

One night, without Elyse's parents knowing, Elyse snuck out to get a better glimpse of that lollipop, and possibly to get a lick. When Elyse got to the center of the town where the lollipop was, she was stunned. Never before had she seen the lollipop like this: so luscious, so amazing, so enormous! Of course, she got a faint view from her window, but never before like this.

She then asked the guard, "May I please take a quick lick of this lollipop-?"

But before she could finish, the guard answered, "NO!" It was like he didn't even have to think about what he was going to say.

"Please, I have been waiting my whole life to get a lick of this lollipop!" pleaded Elyse.

The guard then answered, "NO!" Again, he answered like he didn't even have to think about the answer.

Elyse then said, "Please, Guard, is there anything I can do to get a lick of this lollipop?"

The guard, feeling bad for Elyse, said, “I’ll make a deal with you. Okay, little girl, here is the deal: You come back here in a week and we’ll see.” Elyse was really surprised! Why did the man change his mind so quickly? Would she get a lick? What would happen if she did come back in a week? Elyse didn’t want to take chances, though, and lose her one-in-a-million chance to get a lick of this lollipop, so she said, “Okay, DEAL!”

The guard answered, “You should be leaving now, and don’t forget our deal. Just making sure, do your parents know you are here?”

“Uhhhhh...well...ummmmmmm.”

“So they don’t?”

“Uhhhhh...well...ummmmmmm.”

“Okay. It’s all clear to me now. Your parents don’t know you are here. You just snuck out and wanted to get a lick of this wonderful lollipop. Am I right?” said the guard.

“Okay, okay, okay. I admit it. Yes, you are right, but could you please do me a favor and don’t tell anyone?”

“Sure, Harold never tells a secret.”

“HAROLD?”

“Yes. Harold is my name.”

“Oh. Hi, Harold. My name is Elyse.”

“Hi, Elyse. Well, enough talk. If you want our deal to remain a deal, you should be on your way.”

“Yes, I guess I should. Well, g’bye, Harold!”

“Goodbye, Elyse.”

One week passed by, and that night at the same time as before, Elyse went out to the center of town without her parents knowing. When she got there, the same guard was there protecting the giant piece of candy.

“Hello. I see you are back again?”

“Well, yes, considering today is the day I get to take my lick,” said Elyse, looking very proud.

“I suppose you may take your lick now. Go ahead.”

Then Elyse walked up to the lollipop and took one long, extraordinary, long lick of that luscious lollipop. When she was

done, she walked up to the guard and said, "Thank you. Thank you very much."

"You're welcome," replied the guard.

Now the largest lollipop in the world still exists on 123rd street, in the city of West Bloomfield. And so does the young girl named Elyse. Every night now, she sneaks out and takes one lick of that lollipop, because that guard still knows who she is, and knows that Elyse was patient and waited her turn.

The Lost Brother

*The unexpected is always just around the corner. In **THE LOST BROTHER** by Alexander J. Shanburn, a boy finds out his brother has been kidnapped by a not-so-mythical dragon.*

It was just a normal Sunday morning until my brother Bradley's friends came racing to my front door....

I walked to the front door and opened it. "HELP!" cried Adam, Bob, and Mike.

"What the heck is going on? Settle down, guys, and explain what is wrong, calmly." They all panted very heavily, like a dog that just finished running. As soon as they settled down, they said, "Don't you know that Bradley is missing?"

"NO, I didn't; where could he be?"

"I do not know but it is starting to get very freaky!"

"What kind of creature caught him?"

"I don't know, don't know, don't know," all three of them said at the same time.

"What happened?" I said.

"You know that old man, Crazy Cooper?"

"Yeah."

"Well, he told us that he is stuck in a cage, guarded by some kind of creature."

"But what kind of creature?"

"He said that it was some kind of dragon with a freaky, deep voice."

"Well, we need to go give this guy a talk about what happened."

* * *

"Hey, Mr. Cooper! We need to talk about my brother missing. I need to know what cave my brother is in."

"All I have heard is that he is in Michigan's Mammoth cave."

"Well, who has told you this information?"

"Bob, from down the street, told me."

"Okay, guys, let's go!" As soon as we got to Bob's house, we asked him the same thing we asked Cooper and he interrupted us and told us the same thing Cooper told us.

"Okay, guys, let's go to this so-called cave and check to see if Bradley is there."

* * *

As we entered the cave we heard a squeaky noise; we all stopped at once. I said, "MIKE, WHAT IS THAT NOISE?"

"Um, some kind of bat. Yeah, a bat. You know that bats live in caves."

"Okay." As we went on we heard another noise!

Squeeeak.

"AAAAAAAHHHHHHH!"

We ran for our lives, but I tripped on a chain that appeared to be attached to a cage. When I got up, I looked over and saw my brother and said, "BBBRRRAAADDDLLLEEEYYY." Then, all of a sudden I felt a hard thump on my head. I screamed, "AAAHHHHHHHH!" and I smacked into the wall.

Mike jumped up and slashed the dragon on the tip of the tail, then he was also thrown into the wall. Adam finally jumped up and sliced the dragon on the neck, but he also got slammed on the ground.

We all got up and ran to calm Bradley down. Soon after that we rattled the cage until we broke the side of the cage.

"Bradley, why did you scare everybody like that? Oh, never mind that. I'm just happy that you are safe. Let's go home!"

The Majestic Island

Roxanne and her friends were only twelve when they got stuck in one of Roxanne's dreams, but the dream wasn't a dream for long. It became a nightmare, as told in THE MAJESTIC ISLAND, by Clemence Mazet.

Howdy! I'm Roxanne, but everybody calls me Roxy, and this is my story. I live in Montana on a ranch. My parents and I are always busy. In our town, there are only four ranches that give products to our whole town. Ours is the biggest ranch, so we have to work double the time. Our town's name is Old Joe Clark Tawny.

I have ten friends, but I don't play a lot with them because of the work. The seven friends that were with me on the day of my dream were Emily, Nicole, Andrea, Sarah, Megan, and Marie. The other three, Bethany, Lizzie, and Francis, won a vacation to Hawaii.

My best friend Marie is really special, because she's French and, of course, she was born in France. This is her tenth year in Montana. When she was born she had a medical problem. She couldn't speak, so they brought her here to Montana to see a couple of doctors.

Now that you know about my friends and me, let me tell you when, how, and, where I got stuck in my dream!

Every summer my friends and I go in the prairies to see the wild horses, but this year it was different. In Montana the hunting season is in summer, so my parents always tell me to be careful in the prairies. Instead of wild horses, we saw WILD BUFFALO!

I started to yell really loud while they were getting ready to charge on us! We all started to run the fastest that we could, but

they outran us! While we were running I could hear the beating of the buffalo, and at the same time the beating of my heart. They both started to make this music of a horror movie. We had almost reached the fence when my friends and I tripped over a rattlesnake nest. Only Lizzie, Bethany, and Francis got away.

When my three friends came back with help, my other friends and I already had fallen into a coma. While I was dreaming I could still feel the pain of the buffalos' feet stepping and pounding on my hair, face, and more.

Right after my friends and I fell into a coma, I was stuck to the grass. The grass just sucked me up like a vacuum cleaner. When we arrived in my dream I could still hear people yelling and screaming. I thought it was because they saw us disappear through the grass.

At first we all started to freak out. Then my friends started to talk like crazy by asking questions I couldn't answer, because they were so unreal.

“Hey, Roxy, where are we?” said Emily

“Yeah, where are we?” they all started to ask.

“Hey, don’t look at me. I’m not the one that brought us here!” I said.

“Well, you were the one that brought us to the prairies in the first place!” said Nicole.

“Yeah, well at least we’re not being attacked by buffalos!” I said.

“Okay, break it up, people!” said Megan. “Don’t you guys see that we’re dead?”

“Wait, back up a little! You’re telling us that we’re in heaven or in the H word or whatever this place is?” said Sarah.

“Well, let’s see. We got chased by buffalos and got stepped on by a stumpy. Well, I guess that, yeah, we’re DEAD!”

“Okay, so we’re dead. Big deal, because guess what? We have unfinished business, so we can go back in the real world any time you want,” I said.

“I’m scared,” said Marie.

“Hey, you guys, look what I found!” said Andrea.

“It’s an old diary,” said Emily.

"Hey, I recognize that writing! It's my great-great-grandmom's writing," said Andrea.

"How do you know?" said Marie.

"Because I have the same diary that my grand-mom gave me for my birthday, and it is about her mom's mom," said Andrea.

"What does it talk about?" I asked.

"It has formulas about how to bring dead people back to life. That's so unreal," said Andrea.

"Hey, we should try it. I mean, it wouldn't hurt," I said.

"Okay, let's do it," they all said.

FIVE YEARS LATER!

We read the diary ten times but we couldn't understand the words. We looked for six months for all the ingredients, but the problem was that we didn't know the gibberish language. It took us two years to understand it. We ran tests on creatures that we found. Finally, we found the formula to get out of this, but to get out it said that you needed to be energetic, so we played sports for one week.

We all started to drink the formula, and then something weird happened. We became rainbow colored and our heads became heavy and really thin. Then we popped into one big bubble, and woke up in the real world. My friends and I got out of the coma except for Andrea. She stayed in the dream so she could learn more about the formulas.

I couldn't believe it. Everything got back to normal. When I tried to explain what happened, nobody believed me except my grandma, who was happy. She even told me that something like that had happened to her once, too, but that it is another story.

The Mana Cards

Magical beasts with awesome powers are the weapons in a struggle between good and evil. In THE MANA CARDS by Michael Hill, a young boy named Cloud-ri must control such beings if he is to save his dad from the dark prince.

Two dark figures stood in the dark. “Out of my way,” said a young boy, “or perish.”

“Ha, ha, ha, ha! Do you really think you can defeat me?”

“I’ll give you one more chance to move.”

“I am Korn. I will take you back with me.”

“So the dark prince sent you to do his dirty work? Well, you will perish,” said the young boy as he pulled out a card with a dragon on it and recited an incantation.

“Blade, awake from your slumber,” the young boy said. Just then a bolt of lightning hit the ground as a dragon arose.

“My turn,” said Korn as he threw off his coat and opened his wings, for Korn was a monster. “Aaaaahhhhhhhh! This feels good.”

BANG! Korn shot a cheap shot at Blade the dragon. Then Korn realized Blade was gone. “Where is that overgrown lizard?” says Korn.

CRACK! Blade crashed into Korn flying at high velocity, ramming into Korn’s ribs. “My...ribs. He broke my...ribs.” Korn then took out a sword and said a spell as he slashed. He gave Blade a direct hit, but Blade was only given a scratch because of his hard body.

“Blade, use your incinerator attack!”

Blade’s mouth, overflowing with fire, shot flames at Korn, turning him to ashes.

Blade vanished as the boy walked away. Just then the boy started to have flashbacks of his father, named Cloud, who made Mana cards to stop the war for power between humans and Guados, who look like humans except for being taller, having longer hands and nails, and being skinnier. Mana cards are cards with monsters on them which allow a person to summon the monster. However, only Guados and a few humans can use these cards.

Cloud also made temples where those who died bravely would come and be made into cards. This happened in the middle of a temple in a place called the chamber of fayth. The fayth are the dead people. When you pray to the fayth you would be given a strong card, but only chosen ones can enter the chamber of fayth.

Cloud-ri's father helped the Guado because his wife was a Guado. He made the war a draw. After the war, both races united and got along. But the dark prince would not. He was angered, so he captured Cloud by threatening to kill his son, Cloud-ri, who was six years old when it was happening. His mom teleported him far away. After that he started to collect Mana cards, which the dark prince had found out how to make and had mass-produced. He collected some from temples. Only one more temple was left before he could face the dark prince.

Just then, Cloud-ri stopped his path. There in the middle of a road was a woman in a black cape. "Take this to aid you on your quest," she said as she threw him a summoner's sword.

"I can summon in battle now." When he looked up, she was gone, and there as the fog rose was the dark prince's castle. He had forgotten the last temple was in the castle! He ran into the castle as he noticed there were no guards. He got into the temple and ran into the chamber of fayth.

As he was coming out, he heard a voice say, "You finally got your final summons." For there in the middle of the temple was the dark prince, Dracolord.

"Now are you ready?" Cloud-ri said as he snapped his fingers. It seemed that they were teleported to an island.

"Sin, awake." A beast the size of 100 whales arose from the sea as Dracolord made the final summons.

“Awaken,” Cloud-ri said, as a huge dragon the same size as Sin landed on the island.

“Bring in the prize,” said Dracolord. Two soldiers appeared and dragged Cloud on the ground.

“Father! Die, Sin, DIE!”

Cloud-ri took his sword and released all his energy into an energy wave. Dracolord used oblivion blast. As the dragon shot a beam joining power with Cloud-ri ‘s attack, Sin countered with a giga-graviton beam attack to knock back Cloud-ri. The impact of the beams crashing made whirlwinds and tornados, and started to rip apart the island. The two beams were even and neither one was giving up until Cloud woke. The dark prince was amazed and said the tranquilizer was supposed to last longer.

“I should have done this after the war ended. These cards are a curse on me and this curse will perish,” Cloud said as he said an incantation. The battle never ended. All the cards were destroyed and all the monsters were sent to another realm.

The dark prince was exiled to the other realm. Oh: the dark figure that gave Cloud-ri his sword revealed herself. It was his MOM! Well, they all lived happily after.

Or Was It a Nap?

Will good triumph over evil? A wizard and an elf take up the fight as they try to save all the magical creatures from an evil wizard in OR WAS IT A NAP? by Nicholas H. Orser.

People couldn't help but stare as this strange-looking man ran through the crowded streets of New York City. His name was Nicodemus. He was wearing a worn, deep blue robe with fringe on the bottom. His face was wrinkled and he looked about 600 years old. He kept glancing at the people's faces as if they had smeared paint all over their cheeks. He ducked into a damp alley to catch his breath and recall what he thought he remembered. He had many questions and was very confused.

He remembered that he had awakened from a nap to see the startled faces of two teenaged boys who were rollerblading down the sidewalk next to a high school. One of them said to the other, in a rather uneasy tone, "Look! The statue over there just moved!"

Never before had Nicodemus seen such civilization in one area. He had sat up and looked around him, trying to remember where his house was. He could see that he was not in his own time, for there were odd clothes on everybody. Huge buildings were everywhere, and there was hardly a tree in sight.

Or was it a nap? He remembered that he had been taking a walk in the forest, but the rest was fuzzy to him.

* * *

"Dad, you're not trying to escape again, are you?" came the muffled voice from the cell next to Barnabas the elf.

"Shhh, *He* might hear you, and yes, I am," said Barnabas.

Barnabas was an extremely kind elf. He was short and had pointy long ears. He looked much like his great grandfather, Belzar, who had been a good friend of the great wizard, Nicodemus. If anybody deserved to escape from the horrible dungeon all of the magical creatures were locked up in, it was Barnabas. He always was nice and kind to the other magical creatures, and they adored him.

These magical creatures are the ones that you hear about in fairy tales, and they were locked up in the most horrible place. It had walls between every room. They were separated from their families, and each could only talk to the person in the next cell through the moldy cracks in the walls. The floor was muddy and there were insects flying or squirming to their doom. The only good thing there was the break that they got once a day.

Why are all these magical creatures locked up? It was because Keiran, the dark wizard who spread evil for 600 years, captured them out of anger at Nicodemus. The magical creatures loved Nicodemus, but hated Keiran. When they wouldn't love him, he threw them in a dungeon far away from their homes with nothing around them.

However, in this dungeon there was said to be Nicodemus's mighty sword. And it was also said that Keiran had hidden it. He hadn't hidden it just anywhere, though, but in Barnabas's cell. Yet even though Barnabas had tried many times to find the sword, he had failed every time.

Keiran always wore his deep black robe so he could slip in and out of the shadows, watching over the cells. You could only tell he was there by the long flaps that hung under his arms, whipping and snapping as he disappeared. His hair was full of dead bugs that had gotten trapped in the coarse, matted strands, each one as dark as night. The creatures always referred to him as *He*, for they dreaded saying his name.

You're probably wondering how he has lived for so long. The answer is "Magic." He swallowed his wand to make himself stay young. But magic wears off, and soon he will grow weary and old.

Barnabas packed away the rest of his things and made sure everything was in order. He heard a creak behind him, then the malicious voice of Keiran. "Going somewhere?" he said. He had a

way of knowing when something was going on and then appearing there out of nowhere.

Barnabas turned around and looked him directly in the eye. "No."

He tried to look brave but his voice trembled with fear. He knew what was going to come next. He knew that he could never stop Keiran now. He was going to get what Nicodemus had gotten.

* * *

Back in the alley, Nicodemus was beginning to remember. He had been walking through the woods when Keiran, his archrival in everything, had appeared out of nowhere. Keiran told him of his evil plan to capture all of the creatures and lock them up where no one could find them. Nicodemus had pulled out his trusty sword, Adair, but not fast enough. The swirl of mist had already swept around him and he had been turned into a statue of stone for 500 years.

"So it wasn't a nap," thought Nicodemus. "I must go on a quest for Keiran wherever he is and stop him from destroying the creatures. It is my duty as ruler to do this, and I will fulfill this task if it is the last thing I do."

"I need my sword for this task," he realized. Then, in the most commanding voice he shouted, "I summon Adair!"

* * *

The cloud of mist had started, and it seemed there was no hope for Barnabas. Suddenly, the north wall of his room blew inward with gigantic force. Rubble flew everywhere, revealing a brilliant emerald glow that left Keiran standing there, unable to believe his eyes. There hovered the most stunning sword one will ever lay eyes on. Its handle was made of pure gold, with assorted gems so vibrant in color they could blind a man who glared directly into them. The blade was made of the purest silver, and was so sharp and precise it could slice a single hair off of your arm without making a mark on your skin.

From the moment he laid eyes on it, Barnabas knew to whom it belonged. This was Nicodemus's sword.

Then Barnabas realized why he had never found it before. One could only hold the sword and use its powers if he truly needed it. And before then, he had never truly needed it.

In the cell next to his, Barnabas's son couldn't control his nervousness. He had just heard an explosion come through the grimy wall that separated his father's cell from his. He kept pacing back and forth anxiously on the soiled floor of his room. The worms and spiders scattered from his path, afraid of being squashed. He could almost hear the seconds ticking by as they counted down to the time when the doors would finally open for break and he would be able to see what was going on in his father's cell.

Finally, the sun glared in at him, revealing his path to his father's cell. He rushed over and dashed into the cell. He saw his father reach out and grab the most beautiful sword he had ever seen. He held it over Keiran, ready to drive it into him. Then, all of a sudden, his father disappeared.

The next thing Barnabas knew, he was standing in the damp alleyway facing Nicodemus himself.

"I have summoned the mighty sword, Adair. What are you doing here? Who are you?" said Nicodemus. He was confused about why there was an elf standing before him.

"My name is Barnabas. I must have grabbed the sword when you summoned it," exclaimed the elf, "for there is no other reason for my being here. I was about to drive this sword into Keiran's heart, but then I was brought before you."

"Keiran! Do you know where he is? I was just about to start my search for him, but I must always have my sword by my side," Nicodemus said.

"He is on an island called Kidestome," said Barnabas. "I will go and get some food for the journey."

* * *

As they peered through the bushes, Nicodemus and Barnabas could see the cells in which all the magical creatures were locked. They had traveled a long way, through many odd lands and places,

but now they were here on the unknown island of Kidestome, looking straight at the results of Keiran's evil plot.

Nicodemus decided to take action. He picked up Adair and motioned for Barnabas to come along. They crept up to the back wall of rooms, not making a sound. They didn't even notice the evil wizard lurking in the darkness, watching their every move. He stalked them, almost motionless. Right when they were about to burst open the cell doors, Keiran jumped in front of them and pulled out his sword. He reared back with the blade and brought it down like lightning. Just as it was inches from killing him, Nicodemus pulled out Adair and knocked the sword from Keiran's hands. The sword flew into the air and landed ten feet away from Keiran. He crouched down and made a dive for it. He was in the air when all of a sudden Barnabas ran over and picked up the sword.

Keiran had to think fast. He thought of the worst spell there was, death. He said the words for the terrible curse. All he had to do now was say the name of the person he wished to kill.
“NicodemAAARRRGGGHHH”

The sword held by Nicodemus sank into his heart, and Keiran lived no longer.

* * *

Fifty years later, all of the creatures watched in mourning as Barnabas carried away the coffin of their great leader, Nicodemus. He had died almost exactly fifty years after Keiran's death, which was still remembered to this day. In that time, though, he had helped to change the dirty, rundown island of Kidestome into a joyous, clean, and bright community for all of the creatures to live in.

In his will, Nicodemus had wished for Barnabas to inherit Adair, and to receive the highest honor anyone can attain: to be the new leader of all of the magical creatures.

The Perfect Land

Dinosaurs have been gone for so long that we don't know much about how they lived. Perhaps it was something like the society of THE PERFECT LAND, by Jordan Scandola.

About 65 million years ago, before humans or mammals, there were reptiles called dinosaurs. Some were big, some were small, but we are going to talk about dinosaur children. Those children are called Jordan, Raphael, and Antoine. They are all brachiosaur. They were living in a land called The Perfect Land. You will discover its story in this one.

One more beautiful day had just passed in The Perfect Land. Our three heroes were playing in the river and their parents were looking for food. But they discovered a very strange thing: a tyrannosaurus rex and a gigantic army of velociraptors, gallimini, and therijinosaur. The parents were scared. That evening, they told about the strange things that they saw.

“What!” said the king. “How can you see extinct dinosaurs?”

“But...,” stammered the parents.

The king didn’t believe them, but at that instant the wall that was protecting them was destroyed by the tyrannosaurus rex. Now a great panic was on. Antoine, Jordan and Raphael were the only ones that survived. To escape, they used the ancient tunnel under the *Mont Olympe*.

“Wow,” said Antoine, “that was a close one!”

“Yep, a *very* close one,” said Jordan.

“Guys, we are in the desert,” said Raphael.

“What!” responded Jordan.

“Impossible. This tunnel leads to a forest,” said Antoine.

They decided to walk through the desert without drink or food. Unfortunately, they didn't know that in this desert there was no food or drink. They walked and walked through the desert until Antoine fell down from exhaustion. They stopped for a moment.

"Antoine," said Jordan, "I see a forest over there. Can you walk?"

"I don't know, let's try," said Antoine.

But Antoine didn't know that he couldn't walk because he was too tired. After a two-minute walk, Antoine died. Jordan and Raphael were sad. At this instant Antoine said, "BOOOOO."

"Antoine, you're not dead!"

"No, I'm not," responded Antoine.

They walked to the forest. There they found water and food. But at that instant, a meteorite hit the Earth and killed all the dinosaurs on it, even Jordan and his friends.

Remember the Dalamo

War and fighting are an important part of goblin society. Two young goblins come of age and learn what it are to be heroes in REMEMBER THE DALAMO, by Alex Phillips.

DING! DING! DING! The war bell rang in the middle of the night. The men of the village ran to the Town Square to see what was going on. My dad ran all the way home yelling out the news, “Watch out, Bocksbatons, war has arrived!”

This story starts out at midnight here at my house in the village of Bocksbatons where I wait to hear from my best friend, Rocki. We, as fourteen-year-olds, get to stay up all night just as most adult goblins do. Suddenly the door flies open and there is Rocki with the greatest look on his face. It looked like someone had just given him a present. I asked him why he was so happy and he said, “War has come. Let’s sign up!”

I was excited, too, and wanted to sign up right away, because war is what all healthy young goblins live for. Rocki then told me that we had to wait for morning for the official army sign-up. We would be fighting for control of the goblin borderlands against the high country trolls as we have for millennia. We have only occasional years of peace between wars.

We decided to get a little sleep before the next exciting day. As I was trying to sleep, I was imagining in my head what it would be like to be a war hero. At 4:00 A.M., I was still thinking about the war. I looked across the room and saw Rocki staring at the ceiling, probably thinking the same thoughts. Finally I fell asleep, only to be awakened by Rocki falling out of bed with a loud thunk. Since we were both wide awake now, we decided to go to the Town Square to get information and wait for the sign-up to begin.

Rocki and I arrived in town to see that most of the middle-aged goblins were already there. A short, overweight goblin was yelling for all the goblins aged 13 to 40 years to form a line. Rocki and I both hurried into the line. As I reached the front, the instructor said, "What is your name, son?"

"Daboo, sir," I replied.

"Okay, Daboo, you have to meet us at 4:00 A.M. in Doinker City at the Town Orchard." Rocki and I now had our marching orders!

Our destination was several days walk for short-legged goblins, so Rocki and I decided to use my dad's teleporter device, which is much more comfortable and efficient than public goblin transportation. At exactly 4:00 A.M., we went into the teleporter and typed in the coordinates for the orchard in Doinker City. We materialized in the orchard seconds later, where goblins from five other cities were gathered together. Another instructor started talking. "I am your general, and I want each one of you to choose a gun suitable to your weight, age, and intensity. After you find a gun and locate your troop leader, you will be off."

Rocki and I both decided on the 25-inch machine gun. Our leader was a tall, strongly-built goblin about five feet tall, with a cheerful look on his face.

"Hello, I am Al, your sergeant, and I will guide you through the war," he said. The sergeant eventually led us to a town called Zarfinkel where we spent the night at a military base. At about 3:20 A.M. I heard a BOOM BOOM BOOM. "Remain calm, and follow me to the base lab," the sergeant said.

We were lucky to make it there safely. When we arrived, the sergeant tickled a picture of an old man and a trap door magically appeared. We went in and the sergeant said, "Everyone stay calm and I will sort this out." He ran outside and we heard a huge KABOOM. Minutes later he ran back in.

"What happened?" I asked.

"That was MY bomb you heard," he said.

I laughed from nervous excitement.

