

**Your
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Other titles in the series

Short Stories by Short People

*Who Says Adults Have to Write
All the Good Stories?*

Got Stories?

Tall Tales Gone Short

Stories For Shorties

Five Drafts Later

Your Title Here

132 Stories by
Sixth-grade Students of
Berkshire Middle School

Daniel Fisher, Editor

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TO THE AUTHORS

Your hard work has paid off.
These sound juicy!

Mr. Fisher congratulates each of you
on your accomplishment.

FANTASIA

The Crazy Teacher

*Some people have weird ways of getting attention, and teachers may have the strangest methods of all. Kelly Ann Petersen tells the story of a magazine-throwing educator who she thinks of as **THE CRAZY TEACHER.***

You should all know Mr. Fisher. Well, I do. He is my sixth-grade language arts teacher. When you have finished reading my story, you will know why I describe him in three words: old, weird, and crazy.

It all started on the first day of school in my sixth-hour class with Mr. Fisher. Right out of the blue, you would see magazines flying in the air. Now, that's weird. He even wears crazy ties of all different sizes, shapes, and colors. I asked him where he got all of his ties, and he said, "Ties-R-Us." I never heard of that store.

I wonder where he is from. I heard of a strange town called Looneyville, where only teachers live. I bet that's where he's from: Looneyville.

I really wanted to find out where he lives, so one day after school, I hid in the back of his car. After driving around for what seemed like two hours, he stopped. I slowly popped up and looked out. Surprise: We were right back at school! I guess Looneyville is located in my school.

I followed him right to his classroom, where he took a book out of the bookcase, and the wall opened up. There were stairs, but instead of going down the stairs, there were what looked like lily pads going up.

Following Mr. Fisher, I missed a step and began falling. Just then I was pulled up. "I knew you were following me," said Mr. Fisher. Then surprisingly he said, "Come, I'll give you a tour of my crazy hometown of Looneyville!"

After about ten lily pads up, we came to an area of bright lights and all different colors. Children were swinging on swings that had no chains, fishes were walking around barking, and there were trees made of Jell-o. "This is Looneyville Park," Mr. Fisher explained.

Next, we came to an elevator and came to his house, which was made of chocolate chips and stairways going nowhere. Then I said, "I have to go home." Before I left, he said, "But don't tell anyone about Looneyville."

The next day, Mr. Fisher and I pretended like nothing had ever happened about Looneyville. But magazines are still flying around, and he still wears his crazy ties. It was just another normal, crazy day in Mr. Fisher's class.

Disappearing Baby

You rarely hear a peep out of Simon, the baby of the Smith family. Sarah Smith discovers there's a good reason for that in
DISAPPEARING BABY, by *Jessica Levine*.

Sarah Smith loves kids. She always enjoys taking care of little children. When her parents gave her the chore of babysitting for her baby brother Simon, Sarah thought it was pretty fun. However, Sarah's job turned out to be easier than she thought because Simon was a very unusual baby.

Every Saturday night, Mr. and Mrs. Smith left Sarah in charge while they went out for the evening. At first Sarah thought Simon was sleeping quietly in his room. Sarah could read a book, watch TV and just have time to herself. The baby hardly cried, so she enjoyed the peace and quiet. Then one night, she realized that the reason it was always so quiet was that the baby was gone.

Whenever the Smiths left, Simon also disappeared. Sarah tucked Simon in bed and covered him with his blanket. Later, when she came back to check on him, he was gone. At first Sarah panicked, but it always seemed like whenever their parents came home, Simon was home again, too.

Sarah knew it was important to check on Simon. She would go up to his bed and look under the blanket, and Simon would not be there. She would carefully lay the blanket out on his bed again and look around the house for him. Sarah couldn't figure out what was happening. By the time she came back to check his room again, Simon would be

asleep in his bed. Sarah was very confused. Was Simon playing an unusual game of hide-and-go-seek?

Each time Simon reappeared in his bed, Sarah noticed something different about him. The first night she went in his room, he had sushi rice stuck to him, and a Japanese flag was stuck to his diaper. The next Saturday Sarah checked the crib and he was gone again. Sarah was really confused. By the time Mr. and Mrs. Smith came home, Simon was back again, too. This time when Sarah went in his room, he had spaghetti sauce all over his face and an Italian flag stuck to his diaper. Sarah was still confused.

After Simon disappeared from his crib on two Saturday evenings, Sarah thought she had better tell her parents what was going on. It was such an unbelievable story. She mentioned what was happening and her parents said, "We think you need more sleep. A baby can't just walk out the front door." Mr. and Mrs. Smith trusted their daughter, so they figured she must be exaggerating the story. Sarah always had a crazy imagination, so they didn't think about it much. The Smiths never paid much attention to what Sarah said because they were enjoying their Saturday evenings, and everything was fine and normal when they got home.

On the third Saturday evening, Simon disappeared again. Simon had been tucked under his blanket. Once again Sarah went to check on Simon, and when she looked under the blanket, he was gone. She laid the blanket on top of his bed and went looking around the house. Just like the other times, after Sarah laid the blanket on the bed and went looking, Simon came back. This time when he came home he had guacamole on his hands and a Mexican flag was stuck to his diaper.

Sarah and the blanket were the travel agents that sent Simon away and brought him back. Sarah figured out that Simon was magically going to other countries whenever his

parents left the house. Simon was a very hungry baby and he needed lots of energy for his magical travel. However, being a baby, he was also very messy. He ate lots of food, but lots of it got all over him. Sarah also thought it was unusual that Simon was always home before their parents returned. Sarah didn't know what to believe. She knew something was happening. However, Simon was always fine and he never got hurt. He must be having a fun adventure, and besides, Sarah was always curious where he'd go next.

Sarah never figured out how the blanket made Simon disappear. Sarah just knew it was a magical blanket. Whenever Sarah covered Simon up, he disappeared, and when Sarah laid it on the bed again, Simon would return home. Since Simon was just a baby, he couldn't tell, either. Sarah just accepted that the blanket was magic and that Simon was an unusual boy. Sarah would say, "Sometimes magic can't be explained."

So every Saturday Simon came home with something from another country and a flag. Weeks went by and he visited France, Spain, China, Australia and all the countries in the world.

Finally one night Sarah went to check on Simon to see where he had been, and there he was sleeping quietly in his bed. Sarah didn't notice anything different about him. However, when she looked at his diaper, she noticed an American flag. Simon had had an adventure all around the world and he never disappeared again.

The Dragon's Scourge

*Jason Crouger knows nothing of dragons during the bulk of his twelve-plus years on this Earth. That changes on the eve of his thirteenth birthday, when our hero is whisked away to the Underworld for the fight of his life in **THE DRAGON'S SCOURGE**, by **Rob Swor**.*

Two men stood off in a weird arena-like room, each with a sword in hand. One looked like he was just 12 years old; the other looked as if he were in his mid-30's (though by his dull taste in furnishing, he was most likely centuries old). Then, the 12-year-old attacked. Their swords met, creating a loud, metallic *ping*. They swiped, slashed, and parried, neither one ever making contact with the other's body. Then, the older one struck, knocking away the 12-year-old's sword, and the kid surrendered. All of a sudden, Dark Voiper's voice came out of the old guy's mouth, saying, "Lowke Sidewalker, I, Dark Voiper, must tell you the truth about your father."

"You killed him," the kid said in Lowke's voice.

"No, Lowke, *I am* your father. Search your feelings. You know it to be true."

Jason Charles Crouger (his friends call him Hallo, or the actual names Jason X, Chuckie, or Freddy Krueger) sat up in bed, panting. He looked over to his left. His DVD of *Atmosphere-less Fights* was still playing, and still repeatedly saying "I am your father, I am your father." Hallo looked to his left. His clock said 11:59 p.m. It was *still* June second, 2008. He couldn't wait until tomorrow, because of two things: One, it was his 13th birthday; and two, it was the last day of

school, and he was extremely tired of the sixth grade (being older than everyone and all). Then, the lights in his room turned on. Or, at least, that's what he thought, until he looked behind him. Two *PHOENIXES* with a net came out of a large portal that was as bright as the sun was hot and captured him. *Phoenixes? I thought those were just myths...* he thought. They then dragged him into the portal. Everything flashed by in what felt like years, although it was only a couple of seconds.

* * *

All of a sudden, he was in the room from his dream. He could've sworn the man from the dream was there, but then a window broke, along with a jet of flame coming in, obviously making the man retreat. *Dragons!* he thought, not knowing that he was screaming in fear. "Jason Charles Crouger, these dragons and I come in peace," he heard a man say. He could barely make out the shape through the smoke, but he could hear him fine. "You are the town of Dragonreach's newest Lord Dragonflame," the man said. "My name is Carl Robert Uber-Donley."

Apparently, the dragons were capable of speech, because he knew that this Carl guy and him were the only people in the room, and some new voice chimed in. "Call him Crud."

"Why?"

"His initials. Carl Robert Uber-Donley. Crud," he said happily, then suppressed a giggle.

"Shut your trap, Blaze," "Crud" said. "Okay, Jason, you..."

"My name is Hallo."

"Okay, 'Hallo,' you were brought here by a...Wait. Why are you Hallo?"

“My name is Jason (Jason X) Charles (Chuckie the killer doll) Crouger (Freddie Krueger). Also, it’s short for Halloween.”

“Oh. Where were we? Oh yeah, you were brought here by a man named Dracus, who is bent on taking all of the dragons in his command, so he could sacrifice you to the demon gods, who live right next door to Dragonreach. And before you ask, we are in the Underworldly Crag in Dragonreach, which is the only *smilit* place in the entire underworld.”

“Why?”

“We currently have no Lord Dragonflame. Also, you are the only possible candidate, seeing as every Lord Dragonflame ever was American, you know the most about dragons of all the people we looked at, you are very fond of them, and you’re the right age to begin training.”

“What age?”

“Thirteen.”

“I’m 12. My birthday’s tomorrow, though.”

“Oh. Then your training begins tomorrow. Now we must leave before Pheo and Nix return.” As if that horrid sound of more windows breaking was their cue, Pheo and Nix (the phoenixes who kidnapped Hallo) flew out of their hiding spot, with more phoenixes, each of which are trained in the ways of slaying dragons.

As soon as the dragons, Crud, and Hallo were out of view and reach, the sprinklers came on and nearly killed all of the specially trained phoenixes, who fled. Pheo and Nix hissed from pain and got down on their feet, transforming into their human form and kneeling just as Dracus entered. He said one more thing (after setting a very large phoenix punishment hose to “Drench”), which was, “I’ll give you one last chance,” and squirted them, causing them to go back to their phoenix form from the pain.

* * *

The next day, Hallo stood on a field with lots of dragons and, of course, Crud. One dragon, who was very large and bulky, with even larger and apparently stronger wings, walked up to him. This one was the one who Crud was riding when they saved Hallo. He introduced himself as Rae. “Chosen one, I bow to thee.” Crud pointed out to Rae that Hallo and Rae were only ten years apart in age, but at 12 years old, humans didn’t say “thee” or anything like that to Rae (he then said, “Actually... humans *never* say those things anymore”). “Okay then... Hallo, I am Rae, the strongest, wisest, and most powerful dragon in Dragonreach.”

“What about oldest?”

“No.”

“Who’s the oldest?”

“Shadowarc, my twin brother, born just 30 seconds before me. He is a traitor, belonging to Dracus.”

“Have you ever gone into...” Hallo swiveled his eyes and whispered, “a maniacal rage where you almost wiped out the town and yourself?”

“Why, I never...! What gave you that ‘great idea?’”

“Uhhhhh...,” he muttered the reason under his breath (it was “You look evil”), and before Rae could tell him to stop mumbling, yelled, “I want to meet the next dragon!” A red dragon with black wings approached Hallo.

“My name is Thorn, Hallo. I am the only one of us who has gained the ability to breathe fire, and I can also use telepathy.”

“Okay... Show me you can use telepathy.”

“Fine.” *Undeniable proof for you.*

“Hey! You’re in my mind! You’re in my mind!”

Yes, I’m in your mind. I’m in the mind of anyone I want, you imbecile.

“Ooooooooooh... Thorn swore in Spanish!”

“Imbecile’ is not a swear word, Hallo.” Using telepathy, Thorn called out to Crud and thought, *Are you sure this is the chosen one? He’s kind of weak in the head...* “And what makes you think it’s swearing in *Spanish!*”

“It sounded Spanish... I want to meet Blaze!”

A red dragon with orange wings walked up to Hallo. “Yo, diggy dawg, diggy dig,” Blaze said.

“Uh, Blaze,” Crud whispered, “humans haven’t talked like that for a long time.”

“Oh. Now you tell me. This is why you and I hate each other almost as much as we hate Dracus.”

“Shut your trap, Blaze.”

“Why?”

“Do it.”

“Why?”

“Do it.”

“Why?”

“That’s it,” Crud fumed. He pounced on Blaze and drew his sword and started to fight him.

“I want to talk to...him! That blood-red and white one.” He pointed to the final dragon in the line.

“My name is Aaero. I may be the smallest dragon here, but I am more skilled in close-range combat than anyone here except Crud and Rae. I also am Thorn’s only brother, and the only dragon in the Underworld who blasts air instead of fire. I also can inhale fire and pass it along to Thorn in ways you don’t want to know. I can take in water, dirt, or whatever you can think of, except fire, and hurl it at the enemy in the form of ice if it’s water, stone if it’s dirt, and so on. Finally...,” he looked up. “I am yours when you become Lord Dragonflame!”

“Sweet. My own dragon!” He pictured himself high in the clouds on Aaero’s back...but all of a sudden pictured

himself in a heavy suit of armor, as an adult, with what looked like a dragon tooth jutting out of his belt and a bow of dragon flesh and bones on his back with a quiver full of more dragon teeth. He just stood there.... He all of a sudden fell backwards...and he had the weapons, but not the armor.

Crud walked back from a gravestone that randomly appeared with dragon wings sticking out from under it.

“We needed you to imagine yourself with that stuff, so we got Thorn to help you.” Crud explained that he used to be Lord Dragonflame, but got “fired” by the Dragon Council of Dragonreach for slaying an innocent dragon. Not even Thorn and his mind tricks could convince the council to believe the truth: The dragon told him to do it. Nobody knows why, except, of course, the dragon, who probably hated his life. “At least I could convince them to not execute me...,” Crud said. “I was banned from Dragonreach. They just have no idea I’m still here.... Besides, now that we’re in the underworld, the dragon could just fly back here.”

“Aren’t you mad about losing your job?”

“Nah. I just can’t do any big-time fighting without a whole army to occupy the council and Dragonreach’s leader.”

Hallo began his training. He started on learning to use his sword. It wasn’t that hard for him. He just copied the laser-blade moves from his *Atmosphere-less Fights* video game. He even learned to use the sword as a pole vault pole. He tied a rope to the handle and his wrist...and ran. He then stabbed the ground with the sword, jumped, and let go. He eventually had learned all of Crud’s moves, as well as one he made up involving the runes on the Dragonflame Blade (his sword). He called the words “Ryu-sutoraiki” which is Japanese for “Dragon-strike” and did a pole vault, shot some arrows, and once he got his sword back, when the runes glowed, the sword’s magical energy let loose. (Also, the magic would kill all beings of darkness if not for the fact practically everything

evil was a being of darkness here.) It allowed him to do everything a dragon can do *except* fly.

All of his bow and arrow moves were the same except in the Ryu-sutoraiki, where his natural magic allows him to set them on fire.

* * *

In Dracus Tower, Pheo and Nix readied an army of undead and ogres to attack Dragonreach. They were a little...okay, they were really scared, since not even an hour ago, Dracus hosed down his army of Dragon-slaying phoenixes, and he said one thing to them then, as well: “You two are next.” Nix offered to stay behind in case Hallo or Crud or whoever got in. He was too afraid to say the real reason, though. Nix was just too afraid. “Pheo was always the tougher one...,” he muttered.

* * *

The army marched into town in small groups, each group led by an ogre with an extremely large magic shield. Pheo surveyed the landscape from high above with his group of undead dragons and ogres as their riders. They dove down to the group of dragons who had Crud and Hallo among them. Crud was first to spot them. “FULL MOON OVER A NIGHTTIME SAN FRANCISCO,” he shouted, and an amazingly large blast of water hit Pheo, and he was no more.

All of Pheo’s troops who were hit fell as well, but the ogre riders survived, as they were only about five feet off of the ground at that point.

“Crud, was that a spell?” Rae asked. Crud mounted Rae and soared hundreds of feet above the ground.

“Yes, it was.”

“I don’t get it.”

Crud sighed and (on a maple leaf which he found floating around a few minutes earlier) wrote down *San Francisco = big waves, full moon = bigger waves, San Francisco + full moon = huge waves*. Then, after getting what Crud meant in the spell (and allowing Crud to get in some target practice on the leaf with his bow), Rae yelled all over Dragonreach in his booming voice, “WAR BETWEEN DRACUS AND DRAGONREACH HAS ENSUED! ALL TROOPS BE PREPARED!” Blaze and Thorn then flew away in different directions to get their militias, The Delta Squad and Bloody Flamers. Hallo and Aaero fled from Rae as well, but Crud and Rae didn’t know where.

* * *

A couple of minutes later, Thorn had reached the Delta Squad, which was a small group of specially trained dragons and their masters.

“Okay, guys, we need to protect the town,” he panted.

“What?” said Leo, the master of Leia, the only female dragon in the squad (both were very selfish and rarely got over disputes). “We agreed that we would never help them again after they sent reinforcements when we told them to leave it to us.”

“They need us. Sooner or later our base could be spotted and pushed right off of the mountain we’re currently on and right into plain old fire.”

“I agree with Thorn,” Fluke (another rider) said, and was quickly followed by Gabriele (his dragon) and Zak who was the same as Thorn, having no rider ever since the Underworldly Crag opened up right under their master’s feet, killing them.

“We’re staying behind,” Leo and Leia said at the same time.

“So be it,” Thorn said and left, immediately followed by Zak, Fluke, and Gabriele. They had been flying for about a minute when they heard a terrorized scream of Leo. They looked behind them and saw the base get shoved off the mountain by an undead army of Dracus clones. As they watched it plummet into the flames of heck, the undead army went in the other direction.

“Now we really are a correct squad of four.”

“As they say, stubbornness made the cat fall into fire....”

“It’s ‘curiosity killed the cat.’”

Just as Thorn and Zak started to fight, Gabriele said, “Guys. I think I see some enemies....”