The bombing went on for almost a year as our troop ran from army base to army base and our sergeant instructed us in the art of troll bombing. Most of the real bombing was done by older and more

experienced goblins, and Rocki and I had less exciting jobs to do, such as cooking, cleaning weapons, or just being the gofers for our sergeant. Usually, the closest we got to the action was to see the smoke and smell the burning troll hair in the breeze.

One day we woke up to peaceful silence--no bang, boom or anything. We stepped out of the base and a split second later, BOOM BOOM BOOM! I ran away in fright, unlike my friend Rocki, who was shooting everything in sight. Finally Rocki ran, too. The sergeant ordered everyone back inside the base where we watched his incredible maneuver. He flew into the air and a huge beam of light covered everything, and a strange tingling sound was screeching in my ears. I could tell it wasn't just me because Rocki was covering his ears, too. The enemy seemed to vaporize before our eyes. When the strange noise and bright light finally stopped, the sergeant led us off to a new city called Azeroth.

We stayed that night in a secret military lab in an old horse barn. Later that night I asked the sergeant what the beam of light and strange noise was.

"Metronome Powers," he said.

Seemingly seconds later he dropped to the floor and died right in front of me. We were all confused. Rocki said, "When I was little, my father told me about Metronome. It kills the enemy with torturing powers that melts their brains, but later it kills the user. My dad sacrificed his life for his side in the battle of the Dalamo, and our sergeant just sacrificed his life for our cause." Next he said, "Daboo, I am going to win this war for my dad. I will sneak into their base and kill them all."

"With what?" I asked.

"Explosives!" he replied. He ran out to kill.

"Rocki, remember the Dalamo!" I yelled.

"Goodbye, friend!" he yelled back.

It was years after the war ended before they found Rocki's dry bones on the trail back from the enemy base. He had managed to explode the main camp in the base and help speed their final surrender before he died. My dream of becoming a war hero was not to be, but the next best thing was to write a history of the war starring my best friend, Rocki, the true hero in the war I named "Dalamo's Revenge."

The Sword and the Ring

Ray is a superior swordsman, and Broli excels at martial arts. They must get revenge on evil Lord Draco for their families' murders in THE SWORD AND THE RING, by Freddy P. Todd IV.

It was a cold cloudless night. Two shadowy figures stood around a little boy. The boy was about eleven years old. His hair was shining silver, gleaming from the full moon light. He suddenly drew out a great sword. It was four feet long and had a small gem in the handle. He positioned it up in the air. He and the sword let out a large amount of energy. Wind was swirling around him.

“Yaaah!”

He attacked two figures with his powerful sword, which glowed red with fire ripping around it. The two figures fell down in pieces. The energy of the sword went away. The wind died down and his sword stopped glowing.

Shink

He put his sword back in its sheath. The two figures around him were dead. He scuttled swiftly up to them. They were two monsters that tried to steal his money and orb.

What is an orb, you ask?

Well, the boy went up to the monsters and put his hand on their corpses. His hand started glowing green. He held in his hand the monster's orb: a dark greenish looking bubble. Orbs are a part of the body that, if it is in the possession of another person, allows that person to shape-shift into the form of the body that the orb came from.

Now, back to the story.

This boy's parents were killed when he was just one year old. He was raised by his uncle and was trained for battle. He learned how to shape-shift when he was just four years old. That was very good for a boy of his age. This very powerful, smart, young man's name is Ray Tracer Matrix.

Mr. Matrix wears a blue hooded shirt with black pants and buckled boots. He also bears a sword named Strider in his sheath. Strider also is equipped with an energy shield. The boy has a golden ring on the ring finger of his right hand. He found the ring in the deserted city of Danzwel, in the house of a black mage wizard. (His name was Layken, son of Dracon, and his son is Draco.) He also found his sword Strider there.

Matrix slunk into a dark forest. He was heading for home when *trip!* he tripped over a rock and landed right on his head. He was out cold!

The next morning, Matrix woke up in a small, faintly lit cave. A fire was burning, roasting a delicious-smelling pheasant. Ray looked from one corner of the room to the other. A tall muscular man sat at a desk; it looked like he was working on some small machine. Ray looked closer. It was larger than he thought: a gun. The man looked up from his work.

"Oh, I see you woke up. You were lying in the forest. When I brought you back here, I found your head was bleeding."

"I am...?" he said sitting up in a sleeping sack with his eyes half open. "I mean, I was...?"

"Go back to sleep, kid. You'll need the rest," the man said in a deep voice.

"Wait, where am I? Wh-who the heck are you?"

"My name is Broli," said he. "You're in Birkwood Forest. I found you last night, unconscious. Listen, kid, I need some potion and grease for this gun." He held up what he was working on. "I need to get to town. If you want to come along or just go your own way, it's fine by me."

Ray's head was still dizzy from the fall.

"I'll go with you!" If he were thinking straight, he would have said different.

On the way there, they went through a meadow of wildflowers. There was a blue-sky with no clouds.

“So, kid, what’s your name?” Broli asked.

“The name’s Matrix. Ray Matrix. And don’t call me kid!”

“Anyway, kid, what’s the deal? Got any family or parents?”

“My parents?” Ray said in a quavering voice. “Someone stole their orb when I was very little. The only way to get my parents back is to kill the guy that killed them and get their orb back.”

“So who do you live with?” asked Broli.

“My uncle.”

“Where’s he?”

“He went looking for treasure. And what about you?” Ray asked.

“I - I have no family. All I had was a brother, anyway. His name was Chap-”

Psssvrruu! A needle went right into Broli’s chest. It was a dark goblin’s needle (Exen was the goblin’s name), sent from a crossbow that had battle nicks in it. The needle was poisonous.

Broli fell to his knees.

“Broli!” screamed Ray. “Auraghh!” He whipped out his sword. “You hurt my friend!” He darted towards Exen and thrust Strider towards him.

Exen jumped out of the way and said in a raspy voice, “My Lord Draco is requesting your body and orb. You will die now, Mister Matrix!” Exen hurtled his last needle towards Ray and scuttled up a tree. It just missed Ray’s head.

“Get back hear! You-You COWARD!” Ray let his power and anger free. His hair stood up all fiery red, his eyes turned red swirling with fire, and his sword was burning with fire. Ray sent a red thick beam from his sword towards the tree. It caught on fire and crashed down. Exen rolled out. Ray jumped towards him and put Strider up to his neck. Exen’s eyes were rolled up in his head. Ray didn’t even bother taking his orb.

“Get...blue...potion...in store!” Broli gasped, short of breath, lying on the ground.

“Broli!” Ray jumped towards him and knelt down.

"Get...blue...potion...in store!" he said again, gasping for breath.

"Blue potion in store, blue potion in store," Ray recited. Matrix sprinted as fast as his legs could carry him. He could see the town in the distance.

"Eraughh!" He went three times faster. Ray was almost there.

Sweat was dripping from his forehead. He saw the town's sign. With one last jump, he was there. Ray dodged past all the people walking around in the busy town square. He stopped.

"There!" he said to himself, pointing at a store that had a painting of a potion on it. Ray dashed into the shop.

"Oh, hello! What can I get for you today?" the clerk at the counter asked, with a big grin on his face. He was a big fellow, smiling, with a twinkle in his eye. He had gray hair with rosy cheeks.

"A, um, a...," Ray stuttered, trying to think what potion Broli requested.

"Well, what is it, son?"

Red potion? Green potion? Ray couldn't remember.

"Blue potion!" he spurted out.

"Okay, well, what type?"

"A 'B-L-U-E' potion! I don't know! The kind that gets rid of needle poisoning!"

"Oh, you should have said so," the clerk said with a jolly smile on his face. "Here you go." He handed Ray the potion.

"Thanks!" He started out the door.

"Hey, wait, son, you have to pay for that!" the clerk yelled.

"Oh, no. I don't have any money!" Ray cried. "But I do have this ring."

"Let's see it."

Ray handed the ring to him. He turned it over a few times, eyed it suspiciously, then said, "It'll do."

Looking more closely at the ring, the clerk noticed a small button inside it.

"You know, young man, this ring has something strange inside it," he said, as Ray was about to leave. Ray turned around and the clerk pulled out a pin and pressed the button with it.

All of a sudden, a light projected from the ring, shining a map onto the wall ahead of them. Ray ran back to the counter.

The clerk saw something in the boy. He could tell that he wanted the map inside the ring. He took the ring, twisted the inside, kept the gold encasement, and gave Ray the inner ring with the map projector inside.

Ray said, "Thank you," and gladly took off with the inner ring in his pocket and the potion carefully encased in his hand.

Quickly, Ray sprinted back through the town and dashed out into the field where his friend Broli lay, poisoned with a needle in his chest. Matrix kneeled down next to Broli. He opened Broli's mouth and poured in the blue potion.

"Uragh!!" Broli coughed, got up on his hands and knees, coughed some more, squinted, opened his eyes and stood up.

"Are you okay?" Ray asked.

"Yes," Broli gasped.

Ray pulled the ring out of his pocket and showed it to Broli.

"You know," Broli pointed towards an engraving on the ring, "this says Layken on it. His son is Draco. That's the map to Lord Draco's castle!" Broli exclaimed. "Lord Draco is a very powerful wizard who has mastered almost everyone's and everything's orbs. Even those of monsters, dragons and other wizards. Even my brother... Chapo..." Broli's voice lowered, sadly, then rose back up again. "He's very dangerous. I heard in many foreign pubs that he keeps most of the orbs in the dungeon of his castle."

Ray said, "I think he's the one who killed my parents and took their orbs! Let's go pay this Draco guy a visit!"

Ray Matrix pulled out the two orbs that once belonged to the two monsters he destroyed earlier. He handed one of them to Broli and kept one for himself. They both held them in their hands and pressed a pressure point in the orbs, which transformed them into the monsters. They had turned into flying mini-dragons. They took flight and followed the map to the evil Lord Draco's castle.

They landed inside the castle grounds beside a stone wall. Ray and Broli removed their orbs and quickly scuttled into the shadows of the castle.

Ray spotted two dark hooded guards armed with rifles and swords.

Ray whispered to Broli, "Looks like we have company. You take the one on the left. I'll take the right. Ready?"

Broli growled back, "I'll take them both. You save your energy for Draco. Let's roll!"

Broli jumped ten feet high and landed, pounding on the first guard, beating him up with his brass knuckles and martial art moves.

"Yaaaah!" He delivered the final blow, knocking him out. He ripped the rifle off the guard's back and leveled the rifle at the remaining guard. He fired six times, although two shots would have done the job.

"Heh, heh!" He grinned and cocked the gun. "Let's move in."

They stealthily crept inside the castle. It took a minute for their eyes to adjust to the dimly lit castle.

"Pew! What STANKS?" Ray said holding his nose and looking askance at Broli.

"Wasn't me! It's the smell of all the bodies Draco has killed and kept in this place for hundreds of years. The orbs are in one room; the bodies are in another. Once we find the orbs, we can free them to join their original bodies. My brother will come back as well as your parents and many others."

"Really? Let's find this rat and wring him out like a used towel," Ray said. Anyone could see the anger in his eyes.

"Remember," Broli said while walking next to Ray, "he has many orbs of many powerful lords, wizards, monsters, and dragons. Like I told you, he has the orbs of your parents. Don't let him fool you by changing into anyone you know."

"Thanks for the info. I'll need it later. Let's press on and pick up the pace," Ray said as they were walking down a dark corridor.

Out of the corner of his eye, Ray saw three guards following them with their rifles aimed in their direction. Ray pulled out his large energy shield, which could extend to six feet in all directions to shield them both. As Ray was shielding them, Broli was firing his rifle at them. He shot the rifles out of two of the guards'

hands. He jumped high over the shield and landed on the third guard's gun, knocking it to the ground. Ray threw down the shield and whipped out his sword. Rushing toward the guards, he thrust his sword into the torsos of two of the guards. As for the third guard, Broli took care of him. He karate-chopped him in the neck, snapping it and killing him instantly.

"The next notch in my sword will be Draco himself!" exclaimed Ray.

He started to walk on and turned around. It looked like Broli was taking an orb from one of the guards.

"Let's go!" yelled Ray.

Broli got up and swiftly walked toward Ray. Together they walked deeper into the heart of the dingy, dank castle.

Ray pulled out the ring and projected the map onto the wall. The projection now showed a map of the castle.

"Look, we are here," said Broli, pointing at the arrow on the map. "There are five sectors and three levels. We are in the fourth sector, second level. The orbs are in the third sector, first level. The bodies are in the fifth sector, first level. Draco is in the fifth sector, third level. If we kill him, all the orbs will be free and everyone he killed will come back to life. We must first kill Draco."

They slunk through the corridors to the fifth sector, third level. It was show time!

"This must be the door that leads to his lair," Ray stated.

Broli revved up and shouldered down the door. A surprised Draco looked up from his gruel.

"I was hoping you would find me," Draco breathed. "I see you have gotten my father Layken's sword and ring. I've been trying for the last five years to get your orbs. You two are very powerful; however, you are not as powerful as I am! Prepare to meet your maker!"

"Glad to!"

Ray positioned himself for battle; Draco did the same.

"Let's get 'em Broli! Broli? BROLI? Where are you?" Ray had thought Broli was behind him the whole time after he barreled through the door.

"I guess your friend has run away from you! Heh, heh!" Draco screamed. He charged toward Ray with his silver scepter in his grasp.

"Auraghh!" Ray whipped out his sword, Strider.

Kchssch! The sword and scepter clashed. Draco jumped back and sent a magic lightning bolt blazing toward Ray with his scepter. Ray blocked the attack with Strider and sent it flying back at Draco.

"Ahh!" Draco said in agonizing pain, while holding his shoulder. Now, Ray was winning.

"Err!" Ray sent a rush of fire hurtling toward Draco from Strider. Draco went flying against the wall. The whole castle shook. Draco now slid down the busted wall. The two mighty warriors were both tattered, shaken and bloody. But where was Broli?

"You worthless street rat!" Draco said in vain.

"I'll do it again!" Ray said, squinting his eyes and wiping his forehead.

"Err! No you WON'T!" Draco said with a blood-curdling scream. He jumped up and hung in the air. A yellow bubble was around him as he powered up. "I will get you and find your friend, Ray Matrix!" Draco yelled. Wind was now swirling around Draco, along with red, blue and yellow substances. His cloak flew off and turned to ashes on the ground.

"Yaaah!" Draco positioned his scepter right at Ray. Ray crossed his arms over his head, hoping to defend himself.

"Now, you die. Once you're gone, I shall destroy your friend and melt your wretched sword!" He powered up the scepter even more. A thick yellow energy blast went hurtling at Ray. "Yes, now you die! HA! HA! HA! HA!" Just at that moment, right before the blast hit Ray, a strange figure jumped in and scooped up Ray. He landed on the ground and watched the blast continually hurtle into the wall. This blast went on for ten minutes. Ray felt the heat on his face while he wondered who the figure was and what he was doing. He was about to fall asleep from the exhausting battle and boring blast, when the power of Draco and the blast died down and stopped; Draco was getting

weak. The figure plunked Ray down on the ground, and Ray scrambled to his feet.

"What are you doing? You idiot!" said Draco. The figure was one of Draco's sentry guards.

"No, what are *you* doing?" the guard asked in a deep, low voice.

"Hey, I'd know your voice anywhere!" Ray jumped with excitement. It was Broli! He took off the guard's orb that Broli was wearing, the orb stolen from the guard they destroyed earlier.

Although Broli and Ray didn't know it, Draco was drinking a potion, regaining all his power and energy that he had lost.

"Okay, Draco, let's DO IT!" Broli rushed toward Draco with his brass knuckles. Draco evaded him. "URAAGH!" Broli grunted. He threw another punch. Broli hit him, but it didn't seem to affect Draco.

It was now Draco's turn. "You're no match for me!" Draco whipped out his scepter again and recited a spell. He laughed while a rush of a silvery-red substance flew from his scepter toward Broli. It hit his arm, starting to suck his power away. Broli flexed his arm muscle, so it grew five times bigger. Veins were starting to pop out.

"AAAAGHH!" he yelled in pain. The magic substance flew off his arm. "You @#%&*!" Broli screamed as he rolled down to get his gun. He switched it off rifle mode and onto round-firing mode. "YAAAAAAA!" He fired, aiming at Draco's head.

*TCH*TCH*TCH*TCH*TCH*TCH*TCH*

Draco caught and dodged all the bullets.

"My turn," Draco said calmly. "Let me show you some more of my tricks!" He laughed heinously and glanced at Ray. Ray was waiting patiently for his turn.

"It's not over yet!" Broli yelled with blood and sweat dripping from his head. His clothes were tattered and his arm was gushing blood.

Draco now unleashed a powerful belt of energy from his scepter. Broli blocked it with his arms crossed, covering his head. Suddenly, Ray Matrix jumped in. Broli sat by the side of the wall, catching his breath. The building was falling apart.

"That's enough! My turn!" Ray said emphatically. "Stay frosty, buddy! Now for you, Draco!"

They clashed, both sword and scepter. Ray kept delivering powerful blows with his sword. Draco evaded most of them. Draco then started thrashing Ray with his scepter. Ray dodged most of those.

This kept on for a half hour. Finally, Draco disappeared.

"Where the heck is he?" Ray frantically yelled. Broli was trying to regain his energy in the corner of the room.

Out of nowhere, a little girl appeared.

"Lily?" Ray dropped his sword and shield and walked toward her.

"Where have you been? You disappeared from the shelter a long time ago. Wait--where did you come from? Oh, no. You're not Lily--you're Drac--"

"Matrix! No, that's not your friend Lily. That's Draco! Get away!" Broli yelled, holding his arm.

The little girl was not Ray's friend. It was Lord Draco! He suddenly reappeared. Ray stepped back two steps. It was too late. He had dropped his sword and shield too far back. It was the end for him.

"HA! HA! HA!" Draco screamed madly. He used another orb, and turned into a giant dragon. He screeched and let out a huge energy fire blast. Ray knew it was the end for him. The fire was coming closer, closer, closer, into his eyes, all around him. By this time, he was sweating a pool.

Ray could see the evil in Dragon Draco's eyes. He could not fight it any longer. He had lost. Too weak. He had let the whole world down. Soon Draco would get to everybody. It was the end. The fire was coming nearer. He was waiting to die.

He opened his eyes, for that was the only brave thing he could do. Ray could feel the heat running down his spine already. It was coming--whoosh!--

"Where is it?" he wondered. He looked up. Broli had jumped right in front of him, blocking the fire from hitting Ray. He was taking the whole blast. The heat was intense. All the hairs on Ray's back stood up.

Finally, the power wave stopped. Broli had fallen to the ground, dead.

“BROLIIII! NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” Ray screamed. He had seen enough. All his anger was built up in him, ready to be released. Ray picked up his sword. His whole body was glowing with fiery red anger. His sword started glowing red with fire.

“You monster!” He was trying to hold back his tears. “First my parents, then, thousands of innocent people, now my friend? I don’t THINK SO! DIIIIE!” He ran towards Draco with his sword held outward. Draco had an innocent look on his face, though he was not innocent at all. With one thrash of his sword, he sliced Lord Draco in half, killing him.

Raymond Tracer Matrix had just defeated the evil, powerful Lord Draco!

The second the good had destroyed the evil, all of the orbs went back to their original bodies, and every single person that Lord Draco had taken precious life from was now revived from death.

Ray’s friends and family all were reunited on that extraordinary day. His parents, Lily, all his friends, Broli, Broli’s brother Chapo and everyone else came back to life. The practice of stealing one’s orbs was never used again. As for Lord Draco’s orb, it was destroyed, and the dragon’s orb was released in the northern mountains of Slain.

Ray Matrix and his parents were thrilled to be reunited and had much catching up to do. His parents were extremely proud of him. Broli and Chapo did the same. Ray, Broli and their families had many great feasts with lords, kings, and queens of the Highland. Ray and his parents, from then on, lived happily ever after.

“We’re Not Chickens!”

Don’t let a bully get the best of you. If you do, you may end up like Ricky, Billy, Peggy, and Lucy in "WE'RE NOT CHICKENS!" by Maddie Jenkins.

"You're such a chicken!" yelled Beans.

"Am not!" yelled Ricky.

"Uh huh!" grunted Beans.

"We're not chickens!" added Lucy.

"Are too!" barked Beans.

"C'mon, guys, let's get out of here," said Peggy.

"No way," said Billy. "Then we'll really be chickens!"

"Boac ba baac!" chirped Beans. "Okay, if you're not chickens, then you have to prove it!" said Beans.

"How?" asked Billy.

"You have to stay in Werewolf Woods all day!"

"You're on!" announced Ricky.

Let me introduce you to everyone. Beans is the neighborhood bully. My advice is not to get in his way or he'll pound you like a hammer pounds nails. Next we have Rodger, Hound, and John. There is nothing too exciting about them. All they do is follow Beans's lead. Then we have Billy, Ricky, Peggy, and Lucy. They're the good guys, but also main bait for bullies.

Early the next morning the kids met at the big boulder at the entrance of the woods.

"Lets get this o-o-over with!" said Peggy.

"There aren't really any werewolves in here, are there?" asked Billy hesitantly.

"No, it's all just a myth...I think!"

As they walked into the woods, it seemed to get colder, darker, and a whole lot creepier. The trees looked like skeletons.

Suddenly, they heard sticks breaking and leaves rustling.

"Was that you?" asked Ricky.

"No, I'm right here!" said Billy.

"Girls?"

"Nope, we're right here," said Lucy.

"Man, I'm hungry!" said Ricky.

"Well, I brought some sandwiches for us to eat. And some things just in case we run into any trouble, you know!"

"Hey, look," said Billy, "there's a little house over there!"

"Let's eat there!" said Ricky.

Slowly, the kids walked over to the house. It looked as though someone had purposely hidden it. The garden was grown over with weeds and shrubs. The house was covered by ivy and vines. It seemed so gloomy. But the kids knocked three hard knocks.

No one answered. They opened the door. Inside it was dark and full of spider webs. The only furniture was a couch, sitting in the middle of the room. There were lots of doors. The kids wondered what each lead to.

"Ahhh, so you have finally come!" said an odd-looking lady. She had long, ratty, gray hair, a long nose, and a short stumpy body. "Well, I'm awfully hungry myself!" said the lady.

"We, um...we, um, gotta get going now!" said Lucy.

"Oh, no, you don't. You have all day. Now follow me into the kitchen and you can have some ice cream!" said the lady.

Being as hungry as they were, the kids foolishly followed her into the kitchen. Four bowls of their favorite ice cream were sitting on the counter: Chocolate, Moose Tracks, Cookie Dough, and Superman. They hesitated for a moment. Then, of course, Ricky ate his, so they all did.

"So Peggy, Ricky, Billy, and Lucy, how about a little more food?"

"How did you know our names?" asked Lucy.

"I have my ways!" said the lady.

The kids started eating so much that they couldn't stop. They had pork, ham, turkey, lollipops, pancakes, syrup, butter, bacon, sausage, taffy, and candy canes until the buttons on their pants were popping.

Then they followed the lady into yet another kitchen. In this kitchen there were four pots of boiling water.

"GET IN!" yelled the lady.

"WHAT? You're a witch, aren't you?" said Peggy.

"So you have found my secret. Ayyhh!" said the witch. Suddenly the lady's arms grew bigger and started reaching toward Peggy and Billy. Two more arms stretched out of her body, reaching towards Lucy and Ricky.

Peggy whipped around, unzipping her backpack. She tossed a can of silly string to Ricky and Billy. Then she tossed a foghorn to Lucy. "1-2-3!" she yelled.

The Silly String blinded the witch and the foghorn made the lady lose grip of the kids to cover her ears. The kids ran as fast as they could out the front door and towards the entrance of the woods.

"Thanks, Peg!" panted Lucy as they came nearer to the exit of the woods.

"No prob!" said Peggy.

"No matter how much I get teased or made fun of, I'm NEVER, EVER goin' in those woods again!" said Ricky.

They approached the boulder at the entrance to the woods with more happiness than the first time.

Where's Molly?

Some people imagine that the world we know is just one of many realities. A mysterious thief who snatches a magical dog leads Gabriela and Jenny to an altogether different place in WHERE'S MOLLY?, by Holli J. Nielsen.

My name is Gabriela, and Jenny is my best friend. Molly is a golden retriever puppy, and this is how I found out that Molly had magical powers.

One night I was tucking Molly into bed and was singing her a lullaby. Then I went downstairs. I was in the kitchen eating veggie soup with Jenny and all of a sudden, from upstairs, we heard a CRASH! Jenny and I jumped! I felt a shiver run down my spine as if my body knew something bad was going on. Then we ran upstairs.

I couldn't find Molly anywhere. While I was looking around trying to find her, Jenny was looking out the window. Jenny screamed, and with a gasp pointed out the window. She said she saw a man with a black hat running into the bushes. Another thing Jenny noticed about this strange man is that he had a bag over his shoulder and was running in the bushes. The bag had a hole where Molly stuck her long and fluffy tail through. We also heard Molly whining. As Molly was whining, I felt like crying. Then I said, "Why would someone take my puppy? We have got to find her!"

Even though it was dark outside, we got dressed and loaded our backpacks with supplies, grabbed our flashlights, and set out to find my stolen dog. First, we looked where we last saw the man with the bag running through the bushes. We searched and searched and found no sign of them or where they could have

gone. Jenny slipped and suddenly pressed a branch down. The branches triggered open a mysterious hole in the ground. We couldn't help ourselves, and we fell through the dark hole.

We were brought to a strange land. We were wandering around, wondering at this strange place, and we saw the strangest things pass by. We saw Aladdin, Sponge Bob, Dumbo, Alice, Mickey Mouse, Snow White, Elmer, and Johnny Appleseed. We also saw bright blue clouds, and on the clouds were smiling faces. In addition to that, we saw everything smiling around us, which made us want to laugh, jump, and sing. At that moment we knew this must be a happy place.