“Ogres and undead at ground 12 o’clock!” Leia shouted as she sped up from the flames (with the charred skull of her master—or someone else—in her paw). She had seen what Gabriele was looking at, and a raging battle started. “I wanna live...,” she muttered as Thorn started interrogating her on how she lived and why she came.

* * *

All the way across the mountains, the Bloody Flamers were having a different problem.

“We need to send the entire group into battle, not just riderless me,” Blaze said. “Besides, I’m the only one here who can’t use magic.”

“Since when are you Mr. Serious?” Flare, a dragon who everyone but Blaze liked, said. “Go into war on your own.”

“Fine. I will.” He flew towards Delta Squad and looked back one last time to see the Bloody Flamers suffer the same fate as Leo by the same army. Or maybe they were just approaching and the base slid off since it was so crude and the

Bloody Flamers was about as big as the United States Navy...or maybe the Marines...or at least New York, New York.

* * *

Blaze caught up with Thorn and friends just as the fighting began. “Where’s Leo?”

“Ashes on the Devil’s fire.”

“Poor guy. As they say, stubbornness made the cat fall into the fire.”

“Told you,” Zak said to Thorn, sticking out his tongue. “Pay up.”

“I can’t.”

“Dang.” Right after he said “dang,” he experienced the death of a dragon. Leia was being overwhelmed by some of the undead dragons and their ogres. They shot her, slashed her, bit her, ripped off some talons and stabbed her until one finally got her heart. There drenched in her blood lay Leia. Her last words were: “Maybe it’ll be better when I flee the underworld...” Her last thought was: *Hey, at least this is ogre blood, not mine.*

Zak was enraged so much by this experience that he did two things to the opposing army. He ate the ogres and cremated the undead. He missed one ogre, who just so happened to be an ogre whose aim was nearly impossible to beat, and currently was aiming for Zak’s heart. *One shot and he’s as dead as the rest of his kin from the moun—* Zak’s stomach was the last thing that ogre ever saw.

“Scrumptious,” was all Zak had to say about the taste of the ogre (excuse me, his head).

The four dragons and Fluke all returned to the mountains and re-executed the Dracuses and undead, using the bones as a memorial to Leo, Leia, and the Flamers. The memorial was

also the base of the new Delta Squad, made indestructible by Fluke's magic. There they waited for a signal of the end of Dracus.

* * *

"Perfect," Dracus said as he heard Rae's voice, which could probably be heard at the throne of Death himself, it was so loud. "I pity that dragon's rider, though. He must be deaf by now."

"Sir!" Nix shouted. "We have captured a dragon. He is anchored down outside, literally. With spiked chains and lots of boat anchors. His rider is currently in the dungeon," he said reassuringly.

"See to it that our friend in the dungeon gets executed in a proper fashion, hmm?"

"You mean by you?"

"Why wouldn't I?"

"It shall be done, milord."

* * *

"Hello, Hallo," Nix said.

"Nix. I should've known you of all people would be the one to retrieve me."

"First of all, I *always* retrieve prisoners. Second, I'm a phoenix, not a person."

"Phoenixes are people, too."

"Yeah, just like dogs."

"You don't like being a phoenix, do you?"

"I just don't like being like dogs," Nix screamed. He started to sob.

Now's my chance, Hallo thought. He pulled out his Dragonflame Blade, and right before he struck down Nix, the

phoenix disintegrated right before his eyes. *Too many tears*, Hallo thought, with a smug smile on his face.

* * *

“Where’s my prisoner, Nix?” Dracus shouted at the top of his lungs.

“He killed himself,” Hallo said in the best imitation of a Nix voice as he possibly could manage, which, unfortunately, wasn’t very good.

“Ahhhh, Hallo. I’ve been waiting to fight you.”

“You’ll pay for all the dragons you killed today, Dooglu.”

“My name is Dracus!” he yelled. Hallo took that gap as the right time to strike.

Hallo attacked. Their swords met, creating a loud, metallic *ping*. They swiped, slashed, and parried, neither one ever making contact with the other’s body. They jabbed, stabbed, and blocked, but all they successfully did was make music. Finally, Hallo shouted something Dracus had never heard before. It was the only original move Hallo knew. “*RYU-SUTORAIKI!*” Every single hit made contact with Dracus except the final, most powerful blow.

* * *

Shadowarc looked out the window while watching his little brother battle his master’s troops. Unfortunately for Shadowarc, he couldn’t see Rae.... He heard the window behind him shatter. “Rae,” he said, “It’s about time you showed up. Luckily for you, your master isn’t ever too busy to help you battle your brother.”

“Shadowarc! Rae and I are here to battle! Now bring it or perish!” Crud yelled.

“What makes you think you can make me perish?”

“Look outside,” Crud nodded at the window.

Shadowarc peered outside and winced. There was an ogre and a dragon left! *I warned Master about using only undead and ogres. I told him to use demons and minotaurs. But no, he just had to use weaklings and “brainiacs.”* He laughed at the thought, then did what he was trained to do: fight. The two dragons circled each other.

“Father always liked you best.” Shadowarc lunged when Rae said that.

“Because I wasn’t afraid of my lunch.” Rae flapped up a storm at the memory of his fleeing at the sight of a rabbit.

“My master lets me do what I want, though.”

The taunting and swiping went on for what felt like hours, then Shadowarc felt like he had been speared. To be precise, he had been javelined. He roared in pain and used a power only he could use: He sent a blast of pure darkness from his mouth to hit Crud. Instead, he hit Rae directly in the head. “Brother...I can sense you don’t want to do this...,” Rae said as he fell to the ground. Crud jumped from Rae’s back and landed on Shadowarc just as Rae started to fall.

“Rae...you’re right. But I must.” A tear fell from Crud’s face. “Rae...,” he said softly. “Raeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Why do the good die young?”

A tear rolled down off of his face and fell the hundreds of feet to Rae’s body... and hit right where Rae had been hit by the shadow blast earlier. They waited for what felt like hours before something happened. The dragon slowly stood up and flew to Shadowarc. Crud jumped to Rae’s back as Rae and Shadowarc resumed fighting for a couple of minutes. Just as Shadowarc fell to the ground, panting, followed by his much stronger brother, Rae said, “Come on, Crud. Let’s make this place cave on him.”

“Hallo’s still here,” Crud pointed out. Rae blasted a jet of magma at Shadowarc.

“I can help,” Shadowarc said. The magma stopped short. “I will help.”

* * *

“*RYU-SUTORAIKI!*” Hallo kept wasting his magic.

“Crud has failed to train you one thing, young one. You have a limit,” Dracus taunted. “And you have just met it.” He went up to Hallo and nudged him. Hallo dropped to the ground, in the midst of dying. Just when he thought all was lost, the window shattered.

“WHY DOESN’T ANYONE USE THE DOOR?” Dracus demanded.

“Maybe we just don’t like you, or your dumb tower, or Underworldly Crag in our peaceful Dragonreach. Did that ever occur to you?” Aaero shouted over Hallo’s wailing. A blast of air followed by ice and stone hit Dracus. He was still tired from all of those blows he had taken from Hallo, so the air and stone made it, but the ice didn’t. The ice froze in mid-air (yes, everyone knows that’s bad humor) and just hovered in one spot until Aaero got impatient. He went in for the final blow and....

“*RYU-KORU!*” Dracus shouted. Aaero dropped down, entombed in ice that only one spell that was long forgotten could thaw. The floor started to erupt. That is a literal comment, since Rae was good at making stuff into a mini-volcano. “Great. Now the floor goes!” Dracus fumed.

Shadowarc arched (more bad humor) up into the air and used a healing light blast on Hallo. “Shadowarc? What are you doing?” Dracus fumed impatiently.

Hallo stood up, stronger than ever, and imagined the thought of his soaring over New York City on Aaero’s back in his armor again. This time, he was too heavy to get blasted back. The armor just made him topple over (hint, hint). With

his advanced strength, which he figured was permanent, he made one more attack on Dracus. He nudged Dracus and slashed him with the Dragonflame Blade, removing his head. As the headless body toppled to the floor, followed by the head, Shadowarc felt the life drain from his master.

As soon as Dracus's body stopped twitching (yes, everyone knows that's disgusting), the tower caved in on top of everyone, but the only one caught in the rubble was Dracus's last troop. Immediately after that, the rubble and Underworldly Crag altogether disappeared and a new building appeared in its place. Blaze and Thorn swooped down, followed by Zak.

Fort Dragonflame, a building where Lord Dragonflame stays when he's in Dragonreach, is what Crud said it was. There was a large spire in the middle that was shaped like Crud. "Crud, now I believe that you were once Lord Dragonflame."

"Just call me...Sir Lizardbreath from now on instead of Crud."

"Yeah. I would rather have just my breath made fun of then be called 'poop.'"

"Hallo—I mean Lord Dragonflame, shut your big fat trap." They all had one big laugh and stopped.

"Aero," Hallo said. He could feel him dying. He ran to Aero and looked at his dragon one last time. "*ANTI-RYU-KORU!*" he shouted, having no idea what it meant. Aero collapsed into a big heap on the ground. "We were too late."

Then, all of a sudden, Sir Lizardbreath jumped sky high (literally, and that's HIGH when in the underworld). When he landed, he had one thing to say. "MY BUTT WAS BURNED! THORN, WHAT WAS THAT FOR?"

"I didn't do it, Crud."

"Rae?"

"Nope."

“Aaero! You’re alive!” Dragonflame shouted. “How’d you do it? Burn Crud’s butt? I thought you couldn’t breathe fire.”

“I found a puddle of Rae’s magma and used that.”

Hallo went and hugged his dragon, and the ceremony was held (no, not a wedding, but a promotion). Hallo was officially Lord Dragonflame and Aaero’s master. From that day forth, Hallo, since he couldn’t die from age due to Aaero and Shadowarc’s magic, lived for millennia to come, and finally got Dragonreach back into the overworld (by, of course, fighting darkness alongside Sir Lizardbreath).

A dragon is never *willingly* evil, but is just doing evil because its master bids it. They also cook good burgers, hot dogs, dragonslayer-on-a-buns, and so on.

The dragon Crud killed did fly back to Dragonreach just seconds before Hallo freed the town from the Underworld. Cr—Sir Lizardbreath was allowed to return to Dragonreach since Innocence (that’s the dragon’s name) returned. Oh, what irony.

Dracus’s soul had become a slave of Death, for he was too dangerous to be allowed to return to Dragonreach. Hey, who knew Death’s a good guy? One thing’s for sure, certainly not me.

... Dang! ***I*** was doing so well at never saying ***I, me, my.*** or anything else like that! Oh well.... Just don’t ever call a dragon or me stupid! I MEAN IT!

Frog Hop Extreme

*Are you ready for the next level? Experience a video game from the inside in **FROG HOP EXTREME**, by **Bradley J.M. Mali II**.*

Bradley is a non-stop video game playing machine. His parents try to stop him from playing video games, but their plans never work.

One day at school during lunch, Bobby, Bradley's friend, was talking about a new video game. He saw it at the video game store the night before. It was called *Frog Hop Extreme*. The object of the game is to get across a busy street and a river safely. There are many dangers in the way. For example, the crocodiles in the river can eat you. The trucks, bulldozers, and cars can run you over. Plus, you have to work as a team with another player to win. When Bradley heard about this, he wanted a game immediately!

He got home from school and told his sister and parents about the game. His parents said, "NO, you've had enough of these video games." Bradley and Lauren frowned and went to bed.

After school Bradley stopped by the video game store. He asked the clerk, "Where's the new *Frog Hop Extreme* game?"

The clerk answered, "It's in the back of the store. It's on sale today for 50 dollars"

That's a lot of money for a video game! Bradley and Lauren thought of a plan to come up with the money. Lauren said, "If we count our allowances and join them, we might

have enough money to get the game.” After they put their money together, they had exactly...50 dollars! They both said, “We have enough!”

After school the next day, Bradley and Lauren went to the video game store and bought the new game. They went straight home right down to the basement and turned on the TV and Play Station 2. The game came on and they played, and played, and PLAYED! Then the game froze.

“What’s wrong with it?” Bradley asked. Then suddenly, the TV sucked them in.

“AAAAHHHHH!” they screamed.

When Bradley and Lauren woke up, they were frogs. Their skin was green and slimy. They had big, beady eyes. They each had a big mouth with a very long tongue. The only difference between them was that Lauren still had her long blonde hair.

There was a freeway in front of them. “Where are we?” asked Lauren.

“*Frog Hop Extreme*,” said Bradley. “We are IN the game!”

Lauren said, “I’m scared. What are we going to do?”

Bradley replied, “Don’t worry. I’m your big brother. I’ll protect you.”

Lauren felt better. She knew that once Bradley played a video game he was instantly an expert at winning it.

They both stopped and looked around them. The trees were so green and full you couldn’t see the branches. The grass was very flat and felt smooth. They were close to the road. The cars and trucks going by were fast and noisy. The exhaust fumes burnt the inside of their noses.

They knew they had to cross the freeway without being squashed, then cross the river without being eaten by crocodiles. They had to do all that and then save all of the other frogs in the game. “This is crazy, but I think we can do it,” said Lauren.

“I know we can. Just follow me,” said Bradley.

They saved the frogs on each level. Then a screen popped up and said, “Time for the Toad Level.” Bradley and Lauren screamed. They had to defeat the evil toad in order to win the game.

The sky was dark and stormy. Bolts of lightning were shooting through the clouds. It was just like you would see in a horror movie. The brown toad was mean, vicious, enormous, and ROBOTIC! It was shooting its tongue out at them.

Bradley came up with an idea. He was going to shoot out his tongue and wrap it around the toad’s legs. Then he would pull it and trip him.

Bradley quickly crossed the freeway and river. The giant toad started jumping all around. The ground was shaking, just like an earthquake. Bradley ran behind the toad and shot out his tongue. He pulled, and *BOOM!* The toad fell.

When he got up, he was mad. He turned around and grabbed Bradley. Lauren yelled, “Put him down!” Instead, the robotic toad swung Bradley in the air towards Lauren. Bradley landed with a *THUMP*.

Lauren was so mad the toad hurt her brother. She screamed at the toad, “You can’t do that to my brother! He always protects me. Now it’s my turn to help him.” She jumped across the freeway, dodging buzzing killer bees the toad was sending at her. She quickly swam across the sparkling blue river with the bees behind her. She got behind the toad. When the bees were close enough, she jumped over the toad. The bees stung the toad right on the butt!

The toad got even madder. He started throwing cars, trucks, and bulldozers at Bradley and Lauren. They acted quickly and dodged through them all. They got to the other side safely.

The robotic toad was so mad, his circuits blew and he exploded. The explosion shot Bradley and Lauren right out of the game. They were back in their familiar basement.

“We won!” they said. “Let’s never play that game again.” They ran the disc through the paper shredder.

When they went upstairs, they asked their mom and dad to take a family walk outside: a nice, slow walk on their quiet neighborhood street, away from any video games.

Bradley and Lauren learned a couple of lessons that day. First, when you work as a team you can get things done and win a game. Second, never play a new video game unless your parents have approved or played it first.

Go Away Prince Charming

*When a less-than-perfect suitor comes knocking at this princess's door, she refuses to see him. In **GO AWAY PRINCE CHARMING** by **Katia Lev**, a princess challenges the rules of the typical fairy tale.*

Hi! My name is Princess Crystal. I'd like you to know about a time when I was almost eaten by a dragon (and no thanks to you, Prince UnCharming!). It all started like this...

My family and I were all waiting patiently for the arrival of Prince Charming. We expected him to be like all of the other suitors, tall and handsome and BORING! I didn't like any of them, and I expected this one to be no exception, but I waited for him. The least I could do was give him a chance.

When Prince Charming arrived, forty trumpeters followed him, and I knew at once he was worse than all the other ones put together! Of course he was all the traditional things—tall, handsome, probably dull, and, of course, self-centered. Oh, this was not a good match. I could see that much already.

I ran up to my father. "Father, please don't make me marry him. He is horrible! Oh please, please don't!"

"Very dramatic, Crystal," my father dryly replied. "Now who's talking about marriage? You haven't met the poor guy, for heaven's sakes! Who knows? Maybe you'll like him!" he laughed.

"Why can't you just send him AWAY!" I yelled. Then I stalked off to my room to weep.

A few hours later I heard a sharp knock on my door. "Enter," I said icily. The door opened and Prince Charming came in. No, *came* isn't the right word. He *swaggered* in!

"So, your father said you desired to talk to me...." He puffed up with pride.

"Humph," I answered.

"It isn't my fault I'm so wonderful, great, (insert bragging here)..." he continued.

"Enough! Get out of my room, you pompous jerk!" I shoved him out and flung the door closed. I didn't want to talk to him, and I never got the chance to.

That evening a dragon pushed his way to my room and stole me away! It's not that I minded, because I didn't have to see Prince Charming, but a nagging thought came up that the custom for dragons was to eat fair maidens! I decided the best thing to do was to try and talk him out of it. My father says I have a way with words, but would it save my life...?

When he took me to his lair, I tried my hand at conversation. "So, um, Mr. Dragon...."

"Don't bother with formalities. Just call me Claw." I was unsure if he was joking, but surprisingly he seemed in a good mood. Maybe he wasn't going to eat me yet.

"Why did you take me anyway?" I asked. "Are you... hungry?" I nervously hinted. I didn't want to remind him if he was.

"Not really, you know. I guess I just took you because it is the tradition," he finally answered.

"So you're not hungry. Well, then, maybe, um... yeah, uh, maybe you could take me back?" I quickly blurted out, blushing at my boldness. But I needed to know.

"Of course not! It's the tradition, and I am a big follower of tradition," he grumbled. I quickly saw my mistake. I tried to cover it up.

“Oh, no, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean that you should give up your tradition! Of course it is very important to you, and I made a big mistake in trying to make you forget it. I am so sorry, sir.” You could see he was surprised at my understanding.

“Well, I’m glad someone thinks that. No one else agrees with me. They all changed. But I still follow the traditions. I wish someone else would. It gets so lonely around here. Every one left me. They think I’m old-fashioned. Humph,” he said, gruffly and a bit sadly.

“I completely agree with you,” I sympathized.

Suddenly an idea hit me like a bolt of lightning. I carefully planned it out. Then, not wanting to go against his beliefs again, I carefully said, “I understand your opinion. But I have an idea. Why don’t we start a new tradition? The new tradition could be to keep the maiden for one night and then take her back the next morning!” My heart was pounding like a giant drum as I waited for his answer.