We asked Daisy Duck (with a smiling face) if she saw someone with a bag over his shoulder. Daisy pointed to the darkest, scariest side of the woods, and that happy feeling ran away from us in an instant. Once again I felt that chill run down my back as if it new something bad was going to happen.

We started running so we could find Molly faster. We saw the person with the bag over his shoulder running just ahead of us. Jenny and I started chasing after him and then we stopped to catch our breath. We could not see the person with the bag over his shoulder. It was as if he just disappeared.

Suddenly another secret passageway appeared, and before we could stop ourselves, once again we fell through the hole, head over heels. We landed in a haystack, which was in a very frightening place. Scary monster people with green skin and half-goose, half-chicken legs were laughing at us. We ignored them and kept going so we would not get hurt in any way.

In the woods, I stepped on a yellow painted brick and a mysterious staircase came up. This led us to a dimly-lit room that gave me the creeps. We could see the person who still had the bag. We watched him give it to a man he called "Master Zarkie." Master Zarkie had a purple and yellow robe and also had green skin with half-goose, half-chicken legs. Zarkie turned to us and roared, "You are fools; you do not how to use this magical dog. I do. Go home."

One of Zarkie's slaves whispered with chattering teeth, "You really should leave this place before he gets even more angry, or else you will never have a chance!"

I replied, "I can't leave without my pet Molly."

Zarkie's guards kicked us out of his mysterious chambers. We went back to the woods where we could hide and make plans to rescue Molly.

That night, we snuck back into Zarkie's chamber while everyone was sleeping. Making sure we were quiet, we grabbed Molly, holding her mouth so she would not make a sound. We ran out of the scary chamber. It seemed to me that we woke up some of Zarkie's guards and they were chasing us. At that very moment, Molly's eyes began to sparkle and her body began to glow, and out of nowhere a big mist of fog appeared and the soldiers got lost. We never saw them again.

I think my magical dog may have had something to do with the guards' getting lost. I still don't know how to use my dog's magical powers, but I love my Molly just the same.

The Wishing Rock

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have a wish-granting genie? How about a wish-granting rock? In THE WISHING ROCK by Patrick Jahnke, we see what could happen if a poor farmer found a way to make any wish come true.

There once was a poor farmer who was married and had one child. One day when the farmer, whose name was Mr. Boben, was getting water from the well in his backyard, he found a rock in the bucket. The rock had many tiny crystals on it, so he decided to keep it. Meanwhile in the house, his wife was waiting for the water. “Honey, I told you to get the water. What’s taking you so long?” she asked.

“I’ll be right there,” he replied. He put the rock down on the bench. He looked out over the fields where he was going to plant seeds and said with a sigh, “I wish that the fields where already seeded.” Then he took the water in to his wife. When he came back out he was shocked to find the fields were already seeded.

He looked down at the rock, “Could it be,” he thought, “that this rock is a wishing rock?” He took it inside to his room and made another wish. “I wish that I was rich.” He looked in his wallet and found a million dollars. Mr. Boben was now convinced that the rock was a wishing rock.

The Bobens’ son, Jack, used the rock to make a wish. “I wish that I was more popular at school.” He was surprised at school to find out that it worked. The kids at school were saying, “How’s it going, Jack?” or “Great to see you, Jack.”

Jack brought two friends home from school that secretly made wishes. One said, “I wish I was taller.” Jack looked at his friend in amazement as he grew about six inches.

The other friend wished, "I wish to be stronger." Muscles suddenly appeared on his friend's arms and legs. Jack was watching the rock as each friend made a wish, and noticed that a crystal disappeared with every wish.

The Bobens decided to share their good fortune with neighbors by allowing them one wish. The first neighbor to make a wish was Farmer Smith. "I wish I was thirty-five again," said the fifty-year-old farmer. He was amazed at the change. All of a sudden his back was straighter and he felt better than he had in a long time.

Some other wishes were, "I wish I was as strong as the strongest man on earth," and "I wish I was able to fly." Immediately after a person made one of these wishes, their bodies either became more muscular or they got wings. One of the women's favorites was, "I wish the house would clean itself." They happily found that whenever something spilled, fell over, or got dusty, the cleaning utensils came alive and cleaned the mess.

They soon discovered, however, some hidden dangers in some of the wishes. One of the farmers wished for rain, but it was not what he expected. Right after his wish, the rain poured down. It flooded the crops and roads. Finally, Mr. Boben knew something had to be done, so he wished for the rain to stop.

A different farmer wished for his crops to grow huge. His crops grew bigger than trees and fell on the road, causing major traffic jams. Also, the falling crops were barely missing houses, so he took his wish back.

Word of the "wishing rock" eventually got around to the President of the United States. He went immediately to Mr. Boben's house in Smoke Town, Pennsylvania. The President heard about the dangerous side effects from some wishes and was worried about the rock falling into the wrong hands. If the rock was misused, he felt the fate of the world could be at risk. He asked Mr. Boben if he would turn the rock over to the government for safekeeping.

Jack was listening to the President and knew he was right. The rock could be very dangerous. He also knew a solution no one else had discovered. He decided to make one last wish. "I wish

for all the crystals to disappear from this rock.” With the crystals gone, no one could make a new wish. All of the good wishes that people already made remained unchanged.

Jack’s parents had never noticed the disappearing crystals and were astonished at Jack’s actions. They eventually realized it was really the only permanent solution and were proud that Jack’s decision could have saved them and the world.

PLAYING FOR KEEPERS

Black, Flash of Magic

*When a big city girl moves to a small town, she isn't sure how to fit in. Fortunately, she finds a four-legged friend right next door in **BLACK, FLASH OF MAGIC**, by Bekah Jarzombek.*

"Bekah, get up. It's time to go to school," Mom said.

"Okay, but you know I don't want to," Bekah replied with a groan. She crawled out of bed and got ready half-heartedly.

Bekah is a tall, slim girl. Her hair hangs to her shoulders and shines like a gold coin. She is 12 years old and just moved to Leisure, Missouri from Brooklyn, New York. She doesn't know a soul in her new middle school and is frightened out of her wits. This morning, all she could think about were her old friends and how much she missed them and her old school.

Bekah rode the school bus that morning without any problem. It seemed that all the students were busy talking to their friends. With a huge gulp of air, she proceeded to class. Bekah intentionally decided to be early for class so no one would ask her any questions in the halls.

The first half of the day went fairly fast. Later, Bekah went to lunch in the cafeteria and purposely decided to sit by herself. Somewhat depressed and alone, she decided to not let one word slip out of her mouth to any other kids. She thought to herself, "They will never take the place of my old friends in Brooklyn."

When Bekah got off the bus that day, she admired the horse ranch across the neighboring field from her new home. As she walked up the steps of her front porch, she heard a whip snapping in the distance and the voice of a man. She turned, and Bekah could see a man whipping a black horse. He sounded frustrated and annoyed as he hollered, "Black, you are impossible to train!"

After Bekah did all of her homework, she tiptoed over to the fence where she saw the horse that had been whipped. He didn't look hurt or abused. "Hello, what is your name?" Bekah asked. Its eyes were full of rage and fright as it stared Bekah down. As Bekah reached her hand out toward the very tall horse, it snorted and galloped off wildly back into the green pasture.

At that very moment the grumpy old man who had whipped the horse walked over to her on the other side of the fence where the tall, muscular horse had been. "Are you new to this town?" the old man stormed.

"Yes," Bekah answered. "I just moved from Brooklyn, New York."

"Have you ever been around or handled horses before?" the old man grumped.

"A little when I was younger but not since then," said Bekah. "My dad was a jockey and that is how he met his death. My mom doesn't approve of my riding horses since that occurred," Bekah confessed.

"I'm very sorry about that, young girl," the old man said sympathetically.

His eyes seemed to be looking through hers as if he was thinking about something. "We need some help over here that does not involve riding a horse. If your mom lets you, I'll give you work for money," the old man offered.

"Oh, that would be just super if you would let me do that!" Bekah said happily. "It would give me something to do after school, since I don't know anyone around here. But... why were you whipping that beautiful horse?" Bekah announced.

"You see, he is a young fellow, and is as wild as they come. He needs someone that has time and real interest in him," the old man told her.

"He wasn't being hurt, just punished?" Bekah asked.

"Exactly," the man said.

"Anyway, I will let you know tomorrow if I am allowed to work at your place! By the way, what is your name, sir?" Bekah asked again.

"My name is Mr. Wilson, but just call me Billy. What is your name?" Billy asked.

"My name is Bekah."

Later that night, when Bekah's mom arrived home from a long day of work, Bekah asked the question that she had been waiting to burst out all night. "You what?" Mom shouted. "No, no, nooo!" Mom blasted out. "It's too dangerous for you, Bekah."

"Mom, I'm not actually riding horses, I'm just cleaning and helping out with undone things around the ranch," Bekah told Mom.

"If you are extremely careful and cautious," Mom, being caring, said.

"You have yourself a deal!" Bekah proclaimed.

The next day after school, Bekah went over to Billy's ranch and told him that her mother gave her permission to work over there after school every day. Three days later, Bekah was at work in her new job. She picked the horse manure out of the stalls, filled horses' water buckets, fed horses, and cleaned riding equipment. All of it, she found out, was very hard labor and time consuming.

She was excited about her new job. She was thinking, in the future, that she might get the opportunity to convince her mom to let her ride some of the horses. For now, Bekah would go to the ranch each day after school to do her chores and be paid a little spending money.

Bekah had been working for Billy for a number of months and really wanted to ride horses instead of getting money for her hard labor. She went and asked her mom if she could do that. Bekah's mom went bananas! She couldn't believe that Bekah would ask her such a crazy question. Bekah begged her mom for days. Finally, there was only one option left to try. She told her mom that she was lonely and wanted to return to New York.

It worked! Bekah didn't like having to manipulate her mom for her to say yes, but in a way it was true. She had made a few friends at school, but they lived on the other side of town. Since her mom worked, it was difficult to get together.

The next day, Bekah told Billy that she wanted free lessons for her work instead of money. Later that week, Bekah started her new

lesson! Tammy was her riding teacher. She was a horse trainer that assisted Billy. Bekah saw Tammy break in young horses. She wondered if Tammy had ever worked with the tall, black horse that she had seen that first day.

Finally, it was the moment Bekah had been longing for. Her heart was thumping fast, and her hands were shaking. Her feet were as stiff as logs and wouldn't move a muscle. It took great will power for Bekah to put her feet in the stirrups. After her initial excitement, she relaxed and jumped up into the saddle!

The first lesson for Bekah went great. "You did very well for the first time riding, Bekah," Tammy said.

"Thank you," Bekah answered. "What days will I be having my lessons?" Bekah asked.

"Thursday and Friday every week," explained Tammy.

"Okay," Bekah replied. "Tammy, it was nice working with you," Bekah told her.

"You, too," Tammy exclaimed. "By the way, I have seen you feeding Black each day those apples. Black is very unpredictable, Bekah. He could hurt you permanently. Please be very careful," said Tammy.

One year went by and Bekah was a riding queen. Tammy said that Bekah could even show horses, now that she was riding so efficiently. Bekah would faithfully do her chores at the ranch and, if she didn't have anything to do, she would visit the wild horse she had seen that first day. In her pocket, she always had an apple and would give it to the horse. The horse peacefully took the apples. Not thinking one day, Bekah extended her hand out toward the horse and carefully placed her hand on the horse's neck! He stood quietly still and seemed to like her to stroke his neck and smooth mane. His big eyes seemed to communicate that he trusted Bekah.

After a week of touching Black, Bekah decided to ask Billy if she could work with the horse on her own time. Billy said that the horse was two and one-half years old and needed someone desperately to work with him. The horse was a valuable Missouri Fox-Trotter, but he had not shown a lot of promise. Billy watched Bekah stroke the horse and love him with a tender heart and decided to give her a chance to get the horse to trust a person to

saddle him. It would take some time and patience, but if she wanted to try, Billy would allow it.

Black already had adjusted to wearing a halter. Bekah was able to lead the horse on a rope and immediately started teaching him good manners. Tammy was a great help and showed amazement as Bekah worked with Black with confidence. Six months later, Black was saddled and ready to be ridden. Bekah once again started to freeze like an ice cube, except not as cold. Her legs wouldn't budge. At last, she was on! Black threw up his back feet and took off! "Hold on," Tammy cried.

Black and Bekah were finally retrieved by Tammy. Bekah tried it again. "I can do anything, I can do anything," Bekah repeated in her mind as she went trotting down the field. The horse and rider moved smoothly around the ring this time. "I guess we're going to be fine," Bekah assured herself.

After all the excitement, Bekah gave Black a bath and brushed him down with care. Before she left, she said, "See you tomorrow, my buddy." Bekah and Black were best friends and both of them had eyes for no one else.

Later that year, Black showed an interest in jumping. His back legs had the right conformation and Bekah was willing to work with Tammy to learn about jumping horses. By the time Black had his fourth birthday, he was jumping like a champ. Tammy felt that Bekah should enter him in the local competition for Missouri Fox-Trotters. Bekah went to Billy again and asked permission to sign Black up for competition. That was easy. What about her mother?

Bekah's mom thought about it for a few days. Finally, she said that she felt that Bekah had her dad's gift with horses and she had to let her daughter follow her heart and ability. So it was set. Black would go to the regional competition in a few months!

Bekah received another surprise. Billy came to her one day and wanted to talk. "Bekah, I have watched you and Black work together and form a close bond. I am pretty impressed. I want to sign Black's papers over to you and make you his owner."

Bekah didn't know what to say. She gave Billy a quick hug and ran home with joy! "I can't believe it, he is really mine," Bekah announced to her mom. Bekah was surprised to see her mother's

happiness for her. Everything was in place. It couldn't get any better for Bekah.

The first day of competition arrived and Billy trailered Black and Bekah early that morning. Luckily, Bekah had taught Black how to get in trailers during his training. When they arrived at the showgrounds, Bekah was nervous and Black seemed to sense it. She was turning bright red. Her stomach shook with butterflies. As she brushed him, they both calmed down. Black's eyes were full of intensity. Bekah began to think, "I am not sure about that look I see in Black's eyes."

At last Bekah and Black were called into the ring. They started off. Black was having so much fun that he seemed to float over the jumps. At the end of the round, Bekah was proud of Black and had many of the contenders come over to meet her and the "Black" horse for the first time. Soon they would hear the announcement and Bekah and her horse found themselves standing in the second place of honor with a ribbon.

Bekah couldn't contain her joy as they arrived home after a long day of competition. She had won at least three ribbons and "Best in Show" for a beginner. Best of all, her mom was happy and proud, too. It appeared that Bekah's mother had lost all her fear, too! Also, Billy promised to help her go to other shows during the year.

Sure enough, each week of competition rewarded the "Black" horse and the young girl with ribbons and medals. One day after school, Bekah received a letter in the mail. She was invited to enter a national jumping competition on the West Coast. She couldn't wait to break the news to Billy and her mother. They both said yes and Bekah and Black started working toward their goal of becoming national competitors. Every day and night the two of them worked together until they could jump, in a flash, with their eyes closed. Bekah continued to give Black plenty of love to secure her relationship with him.

The competition arrived and it took four days to trailer to California. They saw colors and kinds of horses that they never knew existed. Black was one of a few black jumpers.

As they were called into the ring, Bekah felt confident and secure with her horse. Black responded and they started off. Bekah's head was held up high and filled with smiles. She remembered all the techniques Tammy had taught them.

Around they went, in a flash, over one fence and jump at a time! The wind blew hard and sand swept over their faces. They went over the last fence and through the exit gate to dismount.

Suddenly, they were encircled by a crowd of admirers. What was the name of this black horse from Missouri? They were concentrating so much that Bekah hadn't even noticed the gathering crowd until the jumping was over.

Soon the winners would be announced. Fourth, third, second and Black and Bekah had not one ribbon. Finally, first place was called. It was awarded to Black, the Missouri Fox-Trotter. Bekah almost fainted. She could hardly believe her ears. "I did it, I did it!" Bekah screamed. She hugged Black with all her might.

They pranced up and down the show ring to receive their honors. Flowers and a ribbon were placed triumphantly on Black. Bekah received a trophy. They had won First in Jumping and Best in Show! Also, the judge congratulated them and announced that Black had broken a competition record in jumping. He jumped like magic!

That night as they traveled back home to Missouri, Bekah thought about the competition and how everyone wanted to know her horse's name. She remembered how the judge said that her horse jumped like "magic." She asked Black that night if she could call him Black, Flash of Magic. It was especially fitting because Black's sire was named Magic. Black seemed to understand her words. Those big, black eyes lovingly met hers. "I love you," Bekah told Black. She hugged him and scratched his face.

Through the years, Bekah's friendship with her horse remained and she developed friendships with other horse-lovers in her town. But, her best friend would always be her Black, Flash of Magic.

Lucky 13

What an accomplishment it would be to become a professional athlete. One athlete's dream comes true at a young age in LUCKY 13, by Tim Walton.

One cold winter day, I was outside playing hockey in the street. As usual, a car came by, so I moved my net to let the car by. But instead of the car driving by me, it stopped right next to me.

It wasn't just an ordinary car. It was a Ferrari. The window started to go down. The driver introduced himself. He was Darren McCarty of the Detroit Red Wings! He said, "Are you Tim Walton?"

Stunned, I said, "Yes." I didn't get it. Why was somebody looking for me? Did I do something wrong? It finally registered in my brain that I was standing face to face with my favorite hockey player! It is hard to find any words that could describe how I was feeling right then. It was very surprising having Darren McCarty drive up to me.

Darren McCarty answered, "We are scouting for new young players, but we can't find any between the ages of 18 and 30. How old are you?"

I replied, "I am 13." I was getting nervous about whether or not he was going to say that I could play for them. To my surprise, he said that I could play for them.

My mom came outside to see who I was talking to, because she saw that I was talking to someone that drove up to me. I asked her if I could play for the Detroit Red Wings.

She hesitated for a while and finally said, "Yeah, that's fine with me." It was set. I was going to play with the Detroit Red Wings!

Darren McCarty and I started talking for a while. One thing led to another, and we started to play hockey for a few hours. After a while, it was 8:00 at night and we were still playing hockey.

It began to get dark quickly, so Darren and I went inside and ate dinner. I couldn't believe that I was eating dinner with my favorite hockey player. I asked him if he wanted to stay the night because it started to snow very hard and the roads were icy. Surprisingly, he said, "Good idea. It looks very dangerous out there!"

I almost died! It was going to be the best night of my life! McCarty, sleeping at my house!

In the morning, first thing, Darren and I had breakfast. He said that we would go down to the Joe Louis Arena to have my first practice.

He introduced me to the team. I was wondering what they would say about me. They were so nice to me. They were probably really shocked to have a 13-year-old on an NHL hockey team.

They brought me into the locker room and they presented me with my own jersey. Steve Yzerman said, "It took a while, but we did it. You were number 13, right?"

Darren told me that they did a lot of number switching for me. I wondered how they knew. It is my lucky number, too.

On January 20, 2002, it was my first game with the Wings against the Colorado Avalanche, the Red Wings' rival. I was playing against them! Surprisingly, I scored three goals against Patrick Roy! He is one of the best goalies in the league!

I didn't know whether to be surprised or happy. I was confused!

I had never skated on the ice at the Joe Louis Arena before, but it was really smooth and it was probably the best ice in the NHL. We ended up winning the game 3 to 0. I scored all of the goals!

I will leave it to you. Think about it: Would you like to play on your favorite professional team at your current age?

NFL Grandma

The straightforward message of this story is to keep reaching for your dream. That's what Grandma would tell you about NFL GRANDMA, by Robert Acho.

One day Adam was at a high school playing football with his friends. Adam was always excited when he would get to do this. He would feel like he was playing in the Super Bowl. That day Grandma had to go pick Adam up from the high school. She pulled up in the parking lot and rolled down her window and said, “Adam, time to go home.” But Adam didn’t hear Grandma shouting his name.

Grandma got out of the car and walked to the football field. Adam saw his Grandma coming. He said, “Sorry guys, I have to go now.”

Grandma said, “No, Adam you can play a little more.” Adam was so happy, he was jumping for joy. However, one of the other guys had to leave, so they were one man short.

Adam asked Grandma if she wanted to play football. Grandma said yes.

When Grandma said yes, Adam’s friends were amazed.

“You’re going to play? Yeah, right.”

It was fourth down and they were 50 yards away from the end zone. They decided to go for the field goal, but no one could kick it that far. Grandma said, “I can do it.”

All of the boys were saying, “No you can’t. You’re just an old lady.” They hiked it, and Grandma put it right through the pipes.

Later that day, Adam and Grandma played catch with the football in the backyard. While they were playing catch, Grandma was telling Adam stories from when she was a kid. Then Grandma

told Adam she always wanted to play football for the Lions in the NFL. Adam said, "Why didn't you try, Grandma?"

Grandma said, "Well, because everyone would say that I wasn't tough enough to play the sport."

Adam said, "Grandma, you still should have tried. You might have proved them wrong."

"You know what, Adam? I am going to try out for the Lions and show them how good I am. I need a trainer, Adam, and you are just the one to take that job."

"Every day we must go to the gym and pump iron and workout. Then we have to watch our weight and stay in shape," said Adam.

Grandpa came home one hour later and said, "I'm back. Did you miss me?"

"Nope," said Adam. "Guess what, Grandpa? Grandma is going to try out for the Lions."

"You mean the Detroit Lions? The football team?" said Grandpa. "Oh, stop kidding around," said Grandpa.

"But we're not kidding," said Grandma.

From that day on, Grandma and Adam went to work out. They would lift weights, run, and do many more exercises. Grandma said to Adam, "Son, I am ready."

Adam said, "You sure?"

Grandma said, "100% sure!"

Adam said, "Let's get some rest and we will go try out tomorrow." So they went home and got some rest.

Morning came and Grandma was already getting her stuff together for the tryouts. Adam got breakfast ready and they were off to tryouts. When they arrived, the other players were making fun of Grandma because she was old and she was a girl.

Then the coach said to the players, "Let's run 20 laps around the field." They started to run, and guess who was in first? Grandma. Then the coach said to do some play patterns and Grandma was the best receiver. All the other guys were looking at Grandma as if they wanted to say, "I thought you were broke down and couldn't run."

When it was time to decide on players, Grandma was the first one to make the team. Everyone said things like, "Wow! Nice job! I never knew you could do that, especially a grandma like you."

Adam was saying, "Yep, that's my grandma, who is now in the NFL."

Grandma was a starter in the first game against the Bears. They won the game 12-6. In week two they were playing the Ravens and they won again, 34-32. In week three they lost to the Packers 12-11. But in week four they beat the Rams 16-15. In week five they whipped the Bengals 40-15. They never lost any more games that season. Then they had to face the Vikings in the Super Bowl.

Grandma got dressed to play the Vikings. The coach gave the team a pep talk about how important it was to win the game. The Lions came onto the field. The fans were on their feet, yelling and chanting, "Let's go, Lions!"

The Vikings won the coin toss and chose to receive. The Lions kicked the ball and the Vikings returned it 40 yards. But by the end of the second quarter the Lions were winning 7-0.

The Lions had the ball on their own 40-yard line. The third quarter ended and the score was 14-7, Vikings' lead.

At half time, the team went back to the locker room and had another pep talk about how they needed to score more. In the third quarter, the Vikings kicked the ball off to the Lions, who returned it for a touchdown. At the end of the third quarter, the score was 21-14, Vikings' lead.

In the final seconds of the fourth quarter, the Lions called a time out. The coach put Grandma in as a wide receiver. The quarterback called, "Hike!" and Grandma ran her pattern in the end zone. She made a diving catch to win the game for the Lions!

That year the Lions won the Super Bowl all because of Grandma. Grandma was inducted into the Hall of Fame as the best receiver ever to play in the NFL on the Lions.

Grandpa was proud of Grandma that she succeeded with her dream.

THE REAL THING

Determined to be a Sailor

DETERMINED TO BE A SAILOR, by *Hannah Santola*, is about a boy who loves the navy. At age 17, he sets his mind to serving his country as a sailor during wartime.

On December 24, the night before Christmas, he was born. A magnificent man he is. I bet you are wondering *who* exactly this man is. Well, this man just happens to be Don Santola.

He was born December 24 in the year 1928 at about 11:30 P.M. in the town of Syracuse, New York. And everyone loved him! Don always had lots of friends and great grades. And he loved the navy. He wanted to be a sailor all his life. He attended elementary school (but they called it grammar school) from grades 1 through 6. Then he went to high school at Eastwood High in Syracuse.

When he was 14, World War II started. He wanted to join, but he was too young. World War II really got him thinking about what he wanted to do with his life.

At age 15 when he was in tenth grade, he told his father that he wanted to join. But his father said, "No. You have to be 17 and you have to graduate first." Don agreed. What his father said to Don really motivated him. He went to school every day and went to night school every night. He did this to graduate.

He ended up graduating at age 16 and he proved what he could do. His dad was really proud.

Don was halfway there. Now all he had to do was turn 17...which was sixth months away. Don didn't want to wait.

That summer Don went to enlist *without* his father. He lied about his age. He said he was 17 but he was only 16 and a half. He forged his father's signature to get in. When the people from the

navy called Don's house to confirm all of this, his dad had no idea what they were talking about. Don had to explain all of this.

Another sixth months he had to wait. It seemed like forever, but the time came. It was December 24 and he was finally 17. He woke up his father at 6:00 A.M. and said, "I graduated from high school and I'm now 17. It's a sailor's life for me."

His father had no choice now. He made a promise and he was going to stick to it. He took Don to enlist that day, and he told the navy, "You can have him. Maybe the navy can do something with him...because I can't. He wants to be a sailor."