I heard a rumble. Then the entire cave started shaking as the dragon... laughed! Great peals of laughter rolled around the cave. I froze. Had I done something wrong?

Finally the dragon calmed down enough to say, “I’ve had many a fair maiden, but you are the first to make me laugh like this, and the first to propose a solution,” he said, thoughtfully. “You have a point. Why don’t I make a new tradition? It’s brilliant! But,” he said slyly “your night isn’t up. You amuse me so. I wish this day would never end.” He sniffed. I got teary watching him. He really was a nice dragon. Then I jumped up.

“There is no rule saying we can’t be real friends!”

He looked down. “Would you really be my friend? After I stole you and everything? Oh, you are the first real friend I ever had!” Then he enfolded me into a giant hug.

When it came time for my new friend to take me home, I was ready for everything—except for what I got when I walked through the doors of my castle. My mother was weeping, my sisters were begging for someone to save me, and my father was angrily summoning the guards. As I walked in, seven pairs of eyes gaped at me, and then my father rushed to me.

“What happened? Crystal, we missed you so much!” After I unfolded my tale, my entire family stood still in shock for a moment. Then they were all over me, asking questions and hugging me. I wanted to know only one thing. What happened to Prince Charming? My father answered that question.

“Prince Charming? Funny you should ask. I sent him off last night when he refused to find you, claiming he had to get his hair done and his nails buffed. He is very proud of himself, isn’t he? Also, the last straw was when he insulted your mother by saying that she wasn’t queenly enough! That brat actually had enough cheek to offer your mother lessons!” I was shocked, but then I swept my father into a giant bear hug. He hugged just as well as the dragon did.

Finally I understood my father’s words. Prince Charming was gone! Forever! Never again will I dread walking out of my room for fear I would see his stuck-up face around the corner. I was free and never again will I wait for such an opportunity to get rid of evil suitors. Although, Prince Charming is in a category all by himself. That was not a compliment!

Now I can focus on more important things in my life than marriage, although I’m pretty sure my father doesn’t agree. Oh well. It’s not him marrying, and he can’t force ME.

The Great Movie Chase

*When your office supplies start talking to you, this is usually a sign that you need help from someone in the mental health profession. But in Mark's case, it signals the start of a bizarre adventure in **THE GREAT MOVIE CHASE**, by Ben Hafen.*

Hi! My name is Mark. I'm just your average 11-year-old sixth-grader struggling to survive school and enjoy life while doing so. Anyway, thanks in advance for reading about my amazing adventure in the Movie Universe. Now that that's over with, let's get started!

It all started when I was reading the movie theater playlist (you know, the thing in the newspaper that lists the different theaters and what they're playing) in my room, trying to decide what movie to see that warm autumn afternoon (don't worry, it was Thanksgiving break). I decided to ask my eraser-friend, Kyle, for advice. "So, Kyle, what movie do you think we should see?" I "listened" for his answer, then commented, "Joyful Toes?"

I "listened" for his answer again, only now it sounded like he was saying, "Of course 'Joyful Toes', you imbecile! Are you deaf?"

I cocked an eyebrow and replied, "Oookaaayyy.... If you insist!" Oh, and by the way, don't ask why I have an eraser-friend. I just do, okay? Before you could say "Berkshire Middle School" (which is where I go to school), I told my parents where I was going, slid into my jacket, and headed out the door with my dad at my side.

Moments later, my dad dropped me off at the theater with 20 dollars to spend (woohoo!), winked, and said, “Have fun, Mark. Just call me if you need anything.” I felt my green and blue cell phone in my jeans pocket as he said that.

“All right, Dad. Love you!” I called as I walked casually toward the theater. Little did I know that I wouldn’t be watching too much of the movie.

* * *

I barely managed to survive the annoying pre-movie trivia before the movie *finally* started. As the near-blinding white form of the North Pole appeared on the screen, I finally started to relax...that is, until I felt a massive rumbling throughout the theater. On top of that, I seemed to be the only one in the theater feeling it! Suddenly, the floor fell away from underneath me, and the next thing I knew, I was falling through a blank white space. Directly in my path below me, I saw a giant slab of rock floating around.

As I prepared to meet my early doom, I thought I heard a familiar voice mumbling to itself in a worried voice, saying, “Uh-oh....” Then I saw a colorful *POOF!* below me, and there were a bunch of pillows on the rock to break my fall. *FOOM!* I hit the pillows directly and hugged them close to me. Then there was another *POOF!* and the pillows disappeared. I was left hovering about a half foot above the rock, so I struggled to get myself into a position where I would land comfortably. Let’s just say that it didn’t work out as well as I thought it would.

Suddenly, I heard the voice again, only more singsongy, calling “Hi, Mark.” I whipped my head around, trying without success to locate the voice’s source. It came back again, announcing, “I suppose I should introduce myself. I am...” There was a blinding flash of light, and then I saw a squarish figure with what looked like a blue sticky-tack cape. The

figure finished the sentence then: "...Kyle, the Magical Talking Eraser!" I heard a small fanfare to accompany the statement. I gaped at Kyle in utter shock and disbelief. When I noticed that my jaw was dangling, I decided to put it to use.

"I-is that r-r-really y-you?" I stammered. When I realized how stupid I sounded, I clamped my mouth shut while my face flushed as red as a sunset.

Kyle half-chuckled, half-giggled. "Of course it's me! Who did you expect, the All-American Rejects?" Kyle laughed again, doing a backflip in midair. He looped around to face me, only now he was *much* more serious. "Have any questions for me?" he said out of nowhere.

"Huh?" I replied, confused.

"About your current predicament."

"Ooohh, that. Umm...how come you never talked to me before?"

Kyle smiled at me, took a breath, and said, "I haven't spoken to you before because in your world—the human world—I'm just an inanimate object. But, when an inanimate object enters this place, it becomes animated. We can speak through telepathy, though. Anything else?" This time, I decided to go with one that was just about ready to tear itself out of my mind.

"Where are we?"

This time, Kyle took a deeper breath and explained, "We're in the No-Movie's Land." Before I could say anything, he added, "That's where none of the movies are."

"Oh, that makes sense," I replied. He sent a frown at me while I had a devilish grin on my face. Nevertheless, he went on.

"Mark, you've been summoned to the Movie Universe for an urgent reason."

"Which is...?" I interrupted, a tad impatiently.

Kyle sighed. He looked me dead in the eye and said in the most serious tone, “We’re under siege by your evil twin, Kram.”

I nearly fainted and fell off of my rock, but thankfully, I didn’t. “I have a twin?” I squeaked weakly.

“Well, technically, he’s your clone—”

“I WAS *CLONED?*” I screamed at the top of my lungs (in case you didn’t know, I’m *completely* against human cloning). My temper had risen and gone where it had never gone before. “Well, excuuuse me, but wouldn’t I *know* if I had a clone? I didn’t know that I had a clone! That is just **WRONG** and—”

“Mark, just listen to me and **CALM DOWN ALREADY!**” Kyle yelled. He calmed down as quickly as his temper had flared up and continued his story. “Anyway, we have had some very good detectives here in the Movie Universe to help us out with the clues. From them, we have been able to determine Kram’s next route.” The whiteness of the area dimmed so I could see portals all over the place. “First, he will be going through *Joyful Toes*.” As he spoke those words, one of the many portals lit up to signify where it was. “Then, he will be traveling to *Bug-Guy*.” Once again, a portal flashed to indicate where that was. “Finally, he will be going to *Planet Skirmishes*.” A third portal lit up. “That’s as far as we know of so far. Any questions?”

I pondered a moment before responding, “Um, yeah. First off, do you have any idea whatsoever why Kram is doing this?”

Kyle sighed sadly and responded, “No, I’m afraid we don’t know anything about his ambitions.” Then I asked my second question, which went a little like this:

“So, Kyle, do you have any powers?”

Kyle grinned mischievously and said back to me, “Actually, yes I do, besides *POOF!*-ing things and telepathy.

Watch this!” There was a third *POOF!* and Kyle had a sticky-tack French beret on, along with a thin sticky-tack moustache. Then he zoomed toward my slab of rock and started rubbing it at hyperspeed. When he zipped away, I let out a yelp and nearly tumbled off of my rock slab. He had erased part of it!

Well, duh, I thought. *He’s an eraser!* Then I asked, “If you can erase, can’t you draw, too?”

Kyle looked at me as if I were the craziest being to walk the face of the planet—mine *or* his. “Of course not! Only pencil-friends can do that!” I just rolled my eyes at the sheer convenience (I was being sarcastic about that last part). Then we heard the opening music of *Joyful Toes*.

Kyle beckoned toward a portal. “We have to go now.” Seeing the unsure look on my face, he added, “Don’t worry; we’ll be invisible to the movie-goers.”

More slabs of rock appeared, creating a stepping stone-like pathway. Instinctively, I jumped from rock to rock while Kyle hovered beside me. There was a blinding flash of light as we went through the portal. All of a sudden, I found myself lying face down in a snow bank. I finally stood myself up and looked at my reflection in a creek in amazement. *I was a penguin!*

I noticed that there were some things that reminded me of my human traits as a penguin. First off, there were dark loops around my eyes that were somewhat reminiscent of my reading glasses. Then, there was a little tuft of feathers in my “feather-hair,” just like my human hair. Then I fainted from sheer shock.

* * *

When I finally came back to my senses, I saw Kyle hovering above me (I had never noticed that his looks had adapted to the environment) with a penguin at his side, who I figured was the lead character in the movie, Shout the

penguin. When I opened my mouth to speak, I found a fish stuffed inside (thus leading to my liking of sushi). I gulped it down with satisfaction, and said, “Oh, yeah, this is good. I mean, I’ve liked it ever since I hatched from my egg...”

Kyle gave me an odd look, raising his eyebrow, and replied, saying, “Nice try, Mark. He already knows about us. If he didn’t, it might’ve worked quite nicely. But, given the circumstances, I must say...*maybe* next time.” He winked at me while I rolled my eyes.

Once Kyle finished, Shout finally spoke up: “Um, guys? Listen up. According to the movie script, I’m supposed to go to where the cheetah whale is with the Freundins pretty soon. Guess what? I also heard that Kram was headed that way. Do you know what that means?” Kyle and I could both tell that, one, Shout was really excited, and, two, we might actually have a chance of catching Kram sooner than we expected.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” I responded. “We have an evil twin-slash-clone to catch!”

Once Shout had gathered the Freundins, we headed off toward the sea to find Kram. The Freundins are Shout’s German penguin friends in the movie. To tell the truth, we didn’t think it would be too hard. Guess what? It wasn’t, seeing how unbelievably *fat* cheetah whales are.

Instinctively, I dove in after it, followed by Kyle, then Shout, and finally all the Freundins but one. He said to himself in a heavy German accent, “Oh, would you look at zat? What, where?” He pushed himself into the water. “AAAAAAAACK!”

Kyle, Shout, and I all caught up to the cheetah whale in no time. On the other side of the whale, I caught a glimpse of another penguin with pure evil and possibly even insanity carved into its features. A look from Kyle and Shout each told me that the penguin was Kram.

I instantly pursued him. I swam in front of him and did some complicated karate techniques I saw on TV once, not forgetting the appropriate yell. Kram just stared at me and laughed hollowly. Then we grabbed each other and started to fight. While Kram and I were locked in combat, I saw Kyle use his sticky-tack to morph himself into me. Our plan, it seemed, was in action.

Kram sent a signal to the cheetah whale for it to crush me. When it closed in, Kram swam upward, while I swam down at the last possible second. That's when Kyle and I switched places. Unnoticed, I swam over to lead Shout and the Freundins while Kyle took off and swam away from Kram and the cheetah whale. Naturally, Kram gave chase to "me."

That left Shout, the Freundins, and I to take care of the cheetah whale. I made eye contact with them and gestured toward land. Getting my message, they followed my lead, jumped up to the shore, and waddled away as fast as we could. If I were right, the cheetah whale would be dumb enough to follow us to shore and then end up beaching itself. I then predicted it would take a loooooong time to get itself "unbeached." Once we were far enough away, I punched a hole in the ice, and signaled for them to follow me into the hole.

While we were doing that, Kram had finally caught up with "me." Kyle swam on, seemingly not paying attention to the looming danger. Kram grabbed Kyle, growling, "Got you."

Kyle spun around, grinning. "Guess again." Kyle then used his *POOF!* powers to make a cage around Kram. Then he used more *POOF!* power to hoist the cage up to the shore, where he would meet me later.

* * *

Later, I met Kyle at the rendezvous point. We said our final goodbyes to Shout and the Freundins and headed toward

the portal. I suddenly let out a yell. “Kram escaped!” Kyle inspected the cage carefully, and then signaled for me to come closer. I was shocked beyond belief to see what I did see. “Erased bars....” I muttered. “But how?”

Kyle gave me a worried look. “It seems that Kram has a new friend. An *eraser*-friend.”

“So that’s how he’s been getting around all this time!” I exclaimed.

Kyle nodded grimly. “I’m afraid so. Anyway, enough dawdling already! We have to catch Kram!” With that, we chased into the portal after Kram.

I froze in my tracks a rock away from Kram and stared at him, taking his appearance in. It was like looking in a mirror. Kram, feeling my intense gaze, turned around to face me. We just stood there staring at each other for at least a minute before Kram turned back and jumped into another portal. I glanced at Kyle, nodded, and leaped through the portal Kram had gone through.

The next thing I knew, I was freefalling through the Detroit skyline....

TO BE CONTINUED...

COMING SOMETIME:

- *The Great Movie Chase Part II: The Awesome Bug-Guy!*

How the Tooth Fairy Became the Tooth Fairy

*If you believe in yourself, you can do anything—just ask the shy garden fairy who rises to great heights in **HOW THE TOOTH FAIRY BECAME THE TOOTH FAIRY**, by *Ellie Klezdek*.*

You probably all know who the Tooth Fairy is. You know the fairy who gives you money or some other gift when you lose a tooth? Well, she wasn't always the Tooth Fairy.

The Fairies get together every 100 years for the Interdimensional Fairy Convention at Fairy Topia.

A small, shy, beautiful garden fairy named Blossom decided to go to the convention. She always knew the world was bigger than her little garden. Some of her friends told her, "Outside of your garden and town, it is way too dangerous with all of the different kinds of fairies, and all of the different busy fairy town-cities!" Everybody told her similar things, all narrowing down to one thing: "DON'T LEAVE." But Blossom thought it would be good for her to get out of her garden, so she went.

On Blossom's way to the convention she went to the Wingport, or as some other fairies call it, "The Airwing Station," and rode on an actual fairy giant's wing. He was very pleasant to fly with. On the way they would ask each other random questions like "Where are you from?" and "Where is the town you live in?" They had a great time. Afterwards she drove on her "leaf on wheels" through the giant Sequoias.

Blossom had a fun time getting there, but the actual Interdimensional Fairy Convention was WAY better!

She liked the Frammy awards the best. That's where they award the most talented fairies. Also when Blossom was there, she decided to take a class on fairy flowers. When she was walking there Blossom got caught in a mob going to the auditions for the Tooth Fairy. She thought she was going to the flower class, but she wasn't. In there she accidentally tried out to be the Tooth Fairy when the counselor came around asking them to do certain things like flicking a wrist with a wand and things like that. Blossom did all this with great confusion. Without knowing, she got to go to the next level to become the Tooth Fairy.

Blossom tried telling the audition counselor that she didn't mean or want to try out—"It was a mistake," she said. Every time she tried telling him he would always say the same thing: "Blossom, you have the talent of a Tooth Fairy. Trust me." Everybody didn't take her doubts seriously; they thought she was just being modest. She ended up staying, because she just couldn't leave. "I have to believe in myself," she thought. "I will trust myself and the counselor."

After, everyone who made it into the next level auditioned again. They waited and waited and waited for a long time to see who the lucky fairy was.

Blossom was surprised when they read off the name of the new Tooth Fairy. She really didn't expect to win, so when the announcer said, "And the new Tooth Fairy is Blossom," she felt shocked at first, but then dazzled.

Every fairy said that she had the talent of a Tooth Fairy: the right flick of wrist to make a human tooth a prize. She wanted to stay with her garden fairy friends, but maybe she could learn to love her new job. She was actually looking forward to the challenge. "It just might be fun," she thought.

When she told her fairy friends, they were sad she was leaving, but they were excited for her, too. “You will do a great job, Blossom!” they all said.

The next day Blossom went to the Tooth Fairy Training class. Her trainer, Foster, made her work hard to be the best Tooth Fairy ever. “I know the work is difficult now, Blossom, but it will be worth it, you’ll see,” said Foster.

After many hard months of training including drills with wands, flying, and zapping, Blossom was ready for her first day on the job. That night, Blossom zapped herself to Paris, France and made each tooth a perfect coin, making sure each child had a shiny coin to call his or her own. Then she zapped herself to the United States and made a bazillion coins and other gifts from the teeth she tapped with her wand. She loved zapping herself from place to place. “This is like flying, only better,” she thought to herself with a big smile.

When it was time for her to do her magic to the last tooth of the night, she flew into the child’s bedroom like always, placed the wand on the tooth, said the secret word, and flicked her wrist. Then, just like always, the tooth turned into a bright and shiny coin. She zapped herself one last time back to Fairy Topia.

To Blossom’s surprise, the fairies put on a party for her. They wanted to congratulate her on her first day on the job. Everybody was there, including the last Tooth Fairy. Victoria may have been too old to zap around, but she was beautiful. Blossom and Victoria spent much of their time at the party together. Blossom had so many questions to ask of Victoria, and Victoria made it all so much fun. Blossom hoped that all the nights to come would be as great as the night she had that night.

Human Again

*She has the appearance of a young woman, but Beth is like no person you have ever met. You may be checking your neck for puncture wounds after reading **HUMAN AGAIN**, by **Chris Chapman**.*

Beth walked down the surprisingly crowded street with her head up high, searching the face of every passing person. Everyone was pointing up at the six moons and saying how they would all be full and in perfect alignment in an hour, something that only happened once every hundred years. Beth didn't care. She had seen five alignments in her time and they weren't all that spectacular. However, she had never witnessed a full lunar alignment while driven by starvation.

Beth was getting dangerously pale, and, even though she hated it, she had to feed soon. Tonight. With each passing year it got harder and harder to find a victim.

She usually looked for a boy around sixteen with no apparent girlfriend. With her beauty and charms, they were easy to lure into an isolated spot. After she fed she would place them in their own beds at their own houses, and they would wake up the next morning thinking they had simply had a wonderful dream about a beautiful girl who didn't exist.