My grandpa stayed in the navy for three years. He crossed the Atlantic Ocean seven times. They were escorting tankers and troop ships, protecting them from enemy submarines. He was on a destroyer and was a torpedo man. All the above was in World War II.

Later he was discharged, and he returned to civilian life. In July of 1950, the United States went to war with North Korea. He got called back to the navy. His whole family was really proud by then.

He went to Korea and stayed in the navy three more years. Again, he was a torpedo man. His ship was hit by enemy fire in September of 1951. He once again returned home and went to college.

My grandpa is now 73 and still doing fine. He never got hit or anything...so he is pretty healthy for participating in two wars! By the time he was 18 he had been three-quarters of the way around the world. And he still loves the navy!

The Journey to Freedom

*When you have everything in life you could ever wish for, you may believe that nothing can destroy your happiness. In **THE JOURNEY TO FREEDOM** by Jaclyn Wolpin, a young man learns how war can take everything he loves away from him.*

Many families living in Eastern Europe during World War II had their lives and families torn apart when the Nazis invaded their countries. Many people were forced from their homes. Some were sent to concentration camps. Some hid in people's homes so the Nazis couldn't find them. There were those who hid their identities because they were Jewish. The story of Jacob is just one of many from those who lived during these harrowing times, and also about one who escaped.

Jacob was a young Jewish boy who lived in a small town just outside of Warsaw with his father, mother, two sisters, and three brothers. His father owned a hardware store where Jacob enjoyed working each day. His family lived on a beautiful farm that the children helped take care of. Jacob helped to milk the cows and feed the animals every morning. He was enjoying his life very much. But the ever-present fear of war haunted him, in a way that he could never forget.

Jacob knew that it was only a matter of time before the Nazis changed everything that he held so dear. The war was intensifying and many of the Jews from his town had already fled to places outside of Poland, seeking safety. Jacob was sad because many of his friends had moved away. He was beginning to feel very lonely. Jacob and his family had many discussions about where they would go if the Nazis invaded Poland. Jacob's fear intensified.

Jacob's father heard that the Nazis were coming closer to their village. The Germans had already taken over Austria and had control

over much of Czechoslovakia. Jacob's parents felt that they had to get their children out of Poland before it was too late. They realized that it was only a matter of time before the Nazis took over and sent the Jews to the concentration camps in Germany.

Jacob feared going to the concentration camps because he had heard that the Jews were being murdered there. He and his father began to think of ways to get the family safely out of Poland. Since they were Jews, the Nazis would surely be looking for them. Jacob knew that somehow either he or his family would find a way. Then when all seemed hopeless, something like a miracle of an idea came to his father's mind!

During the Polish revolution, Jacob's father had hidden a man in his home because there were people who wanted to kill him for advocating the overthrow of the government. After the revolution this man became the president of Poland. He never forgot what Jacob's father had done for him during this most important time. He promised him that someday he would pay him back. That time was now.

Jacob's father realized that this man would be his only hope. It was out of complete desperation that he decided to go to him and ask him for a favor. Getting his help would not be easy, but Jacob's father knew it was the only chance for escape. Jacob could only sit and wait while his father tried to do everything he could. He loved and trusted his father very much. Something inside him said that everything was going to be all right.

After meeting in a secret location with this man on two occasions, Jacob's dad was able to secure just one visa. It cost him almost everything that he had saved up for, but if it meant freedom for at least one member of the family, then he felt he didn't have any other choice. As fate would have it, he made the right decision.

The visa that he secured would allow Jacob to enter Palestine (Israel). Jacob, now sixteen years old, was about to leave his entire family, his home and his happy life in order to live in a foreign place with people he had never met. He was scared, but he realized it was something he had to do if he was going to survive. Even though he was leaving a part of the world that was being threatened by war, he would be entering another country that had conflict. The Jews and the

Arabs were fighting over land that both wanted to take possession of. Although Jacob was fearful, he knew he had to move on with his destiny. He didn't know how brave he was going to have to be.

The day for Jacob to leave had finally arrived. Jacob's mother and father had worked out a plan for his escape. There were Nazi soldiers all over his village and they were checking people's identifications. Some Jewish people had stars drawn on them to show that they were Jewish, so getting past the Nazis would not be easy. Jacob would leave at nightfall and travel to the train station where he would board a train to Palestine. His journey would begin by train and end by boat. And so it was that he left all he loved behind him without a satisfying goodbye.

The trip to Palestine took two weeks. Jacob met other families who were also trying to escape. He talked to many of them about their plans for the future, and it gave him comfort to know that he wasn't alone. The war had taken its toll on many communities of Jews, and Jacob was just one of many who had been separated from their families in order to escape. It was a matter of survival.

It was a difficult trip because there was not a lot of food, and many people became ill. Some even died. Jacob was one of the lucky ones to survive the long and sad journey. But it was better than the journey that many had taken to the death camps in Germany.

Jacob was met by his aunt and uncle. They took him to live in a small town outside of Tel-Aviv called Reshalym. He would take a job as a builder and he spent a lot of time thinking about his family. Jacob missed them very much. He did a lot of activities to keep his mind off his family. Jacob made a lot of new friends and time started to pass more quickly. But his heart was heavy.

While he was in Palestine, he was unable to talk with his family, and all the letters he wrote to them were never answered. He feared that they had not survived the Nazi invasion or had been shipped to the concentration camps. The thought of his family being put into the concentration camps scared him very much. He feared for their lives and couldn't stop thinking of them. It was the low point of his life but he needed to do things that would help take his mind off his sadness.

Jacob thought that it would be important to learn English in case someday he would move to the United States. So he went to school where he spent a lot of time learning the English language. Between

work and school, Jacob's time was constantly occupied. But he began to feel that he needed more of a challenge. His aunt and uncle told him that maybe it was time for him to move on. He had been through a lot for a young man. Now he was going to have to be brave and courageous again.

Luckily, Jacob was able to make contact with some relatives who lived in the United States. He had a grandmother who lived in Chicago. She invited him to come and live with her because she knew it was possible that he had lost his entire family. If this were true, he would need a permanent place to live. The fighting had gotten very bad in the area where Jacob lived. Now was as good a time as ever for him to move.

Jacob, now 21 years old, was on his way to Chicago. He had accomplished many things while living in Palestine, but now he had to face another challenge. Although he was afraid to move farther away from Poland, he thought it was the right thing to do.

After a long and difficult journey during which he spent many hours thinking of his family, he made it to the United States. It was like nothing he had ever imagined, but it was more beautiful than anywhere he had ever been. He had still not heard from his family and he continued to fear the worst. But this was a new start and he was going to make the best of it.

Upon his arrival in Chicago, Jacob realized that he was going to need a job. Since the United States had gotten involved in the war, he decided that he would join the army and fight against the Nazis in Europe. Although he was frightened by the war, he was still going to join.

He became an excellent soldier. He was a valuable asset to his platoon because he spoke many different languages. This came in very handy since none of the American soldiers spoke anything but English. He also did a lot of reconnaissance missions and fought many battles on the front lines.

Jacob made many friends during his stay in the army. Many of these young men died during the bloody battles and Jacob himself witnessed the men dying right in front of him. On many occasions he was scared and alone but he knew he would survive. He had conquered so many battles that he somehow knew he would survive this one also.

On what turned out to be the last day of the war, Jacob was seriously injured. He was helping a wounded soldier return for medical treatment when he was shot in the chest. He almost died from his injuries, but after one year in an army hospital he was discharged. Jacob received a purple heart and a bronze star for his heroic acts. Now the time had come for Jacob to make a new beginning.

Upon arriving back in Chicago, Jacob realized he needed to make money. He would need to find a job that enabled him to move out of his grandmother's home and live on his own. For so long he had been depending on others to help him out. He had no money to start his own business, so his grandmother suggested that he speak with his uncle about borrowing some money to start his own business. With a five hundred dollar loan from his uncle, he started what turned out to be a very lucrative automotive parts business that still exists today.

After he was able to get his business career going, he was able to start working on his social life. He met many wonderful people and after only a year in Chicago he met a young woman whom he became very fond of. They would eventually marry and have three children. He had not felt this type of happiness for a long time. Through his family he was able to feel a sense of security that the war had taken from him many years ago.

The war had changed him in many ways. He was a survivor of a tragic time and there would be many scars that would never heal. He would never forget the times before the war and all that had been lost.

Shortly after the Germans surrendered, Jacob learned that his small town had been invaded by the Nazis. His entire family had been sent to the concentration camps in Germany where they were all killed. Not one member of his family survived. If not for his parents' desire to help him survive, and one simple visa, he too would have perished at the hands of the Nazis, and Jacob would not have been my grandfather.

My Family Trip

MY FAMILY TRIP, by **Davy Kimbrough**, is the story of one boy's vacation. It carries a message about the importance of family.

Every July, my family goes for a week to a place outside of Michigan. During that week we go to malls and amusement parks, and we stay in very big hotels. I have a really big family, so sometimes it can get crowded, but that's all right.

When we get up from a good night's sleep, we go out to a restaurant and we eat until everyone is bloated. I could list about a million things that we do, but there is one particular event I want to talk about, and that is when we went to Niagara Falls.

It was the third week of July when we went and it was the greatest time of my life. I was a little disappointed that my sister couldn't come with us on the trip. Anyway, about the falls: When we took a boat under the falls, I thought I was the luckiest boy on earth. I thought this because there are a lot of less-fortunate people in this world and I was just lucky to have wonderful family to go places with.

I hope you liked my story, and remember that family comes first.

My Trip to Disney World

*If you could pick where to go on your next vacation, what would be your destination? Read about one girl's choice in **MY TRIP TO DISNEY WORLD**, by Leanna M. Cunningham.*

One day I woke up and I went downstairs. My mom asked me, "Where do you want to go for vacation?"

I said, "I don't know."

My mom said, "You could go anywhere you want."

I said "Okay! Disney World."

We went on an airplane. I didn't like it because I do not like heights. I was thinking about how fun Disney would be.

When we got to Disney, we went to our hotel. I wanted to go swimming, so I did. The swimming pool was shaped like Mickey Mouse's head. I thought that was the coolest thing ever.

I got back to the hotel room and put on my regular clothes so we could go to the theme parks. My mom asked me, "What theme park do you want to go to?"

I said, "MGM," because that theme park has the most rides.

We got to the bus stop where the buses from different theme parks come and pick you up, but the bus that we wanted had just left. We had to wait an hour for the next bus. Then when we got to the MGM theme park, we had to wait an hour for them to take our tickets.

When we got to the inside of it, we went to Rock'n Roll Roller Coaster. That ride was fun. It was like you were in a limo and you only had five minutes to get to the concert. You are going really fast and it's like street signs inside it.

Then we went to Tower of Terror. That ride was like being in an elevator when all of a sudden the elevator goes all the way down really fast and flies up.

We left MGM and went to Animal Kingdom. We went into the Tree of Life. Inside of the Tree of Life, there were all these different kinds of waterfalls. Also, there was a 3D movie theater. We watched the characters from *A Bug's Life* come out on stage. Some of them were scary, smelly, small, big, and cute. After that we went back to the hotel and we had dinner with the Disney characters. Then we went to our hotel room and went to bed.

The next day we were leaving at 7:00 A.M., so we woke up at 4:00 A.M. to pack our bags. We left the hotel at 5:45 A.M. and we said goodbye to Disney.

The Rainforest

*Not everyone will have an opportunity to visit an actual rainforest. In **THE RAINFOREST** by **Cristina Manzari**, you'll learn of the author's adventures in a Costa Rican rainforest.*

I went on a cruise through the Panama Canal, Costa Rica, Aruba, and St. Thomas. This cruise was a gift from my aunt. I left on November 23, 2001 and returned December 3, 2001. My favorite part was Costa Rica because we went in a rainforest. The rainforest was not what I thought it would be.

In the rainforest we saw monkeys, toucans, scarlet macaws, turkey vultures, black vultures, iguanas, lizards, leaf cutter ants, and colorful butterflies. The monkeys we saw were white-faced monkeys. They were small and moved very fast. They were jumping from tree to tree and it was really hard to catch them on the video camera or our regular camera. But the pictures of the trees they were in came out nice! Ha!

Toucans were the coolest because they had long, colorful beaks. The colors were bright yellow, bright light green, black, orange and sky blue. The scarlet macaws are parrots. They are bright red, bright yellow and royal blue.

Turkey vultures and black vultures were not the same. The turkey vultures are small and the black vultures are huge! They would be about up to your knees; it was amazing.

Iguanas blend in the trees so well it was hard to see them, and they were big! The lizards were different sizes. They would be about as long as your middle finger or as big as your hand. They all moved very fast.

The colorful butterflies were dark sky blue and there was black going around the blue. They were as big as your hand and

could be bigger. The leaf cutter ants cut up big pieces of leaves and carry it to their nest. It was strange because the ants were carrying these big pieces of leaves that were bigger than them.

The rainforest was really hot. It was about 95 degrees Fahrenheit. It was so hot that I was sweating like a glass of iced water on a hot day. It did not rain when we were there. We went in the rainforest with a tour guide. He told us a lot about plants, but not too much about animals.

The rainforest had a road going through it; it also had a few homes and a school in it. In the rainforest we saw huge plants with huge leaves that were bigger than you and me. Some plants were poisonous, and guess what? I touched one of them. My mom and I went ahead of the tour guide and we came upon an interesting plant. I touched the plant because it looked nice and smooth like velvet. When the tour guide and group caught up to us he was telling all of us that there were poisonous plants in the rainforest, and then he pointed to the plant that I had just touched and said, "If you touch this plant the poison will get on you in about five seconds and will make you itch." Did I start to worry! I started getting really nervous and for the rest of the walk through the rainforest I kept on checking my finger and hand for a rash. Luckily nothing happened, but I think I made myself feel like my hands were itchy. If anything had happened to me the tour probably would have ended right then and there.

Costa Rica was like paradise because it was hot and there are so many exotic animals there that I have never seen before except in books or on the television. Costa Rica is very different than Michigan. Michigan has four different seasons and Costa Rica's temperature stays pretty constant throughout the year. Michigan doesn't have the exotic animals like Costa Rica. Also Michigan doesn't have the lush plants like Costa Rica.

The cruise was really fun, especially the rainforest. I hope we can go again and stay longer and maybe see different animals next time. I think I am very fortunate to have seen an actual rainforest. Who knows? Maybe when I'm older there may not be any rainforests left.

Throwaway Baby

*A woman opens her door one morning to a most unusual event. **THROWAWAY BABY**, by **Erin Freeman**, is based on the true story of how two lives came together unexpectedly, to the good fortune of both.*

One day as usual, Quinn, a 44-year-old sharecropper in Ethel, Louisiana, went out to the fields to pick the sugar canes, just as she had done when she was younger. She was thinking of her wish. Ever since she was 21, she wanted a child of her own. She didn't want just any child; she had her hopes of having a baby girl.

As Quinn walked out of the cabin, she almost stepped on a baby. The baby started to cry. Quinn brought back her foot with surprise and said "Oh-my G-God-d." The single, instant mother sniffed the baby's diaper to see if the diaper stunk.

Soon after she cuddled the baby, she saw some writing that she couldn't read, because she had never learned to read or write. She went to the Stevensons' home. Mr. Stevenson was Quinn's old, used-to-be, nice, non-whipping plantation master.

Anyway, Quinn walked, skipped, ran, walked, skipped, ran, and started to walk again. She got to the Stevensons' home, and as Quinn went by the garden she saw Mrs. Stevenson in the garden. Quinn called, "Emily Stevenson, I have something to tell ya."

Mrs. Emily Stevenson looked up, then she got up and dusted the lower part of her dress. She said, "Oh! Quinn, I didn't see ya. What is this news y'all have to tell me? I'm all ears!"

"Well, first, Mr. Robert Stevenson needs to be out here so I don't have to say the news twice," said Quinn.

"Okay," said Emily, "I'm going to get Robert. Do come in. The door should be unlocked, Quinn."

"Okay," said Quinn as she opened the door so she could go in and sit down. "I'll be on the steps." While Emily was talking, the baby had fallen asleep.

Quinn started thinking about what to name the baby girl. Quinn started with names like Emily, after her good friend; Roberta, after another good friend; and Ashley. Then she thought of Isabelle. After she thought of that name she said, "Perfect. That should be my daughter's name."

When Robert got downstairs, he said, "What is this news that Emily is telling me about, and what is that basket?"

Quinn said, "I was just about to tell you about this basket. This morning as I was going to the fields, I saw a baby on my porch. Some woman has left me this baby and a note," Quinn said. "Of course, I can't read it, so can you please read it for me?" During Quinn's early days of being a slave, she was not taught to read.

Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson began reading the note. It said:

Dear Sir or Madam,

*I left you my baby because my husband got sick
and I can no longer care for her. So, here is two
dollars that would help with her needs. Thank
you very much I really appreciate this.*

*Thank you,
Macy Gray*

Mrs. Stevenson handed the letter back to Quinn. Quinn thought to herself, "Who would throw away a baby?" Back in those days after slavery, there was very little money, and when slave children were abandoned, they were called throwaway babies.

Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson have eight-year-old twins. Amy and Annie heard the conversation, and they jumped out from behind the door and frightened their mother almost to death.

Their mother told her children to go practice their handwriting. Amy and Annie wouldn't budge until they saw the baby. They agreed that the baby was cute.

Emily told Quinn that she should give her daughter a birth date, but Quinn already had one in mind: November 28, 1866. Since the date was July 29, 1867, her baby daughter was seven months old.

Quinn went straight to the fields to pick cotton until five in the evening, because that was the end of the day for her. Quinn left Isabelle at the plantation nursery while she was working the field. There were many other sharecroppers' children there also.

When Isabelle became one year old, Quinn gave her the best gift of all, and it became Isabelle's favorite. It was an Ida beanie doll. Quinn actually made the doll herself, and Isabelle would take her doll everywhere she went. That birthday, she got in the wagon with Quinn and the Stevensons, and they went shopping at the marketplace. Then they went to a restaurant. Mr. Stevenson saw a pet store where he saw a very beautiful dog about to have puppies. Mr. Stevenson went in and purchased the dog, and named her Cuddles. He also bought Cuddles a collar, dog food, dog bed, and a dog dish. Since Cuddles was about to have puppies, he bought liquid food for the puppies.

Mr. Stevenson said, "Oh my! It looks like Cuddles has gotten fatter since she left the pet store. I'll be right back!"

"Where are you going, Daddy?" said Annie curiously.

He said, "Sweetheart, I'm going to the barn to get a box. Why do you want to know?" said Mr. Stevens.

"Oh, just wondering. Why does Cuddles need a box?" said Annie. Her dad went on to explain that when she had her puppies, they would not be able to go all over the farm and get stepped on.

The very next day Cuddles had her puppies, and they were so cute. Amy and Annie asked sleepily, "Why do the puppies look so small, Daddy, and have their eyes and ears closed?"

"Well, when they are first born they look funny, but remember they are still young and were just born. Another thing to remember is they don't have the ability to get around until they are older," said Mr. Stevenson.

"It's the same with you girls not being able to walk as babies until you were older," said Mrs. Stevenson.

Isabelle went to school like any other child. The years went by, and when Isabelle was sixteen years of age, she began teaching another younger group of kids on the plantation. Isabelle dreamed of becoming a teacher someday, and even opening up her own school.

Early one morning after breakfast, before Isabelle set out to do her daily chores, a woman showed up on the plantation. She was looking for the daughter she abandoned almost sixteen years before. After many heartbreakin years, Isabelle's real mother came back to claim her.

Her real mother's name was Macy Gray, and she was only seventeen when Isabelle was born. During those days, it was hard for a single woman to make it alone. After Isabelle's father died of yellow fever, her mother could no longer afford to take care of her daughter. Macy went to the state of Indiana to be a washerwoman. Macy washed clothes for people. Macy only earned 50 cents a week, so she barely had any money to care for herself.

Macy went back to the exact cabin where she left her daughter. Then Quinn, Macy, and Isabelle sat out on that very same porch where Isabelle was left, and talked about the past years.

Isabelle went with her mother, Macy Gray, back to Gary, Indiana. As time went by, Isabelle finished high school and college. She got married and had two beautiful girls. They came back to the old plantation to visit Quinn for many years.

SUPER SLEUTHS

The Attic Door Mystery

Sometimes your imagination can make you afraid. In THE ATTIC DOOR MYSTERY by Troyia Rambo, two children discover what's in the attic.

There once lived a girl named Sarina and her brother whose name was James. Life was all good until their dad got a stupid job transfer to the city of Chicago.

Sarina and her brother James were so disappointed. They had never moved before, so it was a new experience for them. It was hard to say goodbye to their good friends and neighbors.

After two weeks, when they got settled into their new home, they began to like it. But then when nighttime came, they got frightened. They would both wake up in the middle of the night because they would hear noises at night, like banging and footsteps every night, like someone was breaking in.

They would tell their parents, but their parents thought they were foolish. Sarina and James were curious about what it was, but they were too scared to find out.

One night it was cold and stormy, and Sarina woke with her heart racing from the loud thunders. She got up and grabbed her flashlight and ran to her brother's room. "Wake up!" she said to her brother.

"What do you want?"

"Just wake up!" she said. Then he got up.

All of a sudden they heard a loud noise like a door was slammed. "What was that?" Sarina said.

"I don't know!" said James.

"Come on!" said Sarina.

"I'm not going anywhere!" said James.

"Let's go find out so we won't have to worry about it anymore!"

"Fine!" said James.

Sarina went to her room and grabbed a bat. She went back to her brother's room and said, "Let's go."

They quietly tiptoed down the stairs, trying to be as quiet as possible. Sarina turned on her flashlight and looked around. They toured the whole house and found nothing. But there was one door left, and it was the attic door.

"I dare you to go first!" Sarina said to her brother.

"No, you go first!" he said.

"Fine!" she said.

James flashed the light towards the attic door and Sarina walked slowly up the stairs toward it. She turned the knob and opened the door. It squeaked as she opened the door. Then James looked around the room with the flashlight.

All it was were shutters banging against the wall, and a rocking chair rocking back and fourth. Then they saw a big chest full of pictures that someone left behind.

"I told you it was nothing!" said James.

"Yeah, right?"

They lived happily ever after and they never had to worry about the strange noises again.

The Case of the Stolen Vase

A museum theft is police business. Still, a group of teens wants to help out in THE CASE OF THE STOLEN VASE by Kristen A. Kirkland.

In an exciting town in California, there lived four teenaged best friends. They were Brian, who was fourteen years old and a great athlete, Eric, who was also fourteen and loved to swim, Brittany, who was fifteen years old and loved to dance, and Erica, who was fourteen and very talented in art. These teens had completed their school year and finally were on their summer vacation from Crenshaw High School!

When they got out of school, they rushed right over to Brian's house to plan what they were going to do for their summer vacation. After brainstorming for hours, they came up with a few ideas that had to do with some of the things that they loved to do best. These ideas were to go to the movies, the mall, the beach, and the largest museum in California.

One day while they were at the museum, an announcement came over the loudspeakers stating that the most valuable vase in the museum had been stolen. Everyone rushed out of the museum like wild animals and the teens followed them. They went straight to the public library to talk about what had happened that day. In the library, they thought of a great idea to help find out who committed the crime.

First, they needed to go back to the museum and find out things about the vase, such as how it looked, where it was at the time, and other things they needed to know about it. After they

had the information they needed, they headed back to Brian's home. By the time they arrived, they realized that the vase at the time was in a room that only employees could enter or exit. The thief had to be one of the employees.

The next day, they went back to the museum to interview the employees. It seemed that all of them were innocent. The teens had to think of what to do next.

As time passed, they remembered that they had forgotten to interview the guards. That same day, they went back to the museum and interviewed them. They thought that some of the statements that the guards made were hard to believe. The guards stated that the vase was located in a different part of the room than the part that the employees said it was. They also said that the alarm was off when it actually wasn't. While the teens were giving the guards the interview, one of the guards appeared to be nervous. At that point, the teens went to the police station so the officers could give the guards a second interview.

The police officers went back to the museum and found the guards. They gave them their interviews, and the stories they told the officers were different than what they told the teens.

Afterwards, the police officers took fingerprints of the room that it happened in and of the suspects. The only prints that appeared happened to belong to the guards. It turned out that the guards were the criminals after all. They were taken to jail after being found guilty and the teens lived a happy life solving more crimes!

Déjà Vu Revisited

A mysterious person is on a murdering streak, but who? Leave it to Dick Basey to figure out the mystery in DÉJÀ VU REVISITED, by David E. Guz.

Over time, people can go insane. It doesn't always happen, but with stressful jobs, fame, and rejection stressing a person out, anything can happen.

Lex Zippet was a multi-millionaire movie star who rolled in fame and fortune. Lex was like Jackie Chan to Bruce Lee. He was new, hip, and in his prime.

Then times changed. As time went by, newer stars were hired, but not Lex. It was starting to go from Jackie Chan to Jet Le, and Lex wasn't happy about that. He began to think weird thoughts. He was mixing up his movie plots with reality.

One of his most popular movies was about a hairy guy who was paid one million dollars to kill as many people as he could in one month. This gave Lex a great idea. He wanted revenge.

He called up the guy who played the hairy killer in his movie. They used to be friends on the movie set. The guy was very hairy in real life and was also having a hard time finding a job, since there were not a lot of good roles for hairy actors. He needed money badly. It was perfect! Lex hired his old buddy to kill as many people as possible in one month. If he killed two hundred people, he would pay "Hairy" one million dollars.

Since they both wanted to get back at everyone in the movie business that stopped hiring them, they decided to start there.

* * *

Dick Basey sighed as he waited for the results of an autopsy. He wondered why they performed an autopsy when everyone already knew the serial killer had claimed another victim. He also wondered if all detectives were put under this much pressure on the job. So far, Dick Basey regretted that he had become a detective. Since he started on this case one week ago, he had stumbled upon 32 corpses. "Just my luck," he thought, "I haven't had a single day where I could relax on the job."

Just then, a man in a white coat tossed him the autopsy results. Dick read, "Blood drained, mutilations to face makes victim unidentifiable, and several vital organs missing." The same results as the other 32 bodies. The only piece of evidence pointing to the killer is hair; every single corpse was covered in hair. Also, all of the killings had been within the boundaries of Los Angeles, the movie capital of the world.

As Dick read the results over again, he remembered a movie he saw a couple of years ago about a psycho that was hired to kill people by a wealthy mad man. In the movie, the killer had drained the victim's blood, made mutilations to the face, and cut out a few organs. Dick remembered that the killer in the movie was a very hairy chap; he'd actually made a joke about how hairy the guy was when he saw the movie. Then it hit him: someone was taking the plot from that movie and turning it into reality. But who and why?

* * *

Lex sat in his room and read a news article that was about all of the murders. Lex smiled a sick smile and laughed hysterically. "I'm getting my revenge!" he cried.

* * *

Meanwhile, at the police station, Dick was trying to figure out what all of the evidence meant. All of the evidence he had collected made him come down to many possibilities. First, he tried to recall the cast of the people in *What's Up with Hairy?*

Second, he tried to remember what the cast looked like, particularly if any were hairy. He thought that the person who played the psycho murderer could be the real killer. He remembered that the psycho in the movie was very hairy and that he left hair wherever he went. In real life the corpses were covered in hair. He knew he had to buy that movie and see who played the psycho in the credits at the end, because the only person he could remember from the movie was the star, Lex Zippet.

Dick started to make a suspect list: Lex Zippet, "Hairy," and Wolfgang Muck, a close friend of Lex Zippet who cooked fabulous meals for Lex. Wolfgang had been connected to the killings when many of the murders happened at several of his restaurants. He also overheard angry conversations about getting revenge on movie executives. Dick wanted to question Wolfgang about the killings and Lex. Dick called Wolfgang up and said to meet at Barney's Café at 6:00 P.M. on Tuesday.

* * *

On Tuesday, Dick sat at the café waiting for Wolfgang. It was 6:25 and Dick didn't know where Wolfgang could be. Just then, a police officer called on his walkie-talkie and said that another killing had happened. They could identify this one, though. It was Wolfgang Muck. Dick figured he must have known something about the killings because he was killed before he could give any information. Now he had to find someone else who may have had the same information as Wolfgang.

The next day, Dick was looking through his records when the phone rang. Dick picked it up and the person on the other line said, "Star Theater, today, 1:00 P.M." Then the person hung up. Dick didn't know what the whole call was about, but he had a gut feeling he had to go.

The next hour Dick was at the entrance of the Star Theater. It was 12:59 P.M. and he prepared what he was going to say. Right when the clock read 1:00 he saw the most beautiful woman he had

ever seen walk over to him. "My name is Martha Muck, Wolfgang's widow."

"Okay, Martha, why do you want me to come here?"

"I want to help you catch the evil person who killed my husband. I don't have very much information that can help, but I'd like to do something useful."

"Martha, you know that this is very dangerous, and I would not like you in danger."

"I'll just help you research, is that okay? We can meet at Schmagos?"

"Okay, Schmagos sounds fantastic. I love their pineapple pizza. Let's meet tonight at 8:00."

"See you there!" cried Martha.

* * *

Later that night, Dick and Martha were eating together at Schmagos. "Martha, I would like you to help me make a plan to frame and catch the hairy murderer," said Dick.

"Me?" Martha replied.

"Yes, you."

"How about we try to locate 'Hairy's' house, question him, and promise a hair removal treatment?" said Martha.

"Brilliant!" cried Dick.

For the next few days, Dick and Martha searched the Internet to find clues of Hairy's possible whereabouts. They were about to give up when Dick found an ad that was for monster movie monsters. On the ad was a picture. Dick squinted at the picture and realized that it was Hairy!

"Martha," Dick cried, "I found him!"

Martha and Dick celebrated for a while, but then Dick decided he had better get moving. He told Martha to go back home, and wait until she heard from him. It would be much too dangerous to have her there if they were to confront Hairy in person.

* * *

The address led him to an old abandoned building that looked like it was too weak to stand up. Dick started doubting that Hairy was even in there, but he went in anyway. The inside of the house was worse than he thought. There were bloodstains all over the walls, and a skull was sitting on the floor as if it had been thrown. Dick was very scared, and swore as he stepped over the cobwebs. He found a door and decided to open it instead of run away. Inside he saw a man that was way too hairy by human standards.

Dick had to think fast about how he would handle this situation. He decided to flatter the has-been movie star. He asked him if he was the actor in his favorite movie, *What's Up with Hairy?* When the man nodded, Dick asked him for an autograph. As he was handing him the pen, which doubled as a syringe, he "accidentally" poked him and injected a truth serum into the crazy, hairy man's arm before he even knew it. After a few seconds, Dick started to question him.

"Hello," said Dick, "I would like to ask you a few questions." The man didn't answer. "Are you killing people?" asked Dick.

"Why should I tell you?" asked the man.

"In a few minutes, you will want to tell me everything," replied Dick. Dick waited for a while and then continued with his questioning. "Were you involved in the murders of all of those movie executives?"

"Hairy" nodded sadly.

"Why did you kill all those people?" Dick continued.

"It's a long story," Hairy said.

"Did you work alone or did you have a partner?"

Hairy didn't answer.

"Answer now!" Dick ordered.

Hairy looked scared and very sad. He finally started to talk. "It was Lex Zippet who put me up to it. He told me how it was all the movie executives' fault that I can't find work anymore. No one wants to be seen with me. I have no friends or money, and Lex promised me that things would get better if I did what he asked. He was my only friend and I would do anything for him."

* * *

Dick took his new evidence to court to put Lex Zippet in prison. After many hours of court, it was found that Lex had given a strong hypnotic potion to Hairy which made him follow Lex's sick demands. The court declared Lex guilty of murder. Lex Zippet would spend the rest of his years in the rubber room.

"Hairy" got a lot of psychological counseling as well as a state-of-the-art hair removal treatment. He became a new man. He served a minimum sentence in prison and then wrote a book about his life called *What Was Up with Hairy?* It became a bestseller. He also started counseling kids about not fitting in and how to cope. He used himself as the bad example of what they shouldn't do.

After winning his case, Dick got promoted to chief detective and won the famed best cop coffee mug. Whenever Dick drinks from that mug, the coffee always tastes better because he earned it.

Martha Muck took over all of the restaurants that Wolfgang had owned before and became a millionaire. The President of the United States recognized Martha's great cooking and hired her as his personal chef and later married her.

Lex Zippet stayed in the rubber room for the rest of his life and always came up with plans that would ruin Dick's life. But he couldn't use them because he just couldn't get out of that rubber room.

The Evil Aunt

Do we always know others as well as we think? In THE EVIL AUNT by Ragen Wingate, a man finds out the truth about his wife in a tragic manner.

There once lived a man named Alan. He was nice, sweet, and big-hearted. He would do anything for you to make you feel comfortable. Children always had fun with him. That is, until his evil wife killed him.

My name is Michelle, and Alan was my uncle. First, let me tell you about his wife, Evelyn.

Most people thought she was strange and dark. She had such a mean, hateful, selfish spirit, one that was really evil. She was never happy, and no matter what people did, they couldn't please her. She had no friends and most people thought she was a witch and practiced witchcraft. It did seem it existed in her.

It all started one day when Uncle Alan got sick. I thought he would be better in a week, but he wasn't. It had been five weeks and he was still sick. A week later I found out he had a brain tumor. I also found out the tumor was cancerous.

He could no longer take care of himself. He was totally dependent on his evil wife Evelyn to take care of him. Let me tell you something, it was not a pretty sight.

When Uncle Alan got sick, Evelyn thought it was the perfect time to be evil. First, she didn't give him food or water.

Evelyn thought he was going to be dead in a week. But his family came from out of town. They stayed at a hotel because they didn't like Evelyn or her family. That happened when Uncle Alan's father got a job that paid more money. Two people wanted

that job, and Evelyn's father was the second person. When Alan's dad got the job, Evelyn's father didn't like Alan's dad.

When the family got to Uncle Alan's, they started pouring water down him and making healthy foods for him. He was doing a lot better, so his family left him to go home. But once they left he became sick again.

His mother tried to come in but Evelyn had a plan. She invited her family into town and had them stay at her house so it would be too busy for his mother to come in. Uncle Alan didn't get food or water for three weeks. Evelyn's family was on her side, the side that wanted Uncle Alan dead.

Uncle Alan died a day later. His family was so disappointed and knew that Evelyn wanted to kill him because he had insurance for two million dollars on his life. Evelyn was money hungry. Do you know the saying that money can do crazy things to you? That's true with Evelyn.

Then Uncle Alan's family had an autopsy performed and found out that Evelyn wasn't feeding Alan or giving him water. Evelyn went to jail and Alan's mother got the money instead.

The Mystery in the History Class

Some students actually like their teachers. When danger threatens their favorite instructor, four kids team up to save him in THE MYSTERY IN THE HISTORY CLASS by Adam Bodary.

Yesterday, Bobby Gallagher kicked me in the shin. The day before yesterday he kicked me in the other shin. Bobby has been bullying me around since second grade. I've gotten used to him, but I can't ever forget he's around, or my shins start looking like eggplant.

I'm Kate Jones. Along with Bobby Gallagher, I'm in the eighth grade at Shire Junior High School. My two best friends are Alex Robinson and Craig Fortson. Like most eighth-graders, we think school is bogus. Except for our fourth hour class, history.

"Man! I thought I'd never make it!" Craig said. He collapsed into the seat beside me. "First health, then social studies, then math! I've gotta redo my schedule."

"Yeah, well, if you weren't such a brain you could have a schedule like mine!" Alex slammed his books down on his desk. "Gym, art, then music. What could be better?"

"It'd be better if you guys would just shut up for a while!" I said. "Let's just lie back and relax."

"But where's Mr. Allison?" Craig asked. We looked around. Our history teacher, Mr. Allison, was late.

Mr. Allison is the greatest, most spectacular history teacher you will ever find. He will play games when we're supposed to be taking a test. He lets us talk in class. He even goes on field trips with us when no one else in the school will go.

He used to be a banker, but he quit because he thought it was boring. So now he teaches eighth-grade history. We are definitely not boring. But for some reason he wasn't in class.

"Where is he?" whispered Craig.

"Maybe he got called to Mr. Warden's office," Alex said.

"Just because you and the Principal are best buddies doesn't mean Mr. Allison is down there," Craig said.

"Be quiet, you guys! Or we'll all be visiting the Warden!" I said. Just then someone walked into the classroom.

"I'm Mr. Junk," he said. "I'll be your substitute for a while. Mr. Allison has had--an accident."

Craig and Alex and I all looked at each other. "An accident?" we cried out. "What happened?" I asked.

Mr. Junk looked at me in kind of a funny way. "Mr. Allison has broken his leg. He's scheduled for surgery this afternoon." Craig and Alex and I all looked at each other again. Weird.

So history class wasn't much fun that day. Mr. Junk just made us read stuff out of our book. He didn't let us talk or do our regular games or anything. He just stood at the front of the class looking a lot like his name. He needed a shave and a haircut, and when he walked past us down the aisle, it smelled like he needed some deodorant, too.

After class, Craig and Alex and I went to lunch. "We gotta go visit Mr. Allison!" Alex said.

"Yeah. But which hospital is he in?" Craig asked. "There are three in town."

"Get out your quarters, boys," I said. We headed for the pay phone near the office.

"We'd better be careful, or we might get busted," Alex said.

"No risk is too great for Mr. Allison," Craig replied.

I looked up the phone number of St. James hospital, dropped two quarters into the phone and started dialing. Just then, Bobby Gallagher walked up and kicked me in the left shin.

"OW!" I dropped the phone, grabbed my leg and started hopping up and down. "Why do you *always* have to do that?"

Bobby grinned. "Just because you let me," he said. "Who ya callin'?"

"Mr. Allison broke his leg!" Alex said. "We're trying to find out what hospital he's in so we can ditch this afternoon and go visit him."

"That's funny," Bobby said. "I saw him come out of his house this morning on my way to school. He looked okay to me."

Craig and I looked at each other. "Something isn't quite right," I said.

"Let's go check his house," Craig said.

"We can't!" Alex said. "We still have four classes to go today. And the Warden says if he catches me ditching one more time, I'll spend the rest of the year in detention!"

"Alex, think logically," I said. "Do you want to help Mr. Allison? He could be in unimaginable trouble."

Alex put a finger beside his nose. "He is more important than if I get detention. Hey, maybe if I help him, he'll get me off the hook."

When we got to Mr. Allison's house, there was a strange truck in the driveway.

"Bobby, was that there this morning?" I asked.

"No," he said. We all walked up the driveway toward the truck.

"Who do you think this belongs to?" Craig asked. We dropped down to our knees and looked underneath the truck.

Alex looked at the tailgate. "It says F - O - R - D. It belongs to some guy named Ford!"

Bobby whacked him with his backpack. "That's Ford Motor Company, you dufus!" He looked at the truck. "What a piece of junk!"

Craig and I looked at each other. "Mr. Junk!"

"We've gotta go to the police," Craig said.

"You're gonna get me thrown in detention!" Alex said. "We're supposed to be in school, remember?"

Bobby whacked Alex with his backpack again. "We don't even know if Mr. Allison is here."

I kept a careful eye on Bobby as I tried to think. "Come on, you guys, we have to get a closer look."

We left our backpacks by the truck and walked around to the back of the house. It was like walking into a flower show. There were roses, daisies, tulips and bunches of others I couldn't even name. It was pretty clear what Mr. Allison did with his spare time.

Bobby pointed to the back of the house. "Look, there are the basement windows," he said.

We crept forward to take a peek, but before we could get a good look we heard an awful sound – SMACK!! – and a groan. I stretched to see through the window.

"I need the codes to your bank's financial records, Mr. Allison." It was Mr. Junk. He had Mr. Allison tied to a chair next to a desk holding a laptop computer. The computer was running and a phone line was plugged into it. Mr. Allison had bruises all over his face. In fact, it looked a lot like my shins after not looking out for Bobby for a while. While we were watching, Mr. Junk whacked Mr. Allison again.

SMACK! Mr. Allison groaned again. There was a trickle of blood running from his nose. He looked up at Mr. Junk. "I told you. They change them every month. And you know I don't work there any more."

"But you must know how to get into the computer system," Mr. Junk said. "If you can do that, I have a special little program here that'll give me the right codes."

Just then Alex sneezed. AAAHHCHOO! Worse, he blew a loogie right onto the basement window. Even worse, Mr. Junk looked up and saw us looking in.

We scrambled up and ran back around to the front of the house. But Mr. Junk had a direct path from the basement, up the stairs and out the front door. We had just rounded the side of the house when he came through the front door.

"You kids! Stop!" he hollered. Of course we weren't likely to do that. After all, we were ditching school. We headed for the truck to get our backpacks. Mr. Junk saw what we were doing and beat us to them.

"All right. I've got you now," he snarled. Alex and Craig and I were very frightened. We stopped and ran to the other side of the truck so Mr. Junk couldn't get at us easily.

"You can't get away from me that easily, you little twerps," Mr. Junk said. He started around the back of the truck to get us. Just then, by the tailgate that identified the truck as belonging to Mr. Ford, Bobby popped up and kicked Mr. Junk right in the shin.

I'd never been so glad to see Bobby in my life. Mr. Junk grabbed his leg and started hopping up and down. After about the third hop, Bobby cracked him on the head with a rock that he'd grabbed out of one of Mr. Allison's flowerbeds.

Mr. Junk dropped to the driveway, unconscious. We ran in and freed Mr. Allison, who then called the police.

"Are you all right Mr. Allison?" I asked.

"I am now, Kate," he said. "I can't imagine what brought you all over here. Shouldn't you be in school?"

"It wasn't my ideal!" Alex said. "They made me come! Please don't tell the Warden! He's gonna put me in detention for the rest of the year!"

"Okay, Alex." Mr. Allison smiled. We walked out the front door to wait for the police. But when we looked at the driveway, we saw that Mr. Junk was gone! We ran to the truck to see where he could have gone.

Bobby looked around. "He was right here! I got him with a real good shot and he went out like a light."

Then, we heard a rustle from the bushes on the other side of the driveway and there he was. Before we could move, he had grabbed Alex and was moving to the driver's door of the truck.

"Nobody follows us," he said. "Otherwise, this kid is gonna end up eating through his ear holes."

We all started backing slowly away. Mr. Allison spoke up. "The police are on their way, Junk," he said. "You won't get far."

"Oh yeah?" retorted Mr. Junk. "I'll get just as far as this kid takes me." And he yanked Alex toward the truck.

Just then, Alex did something funny with his hands and all of a sudden Mr. Junk doubled over and yelled. Then, Alex twisted Mr. Junk's arm up behind him and swept his legs out from under him with a quick kick to the ankle. Mr. Junk went down in a heap. He tried to get up and run, but Alex slammed the door of the truck on his head and knocked him cold. Again.

We looked at each other in amazement. “Alex,” I said, “where did you learn to do that?”

“My mom’s been making me take karate lessons for years now.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Craig asked.

“You guys never asked. Plus, I didn’t want Bobby thinking I was a tough guy. It could have been trouble for my shins.” Just then the police arrived and took Mr. Junk away.

When we got back to school the next day the story was all over. We didn’t get in trouble for ditching. And the relationship between Bobby and me changed dramatically. Instead of being enemies, we were friends.

But the best thing was that Mr. Allison cancelled all our homework for the rest of the month. Even better than that, he thanked us for being such good friends.

The Mystery of Green Road

Appearances can be deceiving. Get all the facts before you make your judgments about who does what in THE MYSTERY OF GREEN ROAD, by Camilla Pezza.

It was a cold winter day with slush on the road and black clouds in the sky. It was the perfect day for another robbery to take place in the small town of Green Road.

Maggie was inside drinking hot chocolate, and her babysitter, Charles, was watching television, when Maggie heard a knock at the door. It was a man in an outfit as black as the night sky and that shimmered in the light. Maggie didn't know who this man was, but she knew that he was up to no good. He looked scary and he had a pillowcase with him that looked full. Maggie also noticed Charles peeping through the stair rail bars as she slammed the door in the strange man's face and locked it. Then she went to tell Charles what she saw.

Charles, of course, didn't believe Maggie because she was only seven and he was fifteen. All he said was, "Maggie, it's just that overactive imagination of yours, and those detective books you have your parents read to you before bed." Maggie knew that Charles wasn't telling her something. Then Charles said, "I'll put in a movie for you so that you don't go getting into trouble. If you need anything, I'll be sleeping upstairs."

About halfway through the movie, Maggie heard a weird noise coming from the back door. As any curious seven-year-old would do, she ran to the back door. When she got there, she realized that her mother's good china was gone.

Maggie started wondering if there was a connection among Charles's not telling her something, the man at the front door, and her mother's china missing. She ran upstairs and yelled, "Charles, Charles!" at the top of her lungs.

Charles got up and said, "Maggie, what is it now?"

Maggie said, "Mom's good china is gone!"

The two of them ran down the stairs, but when they got to the lower level of the house, they both stopped dead in their tracks and said, "OH MY." All the valuables were gone--vases, pictures, and other things. Charles ran to the phone and called the police.

About five minutes later, they heard another knock at the door, but this time it was the police. Charles answered the door after looking through the peephole and said, "Come in, officers."

The policemen came in and said, "What happened right before the robbery?"

Maggie said, "First, there was a strange man at the door who was dressed in black and had a pillowcase that looked full."

The police said, "Which way did he go?" The policemen finally left.

Maggie said, "Charles, can we follow the policemen around and look for clues of our own?"

Charles said, "Maggie, are you out of your mind? We can't follow the police. What if the person who is behind all of the robberies is dangerous?"

"Well, then," Maggie said, "we will just have to get some of the old slingshots out of the garage, so that if the person decides to come after us we can shoot at him with the slingshot."

Charles finally told Maggie, "Yes, we can go, but only if you don't run off and you come when I say come."

Maggie agreed to Charles's rules and then said, "Well? What are you waiting for? Let's go!"

The two of them went looking for the robber. They went up and down each street many times. Finally Charles said, "Maggie, he is probably out of town by now," but then Maggie heard a bush rattle, so they ran over to it. When they got there they saw a trap door.

Maggie opened it and jumped into the hole. When they got down there they saw everything that had been stolen. They took the most valuable things that were Maggie's and ran with them, but when they went to get out of the hole, there was a tall man standing right in front of the door, dressed in black. He said, "Hey, you nosey kids, what are you doing with that stuff?"

Maggie and Charles dropped the stuff that they were holding and ran so fast that the man couldn't even see them. Then, the man whistled and four other men came running out.

Maggie realized that she still had the slingshots in her pocket and threw one to Charles. The two of them started shooting at the men with little hair beads, but when Maggie realized that the hair beads and slingshots weren't working, she yelled, "Charles, pick up some rocks and shoot them at the bad guys."

Finally, after about an hour of running around in circles, Maggie had shot all the men down. Maggie said, "I'm going to see who this is." When she pulled the mask off she saw her neighbor, Mr. Salmon.

When Maggie and Charles returned home, they called the police. When the police arrived, Maggie said, "Follow me. I'll show you where they are." The police officers followed Maggie and Charles to the trap door. They opened the door and went down. When they got down there they saw Mr. Salmon lying on the ground.

"Kids, why did you shoot these police officers?"

Maggie said, "Mr. Salmon isn't a police officer. He's my neighbor who sits around and plays chess all day."

One of the police officers said, "Mr. Salmon isn't just a police officer. He's an F.B.I. agent. He's been trying to catch Charles, your babysitter, all this time."

Maggie said, "Well, Mr. Salmon, I'm sorry I shot you and accused you of steeling." Then Maggie asked, "So why did you have Mr. Salmon pose as one of the robbers?"

One of the officers answered, "We had Mr. Salmon pose as one of the robbers so Charles would think that he was not suspected. When you answered the door, Charles was robbing the house and we needed proof of that, so we had Mr. Salmon

pretend to be one of Charles's friends who was helping with the robbery. Now the only reason Charles agreed to your proposition is because he didn't want look suspicious to you.

"Now for the good part. The way Charles got all the things out of your house is by agreeing to go along with your plan to try and catch the bad guys. He wanted to put the things he had stolen from your house into his hideout."

Another officer said, "Well, we need to go and find him so he doesn't steal anything else." The officers and Maggie went looking for Charles. Finally about halfway around the block, they saw Charles. After about five minutes of running they caught him and arrested him.

The police officers decided to let Maggie stay home alone because they didn't want Maggie's parents to wonder why a policeman was at their house. They didn't want to have this case all over the television and the radios, because they knew that if there was a police officer there, the parents would ask a lot of questions that they didn't want to answer. Maggie went home and, when she got there, all of the stuff was back in its place. She saw a note on the floor that said, "Maggie, thanks for all the help. We couldn't have done it without you!" It was signed "Mr. Salmon."

Finally, Maggie's parents came home and said, "Maggie, how was your day? Will we be seeing Charles again?"

Maggie said, "My day was fun and exciting, and I don't think Charles will be seeing much of anyone for a long time!" So now the mystery of Green Road is over and all is well.

The Mystery of Maurice Appaco

A day at the ballpark soon becomes a manhunt for a criminal with an odd habit. In THE MYSTERY OF MAURICE APPACO by Maggie Osorio, three girls try to put a felon back where he belongs.

“Okay, here we go. We’ve got a real pressure cooker going here: two down, nobody on, no score, bottom of the ninth, there’s the windup, and there it is--a line shot up the middle. Look at him go. This boy can really fly! He’s rounding first and really turning it on. He’s gonna try for second. Here comes the throw. Boy, what a throw!”

It was a bright and sunny day at Braves Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia. Jackie, Kat, and Cindy were part of the huge crowd that filled the stadium.

Jackie is a medium-height girl with semi-long, dark brown hair. She also has chocolate brown eyes and a bit of a lisp. Kat has short blond hair, is tall, and has hazel eyes that glow in the sun. Cindy also has short blond hair, only she has blue eyes and glasses. Jackie and Kat were eleven, and Cindy was twelve.

“Oh, no,” the announcer said, “Chipper Jones has sprained his ankle sliding home. Though it seems the base was doing the sliding! We’d better get our handyman to come and fix this jinxed base.”

Within seconds, out from the bleachers walked a fat man with black hair and a mustache to match.

With one look, Jackie saw that he looked too familiar. His haunting eyes were just too much. Yes, she had seen him somewhere.

While walking out of the baseball stadium to Cindy's house for a snack, Jackie told the others her not-too-logical conclusion. "I don't know, guys, but Maurice Appaco seems really familiar."

"He's just a handyman," Kat stated. "Hurry or we're going to miss the cross light. And anyway, it's not logical. Where would you have seen him?"

"Don't be mean to Jackie, Kat. I think that her explanation is a very good one. Maybe you saw him in a newspaper. Let's see...Oh wait, I know. Your dad. He's the key source. He's a policeman. Maybe Maurice is in the police records. At my house after the snacks, we can look in old newspapers and on the Internet."

"Can we go? I'm getting hungry." Kat said,

Back at Cindy's house after snacks, the three girls went to the basement, and started finding information on Maurice.

Jackie decided to call her dad. "Hey, Dad," Jackie said, "I've got a case for you. Please look in your records under 'Appaco, Maurice.'" After five minutes, Jackie's dad came back with something.

"Okay, let's see what we've got here... Maurice Appaco, convicted of putting tiny wheels under the home plate in baseball to injure players. He is originally from southern California, but got transferred to Braves Stadium to be a handyman after three years of jail time. Pretty stupid, don't ya' think? I mean, what if he does the same thing as before?"