Beth never got at all attached to any of them and always forgot their names as soon as she left their houses. It would be too dangerous for her to get attached to a human. If she did, it could cost Beth her life.

They would never turn into vampires unless she drained them of all their blood, as she had to do once every year. Beth

hated making more vampires even more than she hated being one. She felt that she had a curse upon her that she had to spread a little more every year.

Beth had never actually met another vampire as far as she knew, except of course the one who turned her into a vampire. Almost to the day, five hundred years ago, Beth had gotten engaged. The night after her lover proposed, a man with dark eyes and hair had crept into her house while she was sleeping. Beth was sensitive to touch while she was sleeping, and the instant he touched her, she was awake. He must have sensed this somehow, and before she could scream, he had clapped his hand silently around her mouth.

He had been surprisingly gentle, considering how much she had struggled. All she had felt was a sharp stab in her neck and then nothing.

She'd had no way of stopping him, for vampires are unnaturally strong and quick. All her struggling had not even slowed him down.

After he had finished draining her of her blood, Elizabeth (as she was called then) saw him turn to leave, and then she saw nothing.

When she woke up the next night, she opened her eyes to see her fiancé was leaning over her with a worried look in his eyes.

“You slept all day, Elizabeth. It is just past sunset. What happened?” Elizabeth had run past him without a word and shut herself in her washroom to try to figure out what had happened and why she wasn't dead.

A muffled scream drew the young man standing outside the washroom to rush in and hold his love.

“It's okay. Everything will be fine,” he cooed to her. “What happened? Darling, what's wrong?”

Elizabeth couldn't answer; she was shaking too hard. She couldn't breathe. She knew what she was now and couldn't

face this man who had loved her before she became a demon. She couldn't bring herself to tell him what she was, and she wouldn't wish this life that she knew was ahead of her even on her worst enemy. She couldn't ask him to join her.

It would be her fault if he got hurt, and she would hate herself for all eternity for that. It was better if he thought that she didn't love him. All she could do was say what she knew she had to say to keep him from her.

It took Beth all her strength, but she managed to force herself to look him straight in the eye and say, "It would never work, Jonathan. We could never be together like this. I shouldn't have accepted your proposal when I knew that we could never work. I am—" she hiccupped from the beginnings of tears "—so... sorry." Then she took the beautiful diamond ring off the third finger on her left hand and gave it back to him. She could see in his eyes how it hurt him to watch her reject him, but it hurt her even more to be the one to do it. She would rather have been stabbed than have to leave the person she loved more than anything. She knew how she would suffer from this memory years later, but she couldn't let him get hurt by her hand. She had then fled the room in tears, unable to hold them back. Only one thought had been playing and replaying itself in her mind: How he must hate me now!

She had struggled to adapt to the loneliness and isolation required by her new way of life. She deeply resented the horrible deeds she had to commit in order to survive. The desperate hunger that overwhelmed her drove her to find victims on which to feed.

Beth could never befriend a human, and all vampires kept too hidden from everyone, including other vampires, for her to meet one. She was alone in the world, and she knew it.

Sometimes the loneliness was a blessing, like when she thought of her fiancé, Jonathan. Beth enjoyed the quiet peace

at those times, with no one there to interrupt her thoughts and memories, just the sweet silence she had come to love to comfort her. That was all she needed and all she wanted.

Now, five hundred years later, she knew every little trick, every little thing that counts. She knew from just looking at him what kind of flirting each of her victims would respond best to. Beth could practically walk her way into their eyes and minds until they were overwhelmed.

Beth hated herself. She couldn't stand who and what she was, what she had to do to survive. She had tried countless ways of ending it. She had even starved herself to the point where she wasn't able to flirt her way into a victim. Instead she'd had to plead for food from a married woman who was kind enough to take Beth into her house for soup. She would never do that again.

She struggled to leave her painful memories and focus on finding the victim who would provide enough blood for her to survive. She had to pinpoint a tall, strong person who appeared to be lonely, isolated and distracted.

A boy, who stood motionless, staring at the moons, captured Beth's attention. He was alone, in the quiet shadows near the entrance to Beth's favorite park.

He seemed perfect for what she had in mind: five inches taller than her five feet and four inches, with a broad and muscular frame, not to mention he was quite good-looking, with sand-dune blond hair that was almost the exact same shade as Beth's, and bright hazel eyes that stood out in his pale face. Had she been human, she would have been very attracted to him, as undoubtedly were the other young girls that passed him. As it was, she thought that he would make a very fine vampire. He would have the same advantage over young girls as Beth did over young boys. It would prove to be very useful to him as a newly made vampire.

While everyone else was bustling with last-minute preparations for the feast that celebrated the alignment, Beth walked slowly toward the park. Throughout the centuries of her existence, she tried to blend in with everyone else, participating in rituals like the lunar feast. Though tonight, starving and desperate, she stalked the boy as a cat would stalk a mouse. For the first time, she had no ritual sweet wine prepared for the feast, but hunger drove her mercilessly.

Beth quietly stepped next to the boy, his blond hair shining in the moonlight. He jumped as she softly remarked how beautiful the moons' light was. He smiled down at her in agreement.

"Come," she said, leading him into the trees. "The alignment will be especially beautiful at the pond."

Dazed by the moonlight and Beth's beauty, he walked with her toward the water. He stared at the shimmering, rippling six moons that shone up at him from the pond. Suddenly his eyes focused sharply on Beth.

"But we've no sweet wine to begin the feast," he cried.

"No matter," she reassured him, drawing him near. Captivated by the darkness in her eyes, he murmured helplessly that they would be the only people in the world without the cup of sweet wine that centuries of tradition required at the exact moment of alignment.

Driven by relentless hunger, Beth caressed his fair hair, whispering reassurances. She was vaguely aware of distant cries as every other person who could hold a goblet chanted the ritual toast to the moons as they reached perfect alignment.

As she opened her mouth next to his skin to feed, she felt a quivering shock throughout her body. Beth's vision darkened, and she fell in a faint at the boy's feet. Her hand struck the edge of the pond, disturbing the moon's reflections.

Then she seemed to have a seizure. All of her muscles contracted, causing her fangs to snap back into her mouth.

Beth's body vibrated uncontrollably on the ground by the boy's feet. Blood started flowing out of her mouth and nose for no apparent reason. She was unconscious but aware of what was going on at the same time. She had no control of her body and could not open her eyes to see. All she could feel was burning pain as the long, sharp fangs pulled out of their normal sized canine casing and wrenched themselves free of her mouth. Two sharp stabs, then throbbing pain, marked when Beth's fangs were torn away from her at last. She heard the gentle crunching sound as they landed on the now red grass around her head.

The boy stood dazed as he watched the limp, empty canine casings in Beth's mouth solidify into real teeth before his eyes. He stared at her bloodstained face and watched her horrible, painful transformation. Although he was dazed, his mind was speeding and taking in every detail of this bloody scene.

Then a final fountain of blood shot out of Beth's mouth, turning the grass for three feet around her body dark red and glimmering in the moonlight.

Beth's body was finally still. Her veins were empty and her skin was limp with not a drop of blood to make her look like a real person. A single tear trickled down her cheek, leaving a clean trail in her mask of blood, to mark all the excruciating pain that she had felt.

After what seemed like forever the pale-haired boy heard a soft double beat coming from the corpse at his feet. Then a steady, quick rhythm of double beats vibrated out of Beth's chest, scaring the boy into stepping back.

For two whole minutes the double-beat rhythm rang on. Then, so suddenly that the boy fell over, a sharp, choking

breath went shooting into Beth's body, bringing her back to life.

As her breathing steadied, the boy picked himself up off the ground. He watched as her frightened eyes fluttered open and she stared at him in shock.

"What just happened?" The boy shuddered.

"I – I think I'm human," was the only response that she could give to him. Beth hated the terrified way he looked at her.

He was horrified. Beth didn't blame him. She probably would act the same had their places been switched.

"Peace. I won't hurt you. But I do need help. Help that I can't get on my own." Beth was begging him now. "Please, I will die on my own. I know that after what I just tried to do to you, I have no right to ask your help, but please, I'm begging you, help me."

If she were human again she would not be able to restart her life without help and money. Since this boy already knew what she had been, she figured that if she could get him to understand the kind of person she really was, then he would be the most likely person to help her.

The boy was curious now, through his horror and fear. "Why did you become a vampire?"

"You honestly believe that I had a choice?" Beth tried to cover her sorrow and pain with anger, causing her to almost yell at this innocent teenaged boy. "Someone snuck into my house while I was asleep. It was completely against my will. I had no choice." Beth's words were harsh with five hundred years worth of anger. "I was engaged, and you think that I would willingly leave that life? He loved me!" Beth's voice now fell to a husky whisper with sorrow and five hundred years worth of unshed tears. "And I loved him. I lost him because of what I was. I still can barely live with that." She looked away from him, unable to meet his eyes for fear that

she would dishonor herself in front of this handsome young male.

“I didn’t know. I’m sorry for what you lost.”

“It isn’t your problem. It was a long time ago. I’m over it now.”

“From what you just said, I very much doubt that.” He quoted her, “*I can still barely live with that.*” It sounds to me that you are still mourning him.” He paused, unsure whether to go on. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Beth. What’s *your* name?”

“Jonathan.” He paused. She almost gasped and laughed and cried all at once. Her fiancé! This boy had the same name as her long-lost fiancé! Beth had to strain to keep all traces of emotion from her face, and to stop herself from jumping up from pure disbelief. A puzzled look crossed the boy’s face, causing Beth to blush. From Jonathan’s expression she knew that her eyes had betrayed her feelings.

“Here, Beth, take my hand. I’ll help you up. Wash your face and mouth with water from the pond. You’re probably hungry. I have plenty of food at my apartment and you can stay there, too. You can take a hot shower and we’ll soak your clothes. In the morning I’ll buy you some new clothes. You can sleep in one of my old shirts. We’ll look on the Internet to find you a job tomorrow. You can stay with me until you can afford a place of your own. I don’t mind. I have an extra bedroom.”

Jonathan didn’t seem to be taking no for an answer, so all Beth could do was accept. She smiled with all the thankfulness in the world, took his hand, and got up off the dark red grass. After she washed her face he led her to his apartment. Beth smiled up at the moons as she walked, able to sense where Jonathan was at her side, and imagined feeling the heat of the sun again after five hundred long, lonely, horrible years.

An Incredibly Random Story

*If the talking school supplies don't grab your attention, perhaps the toxic waste will. Or maybe it will be the time travel, or the history lessons, or the cat.... Somehow they all come together in **AN INCREDIBLY RANDOM STORY**, by *Charles Zuccarini*.*

Today's just one of those days when you wake up and, before you know it, you're time traveling and in the middle of an intergalactic war between living pens and pencils. Well, I'll just start at the beginning. Hi, my name is Rippy and I don't feel like sticking to the script today, so I'm going to tell you my version of this story.

When I woke and got out of bed this morning, I immediately tripped over my stupid cat and went flying through the air out of an open window. Fortunately, I safely landed in a huge oil drum of toxic waste that someone had left sitting below my window. I think that the drum was left there by the construction crew working next door. Maybe I'll think twice before I call those guys fat slobs again.

The toxic waste may have broken my fall, but it also had a strange reaction with my flesh. The next thing you know, I found myself in a classroom that looked like a miniature galaxy. I had shrunk to the size of a pencil and found myself looking at a real pencil that was holding a gun about the size of an M&M. I asked him what his name was (if it was a him), and he responded, "I am Wajinki the 800 and 22." Of course, he already knew my name

because it's common knowledge that talking pencils have magical powers.

I looked around and saw that we were on top of a school desk. There was food all over the place. While eating fried potatoes, Wajinki told me that he had been studying history. I wanted some of those fried potatoes. They smelled like the kind you get at McDonald's. Anyway, Wajinki said that he thought the American Revolutionary War had dragged on for far too long. Having spent what seemed like years studying that war in my Social Studies class, I had to agree. (Was it possible that Wajinki had the same Social Studies teacher as me?)

Wajinki told me his great idea: He was going to gather up an army and go back in time to the start of the Revolutionary War and fight the war in a new way that would end it in one day. I immediately told him that I would help. Think of all the homework that would save me! I asked him where his army was and was amazed to learn that he didn't know, either. So through my amazing powers (I guessed), I opened the desk, and there we found an army of pencils inside. They looked like an overgrown box of pencils from Wal-Mart's.

Next, we built a time machine out of an old pencil box, paperclips, rubber bands and erasers, with an engine that ran on a clock that went backwards, of course. It looked kind of like a container for a super-sized, Quarter Pounder with Cheese, but it worked (boy, I sure could go for some McDonald's). We got in and went back in time to 1775 with Wajinki's army of pencils.

Once we got there, we gave all of the American soldiers amnesia (by feeding them the ten gallons of galactic spiked pop that Wajinki had brought along in the bottom of the pencil box – I mean time machine). We then hypnotized the British forces and told them that the Americans had won the war. They were ordered to get back on their ships and head

for Persia (where they would start another long series of wars that I would have to learn about in Social Studies, but that's a different problem to be solved in my next hallucination). Sure enough, the Americans won the Revolutionary War in one day. I wish we could have won all of our wars that way. Social Studies would be a snap!

We got back in the pencil box – I mean time machine – and returned to the classroom galaxy. When we got back, we found an army of pens had sent miniature monkeys over to destroy our pencil army. While the monkeys were busy breaking up the pencils, we started throwing popcorn at them. They went for it and we lured them to the boys' bathroom down the hall and over the toilet. As they would land, we flushed them down! This really made the rest of the battle personal.

The remaining part of our army grabbed miniature guns and prepared to fight. When we got back from the bathroom, the pens were already shooting. Luckily, we got the chance to blow the pen army's soldiers up with our plastic tanks, bombs and airplanes. I later learned that Wajinki got these for half price at Wal-Mart's seasonal Christmas sale. That explained why they were so flimsy. The pens had destroyed half our army, but in the end, the pencils won, and peanut butter started raining from the heavens. All was well because everyone likes peanut butter, and those who don't need counseling.

After all the fun and excitement (and all the peanut butter I could stand), I sat down to have a little chat with Wajinki. Wajinki asked me how I felt winning two wars in one day. But I couldn't think about the wars because I was too busy picking peanut butter out of my hair, and it had just occurred to me that I had to somehow get back home. Then, before I could respond to Wajinki, some monkeys pulled me back to the toilet and when they flushed me down, I woke up in my bed. My cat just looked at me with that same stupid smile.

I didn't have my wits about me yet. But just when I thought it might all have been a dream, I went to brush my teeth (to get rid of the peanut butter taste in my mouth) and found a note from Wajinki that said that he was sorry, but he had used all of my life savings to buy the plastic tanks and airplanes. I don't remember my exact words, but I think I shouted something like "Curse you, Wajinki!" Because of Wajinki, I was out an entire \$8.27.

So if you ever wake up and trip over your cat when you are getting out of bed, watch out for open windows and oil drums full of toxic waste. Otherwise, instead of going to school as you know it, you may end up in another galaxy where the pens and pencils do more than just write. You could find yourself traveling through time to fight wars in ways unknown, changing history and eating peanut butter as it falls from heaven. But then again, maybe that's not such a bad idea.

But the real moral of this story is "Don't let people from other dimensions borrow your money."

Jubo's Adventure

*Jubo's grandfather has been kidnapped, and what happens next rests on the boy's shoulders. With a loyal pet and a determination not to fail, Jubo embarks on a dangerous journey in **JUBO'S ADVENTURE**, by **Ashanti Seabron**.*

"Big trees, red apples, and the clearest water: This is the life," Jubo thought. The 14-year-old Native American was sitting on a small beach not far from his cabin. He looked at the water. Jubo saw that the tide was about to come in and the sun was about to go down, so he decided to go home.

When Jubo got back home he found his grandfather, Habokubo, cooking a deer that they had both killed earlier in the day. "You're late," Habokubo said.

"No, I'm not," Jubo replied.

"Yes, you are. Now go upstairs and clean up for dinner."

Jubo ran upstairs to his room. When he got there, he found one of his best friends. His name was Azex, and he was a cute, blue-haired ottsel, a type of squirrel with a long tail and big ears.

"Hey, Jubo, let me out of this cage; I've been in here all day!" Jubo ran over to Azex's cage and unlocked it. Jubo laughed out loud when, instead of landing on his feet, Azex fell flat on his face. "Not funny!" Azex said.

"Jubo; Azex! Time for supper!"

Azex hopped on Jubo's shoulder and Jubo ran downstairs.

After supper, Jubo and Azex saw that it was getting late, so they both went to bed.

The next morning when Jubo woke up, he saw that Azex's cage was open! Jubo immediately jumped out of bed and rushed downstairs. When he got downstairs he found Azex running around in a panic. "What's wrong?" Jubo asked.

Azex replied, "Look at the letter. It's horrible!"

Jubo looked at the letter in the terrified Azex's hands. It said, "If you ever want to see your puny grandfather again, come to Death Mountain, or he will be buried deeper than the center core."

Jubo couldn't believe it. Someone must have snuck into the cabin and kidnapped Habokubo when Jubo was sleeping. What was Jubo going to do? If he didn't go to save Habokubo he would be killed, but if Jubo did attempt to save Habokubo, he, Jubo, could be killed.

Later in the evening, Jubo made his final decision. He was going to save Habokubo.

"Why do I have to come?" moaned Azex after Jubo told him to accompany him on his journey.

"Because I can't go and save Habokubo by myself," Jubo replied. "Besides, you have no other choice," Jubo also said.

When the sun had disappeared and the moon had arisen, Jubo and Azex set out for the biggest adventure of their lives.

Very late in the night, Jubo and Azex set up a tiny tent of logs and twigs. Even though he knew that he should be asleep, Jubo couldn't do it. He was too worried to go to bed. He didn't know what was going to happen to Habokubo. About two hours later, Jubo was finally able to close his eyes and fall asleep.

The next morning when Jubo woke up, he found Azex chewing on tree sap for his breakfast. "Want some?" he said to Jubo. Azex handed some sap to Jubo in his sticky hands. After breakfast Jubo and Azex continued on their journey.

In the mid-afternoon they started to hear rustling noises in the bushes. The first few times they thought nothing of it. But, after five or six times of hearing it, they were getting suspicious.

All of a sudden, two ugly strangers popped out of the bushes and said, "It is us, Darrio and Darria, and we have come to stop you in your journey!"