"Thanks, Dad," Jackie said as she hung up the phone. "I remember seeing him in a newspaper once. Bye."

OH, NO. THE BRAVES ARE PLAYING THE YANKEES TOMORROW!

The three girls decided to go to Braves Stadium to find Maurice and put him back where he belonged... IN JAIL.

Soon enough, by a storage closet, the girls found a checklist. It said:

- ~ Put wheels on base
- ~ Get disguise
- ~ Leave the country

The three girls looked up in time to see Maurice putting tiny wheels on the base missing from the field. Jackie ran to the nearest payphone to call her dad. "Dad, it's Jackie. Please come down to the front entrance of the stadium as soon as I'm done talking. The case is on Maurice Appaco. I think you will find it very interesting. Please, please, please, please?"

"Wooooooooooooo, slow down. I'll come as soon as I can. Bye," her dad said as he hopped into the police car.

It was a good thing, too. Maurice was leaving to get a disguise when in stepped Jackie's dad.

"Can you ever keep yourself out of trouble? I'm taking that as a no," Jeff said as he escorted Maurice out the door.

MAURICE APPACO WAS TAKEN TO JAIL WHERE HE COULD NOT "STEAL BASES" OR "SLIDE HOME" EVER AGAIN.

The Mystery of the Hypnotized Teachers

When every student in school starts receiving A+'s, it is clear that something is wrong. In THE MYSTERY OF THE HYPNOTIZED TEACHERS by Ashley Brown, a girl tries to find out why she is getting A+'s instead of the grades she has earned.

This story is about all of the students getting A+'s.

It all started on October 12, 2001. I was just coming from first hour when I heard lots of people saying, "Yeah!" I thought it was just something someone had said that made everyone happy. But the teachers looked liked there was something wrong with them.

I had two tests that day, one in sixth hour and one in seventh hour. I took both tests and felt confident about the first. The second one I wasn't very sure about it. After my seventh hour I didn't go home. I had to stay after school.

The next day came and I got my tests back. I was hoping I got an A on both. I got my test back in my sixth hour and I got an A+. I was so happy that I got that grade. In seventh hour, I got an A+, too. I was screaming down the hall, yelling, "Yeah!" I never even bothered to look at my tests to see what I got wrong because I knew that if I got an A+ there was nothing wrong with it.

It was three weeks later and I was on a roll with A+'s. I was wondering if I should stop studying, but if I did I might not get good grades. That day I had a pop quiz in one of the most boring classes of all, language arts. I never study in that class or pay attention because it's so boring. How can I pay attention when there is nothing to do? I was hoping to do well on that test

because if I didn't it would hurt my grade. The test, in one word, was "HARD." I hoped that I would get a good grade or I would fail language arts.

The day finally came when I got my L.A. test back. You would never believe this: I got an A+. "Whoa, back up. Did I just say I got an A+? Didn't I say this test was hard? I think I am some kind of genius or something."

As I walked to the office to get my medicine, I happened to have my L.A. test with me. I asked the secretary, "Why am I getting lots of A+'s on my tests?"

The secretary responded, "Well, do you study?"

"Yeah, but I got an A+ on my L.A. paper and I don't even pay attention in that class."

"You do know that the school's new policy is that everyone gets an A+ no matter what."

As I left the office to go home, I took a look at my first two tests from sixth and seventh hours. You would never guess what I saw. On the first test I got a five out of ten, so that means that I got a 50 percent. On the second test I got an eighty-two out of one hundred and that is like an 80 percent.

I knew there was something weird about the teachers, but I just couldn't put my finger on it. Maybe it is true the school did have a new policy. Since my mom was part of the Board of Education, I ask her if the was true and she said no.

She asked me who told me that. I couldn't tell her the secretary told me because she would get the whole Board of Education involved. Now I took matters into my own hands.

I asked one of the teachers if she was okay because she seemed a little tired. She said, "I am okay, but those CD's that man gave out made me kind of dizzy."

"What man?" I asked.

"The man in the yellow coat over there by the entrance of the school."

"Bye, see you later," I said.

That man looked kind of weird, too, but he was gone when I tried to talk to him. At lunch I asked another teacher if she got a CD also.

"Yes," she said. "Did you get one?"

"No."

"Well, all of the teachers got one."

"Thank you."

Now I was wondering if the CD that man gave the teachers had something to do with the A+'s all of the students were getting. On the 16th, I stayed after school. One of the teacher's rooms was open and the teacher wasn't in the room, so I went in and found the CD, then went to the media center. In the media center I started the CD.

It was some kind of hypnotizing program, and I didn't want to get hypnotized. So I looked at the table of contents. One of the programs was getting students to get all A+'s. Now I could see why the teachers wanted to go to that one because it would make checking papers even easier.

This would be fun. I could call myself an investigator of a mystery and call it "The Mystery of the Hypnotized Teachers." I was so happy that I could do this, because I could prove to myself that I was responsible. Then I got right to work.

I looked on the CD to see if there was something on becoming dehypnotized. I found something that said if you want to become dehypnotized, you must smell a blue violet. This sounded crazy, but if I wanted my teachers back to normal I had to do it.

As I gave the teachers the violets as gifts, I thought that it was fun getting A+'s, but they were for the wrong reasons. As they smelled the flowers, I was very happy.

The 18th was here and I never thought it would be coming. I had another test in sixth hour. I took it and felt confident about it. The whole day went well but the 19th was the day I was waiting for.

"It's here. It's finally here. The 19th is here." I ran to the bus and couldn't wait until sixth hour was here. Finally it was 1:24, sixth hour was beginning, and I got my test back. I got a B+.

I am very glad that my school is back to normal.

The Robbery on 58th Street

When a late night bank robbery baffles the police, help is literally just across the street. In THE ROBBERY ON 58th STREET by Matthew Chegash, teenagers Frank and Tony step up and decide to figure things out themselves.

“Frank, come here!” Tony Jones called from the window of their tenth-story apartment. Tony Jones was a fourteen-year-old, blond-haired kid. He lived with his mom and dad and his fifteen-year-old brother, Frank. Their dad was the manager of the 58th Street Bank across the street.

From the tone of Tony’s voice, Frank knew something was wrong. He was right. Across the street there were three police cars.

“Let’s go ask Mom if we can check it out!” Frank exclaimed. After their mom called Mr. Jones to make sure the crime scene was safe, the boys left for the bank.

At the bank there were about six police officers. The boys’ dad was sitting in a corner looking worried. “What’s wrong?” Frank asked.

“The bank was robbed last night, and there was no sign of a break-in. The thing I don’t understand, though, is why none of this was recorded on camera. All six of the cameras showed the bank had been empty all night.”

“Then how was the money stolen?”

“We don’t know that yet,” his dad replied.

“Tom,” the police chief called, “I have something I’d like to discuss with you.”

"Dad's in trouble," Tony said. "If they don't catch the criminals he'll lose his job.

"And we'll lose our apartment," added Frank. "Let's go check out the video."

The video showed that the bank was empty all night. No robbers, just a plain, empty bank. The robbers didn't stop the tape, either, because there were just a couple of short blips on the tape.

After the tape was over, Frank and Tony headed for the vault.

At the vault, Tony got out his notepad and began jotting down notes. *Fifty-number combination lock, door three inches thick, no fingerprints on vault....*

"What do you kids think you're doing?" a police officer said gruffly.

"We're just inspecting the vault for any clues."

"We've already inspected it. Now you kids get out of here, this is top secret police business."

"What a jerk!" said Frank. "It's not like we stole the money or anything. I guess we had better go home."

"Hey! What's for dinner tonight, Mom?" Tony asked as he strolled through the apartment door.

"Can't you ever get your mind off food, Tony? Anyway, we're having spaghetti. How did the investigation go?"

"It went pretty well. Frank and I are going to go play some football while we think about the robbery. We'll be back in an hour."

Meanwhile back at the police station, things were not going well.

"So the first thing we need to do is find the intent of the criminals," the police chief lectured. "Mr. Jones, can you think of anyone who would have a grudge against you?"

"I don't think so...no, I can't."

"No one at all?"

"Yes, sir, no one at all."

"Okay, this complicates things a bit. So far we have no . . . well, I shouldn't say that. Our only proof is this videotape which...shows the bank was empty all night. Does anyone have

any ideas on how the criminals conducted the robbery? Okay, then you're all dismissed for the day."

Later that night, Tony leaped out of bed to the sound of sirens blazing in his ears.

"Frank, get up! Get up!"

"What?" Frank said sleepily.

"There's been another robbery! It sounds like Zonder's Jewel Palace down on 57th street!

"Tony, go get the flashlight while I get dressed."

Meanwhile the police were already on the chase. "Look, Steve! There they are!"

"They're getting away, but we've got three patrol cars on their tail," said the police chief. "Radio the other cars to turn down the side streets and catch them at 53rd and James Street. Hopefully we'll be able to surround them."

Swerving left and right, the getaway car was moving fast, but the police were still hot on the trail. Suddenly, a patrol car launched out of the air and landed smack-dab right in front of the burglars. The getaway car quickly screeched to a halt. They were trapped.

"Put your hands up, men! You're under arrest!"

"First things first, hand over the jewels."

"What jewels?" asked one of the criminals.

"Nice try," said the chief. "You know what jewels, now just hand them over and no one will get hurt."

"Errrrrrrgh!" the criminals growled as they handed the jewels over.

"You can explain things when we get back to the station."

Frank and Tony were already waiting at the station. There were six criminals, one of whom looked vaguely familiar. Their names were Todd Ramshackle, Gordon Flint, John Cassedy, Xavier Hendrickson, Jeremiah Tappen, and Harry Bostwick.

"Who's Harry Bostwick?" Frank asked. "His name sounds familiar."

"He works at the bank," Tony answered. "Dad just hired him two months ago."

Then the police chief started asking the criminals some questions. After the interview was over everyone went home.

The next morning the police were back at the bank.

"I have a hunch," Frank told his brother, "that the group of criminals that were involved in that jewel heist are the same group of criminals that robbed the bank."

"Why?" Tony questioned.

"Because that guy that worked at the bank worked in the camera room, and he hasn't been around since the robbery."

"Oh!" said Tony. "So you think the guy switched the tape somehow."

"Well, we know the guy had a key," Frank pondered out loud, "but how could he get to the camera room and stop the tape without being seen?"

"Maybe he hid in there all night," replied Tony.

"I know!" said Frank. "He hid in the bathroom and stood on a toilet when the manager was closing up the bank. Then he slipped into the camera room. But how could they commit the robbery during a quarter-of-a-second tape blip?"

"I'll give it a thought tonight," said Tony.

"I've got it!" exclaimed Tony as he raced to the dinner table. "In that quarter of a second, the criminals put Polaroid pictures in front of the camera."

"Let's go tell the police!"

"Think they'll believe us?" asked Tony.

"It's worth a try."

Their dad was at the police station talking with some police officers.

"Dad! Dad!" Tony exclaimed. "We know who and how the criminals committed the robbery!"

"How?"

"Well, you see, the criminals who broke into the jewel store are the same criminals that were involved in the bank robbery."

"Since one of the people worked at the bank," Frank continued, "the guy hid in a toilet stall and, after the bank closed, he stopped the camera for a quarter-second."

"In that time, the criminals put Polaroid pictures in front of the camera, and then stole the money," Tony finished.

"What are you kids talking about?" asked one of the police officers, "That quarter of a second was just a blip on the tape. But I'll have crime lab check it out, anyway; the results should be in by tomorrow."

The next morning Frank and Tony were eager to get to the police station. They skipped breakfast and went straight over. The policeman appeared to have good news, and he did. "I have good news, boys; the crime lab experts have confirmed how the robbery was committed."

"So we were right!" asked Tony.

"No," said the police officer, "not exactly. You see, the crime lab experts watched the tape in slow motion and they figured out that the tape was just repeating itself every ten minutes. Someone must have hacked into the bank's surveillance system and recorded a loop. And the only people that know the password are the camera room workers, and one of the people involved in the jewel heist worked in the camera room. So, in fact, you were partly correct. The robber's trial is in a month. Hopefully, they'll spend a long time in jail!"

The Sacred Feather

Things that might be sacred and valuable to one person might not be as important to another. In THE SACRED FEATHER by Alex Moss, an ancient artifact of the Samouca people is stolen by a greedy man who doesn't care about its significance to the tribe.

A dark shadow lurched forward out of a small and gloomy hut. He had a curly mustache, a long drooping coat, and a tall hat. In his hand was an object that was in the shape of a chest. He stumbled his way out of the hut as quickly as he could. A devilish smirk crossed his face as he took one more glance around the hut. The mysterious man scampered away, hoping not to be detected. However, he was seen, but not by any ordinary person. The most noble and dignified person of all was the one who saw him.

The tribal chief, Brave Spirit, was walking to his hut when he saw the shadow out of the corner of his eye. He had just come from the traditional ceremony for his tribe's water god, Yeshenqua. His tribe was called Samouca, which meant "people of the woods" in their language. The Samouca Indian tribe believes that their water is pure and fresh if they have the sacred feather of Yeshenqua, which is always kept in a beautiful jeweled chest under a magnificent colored cloth. Without this feather, the people of the tribe believe the water they drink is filled with poison and sickness. Only water present at a ceremony with the feather is purified and is pure for as long as it lasts.

The cloth, the chest, and the feather were all kept in the chief's hut, which he was headed to before he saw the stranger. The chief was now very suspicious as to who the stranger was and what he was doing, especially so close to his hut. The chief walked proudly yet cautiously through the hut and over to the cloth where

the chest and feather were supposed to be. The chief gasped. The chest was missing!

The chief didn't know what to do. Since the chest was missing, the chief concluded that the feather was also gone. He glanced out of the hut and saw the tribe forming a circle and chanting the traditional chants, waiting for the feather to be placed in the center.

The chief remembered seeing the outsider just leaving the village grounds. He had a curly mustache, a long drooping coat, and a tall hat. The chief considered whether he should immediately tell the tribe about the missing feather. He knew the announcement would cause panic and alarm. The chief could not effectively find the feather if his tribe was out of control. He decided to only alert key members of his tribe.

The chief decided to tell the people that the ceremony was not to proceed. *The people will go back to their huts*, he thought to himself. Then the chief remembered that the tribe had purified water from a previous ceremony that couldn't last for a long time, but for a reasonable amount. The chief decided not to use that water until he knew that the feather would be back safely when the pure water ran out. The chief nodded his head to all of this, and walked more briskly out of the hut.

"Silence. Stop the ceremony." The drums stopped playing and the voices of the tribe faded away. "This ceremony is to be stopped immediately until further notice. Everyone is expected to go back to your huts." The tribe's people all had confused looks on their faces. Not entirely understanding the command, but still obeying it, they all walked back to their huts. "Also, I would like to see Little Trout and Little Foot immediately," the chief concluded. Little Trout and Little Foot were the chief's two sixteen-year-old sons. They had helped him greatly in many events such as the fire that burned many huts and crops not too long ago, and the attack on them from the animals of the wild.

After the three of them were in the chief's hut, Little Foot asked, "What is it, Father?"

"Well, my sons," the chief stated, "a great crisis has fallen upon us. The sacred feather of Yeshenqua is missing and I believe

it was stolen. I saw a dark figure with a curly mustache, a long drooping coat, and a tall hat scamper away.” The chief then asked, “So what do you think we should do?”

“How about we go visit George and Jack and see if they will help?” Little Trout said. George and Jack are two brothers that are very good friends of the tribe. They are the same age as Little Foot and Little Trout and they live just outside of the village in the woods. The boys lived with their parents, who were currently on a business trip. However, their parents trusted them and told the boys that they could go wherever they wanted to as long as they stayed out of trouble. The boys are very helpful with mysteries and events that happen to the tribe.

“All right. You both have my permission to visit George and Jack first thing in the morning.” It was quite late at the moment, and the two boys knew that it would be too dangerous to leave at night. So they both agreed with their father, said goodnight, and left to go to their huts.

At dawn the next morning, Little Trout and Little Foot started their journey to George and Jack’s house. The tall trees and the wildflowers swayed back and forth. Wild animals scurried from tree to tree. Little Trout remembered the deer meat they foolishly left behind. They both licked their lips in hunger. Soon enough, the two boys had arrived at George and Jack’s house. Little Foot knocked on the door, and George answered it.

“If it isn’t Little Trout and Little Foot. How are you guys?”

“We’re fine, George, except we have a little mystery on our hands and we thought you could help.”

“Well, sure we can. Come on in.” Little Trout and Little Foot were led into a beautiful room with golden paintings and a grand fireplace. It made Little Foot remember the great fire at the Yeshenqua ceremony. Once everyone had settled, Little Trout began to tell the story. He made sure he told everything about the feather and the mysterious stranger, trying not to leave out any parts.

“Sure. We can help,” Jack said afterwards.

Little Trout asked, “What do you think we should do?”

"How about we go down to the bus station and see if anyone that fits your description of the thief has gotten on a bus," Jack said. "That is his only choice of transportation besides a car."

George added, "There isn't a plane he could have gotten on, and there isn't a train station for 50 miles."

"This is a small town, so the thief can't be from around here," said Jack. "The stranger wasn't sighted until yesterday, right?"

"Yes, that is true," stated Little Trout.

Little Foot remarked, "All right then. That will be the plan. Little Trout and I will stay here so we can help out around the village. We both are very thankful for what you're doing for us."

"No problem. And since Jack and I don't have any plans right now, we can start right away," George said.

"We would be most grateful. Well, we should be going now. Again, thank you very much. Goodbye," Little Trout said.

"Bye," Jack said.

Just after Little Trout and Little Foot left, George and Jack set out for the station. They got into their black convertible and, soon enough, the two boys arrived at the station. They went in and rushed toward the information desk. The man there gave the boys a warm welcome and was very cooperative.

The man said, "Can I help you two?"

George said, "Yes, you can. We were wondering if any of the bus routes from yesterday or today had a passenger with a curly mustache, a long drooping coat, and a tall hat."

The man thought for a second. "As a matter of fact, there was a man that got on a route that fits that exact description."

"Really?" George asked, "Do you remember where that bus was driven?"

The man remarked, "Of course I do. The bus was driven to Rockport about 45 miles from here. Does that help at all?"

"Yes. That helps us a lot. Thanks," Jack said.

"Thank you. We really appreciate everything you are doing for us," George said.

"All right boys. Goodbye!"

The boys decided to take a trip to Rockport to find the stealer and get the feather back. Before they went, Jack suggested they

call Little Trout and Little Foot at the village. It took the phone about a minute to get through. Finally Little Trout's calm and low voice came on.

"Hello?"

George answered, "Hey Little Trout. We just called to tell you that we know that the crook is somewhere in Rockport. We were thinking of driving there in about an hour. How is everything at the village?"

"Everything is fine here. Only please hurry. We need to get the feather before it is too late," Little Trout said.

"All right. We'll try."

"Okay. Goodbye, George," Little Trout said as the conversation ended.

George hung up the phone. Then he said, "We should go back to the house and get some money and possibly some clothes if we need them."

"All right. Let's go," Jack said. The boys got into their convertible, and headed for home. When they got there, George grabbed forty-five dollars from his room, which he had been saving, for a motel in Rockport, while Jack started to pack clothes for the both of them. After these two tasks were completed, they both sat down in the kitchen for some turkey sandwiches since it was around lunchtime. After they ate, the boys got back in their car and started the drive to Rockport.

About ten minutes later, George and Jack passed the bus station once again. Suddenly George gasped in delight and told Jack to pull over into the bus station parking lot.

"What is it?" asked Jack.

"I have an idea that might give us more information on the mysterious stranger. Look, if we take a bus to Rockport, we could ask the driver if he or she knows anything about our crook. I have just enough money to cover the trip."

"That is a great idea. Let's go park the car." The boys found a parking space and parked the car. They walked into the station and decided that George would go get the tickets and Jack would take their luggage to the bus platform. These two tasks were quickly completed and the two brothers met up again. The large bus rolled

its way in and halted abruptly. George gave their tickets to the driver and the boys boarded the bus.

"Excuse me, sir, I was wondering if you drove this bus about two days ago," George asked. He was talking to the bus driver to see if he knew anything about the thief. Jack was back at their seats, putting their luggage in the overhead compartment.

"Yes, I was," replied the pudgy bus driver.

"Well, did you have a passenger that had a curly mustache, a long drooping coat, and a tall hat?"

"Now that you mention it, I remember seeing a man just like that."

"Was there anything else about him that you noticed?"

"Oh yes, he had a very strong Italian accent."

"Really? That's great. Thank you." George said this in a squeaky voice because he was so excited. He rushed back to Jack and told him the great news. Jack now became very excited. They were one step closer to finding the mysterious stranger.

The bus ride took about forty-five minutes. It was filled with crying babies and a number of bumps. After the drive, the boys got their bulky luggage and took a cab to a motel called the Sunnyside Inn. When they got there they checked in and, once in the room, they decided to go over their clues of the mysterious culprit.

"Well, we know that the thief is somewhere here in Rockport. He has a curly mustache, a long drooping coat, and a tall hat. Anything else?"

George replied, "Yes. Remember the bus driver told us on the bus that he had an Italian accent? Although we still don't know how to catch him." Suddenly a giant smile crossed his face like he had an idea. "Jack, do you know why there aren't a lot of places this guy could stay?"

"No."

"Because this is the only motel in this city for miles. So, I think the best place to look for him is right here!"

"You know, you're right! But do you have a plan to get him?"

“Well, we could go up to the check-in desk and ask if there is a man here with the description we have. Only when we found out where his room was, how would we get in?”

“I’ve got it. We can say that he is our distant relative and we came to visit him here and we have never met him before so we don’t know his name. Of course it’s lying, but we need to get that feather!”

“All right. So what are we waiting for? Let’s go.” It was only around dinnertime so they had plenty of time. The two boys scurried to the check-in desk as fast as their legs could take them. A bright young man was standing there and as soon as they were there, Jack asked him, “Excuse me, we are looking for a family member of ours. He’s in this motel, but we’ve never met him. We don’t even know his name.”

“Well, do you know what he looks like?”

“Yes. He has a curly mustache, wears a long drooping coat, and wears a tall hat. He also has an Italian accent.”

“I do recall a man that came here with that exact description. His name is Antonio Garlez. He’s staying in room 216. Is that all you want to know?”

“Yes, that is fine. Thank you.” The man nodded his head and the boys scampered away back to the room to talk things over.

“All right. Well, we know now that his name is Antonio Garlez, and he is in room 216. That shouldn’t be too hard to get to since we are in room 201,” George said. “So here is the plan. I will knock on Garlez’s door and when he answers, I will jump into his room and shut the door behind me. I will lock the door once I am in to make sure he won’t escape. I’ll keep him in the room as long as I can while you go call the police. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” Jack replied.

“All right. There is no time to lose.” The boys then left their room, and headed for the thief and the feather.

George knocked on the door. Jack had already left George after they went over the plan one more time in front of Garlez’s door. Suddenly, the door swung open and there was a man with a curly mustache, a long drooping coat and a tall hat answered it.

The man looked around suspiciously and asked, "Who are you?" He had a very strong Italian accent.

"My name is George Smith. I am only here because you have stolen something very valuable to my friends."

"I don't know what you are talking about." Just after Garlez said this, George rushed into his room, shut the door behind him, and locked the door just as he had planned.

George then said, "I believe you have stolen a very valuable feather from my friends, the Samouca Indian tribe."

"I have done nothing of the sort." George glanced around the room as Garlez said this. His eyes seemed to lock onto a small green box next to his bed.

"What is in that box?" George said, pointing at it.

"Nothing." His face was turning pale and white when it should have been dark tan.

"It's the feather, isn't it?"

"Yes," Garlez confessed.

"So why did you do it?"

"I need some money. I thought if I could convince somebody that it was a very valuable feather from an Indian tribe who believed it was from one of their gods, they might want to buy it. You won't get away with this, though." With that remark, Garlez grabbed the feather off the desk next to his bed. "Nobody will ever know I stole the feather." He darted for the door. He opened it with incredible force and was ready to escape, when a policeman greeted him.

"Good evening, Mr. Antonio Garlez," the policeman said. "This boy tells me you stole a valuable feather from an Indian tribe called Samouca. Is that true?"

"No," he replied.

The policeman turned to the boys and asked, "Do you have any proof that he did steal the feather?"

"Yes," George replied behind Antonio, "look in the green box he is holding." Before he did this, the policeman showed the search warrant he had remembered to bring. When Jack called, the detective happened to be meeting with Judge Green on an unrelated case. Jack was put on a speakerphone and told the

detective and the judge all of the clues he had found on the thief. He explained that the thief fit the description seen by the chief and had a box that was the perfect size to hide the feather. Judge Green agreed to sign a search warrant finding there was probable cause to believe a crime had been committed. The policeman looked inside it and saw the feather.

"Well," the policeman said, "Mr. Garlez, these boys have proved you have stolen this feather. Therefore, you are under arrest. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you. Do you understand your rights?"

"Yes," Garlez said in a mouse-like voice. The police led Garlez out of the motel and into his car. The boys followed him outside and, after Garlez was in the car so he couldn't escape, the policeman turned to them and said, "Well, boys, you have done a great deed. Mr. Garlez will be taken to jail. We will have to take the feather with us for evidence. We can have it back to you no later than a week. All right?"

"Okay. But we have a little request. Can we ride with you to the station so we can call the tribe and tell them we have found the feather?" Jack asked.

"Sure," the policeman said. "Hop in." The boys got in and the policeman started the drive to the police station.

In the station, Garlez was immediately taken away and the boys darted over to the phone. Jack dialed the number vigorously and Little Foot's high and speedy voice came on.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Little Foot. We are just calling to tell you we have caught the thief. He will be put in jail. The only problem might be the police have to take the feather as evidence."

"That's okay. A few moments ago, our father told us we had water that was already purified by a previous ceremony, although we will have to ration it throughout the tribe so it won't last longer than a week. So the police can take it."

"All right. We'll come back to the village tomorrow to help out. Oh, I almost forgot, when the police are done with the feather, you can come down and pick it up."

"Okay. Oh, my father needs some help. Got to go. Bye."

“Bye.”

One week later, the feather was back at the village. The purified water had run out, but just in time. The ceremony was to proceed again and this time the boys were invited.

“I am very grateful you have retrieved the feather back for our tribe,” said the chief to the boys in the village. “In addition, we would like you to join us in the rest of our ceremony for our water god, Yeshenqua.”

“Sure,” the boys said together.

“All right. Follow me.” The chief rose and put the feather, which he was holding in his hand, in the center of a circle the tribe was forming outside. Then drums started to play and faint voices stated to chant. The voices grew louder and stronger. Men and women had on beautiful clothes with designs made of colored beads. They started to dance inside the circle. The sight amazed the boys. Then all of a sudden it started to rain. The chief called the boys into the circle. He silenced the tribe and began addressing the boys.

“What you have done for this tribe is a wonderful act of kindness. The rain that is falling upon us is as pure as gold. That is how precious your souls are. You have proven yourselves as future leaders. I declare upon my death, you both will join my sons in leading this tribe for years and years to come.”

Tom's Mystery

*There is one parenting rule that must be followed: Never take your eyes off your children! The importance of that rule is clear in **TOM'S MYSTERY** by **Nicole Attisha**.*

It was summer: July, 2002. My best friend, named Kelly, had a new baby brother, and his parents named him Tom. He was so cute. He was only six months old. Kelly always used to bring Tom to my house and go for a walk. Tom loved me. Every time he saw me he cried until someone brought him to me. Then he would give me a huge hug.

One day, Kelly invited me to come with her to the mall. It was so fun. We were in the food court, trying all the testers and watching Tom.

After we got out of the food court we went to J.C. Penney. Kelly's mom wanted to try on some shirts and pants. She asked us if we could watch Tom for five minutes. We turned around for one second to try a perfume tester and when we turned back, he was GONE!

Kelly and I were looking everywhere for him. We were running from place to place screaming, "Tom, Tom, where are you?" Then we ran to Kelly's mom saying, "Tom's gone!"

Kelly's mom ran looking for him, but she couldn't find him either. She went to the security guard while Kelly and I were looking for him. She showed the security guard a picture of Tom, but nobody found him.

Kelly's mom ran out and contacted the police. Almost everyone started looking for Tom. They put his picture in the newspaper, saying, "If you see this baby, please contact the police immediately."

Every time I saw Kelly and Tom's mom, she had black circles under her eyes and tears coming down. I was so sad because I knew it was all my fault.

Two days passed and still there was not a word from anyone. Every day Kelly and I went looking for Tom and prayed he was still alive! I was terrified.

On July 7, 2002, we went to go look for Tom. We wanted to take a break so we went and got some ice cream.

When we got there we saw these two strange men who worked there. They had long beards and mustaches. They were wearing black with their hair dyed blue. They were so scary.

When we sat down they were staring at us like they had seen us somewhere before. I had goose bumps all over me. Then I realized that the day when we went shopping they were there by the perfume, staring at us.

When I told Kelly, we had to check it out. We asked for the bathroom, and went in the back of the room to see if Tom was there. When we looked in a closet, there were only brooms. We looked in almost every closet, but he wasn't there. As we were walking back we heard a noise. It sounded like Tom. When we followed the sound, it led us to Tom!

We got out, but one of those guys followed us. When we noticed, we ran as fast as we could to the security office. When we asked the security guard if he would check the back room, he said sure. But when we did, Tom wasn't there.

I went inside the ice cream place, and I saw the other guy with Tom. I ran, yelling, "Stop him! He kidnapped my best friends' baby brother!" He had no place to run. Another security guard grabbed the first guy, and others ganged up on the one with Tom.

Once we got Tom back, we called Kelly's mom one second later. When she got there, she ran to Tom and thanked us. This was the happiest day of her and my life.

THINGS THAT GO
BUMP
IN THE NIGHT

The Devil's Beast

*It's important to pay attention to that little voice that tells us when we are about to do something unwise. In **THE DEVIL'S BEAST** by Megan Stein, three young girls ignore that voice, and become part of an adventure so frightening that even they have trouble believing what happened.*

It was a cool, crisp day at Mia Thompson's house. Rain drizzled as Mia stared out of her family room window.

"Mom, can I phone Jess?" Mia asked. Jessie was Mia's best friend since second grade. She only lived down the block, but Mia was always on the lazy side.

"Mia, angel, you know: no friends over before dinner," her mom kindly replied.

"At least can I give her a buzz?" Mia groaned.

"Oh, all right. Only for a little bit. You've got to eat soon."

* * *

About three weekends before, Mia and Jessie did something that would change their lives, along with one of Mia's other buddies, Lizzy. Now, Lizzy has been known to beat up kids twice the size of her. In first grade, the school bully, a big, bulky kid who smelled like stinky gym shoes, had barely brushed against her. She took his chubby fist and she shoved it into his stomach. When the principal found out, she was suspended for two weeks.

Like any other 13-year-old girls, this would have been another Friday: last day of school, sleeping in, and all of the other great stuff. Not according to this story.

As the group of friends walked home, Lizzy came up with a terrible idea. “Hey, ya know Dead Man’s Cave? Ya wanna go to it t’night? Full moon.”

“Lizzy, you know you can’t go there. Last time someone did that, remember, they never came back,” snapped Jessie. “Besides, I’ll need to haul a bunch of snacks, ‘cause we’ll probably get hungry, and,” coughed Mia, “I always seem to be eating at eight or nine.”

“Fine, if you guys are chicken, I’ll go. Humph,” said Lizzy.

“Fine! Fine! We’ll go!” yelled Jessie and Mia.

A few hours later, Mia climbed into bed, and pulled over the covers. She waited about an hour before everyone was asleep. She quietly scampered out of bed. Mia grabbed one of the sheets, pulled it into a bundle of knots, and slowly threw it over the windowsill.

The night was cool and chilled. Jessie and Lizzy were waiting by a couple of bushes. Jessie waved her hand so Mia could see where they were hiding.

“Coming!” Mia screamed.

“Shhh!”

“Sorry.”

“Come on. Let’s get away from here,” barked Lizzy, as they began their journey to Dead Man’s Cave.

Along the way, Mia realized she had forgotten the snacks for the gang. “Oh no! You guys! I forgot the snacks!” she said desperately. “We should go back. Now!”

“No, Mia! Not by yourself! No way!” screeched Lizzy. “I’m in charge and I say NO!”

“Who said she’s in charge?” whispered Jessie into Mia’s ears.

“Apparently, she did,” Mia whispered back. They both giggled and pressed on.

“Ah-ha. We’re here! Hey, Mia, you’re brave. Ya go ‘ave a look,” said Lizzy.

“Me?” cried Mia in surprise. “I’m not going in there.”

“Fine. Jess, ya go ‘ave a look in there.”

“Why us, Lizz?” Jessie said. “I thought we were, ‘Boak, boak,’ chicken!” She had the sound of sarcasm in her voice.

"Fine, I'll go in. But...y-y-ya guys?" She sounded a bit nervous.

"What, Lizz?" Mia and Jessie said together.

"Will ya guys be righ' behind me?"

"Yes!"

"Oh, okay, let's go."

The three girls walked up to the cave. Lizzy shrieked, "I wanna go back home."

The cave was dark and wet. Bats hung every which way they looked. Bones of the previous bodies lay there from the attempts of other people trying to enter. Everyone shivered at the sight of this, but only Jessie seemed to be brave enough to keep looking.

"No. You said there's no turning back, now come on!" said Jessie, with annoyance.

When they entered the cave, someone or something was with them. Mia felt a cool breeze trickle down her spine. "You guys, I wanna go back. I'm feeling a bit weird," Mia said.

Tic, tic, tic, tic.

"What was tha?" cried Lizzy.

Tic, tic, tic.

"There it is again," said Jess.

"I'm going home!" shouted Mia.

Crack. Then all three girls froze in fear.

"Who-Who's there? C'mon, show yourself," shivered Jessie.

"Hello, girls," said a creepy, ghostly voice. "So glad you could make it. Too bad you have to *die!*"

There was a loud thud. Mia had fainted. She was lying stiffly on the ground, Lizzy and Jessie right by her side.

"Wake up. C'mon, get up. Quit jokin', c'mon, get up." Not one nerve in Mia's body twitched.

"One down. Two to go," chuckled the voice. "For shame. I was really starting to like that one. Tsk, tsk."

Then the being stepped into view. Its legs were like a goat's, but its upper portion was like a man's. Its leathery skin was blood red and its hair was jet black. Its horns were as sharp as needles. It was a Devil's Beast!

Lizzy became so afraid, she just ran away without knowing that she was on the run. All that was left was Jessie and the unconscious Mia.

“Don’t even bother to look for her,” said the devil lazily. “Good to know who your friends are.”

Tic, tic, tic pounded the devil’s hooves. *Tic, tic, tic.* Closer and closer he came, ready to strike. *Tic, tic.* It stopped. The beast was bending over, his hand opened for something to *kill*.

Just then, Jessie remembered her precious cross necklace that her mother gave her before she died. It was a cross so pure and filled with love that no evil being could handle it. Jessie threw it up at the opened hand. The devil grabbed it, without knowing that it could not touch it. The beast starred stupidly at the cross and then with fear. It screamed so terribly that Jessie could not hear another thing. It was like hearing a banshee sing. Then there was a blinding, white light covering every corner that Jessie could see.

Slowly and quietly, everything came back to order. Jessie noticed a pile of dust was spread along the floor of the cave. At the heart of the pile was the cross necklace in perfect condition. Jessie bent down, picked up her necklace, and put it back on.

The police and the girls’ parents arrived. Lizzy had run all the way back home and called them immediately.

Mia was rushed to the hospital in case of any further injuries. Jessie had to make up some other story to make sense of what really happened. Lizzy was sitting in a police car, still petrified from the beast. Really, Jessie couldn’t make much sense of what exactly happened.

* * *

“Also, Babe, don’t make another plan for any ‘Midnight Escapes’ again. Okay?”

“All right, Mother!”

Murder at Samonga

Unusual things are happening at Camp Samonga, and one girl is getting close to the truth. Find out if someone will get away with murder in MURDER AT SAMONGA, by Samantha Hutzley.

“Hello, my name is Cassandra.”

“Hi. I’m Lee.”

“And I’m Daria.”

“Have you ever been to camp Samonga before?” asked Cassandra.

“No,” said Lee and Daria at the same time.

“We’re best friends,” explained Daria, “and we just wanted to come to the same camp and this was the only one open.”

“Oh. Well, I think we’re in the same cabin, so I’ll see you guys.”

Later that night when the two girls went to their cabin, they met Cassandra. Lee and Cassandra found that they had a lot in common, and they turned out to be great friends. They hung out at lunch and recess. Daria came sometimes, but Daria usually was planning. She didn’t tell anyone what she was planning, but Lee and Cassandra new she was up to something.

One night when Lee and Cassandra were hanging out, Cassandra said, “I’m going to brush my teeth and I’ll be right back.”

“Okay,” Lee said.

“Oh, I’ll go with you,” Daria said.

“Okay.” The two girls arrived after 15 minutes and continued going with each other for the next week.

Once when Cassandra was in the restroom, Lee and Daria started to talk. Lee found out that Daria really didn’t like

Cassandra. She said that she was taking Lee away from her and that she was going to do something about it.

One night when the two girls went to go brush their teeth together Lee noticed that they were taking longer than usual. Lee knew that something was up. Lee was just about to leave to find the other two girls, and then she felt a tap on her back.

“Lee, where are you going?” asked Daria.

“Well, I was just going to look for you.”

“Oh.”

“Where’s Cassandra?”

“Oh, she left. She got kind of scared, so she went with Ms. Finch to sleep.”

“The whole night?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh, well, let’s go to bed. It’s late.”

In the morning, the girls woke up and Ms. Finch told them that they had swimming in 15 minutes. They got their stuff and went to the lake. Lee thought that Cassandra was going to meet them there, so she just waited. Then Lee dove in.

Daria started complaining of pains in her side and said it would be best to get out. Lee said to give it at least five more minutes. Lee went under with her goggles on and then she touched the bottom of the Lake and felt something funny. She didn’t know what it was, so she told Daria. Daria dove in and Lee stayed up to wait for her to come back up. Daria was under there for at least four minutes and wouldn’t come up for anything.

Daria rose and said she didn’t see anything. “Well, it was right under me so I’m going to find out what it is,” said Lee.

Daria pulled her up by her hair and said, “NO! It’s time for lunch.” Lee still felt the urge to go under so she did. She saw a body that was held by a rock under very deep water. When she rose, she didn’t say anything to Daria because she thought that she wouldn’t believe her.

She waited until later to revisit the lake. She waited for Daria to fall asleep, and then she went to the lake and got the body out. Then she knew that Cassandra had been murdered by Daria. She thought she had to have done it. Lee ran to go find Ms. Finch.

She was right at the door then she saw a dark figure. Knowing that it was Daria, she followed her. She found out that Daria was going to get the body out of the lake to put it into a safer spot. Then she heard something. It sounded like Daria said, "I can't get this fat body out of here. I'm getting a rope."

Lee knew it was her chance to get the body out of the lake and show her to Ms. Finch. Lee went in. She had a strong grip on the body, and then she pulled, using all her might, and she got her free from the bottom.

Daria was coming back. Lee immediately dropped the body and hid. She saw Daria getting the body and saying, "You aren't under the rock anymore. Why? Is there someone trying to help you?" Lee froze at the words.

Then she saw Daria taking Cassandra to the center of the woods. She followed them and saw Daria burying her and said, "Everyone is suspecting, especially Lee. Plus, you are just getting too smelly." Then Daria disappeared out of the woods.

Lee went to dig up the body. And she then knew for a fact that Daria had murdered Cassandra and that she was in huge danger at Camp Samonga. She paused because she heard a loud sound like leaves breaking. She knew that she wasn't alone. She heard a lot more. It continued for at least two minutes. Then it stopped.

Lee tried to dig the body up again because she heard the footsteps of someone or something. Lee hid behind a tree as quickly as she could and then--there was nothing, not a sound.

BAM! A knife swiftly went into Lee. Daria said, "You knew all along, but now no one but you will ever know." She kicked Lee and stabbed her over and over until she was dead.

Then Daria cried. She didn't want to kill Lee, but she had to for her safety. This story tells you to be careful of who you trust. You might think you know someone, but maybe you don't.

The Myth

In THE MYTH by Adam Moore, a stranger tells a seemingly unbelievable story, then disappears. When the story starts to come true, what will the people do?

In the small town of Jamie, every month there is a story told by members of a group of old people. There are only eleven people, so in December there are a ton of arguments over whose turn it is.

It used to be fun to go, but now it is so-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-boring. Now only tired people go, as well as me and all of the Rating Club (unfortunately).

The Rating Club is a club that still rates the stories told by the old geezers, and I'm the leader, Adam Moore. Well...we used to, because they were good, but now they're just very stupid, and something a kindergartner would like.

But tonight we have a twenty-year-old man who wants to tell a myth of a legendary monster, and tonight is the night.

When I got there with my parents, it was almost time to start the myth.

The man walked on stage, sat down, and began. "This myth is from my old 'ountry, Transylvania. Ahem... December 20, 1990.

"In sa small town, just like your own, a strange man moved into a house next to the ma'er, which made th' people nervous. Th' ma'er said, 'I spoke to th' man, and he is a very nice man.' But that night th' people heard 'Ahhhhhllllllllllllllllllllllllll!' from th' ma'er's house, which they thought was a horror movie, because their ma'er liked to watch horror movies.

"December 27, 1990. For th' next week or so, a couple of people were 'disappearing.'"

He stopped talking and took a drink of water from the gym's fountain.

"Th' people began to worry about th' other families that were gone. Then, within a month's time, almost all of th' town had gone, like into thin air. Some moved, some stayed, but those who moved, none heard from them again."

Then (without being applauded), he walked off stage. No one moved, or talked, but we thought the same thing: That was the most bizarre story we had ever heard.

We all went to bed thinking about the story, that bizarre story.

The next day at school the story was the only thing the kids could talk about. Even the teachers seemed to talk about it.

Then the next day, five different families were gone.

The next day, five more families were gone.

Pretty soon, only fifteen families remained in the city, and something was going on with my best friend.

Then something really strange happened: All the families were gone except two! Sam, my best friend, called and asked to sleep over. His mom and dad said okay and so did mine.

That night we heard a bang at the front door, as if someone was breaking in. We took out our big wooden swords. Then we walked downstairs and saw something with hot red eyes, two teeny-tiny hands, and a wide mouth on its belly, wide enough to swallow a fully-grown person.

We ran at the thing. We started to smack it with all our might, but it just ate us.

The Screaming Mummy

Adults need to listen to the concerns of kids. In THE SCREAMING MUMMY by Ben Farce, such attention could have made all the difference.

It all started on Thursday when our second-hour teacher announced, “Tomorrow, we will be visiting the local museum.” I tried to figure out if she was excited about the field trip. Unfortunately, no expression would come through. Ms. Stevenson was like a brick wall, and only her madness could be seen.

While she explained to us what we were going to do, my friend Brian and I talked about how even a really lame field trip always beat a school day full of stress and bad grades. We are not crazy about school. Of course, my parents do not share my point of view about this. The most important things to them are good grades and school. I guess you could say that Ms. Stevenson is like them.

I had been to the museum plenty of times, so I knew what to expect. For that reason, unlike most people, I was not surprised by the size of the building. There was enough space for four sections: History (which I liked); Technology (my favorite); Biology (they have some cool facts about animals), and Art (that part was boring).

Because I hated the art section, I was happy that we started with it, because it meant I had the rest of the day to look forward to. I did not like art because I could not identify the meaning of each painting or sculpture. Also, I always failed art class. Not one of the paintings made sense. To me, it was just a bunch of shapes, and for some reason I could not get the “big picture.”

After that, we went through Technology, then Biology. I always liked knowing how things work or how you can make electricity with water and stuff like that. I wanted to be an engineer later. Another thing that I like is facts. In the biology section, there were plenty of them. Like, did you know that it only takes 0.6 seconds for a snake to bite an animal? I enjoyed myself during that time.

Finally, the class and I arrived at sign that said “The Ancient Times.” My eye slid across the room to a mummy from 30 B.C. It was truly ugly. Its dark hair looked like hard thread. The body was almost totally decomposed, and there was not any skin. To top it off, the mummy was eyeless. I called Brian to look at it.

The title of the sign next to the body was “Cleopatra.” The explanation went on to say, “This mummy was discovered in 1940 in the upper part of Egypt. The archeologists that found Cleopatra were Jim Moore, Tim Moore and Kevin Hunter. The pyramid in which Cleopatra was left was cursed. Disturbing the queen’s sleep would cause a curse to be set upon the one responsible, so much that it would be like welcoming one’s own death.”

At that moment, a girl named Marie Dunmore screamed because a bee landed on her bare arm. The pitch of the sound was awful. It bounced back on the walls of the large room. At that moment, I thought, “That shriek could wake the dead.” I did not know how right I was.

A few seconds after Marie screamed, while my ears were still ringing, the mummy’s head moved. I could hear bones cracking. I said that Marie’s scream was awful, but the sound coming from the cracking of the bones was something else. The sound alone could make you sick. It became even worse as the mummy stretched its entire body. From the look on Brian’s face, I knew that he was seeing the same thing I was staring at.

Brian and I ran back to the group as fast as our legs allowed us. We went straight to Ms. Stevenson, yelling about a moving mummy. Our teacher’s exact words were, “Get back in line, you two! And stop yelling about a mummy that’s alive! There’s no such thing! We’ll have a talk about that on Saturday, IN

DETENTION!" Never in my life have I seen our teacher so furious, and believe me, she got angry on a regular basis.

After the experience, nothing seemed interesting or fun. Everything seemed boring. Even the movie about sword fights was not any fun. I knew Brian felt the same way. We just waited impatiently until the day was over and we could finally go home to tell our parents about what we saw. Unfortunately, our parents felt the same way towards our story as Ms. Stevenson.

I called Brian to tell him to come to my house as fast as possible and that he could have a sleepover at my house. Our parents were used to us always having sleepovers, so it would not be a problem having them let Brian come over. Within an hour, Brian had arrived.

We went over the problem. We agreed that the mummy might be dangerous and that Marie's scream had awakened it. We also agreed that it was probably still at the museum, so we thought we needed to break in. Then we could burn it with my dad's fire batons. I knew he would be mad, but it was a matter of life or death. We figured it was the best thing we could do.

At the museum, at 10:30 P.M., we caught a glimpse of the mummy through a window. The dead queen acted as if nothing was wrong. We waited until the mummy was out of sight. Then we opened the window after bypassing the alarm using a gum wrapper. I placed the foil between the alarm strings to create the illusion that the window never opened.

Once inside, we approached the mummy quietly, each carrying a fire baton. I could feel the flow of adrenaline in my body. I saw the tense look on Brian's face and realized that I was not the only one scared.

Brian and I kept getting closer and closer. Ten feet...eight feet...five feet...three feet...two feet. I lit up the baton in my hand. Then, suddenly, the mummy swung around to grab Brian and me. Brian was so shocked he dropped his weapon. I held onto mine, but the mummy blew the flame out. Then everything went black.

When I woke up, I had a headache and felt weak. I was tied up next to Brian who was still unconscious. I could not get away.

The mummy opened a sarcophagus. I finally realized what it was going to do. It was going to get revenge by closing a coffin until we would not have any air left. The mummy dragged us to the coffin. I yelled and kicked but it was no use. When the mummy closed the door, everything went black again.

I calmed down because no sound would go through the coffin. I thought about all the things that went wrong in my life. Most of all, I thought about my family, my friends, and Brian, who was still not awake. I took my last breath and thought, "No one will know what happened to me and Brian." After that, I died.

If you happen to go to the Franklin Museum and you see a ghost: well, it is either Brian or me.

Wendy the Witch

A long time ago, many of our ancestors worried about evil witches who, they believed, would bring wickedness to those around them. In WENDY THE WITCH by Raven Brendarée Thompson, the threats of one bad-tempered girl lead others to make that same conclusion about her, with deadly results.

This is the true story of Wendy the witch, as told by Julian, Wendy's old best friend, with Jenny, Julian's new best friend.

Some summers ago, Wendy and Julian had to say goodbye. Julian went to camp and met a new best friend, Jenny. While Julian was at camp, Wendy started to get really mean and really greedy, and when people turn mean they get ugly. But she didn't stop being mean and ugly at the same time, so she turned into a witch.

Wendy somehow found out Julian had a new best friend. Julian brought Jenny over, hoping they could all be friends. Wendy stormed out and later wrote Jenny a note:

How could you do this to me? I thought we were friends. I just want to kill you, and your new best friend.

Wendy

That's when this whole thing started. I'm sorry to say she was serious. How cruel! She threatened me and set off to kill me.

I couldn't take it anymore. I got a group of people together. I convinced them that she was a witch in many ways I cannot

explain right now. Together it took time to suffocate her to death! It was awful!

Innocent people would have been killed for no reason whatsoever if Wendy was allowed to live. For evil witches, simply putting them in jail isn't enough. You have to put their souls to death, and by doing that you have to kill them by suffocating them. It was horrible, but we did it, and she's dead.

Now I know never to mess with witches like Wendy.

WHAT IF...?

Cyberspace Chase

There is no genius like an evil genius. CYBERSPACE CHASE, by Joshua S. Burnett, tells the story a computer expert who gets mysteriously sucked into his computer by an evil doctor.

It all began one ordinary day when Vertex, the computer wiz, received a telegram telling him that he had just won a new hi-tech super-computer in an “Ultimate Computer” sweepstakes. Vertex was always entering contests but this was the first time he had ever won anything. He was especially happy to win a state-of-the-art computer, which was just what he had dreamed about owning. The telegram said that the computer would arrive that day, and sure enough, the UPS truck pulled up with a huge package.

Vertex ripped open the box and unpacked his new computer. He said to himself, “I can’t wait to put this together. All I have to do is plug it in and start surfing the web.”

What Vertex didn’t know, however, was that someone had infected the prize computer with a virus. Vertex, not knowing about the virus in his new computer, started playing around with it. He pushed the DELETE key and “Whooooosh!”

Suddenly, Vertex didn’t know where he was. All he remembered was playing with his computer, and now he was somewhere that didn’t look like his home. He knew that only one villain had the power to warp people from one place to another: Dr. Oogly. Now his job was to find out where he was and get back home.

He set off on his journey, when all of a sudden a ghost appeared. It scared the living daylights out of him.

Vertex jumped in the air and screamed, “AAAHHH!” Then all of a sudden, a short, two-foot tall professor, with a vacuum on his

back, sucked the ghost in. Vertex was amazed. He had never seen any vacuum like that one before. Right away, he knew it wasn't any ordinary vacuum.

After the professor had finished sucking in the ghost, Vertex went up to him and thanked him for saving him. Then they introduced themselves. "Hi, I'm Vertex. I was just wondering where the heck I am?"

"Well, I'm Professor E. Sadd, and you're in Cyberspace."

"Cyberspace!" said Vertex. "I just hit the DELETE key on my computer and here I am," said Vertex, "and all I want is to get home. How did you wind up here?"

The Professor said, "It all started about ten years ago when I also was warped here. Computers were still kind of new then and it took me a while to figure a way out. Once I realized that I could come and go as I wanted, I thought it would be a good idea to stay here and help others who may be trapped in Cyberspace. I guess you could call me a kind of guide."

"You see, I know who does this to people," the Professor added. "It was Dr. Oogly."

Vertex said, "I know him, but how do you know him?"