"Ewwwwwwwwwwww, look at their faces," Azex said.

"What do you mean?" Darria said. "We have beautiful faces."

"Beautiful?" Azex said with shock. "Have you guys looked in the mirror lately?"

"Okay, that's it. Let's show you what happens when you insult us," Darrio said.

They both grabbed a bag of stones out of their pockets and started to throw them at Jubo and Azex. Azex quickly hopped on Jubo's shoulder and said, "Run, Jubo, run!" Jubo ran down the path as fast as he could, with the strangers right on his tail.

"Come back here!" the strangers yelled.

All of a sudden, Jubo felt cold. He felt like snow was falling on him. Then Jubo realized that it actually was snowing. He soon saw a sign that said "Snow Palace," so Jubo guessed that was the reason it was snowing. Jubo then saw a curved rock. He thought that the rock was a great place to hide from the strangers, so he quickly jumped behind it. The strangers ran by. "Whew, that was a close one," Jubo panted.

"Look!" exclaimed Azex. "A warp portal!" Azex was right. Behind them was a great, blue portal.

"That's impossible!" said Jubo. "Habokubo said that those were all destroyed thanks to mankind's creations!"

"Well, I guess that mankind forgot one, so come on!" Azex said.

"But, Azex..." Jubo moaned, but it was too late. Azex had already jumped through the portal. Assuming he had no other choice, Jubo jumped through the portal as well.

When the portal let Jubo out, he could see that they were in a lit cave. Jubo then looked to his left and saw Azex trying to free Habokubo from his chains. "Habokubo!" Jubo yelled with glee.

"Shhhhhhhh!" Habokubo hissed. "It's good to see you, too, Jubo, but we have to get out of here!"

“Okay,” Jubo replied.

“I think I got it,” Azex said, trying to break open the chains. The chains burst open and Habokubo was free.

“He built a tiny rocket that we can escape with,” said Habokubo.

“Why would he build a rocket for us, and who is he?”

“Your boy is smart,” he said, a deep voice from behind them. They all looked back and saw a tall and evil-looking man.

“We’re going back home,” said Azex with bravery.

The man laughed and said, “I don’t think so.”

Then the two ugly strangers who had chased Jubo and Azex through the Snow Palace jumped out of the portal and said, “There you are!” Darrio and Darria charged at Jubo with a bag of stones in each of their hands. Habokubo then jumped out of the rocket and punched both Darrio and Darria.

The man clapped and said, “Very nice, Habokubo,” sarcastically.

“Grandfather, who is that man?” Jubo asked. Before Habokubo could reply the man grabbed a sword off of the wall, jumped across the cave room, and stabbed Habokubo right in the heart.

“Nooooooooooooooooo!” Jubo yelled. The man swung the sword towards Jubo’s head, but Jubo quickly kicked the man in the stomach and threw him against the cave wall. Jubo yelled, “Who are you? Why did you kill my grandfather?”

“Some things are better left unsaid,” said the man. He pushed Jubo away and then with all of his might pushed the rocket toward the cave wall, leaving a humongous dent in the wall. The cave was collapsing by the second. “Now I won’t die alone,” said the man crazily.

“We have to get out of here!” Azex said with fear. Forgetting about the man, they both ran and jumped through the portal.

Much later in the day, after Jubo and Azex had walked the long way back home from the portal in the Snow Palace to Jubo’s cabin, Jubo lay on his bed and thought, “Who was that man, and why did he hate Habokubo so much?” What Jubo really knew was that this was the beginning of it all.

The Life of Food— A Survivor Episode

*If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? If you go away on vacation without cleaning out the refrigerator, will the food take on a life of its own? One of these questions is an existential riddle. The other is the editor's lame introduction to **THE LIFE OF FOOD—A SURVIVOR EPISODE**, by **Drew Hendrickson**.*

Once in a kitchen far, far away... (Duh duh duh daah daaaaaah da da da daaaaaah daaaaaah duh duh duh daaaaaaaaaaah – Star Wars song)

Anyway, in the kitchen there was some food. (Yes, Bill, I know that all kitchens have food. Look, would you put a cork in it and let me finish, Mister Smart Guy? Geez!) So, among the food there was some magic food. (CORK IT, BILL!) There was the prideful three-meat pizza, the annoying rhubarb pie, the “gangsta” chocolate cake, and the preacher loaf of pumpernickel bread.

One day, they all decided to have a contest to see who the best was. (Not in nutritional values, either.) To decide, they decided to put on a kind of *Survivor* thing. The only differences were that it was played by food, and there were no interviews in it.

They made a napkin airplane and glided on over to the island bar in the center of the kitchen. Once there, they had to

make their way through dense “forests,” defend themselves against ravenous flies, and trek through uncharted territory.

The Stevensons, the owners of the house, had just gone off to a Caribbean vacation, so the food didn’t have to worry about the Stevensons eating them or putting them away.

Rhubarb was trying to annoy everyone else so that they would do something to get kicked off the show or break down. Instead, the Keebler Elves, who were acting as the police, had to kick him off the show because he was annoying *them*.

So the show went on with only Glenn (bread), Choco (cake), and Triple Play (pizza) left.

Meanwhile...

On the far corner of the counter there lay an old, stale Chips Ahoy™ cookie named Carl. Carl was an orphan.

When he had been a wee crumb, ten-year-old Bob Stevenson had brought his baseball team to celebrate and...ugh. I can’t even describe it. Carl was the only survivor and, because the Stevensons are the sort of family that say they will do something but never do, Carl was left out for ten long years, growing stale, hard, and old.

We will now take a commercial break.

This program is brought to you by viewers like you and:

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Are you tired of your summer break being so boring? Well, Camp Lottafun™ is here to help you with your insomniating mid-year!! Here at Camp Lottafun™, we offer a wide variety of adventurous, breathtaking, wet-yourself-out-of-excitement experiences.

*HERE IS A LOOK AT SOME OF
THE MOST EXCITING THINGS WE HAVE TO OFFER!!*

- **Study Hall** — You get to study for a whole three hours with no noise whatsoever. HOOOOORRRRAAAAAAYYYYYY!!!
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- **Dictionary Hour** — Read one letter section of the dictionary (Example: A, B, C, etc.). You then have one hour to read that section and memorize every word and definition. When an hour is up, you must be able to tell us every word and definition in that section, or else! Tee Hee!! ☺
- **Quantum Physics for an IQ of 5000 or over** — If you have the IQ of Einstein, Edison, and Franklin combined, you still aren't smart enough for this mandatory class.
- **School Classes** — You can get the same quality of education as pack mules because this class is also mandatory. Enjoy this great combination of science, social studies, math and advanced literature!

And much, much more!!

Even though this is a fun camp, we still have some rules that you must abide by. Here are the rules that you must follow to enjoy the maximum experience here at camp! None of the following things and/or activities are permitted here:

- Anything that has "ball" in it.
(EX: BaseBALL, FootBALL, BasketBALL, etc.)
- Singing or dancing
- The ability to even glimpse the light of day
- And other things of that sort.

Here at camp, we have a three-acre pool with six 100-foot waterslides, ten five-by-ten diving boards with adjustable bounciness, four hot tub Jacuzzis, and a snack bar with every possible treat imaginable. But unless you have a drivers license, an Xbox 360, a Sony Product, and a masters degree in the study of time and space, you can't go anywhere near it.

So when you feel like your summer
couldn't get any worse, sign up for

☺ **Camp Lottafun™** ☺

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call us at 1-800-LOTTAFUN,
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<http://www.summerfun.camplottafun.info.com.net.org>

And remember, before you say no to sign up:
We know where you live!



Back to the previously scheduled show:



So there were only Choco, Glenn, and Triple Play left. Triple Play seemed a little high-strung, but no one expected what happened next. One morning, everyone woke up to the sound of Triple Play screaming like a madman.

“Get them off of me! They’re eating me alive! I’m gonna disappear if they don’t leave!” Apparently, some flies had “visited” Triple Play overnight and had started to eat the meat off of him. Of course the flies left after about seven seconds of Triple Play’s episode, but he didn’t know that.

So Choco called the Kellogg’s crew on his Verizon Chocolate (hahahaha) and in a few minutes, Tony, Toucan Sam, and Mr. Sunshine came, put Triple Play in a straightbox, and shipped him off to the funny farm.

That very next Sunday, after Glenn had preached for Sunday service and Choco had spray-painted “Choco Wuz Heer” on the church wall, they both decided to leave. They left because Choco had a gang war in two days and Glenn was supposed to be there to try to get them to resolve it peacefully. ←(Whatever!)

So who won, you may ask? It was Carl, the orphan cookie that no one really knew about. Remember Carl, from before the commercial? That Carl? Good times, good times....

So Carl went up to accept his award and in his speech, he thanked everyone he knew except for Milky, his arch-nemesis. And you know, Milky would be your enemy, too, if whenever you passed him, he dunked you into himself. And if you’re an Oreo™, well, they ain’t called milk’s favorite cookie for nothing.

So Carl got the award and everything in it. He got 20,000 sprinkles (\$), fame, fortune, and chicks! When I say chicks, I mean those marshmallow things that are covered in sprinkles. *Très magnifique!*

And they all lived happily ever after! Well, in a weird, demented sort of way.

The End

Note From the Author

Here are some key points that I would like to, well, point out:

- I like to use parentheses and quotation marks. If you have a problem with that, call me. My people will work with your people, and we can get it all straightened out.
- I AM NOT CRAZY! The person I was talking to at the beginning of the story was only imaginary. (Sorry, Bill.)
- You may have noticed the sarcasm in Camp Lottafun. I was just trying to prove a point. I am, however, still trying to figure out that point, SO DON'T RUSH ME!
- I hope you liked my story and if you didn't, you probably should have picked a better story. (wink, wink)

Copyright Date: Who really cares?

Special Thanks to: Drew Hendrickson (that's me), Mr. Fisher, and the guys who sell this book.

Mini

*When he is suddenly shrunk to the size of an insect, a boy is faced with incredible challenges. His once-safe house presents potentially lethal obstacles at every turn in **MINI**, by **Devan Moosherr**.*

THUD! That’s what it sounded like when the brick fell down from the construction site in Birmingham.

When I woke up from my encounter with the brick, I was on some sort of oversized pillow! But as I looked closer, I could see that it was my bed! “WHAT HAPPENED?” I screamed.

I got out of my bed and saw that everything was huge—the dresser, the lamp, the door, everything! Just then my dog walked into my room. He was huge! He came over to me with his big pink nose and started sniffing me. The force of his nose was so strong that it sucked me in. Then my dog found something else to sniff, walked over to it and blew me out. I was covered in green gooey slime.

I decided to find my parents, so I walked downstairs. My dog came running down the stairs and knocked over a baseball. The baseball came rolling down the stairs and sent me flying into a garbage can.

The garbage can was full of lasagna, moldy bread, mashed potatoes, and a squeaking noise. “There’s a mouse in the garbage!” I screamed. To make matters even worse, my dad came by and poured moldy cottage cheese into the garbage can. “DAD!” I screamed, but he couldn’t hear me.

After I climbed out of the garbage can, I decided to take a bath in my dog's water bowl. But my dog was thirsty. He came over to me and drank me up. "Yuck!" His breath smelled like rotten fish. His mouth was dark and wet. He started coughing and spit me out.

I decided to go downstairs and see if my mom was there. When I got down there I started screaming for her. She was vacuuming. The force of the vacuum sucked me up. The vacuum was dark and dusty. It looked like a dust blizzard just blew through. A big spider was at the top of the vacuum on its web. The spider started to crawl towards me. The spider charged at me. But I was too smart. I jumped on the spider's back and rode it out of the vacuum.

Suddenly I heard a screech. It was my mom. She was holding a broom and whacked me and the spider with it. Suddenly I started to grow back to normal size. My mom looked at me. She started shaking. Then she screamed and ran out of the house.

The Mission

*On their return trip from the Dragon Castle, Leo and his friends encounter the evil Dragonor. There is only one course of action in **THE MISSION**, by Jory Johnson.*

Jory was an eleven-year-old boy who had two best friends named Leo and Charlie. They had been friends for a long time. They were on their way to the castle of Dragons to get something for the Great Tree, which is a guardian of the Sacred Forest. The Sacred Forest used to be a good forest, but now it is starting to wilt. Dragonor, who was the evil dragon who Jory and Charlie battled two years before, caused the wilting. This battle took place even before they knew Leo.

“We’re almost there, guys! It’s been a long journey, but we’re close!” said Jory.

“Yup,” said Charlie, who is a swordsman. They arrived at the Castle.

“Halt!” said one of the two dragon guards whose job it was to guard the king.

“You may not pass!” said the second dragon guard.

“But we’re here to see the King Dragon,” said Leo.

“And who the heck are you supposed to be?” said the first dragon guard.

“Yeah!” said the second dragon guard. “The only one that we’re supposed to let in is Leo!”

“But I am him,” said Leo softly. The guards froze for about five seconds.

“Bwa ha ha ha ha ha ha! You really think that we’re going to fall for that?” said both dragon guards, still laughing.

“Show us proof!” said the second dragon guard. Leo took out the Flute of Dragons, which is a sacred instrument given by a princess to help Leo on his quest to save the world. The princess is so special because she is the Dragon King’s daughter and she is Leo’s best friend.

“That’s the Flute of Dragons! Only Leo is supposed to have that! You may pass Leo,” said the first dragon guard, bowing. “Bow, you idiot!” said the first guard to the second guard.

“Oh! Right!” said the other guard.

“Thank you!” said all of them. They went into the castle.

“Leo,” said Charlie.

“Yes?” Leo said.

“Uh, where the heck do we go?” asked Charlie.

“Easy!” said Leo. “I’ll find the way to the Dragon King.” Leo knew that the Dragon King was a loyal king in charge of The Land of the Dragons and is the father of the princess.

Thirty minutes later...

“We’re never going to get to him!” said Jory, panting with tiredness.

“Wait!” said Leo with inspiration. “It’s right there!”

“Let’s go!” said Charlie with relief. They went to the king’s room.

“Hello, Leo,” said the king with gratitude.

“Hi!” said Leo.

“And who are these...delinquents?” asked the King Dragon.

“Hey! Are you calling me stupid? Well! Here are some words for you, King Dragon!” yelled Jory. Jory’s friends knocked him out before he said, “Uh, let’s forget that, ok?”

“We came for the package,” said Leo.

“Oh, right!” said the King Dragon. The king of the dragons gives Leo the package.

“Thanks! Uh, how do we get out of here?” said Leo.

“Do not worry,” said the king. “My loyal dragon guard will lead you out.” Fifteen minutes later they arrived at the entrance of the forest that is a log.

“We made it!” said Jory. Before they entered, someone appeared in front of them wearing a black robe with a hood over his face.

“Who are you?” said Leo.

“Your worst nightmare!” Twilight suddenly covered the sky!

“What’s going on?” said Jory.

“Now to reveal myself! Haaaa!” said the stranger fiercely. “My name is Dragonor!”

“Dragonor!” said Jory and Charlie together.

“You know this guy, Jory and Charlie?” said Leo.

“Yeah! This creep! He steals souls! We had to double sword fight Dragonor to beat him!” said Charlie. “Why are you here, Dragonor? Jory and I beat you! So beat it!”

“Too bad!” said Dragonor. “I used the last power of my dragon pendant to revive myself! So, if I beat one more person, that person’s soul will be enough to make me ruler of the world! But to do that I must capture the soul of a hero! A hero...like Leo!

“Leo! You must sword fight me because outsiders can’t get in! And insiders can’t get out!” said Dragonor.

“Leo! Do not fight this freak! It took both of us to beat Dragonor!” said Jory.

“I gotta fight! I never back down from a challenge!” said Leo.

“Should we let Leo fight Dragonor? I mean, like we have a choice!” said Charlie.

“Leo! Beat this creep!” said Jory.

“Okay,” said Leo. Leo pulled out his sword and shield!

“Now!” said Dragonor. “Raise the field!” The ground started to rumble and shake!

“Earthquake!” said Charlie.

“Look!” said Jory. “The ground where Leo and Dragonor are standing on is rising!” Jory was right! The ground was rising!

“Now, Leo!” said Dragonor, pulling out his Dragon sword and shield. “Are you ready?” said Dragonor.

“Yeah!” said Leo. Leo made the first move! He charged at Dragonor with great speed! But then Dragonor dodged and hit Leo back on the right leg! Leo dodged, but he was still scratched! “Ouch!” said Leo! Dragonor used his pendant to fly!

“Catch me if you can, Leo!” said Dragonor.

“Leo!” said Charlie! “Catch my magic feather!” Charlie threw Leo the feather. It gave Leo wings, and now he could fly! It was a sky battle!

Dragonor blew out fire from his mouth, while Leo shot a light beam from his magic sword! It was a stalemate. Both blasts were even!

They then called off the fire, and Dragonor did a seismic toss on Leo. Dragonor grabbed Leo and spun him around a few times in the air! Leo fell to the ground and was knocked unconscious. Leo was injured badly! Dragonor flew in some circles a couple of times! Dragonor did not finish him off because he wanted to injure Leo more!

While Leo was passed out, the princess appeared in his dream. “Leo,” said the princess. “Do you still have my Flute of the Dragons?”

“Yes,” said Leo.

“Use this song to heal yourself,” said the princess.

“Doo do dooo. Doo do dooo,” Leo repeated. When he stopped he woke up and was healed! No wounds! No scratches! Nothing! He was healed!

“NO WAY!” said Dragonor. Now Leo flew so fast that he slashed Dragonor in the wing!

“AhHHHH!” said Dragonor in pain. (“Yeah!” said me.) He slashed again and again and again, hurting Dragonor!

Jory said, “I can tell the story of the battle from beginning to end. They each started strong and then Leo was weakened. Then when Dragonor did his seismic toss on Leo he was even weaker. But Leo soon got his strength back and he hit Dragonor so many times he was now weaker than Leo was.”

“You’ll pay for that, Human!” said Dragonor. Dragonor glowed! “Mwa ha ha ha ha ha ha! I am now the greatest dragon in the world! I am now King Dragonor! And you will perish, Leo!” said King Dragonor. King hit Leo multiple times!

“Ahhh!” said Leo. Leo was badly wounded! Dragonor stole his instrument. But Dragonor did not know how to use it!

“Now, Leo,” said the King Dragonor! “Surrender, or I will kill you!”

“Ne... ne... never!” said Leo.