"Well, he used to go to school with me and would always bring evil to the school and cause everyone pain and suffering," the Professor explained. "But then he was kicked out of school forever for taunting the children. I guess that caused him to turn into an evil doctor."

"Dr. Oogly is one of the most evil creatures alive. When I was very young, he cast a spell on my entire town just because he said that doing evil was his job. Because of his spell, my parents died in a terrible way when a huge boulder plunged from out of the sky and landed on our house. I was at a friend's house that day or I would have died along with them. Dr. Oogly doesn't like a survivor like me. Who knows what evil he can do?"

"Anyway, I was just wondering how to get out of Cyberspace?" asked Vertex.

"To start off with," said Professor Sadd, "just like in the video games you like to play, you have to beat every Stage in Cyberspace. There are three Stages, each guarded by two ghosts

and a boss. To defeat them, you need a POLTERGUST 10,000 to make the ghosts vulnerable to capture.”

“What happens when you beat the ghosts?” said Vertex.

“Whenever you defeat the ghosts, you will earn money and gold bars,” the Professor said, “and when you defeat a boss, you will receive a key to the next Stage and lots of pearls. So, here’s your POLTERGUST 10,000 vacuum, and now you’re off on your journey through Cyberspace.”

Vertex set off into the first stage.

“I’ve played tons of video games,” thought Vertex, “and I know you always get a reward for reaching a goal or defeating a rival. However, I know this is not like an ordinary game, and it won’t be easy to get out of here.”

The first stage was dark and foggy, and Vertex had to walk through slimy, murky water. It felt like walking in a sewer. Just then, Vertex felt two scaly things swim by his leg. He shined his flashlight in that direction. The scaly things that swam by his feet turned out to be two serpent-like ghosts. Vertex took out his POLTERGUST and tried to suck them in. Of course, the serpents tried to break free of the vacuum, but they couldn’t. One of them was extremely weak so it was immediately sucked in. The other one was a little stronger, but was not as strong as the POLTERGUST, and was eventually sucked in, too.

Vertex gave a big sigh of relief once the ghosts were gone. He wasn’t off the hook yet because he still had to worry about the boss. So, he ventured on through Stage One looking for the boss. He then saw a huge brick wall. He thought to himself, “Well, I guess this is the end of the level.”

Then Vertex heard some deep laughing from close by. A fat spirit appeared eating a large jelly donut. He said, “My name is Sir Luggs, the boss of the first stage, and here’s where your journey ends.”

Vertex laughed and said, “That’s what you think, Luggs.”

He pulled out his POLTERGUST, pointed it at the ghost, pushed the button, and began the process of sucking him in. But Sir Luggs laughed back and said, “You actually think you can defeat me with a puny vacuum? Well, you’re wrong!”

Sir Luggs slapped Vertex in the face and Vertex went flying and splashed into the water. Sir Luggs laughed again, but Vertex wasn't finished yet. He switched the POLTERGUST onto TURBO and aimed it directly at Sir Luggs. In the blink of an eye, Luggs was sucked in, and pearls spewed out of his body. Vertex collected his prize pearls, and a key magically appeared which he could use to get to the next stage of Cyberspace. An opening appeared in the brick wall and Vertex walked through to Stage Two.

Stage Two wasn't anything like the previous level. This level was a huge dining room with a giant table with turkey and all kinds of food on it. Vertex wandered around the room for a while and finally found something. There, right in front of him, were the two ghosts guarding the area around the boss. They appeared to be ducks, huge white ducks, and they were using golden eggs as weapons. Vertex was trying to dodge every egg possible. He knew then that he would have to turn the vacuum on HYPER-DRIVE to exterminate the ghosts. He aimed it at the ducks and gave it a go. They struggled like crazy, but in the end, they were too weak for the POLTERGUST.

After the disappearance of the ducks, Vertex wandered around the room again and heard a faint voice in the distance. A little later, he was able to make out the words. The voice yelled out, "Fe, fi, fo, fum, I'm looking for some man's bones for my soup."

Vertex, being a brave guy, said, "Well, here I am."

The giant started to chase him and Vertex took out his POLTERGUST and made a weak attempt to suck him in. The giant didn't even move.

All of a sudden, a thought came to Vertex's mind. "Everything has a weakness. If I find that weakness, I can defeat this giant."

Then he saw an enormous club on the table. He sucked the club into the POLTERGUST and shot it back out quickly. It hit the giant right in the head, knocking him to the ground with a large boom. Vertex then sucked him in easily and claimed his prize--pearls and a key to the Third Stage.

The next key was rather small and Vertex used it to enter a room. Right away, two ghosts appeared.

"They're just little mice," said Vertex.

He knew there had to be something more than this, so he switched the POLTERGUST back to normal and tried to suck them in. Both mice opened their mouths wide and their giant fangs appeared. They were huge, and they had just bit off part of his shirt while he was trying to get away. He just barely got away. Then, he turned the POLTERGUST back to HYPER-DRIVE, turned to them, and chased them to the wall. There he cornered them and sucked them in.

Vertex walked throughout the room for hours, and still no boss. Suddenly, he heard something lurking beneath his feet. It emerged from the floor--a rat the size of a great white shark. It had teeth about five inches long, sharp as razors, and it almost bit off his head.

While Vertex had searched the room, he noticed a can of rat poison sitting on a shelf in the corner. He knew that was his ticket to kill the last and final challenge and meant he could be released from Cyberspace.

He grabbed the can of rat poison and sprayed it in the rat's face. It was blinded. While it was down, Vertex sucked the rat in. Then, all of a sudden, he was warped back to Professor E. Sadd's lab. The professor congratulated him for his victory and ordered one of his assistant's to transport Vertex back to his home.

"It sure feels good to be back home," Vertex said with relief in his voice. "I'm going to pack this computer away and try to forget that whole ordeal."

Could Vertex ever forget? After all, Dr. Oogly was still out there somewhere and might return to do more evil deeds. Could Vertex ever feel safe again knowing Dr. Oogly is out to get him? No one knows for sure.

Fishing in the Sky

*This story gives a spin to the idea of the man on the moon. In **FISHING IN THE SKY** by Madelaine Grzybowski, ten-year-old Jack sets his sights on winning a contest that he's spent years preparing for.*

"I'm Jack," I said as I introduced myself to our new neighbors, the Starrs, and their son, Carl. After a while Carl and I were inseparable.

The next day my father took me fishing, but not regular fishing. This was fishing in the sky. I was very eager to start. Soon we were in a rocket headed toward the gap between the moon and the earth.

When we got there, my father showed me how to bait and fish for stars, comets, and asteroids. When I got older he would teach me to catch planets.

Soon enough, I was ready. It was time for me to catch my first planet. After waiting awhile, I caught my first planet. I think it was Pluto, but it got away when my dad and I started to fight over the pole.

The next day at school I accidentally bragged to Carl about fishing. He got mad and decided not to be friends with me anymore. Then he became my rival. Carl's father started to teach him to sky fish so he could show off and beat me in competition.

The next month on the school bulletin board, there was a notice. It read:

Sky Fishing Tournament
Wednesday, December 2, 2056 at 3:00
All interested: Sign up outside lobby

I went to go sign up and I saw Carl had signed up, too.

At last it was time for the contest. The contestants got to space and we each had to catch four things worth points.

Planets	=	1000
Asteroids	=	750
Comets	=	500
Stars	=	250

Soon we were off, racing around. My rival and I both had caught two planets and there was only one left. Everyone watched in silence as we raced toward it and put our ropes around it. When he was about to pull the planet away from me, I bit his rope in half and he went spinning out of control and knocked everyone else out. I won!

The grand prize was a trip around the solar system for two. I took my dad because he deserved it.

The Kung-fu Grandma Adventures

DEDICATED TO GRANDMA DOROTHY.

When space aliens threaten the Earth, the person to call is--Grandma? Of course it is! You'll see why in THE KUNG-FU GRANDMA ADVENTURES, by Zak Diaczok.

One day, an evil teenaged piece of chalk from planet Chalk Dust ran away from home after its parents wouldn't allow it to attend a party at a local blackboard. In its fury, it flew across the galaxy, vandalizing everything in its path. It came across the Earth and started to destroy everything that it saw. The first thing that came into its path was Asia. It destroyed Asia by rubbing itself against everything. Rubbing its head would release acid, which would fry everything up. After destroying Asia and Europe, it went to North America in search of new victims.

One day, a grandma was walking home. The evil piece of chalk came out of nowhere and started trying to rub her out. Little did the piece of chalk know that this was the Kung-fu Grandma. The Kung-fu Grandma is a superb crime-fighting superhero. As a young woman, she won seven world championships and three Olympic gold medals in martial arts. She became so famous that people from all around the world would ask her for help in defeating criminals. In her golden years, she opened a web page and advertised her services as the Kung-fu Grandma.

The piece of chalk tried many times but couldn't rub her until she fried. Again and again, the piece of chalk tried to rub her.

When the piece of chalk came close, Grandma chopped it in half. All that blow did was to double the piece of chalk. After each blow from Grandma, the number of pieces of chalk multiplied. After there were ten pieces of chalk, they scattered to different parts of the world. The grandma went home in search of a weakness to defeat the pieces of chalk.

Grandma worked twenty-four/seven to find a weakness. She tried fire, love, time out, discipline, and asparagus, but nothing worked. Then she thought of a bath. She took a piece of chalk and put it into a tub of water. The piece of chalk bubbled until it vanished. After finding the weakness, she went in search of the pieces of chalk.

Since Europe and Asia were gone, this narrowed her choice to five continents. She picked the closest continent, South America. She followed the path of destruction and found four pieces of chalk terrorizing Chile. Luckily, they were near the ocean. Grandma, running as fast as she could, scooped a bucket of salty ocean water. She ran back and tossed the ocean water on the pieces of chalk. They fell to the ground and started to bubble, and screamed, “I’m melting, I’m melting.”

“Yes!” she exclaimed joyfully. “Only six to go.” Hopping in her jet, she decided to survey Australia for more angry chalk. Because the Earth is round, she took a shortcut over Antarctica. Over Antarctica, she saw four pieces of chalk terrorizing penguins. The pieces of chalk were drawing pictures of polar bears. This terrified the penguins so much that they turned as pale as the snow. As they ran frantically to avoid the polar bears, they kept running into each other.

As she landed, a treacherous snowstorm hit. Luckily, the grandma knew how to build an igloo. After days of searching in the blizzard, she finally found the pieces of chalk. With her ingenuity and arctic knowledge, she started a fire, melted four buckets of snow, and chucked it at the pieces of chalk. The four pieces of chalk sizzled in the snowy wasteland. Only two pieces to go.

Finally she arrived in Australia, followed the path of terror and destruction, and spied two pieces of chalk rubbing out the

Sydney Opera House. These two pieces were not like the other pieces. Somehow, when the Kung-fu Grandma came, the pieces joined together to form a giant piece of chalk. She tried two buckets of water, but it didn't work.

The evil giant started to run after her. As she was running, she wondered why the buckets of water didn't work. She realized that these were bigger and stronger pieces of chalk. She needed bigger and stronger water. A light went off in her head. She had a plan.

She turned around, struggled to pick up the piece of chalk, and threw the giant piece of chalk in a deep ocean trench just north of Australia. The piece of chalk started to sizzle in the deep murky ocean water. That was the end of the chalk menace from the planet Chalk Dust.

A ship from the planet Chalk Dust arrived as the last pieces of chalk fizzled. A giant chalkboard eraser emerged from the ship. The eraser wiped over the Earth. All the damaged continents magically recovered. A small, friendly-looking piece of chalk wrote on the Nazca plains in South America, "Sorry for the damage." The Kung-fu Grandma smiled as she read the message, and flew home waiting for the next threat to world peace.

The Secret Journey

The chance to see what secrets are kept in a locked attic proves too much for a girl to resist. In THE SECRET JOURNEY by Caroline Meder, Nina discovers the surprise of a lifetime.

“A ‘D’ in Social Studies!” Nina’s dad yelled. He could not believe his daughter, the usually straight-A student, failed one of her most important subjects.

“How can Social Studies ever be important? Why do I need to know what happened years ago, when I’m too busy trying to get everything straight that is happening now?” Nina exclaimed.

“I know that you think Social Studies is extremely dull, but can’t you at least try? Look at all the kids that don’t even have an education. They’d be happy to go to such a good school as you do....”

Here we go again, she thought, with one of the usual “parent” lectures. Her dad is one of those boring adults that doesn’t understand anything about being a teenager. When Mr. Wayneland was in school, he was one of the “dorks” that wandered around with his head buried in a physics book. Her dad never got out of that trend. He now owns a very successful company which creates inventions. While such a dad would thrill many girls, Nina dislikes her dad. She hates his “scientific” way of life.

“Dad, can’t you just be happy with me the way I am? I got A’s in all of my other subjects. Just because you were a ‘whiz’ when you were in school doesn’t mean that everyone around you is as smart,” Nina explained.

“I guess I should be proud of you. But you just have to get that brain going in Social Studies, or maybe I could set up a meeting with your teacher after school.”

"Was that a threat? If you set that into reality, my life will be over. By the way, she'll suggest tutoring and I don't have time for that."

"I don't get why you don't like that lady. Anyway, I can take you out to lunch today. Besides, your report card isn't so bad."

Great, another embarrassing day. And my Social Studies teacher isn't a nice lady. She's an old witch that likes to torture students, Nina thought.

At that moment the phone rang. Mr. Wayneland ended this conversation by picking up the phone. "Scientist Wayneland's residence."

"Please not one of my friends," Nina pleaded. But her dad's response to this anonymous caller was a relief.

"Of course, I can attend the meeting. For such a good cause I'd do anything." Mr. Wayneland hung up. "Honey, I'm so sorry to tell you this. Something has come up at work and there is a very important meeting that I have to attend. All of our computers and machines were shut down because of a virus. I'll make this up to you as soon as I can. Your mom will be home in about three hours. I've got to run. See you later," Mr. Wayneland explained.

"That's great, I mean, I'm very sorry that you couldn't spend lunch with me, but I can understand that the meeting is very important to you," Nina agreed. She was relieved that she didn't have to spend the day with her dad.

"What can I do on such a boring, rainy day?" Nina thought. A key, placed on the small end table next to the couch her dad had gotten up from, caught her eye. She took the key into her possession and viewed the tag on the back. In Mr. Wayneland's sloppy handwriting, it read ATTIC.

She considered the magic of this wonderful key. An attic key wonderful? Yeah, right! That's what you might think, but what if your attic had always been locked up, a big closed secret? Then this image might flop around differently in your mind.

Nina's mind was struggling with this thought. One part of her just wanted to dash up to the attic door and give the key a twist. The other part of her wanted to stay down here and wisely give the key back. Her parents had always forbidden her to even touch

that old wooden door that was supposed to lead to the attic. “I should see this as an adventure,” Nina thought. “I should take this step. Why don’t I just go up there? I mean it’s just an attic, right?” Nina decided.

Nina strode upstairs to the old wooden door that led to the attic. She stuck the golden key into the door. Nina pushed the squeaking door aside. In front of her was a small, dusty room, with a big “old fashioned” staircase. Dust gathered on the steps, and you could see that some pieces of the wood were chipped off.

Slowly, Nina set her foot onto the staircase. She strode up to the top, where she saw many bookshelves, old cartons, and a fine wooden closet. There was just one thing that Nina thought was fishy. On one of the cardboard boxes it said SECRET.

Nina stepped closer to see if there were any other signs of what was in there. But she was out of luck. There was nothing. Nina slowly opened the box. What she saw was a big disappointment. There were stacks and stacks of magazines from years in the past. She took the top magazine that was staring her in the face. “1945, WORLD WAR II,” Nina read. She opened the magazine to the first page.

Everything started to spin. A spiral of flashing light was pulling her down into what seemed to be a large black hole. She tried to resist it, but the force was too strong. The spiral dragged her down further and further. Nina was getting extremely dizzy from the surrounding. She closed her eyes.

Her head banged on a hard surface, and then everything started to fade away. When she opened her eyes, she was in a dark room with the magazine still in her hand. She stuck the magazine in her leather pocket. Strolling toward the door where light came from, Nina was trying to get everything straight that had happened in the last couple of minutes. Nina gradually opened the door. Then she saw many girls and boys her age walking by. They were all dressed in dresses and suits like at a party. A school bell rang, and the kids disappeared in the rooms. Nina stepped into the hallway. “Is this a school?” Nina questioned herself.

“Yes, it sure is a school,” Nina heard a friendly voice say. Nina was astonished. A lady only a few years older than her

appeared out of a door. The lady had a very mysterious look on her face. "Come with me," the lady advised Nina. They walked along the hallway to a small room that had a wooden sign on it which read "Ms. Sanches."

The young lady opened the door and offered Nina a chair. Nina didn't dare to ask a question, even though she had so many that puzzled her. "Did you come through the magazine you're holding?" the friendly lady asked.

Nina didn't know what to answer. Did she get here by the magazine? So she insisted, "I'm sorry, but I don't know how I got here. Where am I, anyway?"

"Do you know who Mr. Wayneland is?" the lady questioned.

"Of course, I know Mr. Wayneland. He is my father," Nina answered.

The lady continued, "That takes care of everything. You probably don't know that your dad was the first one to invent a way of time traveling. That is the way I got here, but that is a different story. Right now, you are in 1945 in Hungary in the middle of World War II."

"So you mean that this magazine took me back 57 years?" Nina asked with amazement.

"That would be correct. By the way, I'm Kate Sanches, a teacher in this school. You must be Nina?" the lady asked.

"Yes, I'm Nina Wayneland," Nina replied. She could not believe that she had gone *back in time!* How can her dad have never told anyone about it, or has he? "How do you know about this and how does it work?" Nina asked Ms. Sanches.

"Your father invented the time traveling three years ago. He didn't want it open to the public, so he only told the family. He asked if someone wanted to take the risk of going, and I volunteered. The time traveling works by microscopic electronics being converted into your mind about the past," the lady explained.

Nina nodded. Right at that second an alarm went off. "Let's go! We have to get into our bomb shelters," Ms. Sanches explained. Ms. Sanches ran out of the room and Nina followed. Many kids were running and screaming, but they all seemed to

know where they were going. They ran down the stairs and out of the school. About a hundred yards away was a door hidden under trees. The crowd went in there as fast as they could. Nina and Ms. Sanches were the last ones to reach the door. Ms. Sanches advised her to pretend to be a student there. Right at that time a plane fluttered over them. Ms. Sanches pulled Nina into the door. Now they could hear that many more planes were flying all over the town.

Ms. Sanches led Nina down many, many steps. They came to a room with rows and rows of mattresses. The mattresses were in case of an emergency when you had to stay overnight. Down there you could survive for days. They had food, beds, and anything else that they would need.

Nina set herself down on a mattress right next to Ms. Sanches. Many kids looked at her strangely, because of her bizarre outfit and because they had never seen her before.

Nina never thought of what could happen to her until now. If she would do something to herself, then she could never go back. Her parents, then, would worry forever about what had happened to her.

After what seemed like hours, they told the group of kids that it was safe to go back up. When they all reached the door, teachers declared that school was over. "What should I do?" Nina thought. She didn't have to think very long, because Ms. Sanches gave her the answer.

"Nina, you can come with me. A family with four kids took me in. Three boys and one girl. We can let them in on our little secret. They'll understand." She collected the kids at the exit of the door. Megan, as the kids called her, told them all about Nina.... By the time Megan had finished, they reached a large farm on the out-skirts of town. The farm was modern for its time and it looked very beautiful. It wasn't smelly and messy like what Nina had expected.

They walked to the back door, from where Nina could see the horses and the big barn. Megan looked for the key behind the chair, where it was always hidden. There wasn't a key, but a short note. The letter was from her "mom." Megan read it quietly. After

she put the note down, she looked around to be sure that no one was around but the kids and her. Then in a whisper she instructed, "Something has come up, so we must go to the hideout quickly. Don't ask any questions, just follow me."

Ms. Sanches took a shortcut through the fields. Nina and the other kids were trying very hard to keep up with the fast walk with which Megan led. The hideout was almost on the other side of town.

By the time they had reached the small hideout, it was very late. A lady was standing in front of a small cottage waving to Ms. Sanches. "Hi, Mom," Ms. Sanches said by the time she reached the door.

"Come in quickly," Mrs. Sanches ordered. They went into the door to the hideout, which was not at all like the one at school. The hideout was filled with blankets and a big suitcase.

Megan quickly explained to her stepmother who the guest was that she brought with them. Then Mrs. Sanches spoke in a rather upset and sad voice. "I've been warning you about the government throwing us out of this country for a long time. And now is the time. Germany lost the war and they are throwing us out. The list for the people that have to leave went up today. All of the Germans have to go back. We can only take one suitcase. The Russians are coming tomorrow to take everything that is left." Everyone looked shocked. There was a long moment of silence.

Mrs. Sanches continued, "I know this is hard for you, but we can't do anything about it. Listen up! Louise Bierbaum and her family have to leave also. When Louise knocks on the door, that means that it is time to go. We're supposed to leave on the train tomorrow, but we might not get any rooms back in Germany if we leave tomorrow...." Mrs. Sanches let them in on the rest of the plan. After many arguments they sat down to rest, because this would be a long night.

Finally, after what seemed to be hours, they heard the signal for Mrs. Bierbaum's arrival: three long and three short knocks. Mrs. Sanches opened the lock and pulled the door aside. Everything was going just as planned. They took all their belongings and quietly left the hideout.

After walking in the darkness for what seemed like hours, they finally reached their destination, the bus stop. There they met the Bierbaum family. Quietly they greeted each other so as not to draw attention from people in the surrounding houses. They didn't want to be caught by any Russian soldier checking houses, because the soldiers would send them back home. When Russians caught anyone running away, they would be found in prison the next day.

The bus arrived to pick them up only a few minutes later. One after the other they went onto the bus. Finally they had reached some place warm after standing in the winter cold. There was no one on the bus, and not one person got on the bus the stops after.

They got to the train station just as planned. When they got off the bus, they saw a very unpleasant setting. Soldiers were lined up in a straight line. In everyone's mind there was the same question, "How can we ever get past them?" But then one of the soldiers glanced at Megan. It was one of their good friends who joined the army to be the ones that had to go in and out of the country.

He came up to the group of "strangers" and commanded, "I'll be taking care of these fellows. You just keep an eye on the rest of our new visitors. And you folks, follow me."

He led them through the crowds of people into a small room. "You have to be careful once you get to Germany. There might be soldiers checking that you are where you belong. Whenever you get in trouble, just say you want to talk to Mike Gatenburg. He'll give you your destination and anything else that you'll need. Well, good luck, and nice to see you again." They said good-bye, and had passed another obstacle. They went back to the terminal where the train had just arrived. They boarded the train with great relief.

Megan and Nina were still up after everyone else had fallen asleep. The brisk wind brought a bitter cold into the wagons. "Why did you never try to get back?" Nina whispered into Megan's ear, not wanting to wake anyone up.

"The day I arrived here, it was December 30, 1941. I had my magazine with me, just like you did. Only mine was made for 1941. Of course I kept my magazine with me.

"I went to the governor of this town. I pretended to have lost my family, and he sent out a flier shortly about me. I was with him for two days when finally a letter came. It was from the Sancheses, willing to take me in with them. I moved in with them. I told them my true story and they didn't believe me at first, but after I showed them the magazines, they made eyes. I had planned to stay for about two months. When the time came for me to go back, I noticed that on the magazine the date was one year ahead. I discovered that you must leave during the calendar year in which you arrived. After that year ends, the magazine is, let me say, expired. Since I arrived here on December 30, I was stuck here. I tried reading in the magazine again, but the method no longer worked. I stayed here, and now I would never want to go back," Megan finished.

"So even if you could, you would never go back?" Nina made sure.

"That's right," Megan replied. That was the last word that either of them said that night. Megan fell asleep very rapidly, while Nina stayed up a lot longer. She thought about all the knowledge and experience she would get from this adventure. This is one of those adventures that will always have a spot in your mind, always. With that thought, Nina dozed off.

* * *

After the twelve cold hours, they finally reached Germany. The families were relieved by the safe arrival. They went to Mike as the soldier told them. He gave them a room in a town near Stuttgart, where they could start all over. They had no more money, so all of them would have to get a job.

They went to their new house, where they found a very small room for all of them. This sure wasn't what they were used to. Nina, though, had a different goal in mind. She had spent so much

time in the “past,” so she should better try to find a way to get back. Wouldn’t her family worry by now?

After a couple of hours of sleep, Nina and the rest of the family had to get up. “Megan, I’ve spent some days with you, and I think it’s time to go back. But how do I get back?” Nina wondered.

“Just flip the pages in your magazine and you’ll be on your way,” Megan instructed.

Nina tested her pockets and found that what she was looking for was still there. “I still have it,” she yelled with excitement, “and the magazine says 2002 on it. Your theory was correct.”

It was a very long goodbye. Many tears rolled down Nina’s cheeks. Before she left, they talked and talked. Nina thanked everyone, especially Megan. Now it was time to go back to her dull life in New Jersey. When Nina opened the magazine some flashes of lightning came by and then she saw the world from the top. She was flying over the world seeing all of the countries, cities, houses, and people. The only scary thing was that no one was moving. The time in the real world must have stopped while she was gone.

Boom! Nina landed hard on the attic floor. She decided that this definitely should be kept a secret. She safely put the magazine back where it belonged. “I’m sure going to miss the Sancheses,” she thought as tears ran down her cheeks.

As Nina was letting this adventure flow through her mind like a wonderful movie, she thought about how wrong she was judging her dad the way she did. “Maybe my dad isn’t the good-looking, popular dad that a girl would wish for, but he sure is some scientist. I can’t believe that I judged him that way. At least there was a reason for having his head stuck in a physics book all his life. Without those geeks in school, we’d probably still be living in stone houses,” Nina considered.

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