“Then perish!” said King Dragonor. Dragonor was going to take the final blow, but then Leo did a move even he did not know!

“Shining brightness!” said Leo. Leo soon realized that “shining brightness” was given to him while he was knocked unconscious. It was a special power that was given to him by the princess, and its light shredded right through the twilight and turned it into daylight. Dragonor disappeared! It put evil on its knees!

“NO!” said Dragonor! Then the playing field went into the ground where it belonged. The playing field was a giant

landscape that had lifted from the ground at the beginning of the battle. Once it returned to the ground, Leo then picked up his instrument.

“Whoa!” said Jory and Charlie in amazement.

“Leo!” said Jory, pouncing on him. “How’d you do that?”

“Yeah! How?” said Charlie.

“I don’t know,” said Leo. “It just popped into my head. And then I did it,” said Leo.

“Is that all the info you have, Leo?” said Charlie.

“Yup. Pretty much,” said Leo.

“Hey! We still have to deliver that package to The Great Tree!” said Jory.

“Right!” said Charlie and Leo. So they went into the forest and saw The Great Tree.

“Thank you Leo, Charlie, and Jory,” said The Great Tree. “I am grateful to you for bringing me my package.”

“So? What’s in it?” said Leo.

“Let’s find out!” said Jory.

They opened the package. It was the sacred green gem passed down from forest to forest. And so the forest was purified! All the children were happy. And Dragonor was stopped! Or was he...?

“Mwa ha ha ha ha ha haaaa!” said Dragonor!

Monkey Business

*A brother and sister are left specific instructions by their mother before she leaves the house. Unfortunately, she didn't say anything about visitors. Check out the unusual uninvited guests in **MONKEY BUSINESS**, by **Asha A. Brown**.*

“Don’t act like crazy monkeys!” Mom exclaimed.

Well, it all started on a sunny day in Gillytown when Mom left home to go to town, leaving me with my brother José. We only remembered two things our mom told us: Grandma Bertha was coming over so keep the house clean, and don’t act like crazy monkeys. Grandma Bertha is a big lady with the ugliest feet ever.

My brother said, “We are going to have a blast.”

“No, we are not,” I said sternly. Then I went upstairs and picked up my orange and pink striped brush.

After my first stroke, I felt something nudge at my hair. I looked behind me and saw the most adorable thing ever.

“Hi, I am monkey number one. I came to you to have some fun.”

“Hi, I am monkey number three. I like to climb trees.”

“Hi, again; remember me? I am number one; there is no two. He got lost at the zoo.”

“What is up? I am number four. I like to bling more and more,” she said.

“I am monkey five. I make no sense but I can rap,” he said.

“Hi, I am monkey six. I am the dumbest one because I count sticks,” the little monkey six said.

“Hi, I am monkey seven. When I cook you are in heaven,” he said.

“Hi, we are monkeys eight, nine, and ten. Do not make us repeat it again,” said a group of hairy friends all in unison.

“Now it is time to have a blast. We will start in the kitchen and end in the bathroom last,” the hairy creatures sang.

“José, come here,” I said.

“What?” José said.

“Did you have something to do with this?” I questioned him. I cut him off quickly before he could reply. The monkeys were gone.

I ran downstairs to the kitchen and saw monkeys one and two rummaging through my mom’s pots and pans.

Then I saw monkeys three and seven were drawing smiley faces on the wall in the living room.

I heard some racket, and I ran into my mom’s room. Monkeys five and four jumped up and down on the bed and rapped about steak. “Yo, yo, yo! I like cake and I like steak with the A-1 Sauce. It’s great!”

Then I saw numbers six, eight, nine, and ten doing ballet in the den.

Suddenly the doorbell rang

It was my Grandma Bertha!

“José, go start cleaning. I will stall Grandma Bertha,” I said.

“Oh, no. Mom is pulling up!” José shouted downstairs.

Suddenly the door opened. We could see the fire in my Mom’s eyes. She was embarrassed. We explained to her what happened. She did not believe us. Grandma and Mom walked into another room and conversed.

“Mary, I am shocked. I thought I raised you better,” Grandma said.

My mom started to cry. She then walked into the room we sat in. “How could you? I am going to get you guys back for embarrassing me. Oh, I get it. You didn’t want Grandma to come over, did you?” Mom said.

“No!” we replied.

“Then what?” Mom said.

“Well, there were these monkeys. See? They took a patch of my hair!” I said.

“It was probably José,” Mom said.

“No, it wasn’t!” José said.

“You know what? I got just the right payback for you guys. Grandma Bertha is coming to live with us,” Mom said.

“I’m gonna what! Live with these troublemakers?” Grandma said.

“Yep,” Mom replied.

Grandma Bertha decided to move in. We had to clean for the rest of our lives. We even had to scrub her smelly toes. Maybe one day we will meet those crazy, hairy things again. Or maybe I will just forget that it even happened. But wait, this isn’t the end. We finally decided to move out of the house because strange things were happening.

Nature Queens

*There is trouble in the forest. Two girls do all that they can to save the innocent creatures that live there in **NATURE QUEENS**, by **Mackenzie Curtis**.*

One day, it was winter in the neighborhood. There were kids who played all the time. On East Breckenridge, the third house on the right, was a girl who lived in her own fantasy world. Her name was Mackenzie. She was twelve years old.

“Hey, Molly! This slumber party is so much fun!” her friend, Mackenzie, shouted. “But don’t tell anybody. We’ll go to the forest. Let’s go!”

Molly was Mackenzie’s best friend. She was ten years old.

They left the neighborhood and arrived in the forest. There were lots of trees and tons of animals. It was a perfect place for an animal to live. Not long after that, a little bunny approached them. Mackenzie asked Molly if she noticed the little white ball.

“Yes, I do. It’s a little white bunny. Hi, little white bunny.”

Just then, the bunny yelled, “He’s coming!”

“Who’s coming?”

“The troll, Teddy the troll!”

“Who’s the troll?”

“Teddy the troll! He’s trying to find a leader for the forest!”

Mackenzie said, “The troll is by the pond. Let’s go, Molly.” So the two girls went to the pond, and there he was.

“Hey, Mr. Teddy!” called Mackenzie.

“WHAT!”

“Sorry to bother you. We heard you are looking for a leader of the forest.”

“So what do you have to do with it?” the troll asked.

“Well, my friend and I would like to be the queens of the forest,” Mackenzie said.

“You? Queen? Ha! Never!”

“But we can! We love animals. Please!” But the girls did not know that the troll was bad.

“Okay, you two can be queens on one condition. You have to make me your assistant. Let me show you your rooms.”

The girls’ rooms were the best rooms there. They had hammocks that were white with ruby red gems on them. There were gold tables with diamond silverware and diamond plates. There were silk blankets and pillows. There were also fruits and vegetables. The girls noticed a shield with a bear on it and a shield with a wolf on it, and they both had matching swords and helmets.

“Wow! This is so cool,” Mackenzie said. “Well, we should get some sleep. Goodnight, Molly. You’re my best friend forever. I will be with you forever.”

“You, too, Mackenzie.”

Soon they fell asleep, but before long Teddy woke them up.

“It’s the first day of spring. Look, Molly! Wow! All those animals! Girls, the deer are fighting! Oh, no! Let’s go!”

The girls did not know that Teddy was lying. They left with Teddy following them. He quickly stole some food and ran off. The girls came back, and he was not there.

“Teddy, where are you? The deer are not fighting. Mmmm...he must have gone home.”

The little white bunny they had seen before came up to the girls and said, “You have to believe me. He is whipping the deer.”

Molly said, “No, he’s not.”

“See for yourself.”

“Oh, no! He is! Mackenzie, look for yourself!”

Mackenzie and Molly grabbed the equipment. Mackenzie took the wolf set and Molly took the bear set. The girls each had a shield, a sword and a helmet. They were made of metal. As they dashed outside, they immediately saw a bear and a wolf eating grass nearby. Molly jumped on the bear as Mackenzie jumped on the wolf.

“Let’s go!” Mackenzie cried. “Teddy, it’s over for you! We know what you’ve been doing. Let’s get him! How can you hurt animals like that?” Suddenly, Mackenzie yelled, “Look out! He has a laser and is blasting you!” Mackenzie used her shield. “Molly, go get the silverware! Animals, attack! Get the silverware and hook them together!”

They tied the troll up with the silverware. Teddy remained tied up in the bottom of a well for the rest of his life.

“All hail to the Queens!” The forest animals shouted.

“We are sorry,” the girls said. “We think the forest does not need a ruler, so we quit.”

“But can’t you stick around?” the animals asked.

“We have a home of our own which we have to get back to. Goodbye.”

“Yes, our moms are probably sad that we are not home. Mackenzie, you are my best friend forever.”

The story is fictional, but the people are real. Molly and I are really best friends and neighbors.

Pickle in a Jar

*There is a fascinating world to discover...in your refrigerator! In **PICKLE IN A JAR** by **Bobby Veresan**, peek into the lives of Pickle, Peas, and Broccoli, three friends who fear the worst every time the light goes on.*

One cold morning, a vegetable called Pickle, who lived in a jar, woke up inside a small refrigerator. Pickle was dark green with bumps, and medium in size. He had two good friends, Peas and Broccoli. They all lived together on the same shelf in the back of this small white refrigerator.

Pickle was enclosed in a tiny jar with lots of green pickle juice for him to float in. His friend Broccoli stayed in a clear plastic bag that kept him fresh, green and healthy. Peas stayed in the bottom of a deep bowl covered with plastic wrap so tight that his greenish-colored body reflected off the clear shiny wrap.

These three friends were all the same shade of green. They were as green as the grass is on a bright summer day with the sun beaming on it. They met one day when they were all relocated to the same shelf of this small refrigerator. Pickle remembered this day well because it was the day after his family had been served up as a garnish at an outdoor barbeque.

Pickle used to be surrounded by his family inside a large jar of pickle juice where they floated and kept each other company. They came from a local grocery store called Mister Fisher's Market. It was there that they lived on a shelf above the ketchup and mustard and next to relish and mayonnaise. Then one day the Pickle family's jar was picked up and put in a shopping cart

full of other produce. He remembered the feeling of moving down the black conveyer belt just before being put into a large dark grocery bag. It was shortly after that trip that he became separated from his family.

He remembered the commotion of his relatives after the lid to their jar was opened one day. He could hear his cousins calling out to him as they were removed from the juice in the jar one by one. Pickle watched as his relatives were put on a round flat object and moved to a table full of other foods. They never came back after that. Pickle, being the only one left in the jar, was then moved to this small refrigerator.

He felt the cold as he never had experienced it before. He began to cry, missing his family and feeling alone in this dark, cold place. Then the door of the refrigerator opened and a great light went on. Pickle could see something green being placed next to him.

After the door shut and it was dark again, Pickle tapped on the side of his jar and called out to the green stalk of food next to him. The greenish stalk looked over and peered at Pickle through the plastic bag he was enclosed in. It was then that Pickle met Broccoli for the first time. Broccoli told Pickle he, too, lost his family during the barbeque.

Broccoli was bought from the Farmer's Market. He watched his family get cut up and served with a side of ranch dressing along with other vegetables. He was the only survivor from his family after the barbeque was over. That was when he was slipped into this plastic clear bag and put in the cold darkness.

He was glad to have someone like Pickle to talk to. Together they vowed to stay close as long as they could. As they were talking the door of the refrigerator opened again, and the bright light went on. Pickle and Broccoli stopped talking and watched as another green small vegetable was placed on the same shelf. Once the door shut and it was dark again, Broccoli and

Pickle were anxious to see who was sitting next to them. It was then that they met Peas.

Peas was small and shy and very afraid of the dark and coldness. He used to live in a can in the dark, but this was different, being in the cold. He shivered nervously in the coldness. Pickle and Broccoli introduced themselves and asked if Peas was going to be all right. Peas felt better knowing he wasn't alone in the coldness, and the three became close friends from that day on.

Their days were spent together sharing stories of their families. They were good company for each other. They would laugh and sing and console each other when one of them got sad or lonely. Each time the refrigerator door would open, they would stick close together at the back of the refrigerator, hoping not to get picked for the next meal. They would play games like "I Spy" and "Simon Says" all the time. Other vegetables would want to play also, and they would let them. When one of the three was getting bullied by other foods, they would stick up for him by sticking together like peanut butter and jelly. Then came that terrible day when their luck ran out.

The refrigerator door opened as it always had before, but this time they were not as lucky. Pickle was the first one up that day. He woke to the sound of food containers being banged around. He noticed a large figure with five long tentacles swaying back and forth like spaghetti reaching for something or someone. He was familiar with this scene, but today was different.

The tentacles grabbed one item after another from the surrounding shelves in the refrigerator, each time removing them from the coldness. As Pickle watched, he knew this was not a good sign. He had to act naturally until the darkness came back because he could not show signs of life when the bright light came on.

Once the darkness came back, Pickle called to his friends Broccoli and Peas to make sure they were still nearby and safe. He was reassured when he heard their replies. They all started to talk about what was happening to their living space. Broccoli thought they were all going to be moving to a new home. Peas was shaking from the fear of losing his friends during the move. Pickle was calm and trying to think of a way to stay together. They didn't know how much time they would have before the tentacles came back and the bright light would go on. They had heard stories of other vegetables losing their lives after the bright light came on.

Suddenly while they were thinking of a plan, the light came back on. The tentacles reached in to the back of the shelf where they all stayed and grabbed Peas. Peas was removed from the coldness, and again the darkness came back. Pickle and Broccoli knew they would be next. The door of the refrigerator opened again, and the tentacles picked up Broccoli and Pickle and swung them around out of the cold air and into a cardboard box. They then felt the upward motion of the box being lifted off the ground, and they were moving to another area nearby.

They were not alone in the box. They could see Peas was also inside the box, looking nervous. Then there was a thump, and the box was set down on a hard flat surface. The tentacles came back and picked them up one at a time and placed them in a new, bigger refrigerator. They were in separate sections of the refrigerator. That was the last Pickle saw of his good friends.

Pickle grew sadder as time went on and knew he had to find his friends in order to be happy again. Then one day Pickle was approached by a tall, rather fancy-looking bottle with a golden liquid inside. That was the day Pickle met Italian Dressing. Pickle was so happy to finally have someone to talk to, even though he didn't speak Italian. He shared his stories about his friends with Italian Dressing and asked him how long he had been on the shelf in the big refrigerator. It turned out that Italian

Dressing had been around quite a while and had seen his friend Peas. He was sad to say that Peas had gotten sick with mold and died quite some time ago.

Pickle was very upset over the news of his good friend. He wondered now if he would ever see Broccoli again so he could tell him about their friend Peas's fate. Pickle asked Italian Dressing if maybe when he was out in the light sometime he might look for Broccoli. Italian Dressing said he would ask around when he met up with some of his salad neighbors, lettuce, tomatoes and carrots.

A few days passed and Pickle had still not heard from Broccoli. He was floating in his juice on his back when he heard Italian Dressing singing in Italian from a nearby shelf. He yelled out to him to see if he had seen Broccoli anywhere outside in the light. Italian Dressing had asked his friend lettuce about Broccoli and began to tell Pickle what he heard: One day there was a beautiful piece of Broccoli put upon a small child's plate outside in the light. Half of Broccoli was eaten, but the other half suffered a terrible fate. The child had taken the other half and fed it under the table to a furry, four-legged creature that devoured the remains of poor Broccoli. Pickle stared in disbelief over how awful this must have been for Broccoli to die such a cruel death. He sunk into his jar of pickle juice and stayed there for a long time.

Pickle told stories to the younger vegetables about the good times he shared with his friends Peas and Broccoli. He felt better remembering them when they were together in the little refrigerator. Everywhere Pickle went he left his tales about his times in the little refrigerator with his good friends.

As the years went past, Pickle got old and began to show his age. He never saw the light again after that day of the move, but instead he died in the cold darkness alone. Some say he died from a broken heart, while others like to think of him as the great Pickle in a Jar who survived the big move of 2006.

Pixieland

Never judge a pixie by her size. Even the smallest pixie can do great things in PIXIELAND, by Rayanne Brode.

A speck of pixie dust away, the tall razor leaf grass was covered in bright and shining tree dew, and the sky was azure blue with cotton-shaped clouds in the sky. Rays of a blast of colors like orange, red, and yellow sunlight covered the “Land of the Pixies,” a place of peace.

The calm was broken with the announcement beamed over satellite to all receivers: “You are watching PLN.”

“An urgent report on the newswire warns that there is a wanted man on the loose. Viewers are cautioned not to be alarmed if they come upon this mad man, but that they should immediately call the number on your screen—1-555-CRY-HELP, 1-555-279-4357.” Abruptly and as intrusively as the report, the announcer introduced a scheduled commercial break.

As you may already know, because of national security reasons, all Pixies in Pixieland are required by law to watch all news bulletins.

There was one young Pixie named Flora who didn’t. Foolish Flora was troubled. She didn’t understand why, but she felt unloved. She wasn’t sure if she was loved, so she didn’t behave. She actually didn’t follow the rules at all. She didn’t even wash the dishes when it was her turn.

Sweet Flora was a young Pixie. She had two younger sisters named Rose and Lily. The two younger sisters were twins. They were considered by many to be very, very nice. The twins did what

came naturally, and all they did was good. A very good and valued thing they did and loved to do was dance.

Flora, unlike her twin sisters, was an adventurer who was very curious and seemed to always find trouble. One day she simply decided to go for a walk around the flower garden, a vast place, alone.

After several hours of walking through the gardens of Pixieland, Flora came upon a sight that frightened her. She saw a giant worm that was guarding something that Flora knew was to be feared.

Flora jumped high into the air. She flew higher and higher into the sky. She flew as high and as quickly as she could to get home. She knew that she had to tell her sisters that she needed their help.

Only minutes from home as she soared high in the sky, Flora looked back. Suddenly she saw that the dreaded worm was following her from the ground. It was so close that it was practically clinging to her wing.

What should she do? Frightened, Flora quickly flew home. The door was open. The dreaded worm was “on her wing.” Flora landed by her house. Fortunately the worm was too big to climb up the stem of the flower that led to her house. Soon Flora was home and free of the worm.

The now very angry worm growled a warning as she escaped becoming his prey. Brave Flora didn’t care because she is a daredevil.

Later that night, Flora could not sleep. Being the adventurer she was, she snuck out of their idyllic nest and surprisingly took her sisters with her by nestling them between her wings. For light and safety Flora and her sisters brought their pet, Shimmer the firefly.

The night was dark. Lights were off in every flower. A chorus of crickets was mating, filling the air with songs of love. Night birds of prey were cawing. High in the trees, limbs were swishing in the breeze in the night.

“Flora, I am scared. Get me out of here,” said Lily.

“Don’t be a baby. Come on, be like Flora. She is brave,” said Rose sternly.

With her sisters by her side and the glowing pet, they would be safe, and Flora, with wings spread, flew high in the sky where the stars were twinkling.

They flew to the spot where Flora had spotted the giant worm earlier that day. The whole gang landed with a big “thump,” and they were finally on land. They were to find no worm at all. They were lucky.

Flora glanced down and saw blueprints that seemed to belong to the mad man. “We need to get back home so we can scan this together,” said Flora, “just like the detective Sherlock Holmes.” They all agreed and soon flew home together to scan the blueprint.

The blueprint showed where the man was going, what he was doing, and what he would eat. “We need to turn this into the Pixieland Patrol,” said Flora in a helpful way.

“We are going to do it tomorrow, ok, Flora?” said Lily.

“Yeah, Flora, I am very tired,” said Rose. Flora shook her head, tucked her sisters into bed. Flora also went to bed. For safekeeping, she placed the blueprint under her pillow.

The next morning, Flora made a breakfast of sugar cookies and cake and, to drink, cold, refreshing milk. Flora turned on the TV to watch the morning news as she woke up her sisters. Once Flora, Rose, and Lily all ate breakfast, they got dressed and off they went.

Flora wore a pretty puffy pink dress. Rose wore her rose petal skirt and her white cotton tank top. Lily decided to wear a lovely green lily pad skirt and fuchsia top.

They all flew with their pet Shimmer to the Pixieland Patrol Post. The chief looked carefully at the evidence. He saw the blueprint. Together with the chief, they went to find the villain.

When they found him, just where the blueprint indicated, they placed magical cuffs on his arms and locked him in a room that he can never get out of. The room was made of steel and stone.

Happy to be free of the villain, the girls went home filled with the excitement of the day. They were tired so they just sat on the couch and turned on the TV.

Suddenly they heard the news reporter interrupt with an urgent news bulletin: "Breaking news! We just got a heads-up on what happened to the madman terrorizing Pixieland. Our heroes are three of Pixieland's greatest pixies: Flora, Rose, and Lily. The pixies found the blueprint of the madman and, because of their bravery, he is behind bars. Pixieland is safe! Wherever you are, pixies, you saved the land. We all love you!"

After a commercial, again they all were happy when they heard the TV news reporter announce, "The pixies saved our land! Thank you, Flora, Lily and Rose!"

Lily was so happy she said, "Yea! We did it, Rose and Flora. Thanks to Flora! She changed history. She changed history quickly!"

Knock! Knock!

"Who could that be?" asked Rose.

They were in shock. "I think the press is at our door," said Lily.

Flora opened the door, and at that door there stood a lady. It was Flora's mother. She stared into Flora's light blue eyes. Flora stared back. They stood there in shock, and, finally, Flora's mother opened her arms, and Flora leaned in for the hug. Flora felt so happy, and her love bucket was filled to the top. "I think the reason why you were upset earlier was because you needed some love," said Flora's mom.

"Mom, I am so glad you are home! We thought you would never come back, and we need you home," said Flora. Everyone was so happy, and they felt safe with their mother. They celebrated, and Flora knew that all she needed was love.

Never be down in the dumps when you need love! Just hug your mom!

The Rescue of Holiday Hill

THE RESCUE OF HOLIDAY HILL *by Jeremy Fine*
encompasses two planets and countless strange beings. As best friends square off over human prejudices, the fate of a peaceful society is at stake.

This story could be funny, scary, or weird, but you should find interesting how these events go.

This all started 32 years ago. That was when I lived on Lollypop Lane on the planet Mars in the year 7629. This was where my three brothers and two sisters and I lived. I had a best friend named Hannopali. He looked like his father. He had a secret that he never told anyone.

We went to school at 3:45 in the afternoon. We came back at 4:00 in the afternoon. In school we found that there is a land outside of Mars. That land is inside the Earth. It is called Holiday Hill. Holiday Hill is where all types of creatures come together to be friends, like goblins, humans, aliens, and other marvelous creatures.

Holiday Hill got its name by people finding a space of land on the humans' new year, which is a holiday. And in middle Earth it had mountains. So they named it Holiday Hill.

There is one guy trying to stop Holiday Hill. That is Kuwan Balmidage. He is just an ordinary guy. He's short and stubby. The only problem is that he's Hannopali's father: The King of Mars.

Kuwan wanted to destroy it because the people of Holiday Hill didn't let him join because he was too powerful. So they kicked him out.

That was 32 years ago. Now it's in the present time. Kuwan Balmidage sadly passed away, but his dying wish to his son was to stop Holiday Hill.

When Kuwan died, that meant that Hannopali was crowned king of Mars. I thought that it would be just fine, but Hannopali tried what his father told him to do.

The next day I saw him get the armies ready to attack Holiday Hill. The armies didn't want to do it. However if they didn't, they would go to jail.

I told him he didn't have to do it. He said that it was his duty to stop Holiday Hill from happening. I asked him why he'd do that. He said there shall be no peace between Marzanians and anything else.

I knew I had to stop him. I went down to middle Earth to find Holiday Hill and then warn everyone to run away. Once I got there Hannopali already was there. The only good thing was a stun ray that controlled all the armies. Everything was blasted, and then he saw me. In his face it looked like he's been brainwashed.

I found out what happened. Kuwan had an ability to brainwash people. When he was dying, Hannopali had a crazed look in his eye. He was brainwashed. It was too late.

He ran after me. He tried to shoot at me three times, but on the third time the blaster backfired. He went flying through the air. When he landed I ran towards him.

When I came to him he was not brainwashed. He told me to let him die. He begged me. I couldn't listen to him. I picked him up, took him to Mars, and then found a medic.

Everyone from Holiday Hill came back. Every person in the universe came to restore Holiday Hill.

Hannopali admitted himself into a mental hospital. He came out 37 minuets later.

Now because I saved Holiday Hill and saved armies, I live as king of Mars, and also leader of Holiday Hill.

The Secret Room

*Strange occurrences in a seemingly normal condominium lead to a mysterious discovery for two men in **THE SECRET ROOM**, by Sarah Powell.*

It was a stormy night when the power went out at Tom and Jerry's condo. Tom was pretty frightened, but Jerry wasn't really scared at all. It had been a year since they had moved into the condo, and they knew it like it was a map. "I'll call the electrician," said Jerry in a calm voice. He got out his cellular phone and called the electrician.

To make a long story short, the electrician came and fixed the fuse box, and they all were happy. But that was only the beginning.

Later that week, Jerry went to get a job at a place he had wanted to get a job at. Tom was doing a little bit of work, too, while he was at the house.

It was getting late and Jerry wasn't back yet, so Tom decided to watch TV. He was in the middle of watching the game when the TV shut off. It didn't seem normal for it to do that, so Tom went upstairs to check the cord.

When Tom saw the cord, it wasn't broken or unplugged. "How weird," he thought to himself, but he couldn't explain the problem, so he left it alone.

Jerry got back from his new job, and Tom told him what happened. Jerry turned the TV on, and it started to work! Tom was really amazed by it, but they just went to bed.

The next day Jerry wanted to see if Tom was right about the TV. He went upstairs and followed the cord to a wall that was hollow. It was weird finding out that the wall in the guest room was hollow. Jerry told Tom to get tools from a hardware store to knock the wall down with. Tom got back with the supplies and they started to knock down the wall. Even though Jerry would have to pay to fix the wall, he didn't really care.

They finally took down the whole wall, and saw that there was a passageway leading to a place. Jerry started to go down the passage first, and then Tom went. It was very dark at first, but as they were going it started to get brighter. They both ran towards the light, and then stopped at a door, which was the source of the light. Jerry opened the door very slowly, and then they saw it: a room full of money and things back when there were pirates. It was marvelous, Tom and Jerry thought, but what would they do with all this money?

Of course they split the money equally, and they were pretty proud of themselves, too. But when they had put the money in the bank, it didn't show up on their receipts. It couldn't have been their imagination that made it all up, or could it?

In the past years, Tom and Jerry were still puzzled about whatever happened that day. It is told that that very condo was haunted on a stormy day, and it will stay haunted until someone finds the money. Tom and Jerry never knew about it, so they just went on with their lives.

Super Dario 2 and the Missing Muggy

*Enter the magical land of Snow World and prepare for invisibility, evil flying villains, and two heroes who are having a tough day. **Josh Michael** takes you through the world of **SUPER DARIO 2 AND THE MISSING MUGGY.***

Once there was a magical land named Snow World. The little people who lived there spent their days building snowmen. It was normally a very peaceful and beautiful land. It snowed almost every day. As far as you could see there were big beautiful snowmen covering the land.

The little people had special magical powers; they could turn themselves invisible or use an invisible shield for protection. They also had the ability to paralyze other people. If they felt they were in danger, they began shooting pellets from the palms of their hands that looked like little flowers.

The only problem was that the land was also filled with evil Carpas. The Carpas liked to destroy the snowmen so they could eat the carrot noses. The Carpas looked harmless enough. They looked like cute little bunnies, except they had wings and could fly, too. They always traveled in packs.

Whenever the little people spotted the Carpas, they would get very angry. The Carpas could destroy hours of their work in just a few minutes. So the little people of Snow World always kept a good eye out for the flying Carpas, including two hard-working men named Dario and Muggy.

One day Dario and Muggy were building snowmen in Snow World. It had been snowing hard all day and the snow was getting very deep. Dario and Muggy were eating mega mushrooms to grow stronger, so they could lift the heavy snowballs, but it was almost lunchtime and they were both getting very hungry.

“Hey, Muggy, this snow is getting very heavy. I need your help.”

“*No problemo*,” said Muggy, and he ran over and helped lift the large ball of snow.

“Thanks, dude,” said Dario.

They had already built 20 snowmen, but their goal was to build 50. They needed to build five more before they took their lunch break.

“Hey, Muggy, how much longer do you think we have before the Carpas show up and begin destroying our snowmen?”

“I don’t think we have much more time. I know I’m getting hungry, so they probably are also.”

“We’d better get moving!” they said together. They laughed!

All of a sudden, a bunch of Carpas came and started to destroy the snowmen. Dario got very angry and began shooting flower bombs at them. Dario yelled, “Muggy, you protect the snowmen. I’ll take care of the Carpas.”

“*No problemo*,” Muggy said.

Flower bombs paralyzed Carpas immediately when they were hit. Muggy tried protecting the snowmen with his invisible shield, but by accident, he turned invisible. Without even realizing what had happened, Dario kept fighting off the Carpas. In the meantime, Muggy was hit with a flower bomb, fell into a snowman, and got buried in all the snow that was being thrown around in the fight. Muggy tried to scream for help, but it was no use. He was paralyzed. By the time Dario

had paralyzed the rest of the Carpas, he noticed that Muggy was missing.

“Muggy!” Dario yelled, but there was no answer. Dario muttered to himself, “I can’t believe Muggy left for lunch without me.”

He thought that Muggy took off for lunch; he couldn’t believe his best friend just left without telling him. So Dario decided to take a break also. He was very hungry, and since all the Carpas were paralyzed, they shouldn’t be any problem for a while. Dario set off for his home and ate a big lunch.

After lunch, Dario set off back to Snow World to finish building the snowmen. He was surprised that Muggy hadn’t returned yet. Dario tried building them by himself, but he didn’t have enough strength to pick up the heavy snowballs alone.

Frustrated, Dario walked through the deep snow over to his friend Muggy’s house. He knocked on the door, and was shocked when Muggy’s pet piranha just howled and barked. Dario tried the door handle. The door was unlocked so Dario went inside.

“Muggy,” he called, but there was no answer.

After walking around the house and calling out for Muggy, Dario realized Muggy was not home. He also could tell that he had not returned since they left that morning because the fire that normally blazes in the furnace was just barely smoldering.

Now Dario was worried, so he ran back out the door and began searching and yelling for Muggy. Dario went back to Snow World where they were building the snowmen, screaming Muggy’s name. When he returned to the site he was horrified to see the Carpas were no longer paralyzed, and were destroying the snowmen again. He began shooting the flower bombs, then noticed one of Muggy’s feet pop out of a snowman.

Dario quickly ran over and began helping the Carpas destroy the snowman. With three swings, Muggy popped out of the snowman. He was almost frozen solid. He looked like an abominable snowman! So Dario hit Muggy on the head.

“Dude, you need to be hit bad.”

Most of the snow fell off Muggy.

“No, I need a mallet so I can hit you,” said Muggy. “You hit me with a flower bomb and it knocked me into a snowman. I practically froze to death.”

“I’m sorry,” said Dario, “but you were invisible. I didn’t see you.”

Dario was so happy that his friend was ok. The Carpas were so freaked out when Muggy popped out of the snowman that they flew away as fast as they could.

“Come on, just help me build five more snowmen,” said Dario.

They finished building the five snowmen and took a break. Dario decided they would build the rest tomorrow. They had too much excitement for the day. So they ran back to Muggy’s house, built a fire, and played games for the rest of the day.

The Tomb

*In order to investigate a newly-discovered Egyptian tomb, three friends with unusual abilities must find their way past daunting obstacles in **THE TOMB**, by **Dylon E. Tyldesley**.*

One day three explorers (also best friends with amazing powers) went to Egypt. Their names are Adam, Kenny, and Michel. Their powers are super strength (Adam), super speed (Michel), and super smartness (Kenny). They decided to go to Egypt because they had never been there.

They made it to the campsite. They saw a gigantic sandstorm coming at them. Adam grabbed the truck they were driving and went behind it. Kenny went, too. Michel ran to France.

After the sandstorm, Michel ran back with a croissant.

As they looked to see how much damage the storm made, they saw a tomb. They did not know whose tomb it was.

They went inside, and the first step was a trap. Giant axes swung back and forth. Michel ran back and forth just to show off. Kenny made a strategy to get through: By running a certain speed, the axes would miss you. Adam followed Kenny and made it after a few minutes. After they made it, they found a giant staircase.

They started to walk, and Michel ran all the way up over and over. Finally Adam stuck out his arm and Michel fell hard. By the time he woke up, Adam and Kenny were at the top of the stairs. They were just staring.

They knew whose tomb it was now. The tomb was that of the richest man, King Ezra the second.

They took as much gold as they could. After they went home rich, they returned, but could not find the tomb again.

The Tragedy

*From his appearances on television, you might think that the life of the Pillsbury Dough Boy is nothing but giggles. Guess again. **David Stallings** reveals the cost of being a corporate icon in **THE TRAGEDY**.*

One day the Pillsbury Dough Boy was driving home from his job. He didn't feel well. He was sweating from his dough head and it was making his car rather sticky. At work, he received twelve hard pokes while filming his commercials. All day his stomach felt like butterflies and a volcano exploding. He couldn't wait until the workday was over.

On the way home, the Pillsbury Dough Boy decided to stop at the CVS drug store. He picked up some medicine and chicken noodle crackers. While standing in the checkout line, he felt dizzy and his vision became blurry. He swayed to the left and swayed to the right. *Bam!* He went crashing into a canned goods display. The store manager called an ambulance, which rushed him to the hospital.

When he woke up, he didn't realize he was in the Flour Intensive Care Unit. His family, wife Jennifer and two daughters Rolly and Sprinkles, were at his bedside. They were all crying because the dough boy didn't look well. He had tubes of flour hooked up to his body to help dry him up. He had a yeast infection that was causing his body to swell. He looked like a giant marshmallow with yellow food coloring. The doctor said he received too many belly pokes in his lifetime. His dough was getting ready to dry up.

The doctor told Jennifer that the dough boy was very sick and was not going to make it through the night. She and the girls needed to say their goodbyes.

The Pillsbury Dough Boy looked at his wife and said, “Don’t let our daughters become Pillsbury Dough Girls because they may get too many stomach pokes and they could die, too.” The Pillsbury Dough Boy knew his job was risky, but wanted to make a decent living to provide for his family. He had loved his job until now.

He told his family he would see them in Gourmet Dough Heaven. Just then, the life monitor had a long continuous beeping sound. The dough boy passed away.

He will be remembered as a happy cheerful dough boy. May he rest in peace.

When Lawnmowers Attack

*You may never feel at ease in a lawn and garden center again after reading **WHEN LAWNMOWERS ATTACK**, by **Jake Rothenberg**.*

One day millions of years ago, lawnmowers ruled the Earth. Then when dinosaurs came to Earth, the lawnmowers went to India from the United States.

But the lawnmowers wanted their homeland back, so they thought of an evil plane to freeze the Earth called “Plan Ice Age.” (The lawnmowers weren’t the smartest things. They really never thought things through. They did not know they would also kill themselves with Plan Ice Age. Now, back to the story.)

The lawnmowers went to the Artic Ocean to freeze the water by fanning it with their blades. The lawnmowers froze the Earth, the dinosaurs, and themselves. (See? They’re not very smart.)

But now humans have created lawnmowers again. I wonder if they will take over the Earth, or at least try.

The Zombies' Revenge

*Does anyone want to say something good about homework? No? Then you should enjoy **THE ZOMBIES' REVENGE** by **Andrew Perry**, where we see the evil that homework can cause.*

Once upon a time, there was a mean teacher called Mrs. Evil. "OK, class, you have very easy homework tonight. All you guys have to do is one math problem. You have to solve this problem: $(3 \times 22 \times 2 \times 5 \times 161 \frac{5}{5}) \times 12 + 1652439 \times 2.0000000001$," said Mrs. Evil.

"We haven't learned most of that stuff yet!" said a student.

"You have been too hard on us!" said another student.

"I have been so patient to listen to your lame, stupid reasoning," screamed Mrs. Evil. "I am not being hard on you; you are being hard on me!"

Then the bell rang, and everyone went to homeroom. When it was time to go home, the students were studying the things in the problem that they hadn't learned yet. Their parents tried to help, but they were no use. They worked on it whenever they had free time, at support hour or recess. Everyone worked together to try and solve the math problem. They all made a plan to work on the problem whenever they had time to.

After a couple of weeks, Mrs. Evil said, "Come on, this is absurd. You should have been done a week ago. I am tired of watching you work on this one problem nonstop." One student got lightheaded and fainted because of all the hard

work. Mrs. Evil said, "For heavens sake, you can stop now. Please stop working!" Then everyone passed out. When it was time to go home, the students had to be carried home by their parents.

The class walked into the school the next day in the form of zombies. They were turned into zombies from working so hard. Everyone who saw the zombies turned into a zombie. Then the zombies turned in their unfinished homework, but their work disintegrated into dust because of their horrible ugliness. Finally, Mrs. Evil also turned into a zombie.

Even the building was affected. The building started crumbling and giant pieces fell. Half of the zombies made it to safety, and the other half got hit with debris. The zombies that got hit with the debris turned into humans. Then the zombies who saw the humans turned back into humans.

Eventually, everyone turned back into humans. At that same moment the debris stopped falling, and everyone walked out of the area that was the building and ran to the playground. When everyone was safe, the debris started to fall again and the building caught on fire. The students and teachers watched the fire and were wondering how the debris stopped falling until they were all out.

Just then a man appeared in front of them out of nowhere and explained that he used his powers to stop everything from falling. He said that he would put out the fire and repair the building with his magical powers, but it would cause him to faint.

He fixed up the building and fainted. Then he disappeared just as mysteriously as he had appeared.

At last the principal declared that Mrs. Evil would be taking an early retirement and that from then on all homework would be easy.

A
FIGHTING
CHANCE

Danson's Adventures at War

*Through contrast, the inclusion of comic elements can underscore serious themes. **Lawrence Geist** looks at the hard realities of war through a comedic lens in **DANSON'S ADVENTURES AT WAR.***

I remember two things about that day. It was hot and I was scared.

"When are we getting off this thing?" said Sev. "I hate flying!"

The commander barked, "Sit down and shut up! We'll be off this thing soon!" He turned to speak with the pilot. "Where are we landing?"

"About a mile from the landing site. I can't get you closer because of a large AA gun."

"OK, then," said the commander, and then Sev let out a disgruntled cry.

"I hate this thing!" and with that he kicked the door.

"Hey! Don't kick the door! You're going to damage the latch! Then we'll never get out!"

"Don't worry," said Scorch. "He'll be fine once he kills something."

As everyone else argued, I looked out the window and thought, "Those are some big guns...pointed right at me! I have a bad feeling about this." Then I thought, "What's that spiraling thing flying at great speed towards us?" and then *bang!* I was falling. I had a faint sense of what was happening

around me as I screamed and landed on something hard that went, “Ow.”

When I woke up I saw my best friend Bhiff standing over me and I asked, “What happened, Bhiff?”

“The ship got hit with a missile, Danson. And in case you wondered, the thing that went ‘ow’ was the droid you landed on.”

“Wow, that’s odd...”

“You better check your armor, Danson. You hit that droid very hard.”

“It doesn’t matter! It’s all the same plastic! I mean, really! Do they think plastic is going to protect us against lasers and rockets?”

“Danson, don’t start this again.... Just go to the command center and shoot anything that’s not in armor.”

“You mean plastic?”

“Yes, Danson, plastic. Now get over there and stop bothering me!”

Away I ran. When I got there, I was shocked. I walked up to the sergeant and said, “Look, Sarge! Sleeping people!” Then he told me that they were dead.

“Probably killed by the big droids with pike...Gahhhhh!” I looked down and saw a spike through his stomach. I screamed again and started firing blindly. When I opened my eyes I saw that the droid was dead and the sergeant was on the ground.

I said, “Sarge! Sarge, are you OK?”

He replied with, “No, I’m not OK! I’m about to die!”

“Oh, then what should I do? I have to call a medic!”

“Danson...I always wanted to give you my shotgun.... So take it now...and remember me...because I never liked the way you held the SMG.”

“Sarge! No! Wait, you didn’t like the way I did what? Sarge?”

Then Sarge went, “Blaughhhhhhhhh,” and Bhiff was standing there.

“Bhiff! Bhiff! Sarge just died! What do we do?”

“Come on, Danson! We got to assault the warhead!” And then I was pushed in the direction of a giant ship crawling with enemies. I asked Bhiff why we were going in the direction of the enemy, and he answered, “We’re going this way because we were ordered to! Now get moving! I want to go home!”

So we ran in, shooting everything and blowing things up. I ran up to a droid and started hitting it with my gun. The droid replied with a clear “Ow!” and I just yelled, “Oh come on! You can’t feel pain!” And the shooting started again. All I could see were the illuminated glows from discharged rifles and screaming soldiers and droid parts falling to the floor. I looked around and saw a fuzzy glowing blue sphere and said, “Oh...my...god.... A grenade!” And then it exploded and I was thrown back into Bhiff.

“What happened, Danson?” asked Bhiff.

“Grenades! Explosions! Tanks! Run!” and I ran with Bhiff behind me as a massive tank smashed into the wall we had just been crouching by. We stood back to back, shooting, and when the dust finally cleared, we headed to the ship.

When I got on I saw Scorch and the commander and Sev in the back, cleaning his sniper rifle. I was so happy we were leaving the battlefield, I whistled all the way home. That is, until the commander said we were shipping out to the next battlefield in 20 minutes. Then I was worried.

D-Day

*The excitement of a war story can obscure the human tragedy that comes with the real thing. It is to our benefit that **Alan Panley** reminds us of the realities of war in **D-DAY**.*

May 20, 1944

I signed up for the Army two weeks ago, and I am in a training camp at the moment. It is very hard because they make us run, climb walls, and do other stuff that will get us ready to go to war. I am not sure where I am headed, but I am very nervous, as are all other guys in the camp. There are about 500 soldiers here, and it is very overcrowded. It is so overcrowded I have to sleep on the floor because there are not enough beds.

June 5, 1944

I have been told by my sergeant to be ready tonight. I have to prepare all my stuff and still get some rest! Suddenly, I just got REALLY scared. My comrades and I are saying a prayer tonight for good luck in the upcoming battle, "D-day."

June 6, 1944

Our plane got to England last night and we took a small, overcrowded boat headed toward the coast of France. The noise was unbelievably loud. There were soldiers next to me getting shot. There were tanks shooting, and boats and planes exploding everywhere I looked. On the beach in front of me, there were planes dropping bombs and people throwing

grenades. The Germans were shooting our soldiers as they ran across the beach. Other soldiers are trying to climb up the cliffs on ropes, and they were also getting shot at. The only thing going through my mind was “How am I ever going to get through this?”

June 8, 1944

Two days ago, I jumped out of the boat at Utah Beach and realized the water was over my head. I had to swim to shore with a rifle in my hand, a pistol in my pocket and a 40-pound pack on my back. When I got to the beach I got clipped by a bullet. Luckily, a comrade of mine pulled me to safety. He healed my wound well enough with a bandage and some medicine. I still had to wait and rest before attempting to climb up the cliff.

June 10, 1944

Tonight I am sleeping in a partly burned house. It is better than last night when I slept in an underground bomb shelter we had taken over. The shelter was cold and made of cement stained maroon from blood. It was very unclean and the blankets were dirty.

Yesterday, I was so tired I almost fell asleep in a trench. I awoke to the screaming sounds of a wounded soldier nearby, and that got me running. There are very few German forces left in this town and by tomorrow morning I bet the “night forces” will clear them from the battlefield.

June 20, 1944

I know now that I am staying for the rest of WWII. We have not cleared much of France since I’ve been here, as the German defense is huge.

The only time I have been injured since D-day was when a grenade exploded a little too close to me. I was shooting a

machine gun set into a window and the roar of the gun was louder than the grenade hitting the floor. I noticed the grenade when a private pushed me out of the way. I spent two days in the field hospital. The private also got injured. I am thankful that he protected me.

I have seen a lot of deaths since I've been over here. The most painful ones are when soldiers right next to me get their heads blown off, or when I see soldiers get beaten to death by German guns.

June 25, 1944

Yesterday we marched into a city where there were little kids playing soccer in their backyards. This was a very different scene than what we were used to. They were laughing and were very happy to see us. They thanked us for driving the German army out and offered us some food and water. I felt bad for them that they had to live through this war.

June 29, 1944

Today, at a small village in central France we were in a fierce battle with a German Tiger Tank unit and some infantry troops. I got shot in the shoulder. The pain was extreme as I waited for the armored vehicle with doctors to arrive. They immediately put me on a plane and sent me back home. When I got back to the USA I was told that because of my injuries, I couldn't return to the war.

I then smiled. I feel relieved that I don't have to go back to war. Inside all my joy I also feel guilty. I left all my friends that I had made back in war to suffer. I hope they will survive, especially the private that saved my life. I am just glad that I made it through the war that thousands of others died in. And soon I will have a Purple Heart to prove it.

The Destiny

*Three boys separately experience events that help them plan for their futures. As young men, together they find that the future unfolds despite their plans in **THE DESTINY**, by **Lenny Gross**.*

Jack woke up to his everyday life. He brushed his teeth and rushed downstairs for his meal. Today he predicted that he was going to be welcomed by waffles and syrup, his favorite breakfast.

As Jack scurried downstairs, anxious to gobble down his delicious meal, he couldn't help noticing that the television was on. The show was taking a commercial break. The commercial was about joining the National Guard or army. He took that moment in time to pause and think. Jack thought of all the innocent people losing their lives. For that one minute, Jack was speechless, and for one of the first times in his life, he felt sorry for someone. This wasn't a type of sorry that you would say to your brother when you pushed him down, but inside him, an intense feeling for other people was brewing up. He really just wanted to let it out, but he couldn't.

* * *

“WAKE UP!” cried the dorm commander. Allen woke up begging for more sleep. It was already six o'clock in the morning. To everyone else at the school, this felt like eight o'clock in the morning. Allen had suffered from this pain every single morning since Allen's parents had sent him away

to military school when he was just ten. Allen had found his confidential school file. He learned that he was sent away because his parents did not care for him and deeply hated the thought of having kids. Ever since then, Allen has struggled with a deep depression, but has pulled through in these years. Allen hated his parents, whether they were dead or alive.

Allen always had an interest in the United States Air Force before he was sent to military school. Allen was anxious for class. Flying combat planes would surely drift from his brain once class started. Those thoughts, however, would return more quickly than expected.

* * *

“I must get to class!” announced Ernest when he woke up. He realized it was only six o’clock in the morning. His day unfolded as scheduled. He tossed on his red plaid button down shirt. Over it, he threw on his genuine denim suspenders. He then rushed downstairs to enjoy an amazing breakfast. He knew he was going to have plain old cereal, as always. He managed to acquire a taste for it after the thousandth time.

After he ate his cereal, his mother drove him to school. Ernest was excited for his first class of his day. It was his favorite: science class. Although Ernest was often called a nerd or a science geek, he still enjoyed science in great deal.

* * *

None of the boys knew what this future held. Jack and Ernest hoped that they would not have to go to war, whereas Allen dreamed of serving his country. Each of the boys had different plans for his life. None of them knew what would happen to them.

Thirteen years later...

All three young men had their televisions on—Allen in South Dakota, Ernest in Missouri, and even Jack in California. In a television statement, the President of the United States declared, “Due to the recent war in Venezuela, I have decided to renew the draft. From now on, all people aged eighteen through twenty-eight must join one of the following fighting forces: the United States Air Force, the National Guard or Army, or the Marines. If you fail to register for this mandatory draft, you will be forced to spend seven years in prison.

“There is also some other urgent news. Military intelligence has led us to believe that the Venezuelans are hiding something from us. We suspect the Venezuelans might have nuclear weapons. Therefore, all soldiers should be cautious regarding what they are up against.”

The news was heartbreaking. Two of the young men, Ernest and Jack, were torn from their families. Allen decided to join the Air Force because of his interest in aeronautics. Ernest joined the scientific research group of the Marines to help find a cure so that soldiers could heal faster from severe wounds. And lastly, Jack joined the Army due to...well... the commercial he saw.

The destiny for all three men looked very bleak. They were going to war. They were clueless as to what was going to happen to them, and did not know whether or not they would survive. They barely even knew why they were fighting. They were just protecting their country from danger.

About five years later, the men were still in the brutal war. They had suffered from wounds both mental and physical. The physical wounds would heal, but the mental wound would be with them for life. They were finally together, and they do not even know it. (The men turned out to be together

because the president said that if a soldier's father had been in another war, that soldier would be in a certain team. It just so happens that Jack, Allen and Ernest had fathers in the past war.)

Fighting side by side and fighting for their own rights, the men took caution, prepared for any upcoming situation. Right when they thought the war was over, things took a turn for the worst. All of a sudden, they heard gunshots. They anxiously loaded their weapons and were ready to fire.

They all knew they would have to take cover, so Jack jumped on top of a house behind the chimney, while Ernest and Allen found cover behind a metal trash wall that they had set up just in case they were ambushed. Luckily, they were all prepared and well trained for this type of situation.

Finally, when they thought they were just hearing things, they saw twenty—no, thirty—no, *forty* enemy soldiers lined up, guns loaded, ready to open fire on all visible people.

The first shots were fired from the enemy side. U.S. soldiers retaliated and fired back twice as hard. They threw a booming grenade. They still had many more of the enemy to take out.

The situation escalated drastically when the Venezuelans decided to use Terror Bite, a top-secret design stolen from a Marines science lab. Ernest, the creator of Terror Bite, knew its power. It could kill a single person in less than fifteen seconds. Terror Bite attaches to any human's skin with its heat-seeking power and uses a sharp needle, disguised as a tail, to inject a killer formula into its victims. Terror Bite was only a prototype and had never been tested before, so they did not know what could happen.

Once the Venezuelans released Terror Bite, they threw smoke grenades. This blinded the United States troops. And just like that, the three men were taken. Ernest, Jack and Allen were shot with a sleeping dart to ensure that they would not

try to escape. And as quick as lightning, the rest of the troops were wiped out by Terror Bite. They were outnumbered.

When the men woke up, they were sitting on a cold, hard jail cell floor. They realized they had been taken war prisoners.

All of a sudden, Allen was grabbed and taken out of the jail cell. He was tortured and beaten. He came back to the filthy cell with bruises scrapes and blood all over him.

They panicked. They did not know what to do. There were so many questions: Are we going to die? What are they going to do with us? All questions were left unanswered.

Finally Allen took control over the two men, no matter how beaten he was. He realized that the three of them, thrown together by horrendous circumstances, needed to unite to formulate a plan to escape this dreaded place. "STOP!" Allen said. "If you're all going to be babies, it's fine with me," Allen said with confidence, "but I want to get out of here, so who's with me?" Allen put his hand in. Jack repeated along with Ernest. "Now here's the plan."

Allen formulated a genius plan to escape. He suggested that they climb through the vent system and find their way to the central entrance. If something went wrong, they were prepared. Allen and Jack were both fully loaded with guns: two pistols they kept in their pockets, and two machine guns that were stolen from the enemies. If worse came to worse, Allen brought a military infiltrating class knife. And even Ernest had his own special form of firepower. Soon after that, they were off.

Climbing through a vent system is not as peaceful as you might think. It's really small and cramped and the men barely had any room to crawl. In no time, all three men were freezing cold. But they had no choice. It was either crawl through a metal vent system, or get the worst sort of torture.

All of a sudden, the vent broke due to too much pressure. They fell into a meeting room at the wrong time. Six

Venezuelan army generals were in the middle of a top-secret meeting. The generals were well armed, along with Allen, Jack and Ernest.

They all took cover as soon as possible. Allen whipped out one of his pistols and shot one of the generals in the chest, who fell down dead. Jack took care of two by shooting them. While Jack fought off the three generals left standing, Allen snuck up behind one of the generals and stabbed him in the thigh. Jack spared the lives of the last two generals, as he wanted to question them on their meeting. Neither spoke, and they were killed.

The men knew that while they were present on an enemy bases, they should search for information on who was behind the evil Venezuelan scheme. Ernest spotted a portable laptop. He thought some “inside info” might be on the hard drive.

Suddenly, they spotted some more enemies. They took cover until the enemies were walking right towards them. Just like that, Allen hit the first guy right in the nose.

They ran through a small metal cubicle. Jack noticed files that read “CONFIDENTIAL” sitting in a wide-open area. Jack snagged the files, and they were off to find a way out of this horrible place.

It was a maze with no ending: place after place...door after door. When will this feud ever end!

Hours later, the men found an exit, although it was heavily guarded with enemies. They were armed with knives and guns, secondary ammo—everything a soldier could ever wish for in combat. The only way to escape was to distract one and let the other six get off track wondering what happened. While the enemy squads were in fantasyland, the men were going to sneak behind them and knock them out. They would then take in to provoke the man who they distracted.

Jack found a glass bottle on one of the shelves near the exit. He slowly threw it out in the hall. Obviously, one guard got distracted; he called the other for back up. This was not what they expected! They thought only one guard was going to come. Jack, Allen, and Ernest frantically (yet silently) panicked. Allen was being stupid and tripped the guard. Sadly his stupidity nearly got him killed. The second guard shot at Allen but missed. Allen retaliated by stabbing the enemy gunner in the back. The loud exchange affected the other squads, who started shooting. Allen shot all of them in seconds. They rushed out the door ASAP.

Just when they thought the coast was clear, the alarm started going off. Swarms of guards marched out silently. They had to think fast. Ernest spotted a nearby empty tank. Before the guards could do anything the three men ran over to the tank.

While in the process of running, Allen was shot. He fell to the ground, yet got up with great pride. Still, Allen could not run his average speed; he was limping from the shot. Before he could look back at the guards he got shot in his other leg and was now unable to walk.

When Allen thought his days were going to end, he glanced at the tank, now up and running with his allies in it. The guards could not take on their own tank and started to flee back to their base. Seconds later Jack and Ernest fired the shots. The ground shook.

Jack and Ernest saw an oil tanker near the base. They aimed at the tanker and fired away. The explosion was so enormous that it conducted enough power to blow the base into mere pieces. Just when Allen thought he was dead, his own comrades saved his life.

Although different circumstances brought these men together, they were unified by one cause and a desire to survive.

The Hider

*A girl under threat must do what she does best in order to survive. In **THE HIDER** by **Emily Honet**, one girl realizes that life is more than just a game.*

France News

January 19, 1963

Nouvelle de dernière heure! (Breaking News!)

As we all know, the Canadian soldiers are coming to France to fight against our own troops. What we didn't know, though, was even though the soldiers are just arriving here in France, they are already starting to search houses looking for innocent people to kill. Keep a look out for any soldiers scouting your area. Some certain areas already have soldiers scouting the area, including Rouen, Lyon, and Rennes. If you see any soldiers in your area, you should quickly evacuate your house and go to your local church, where you'll be safe. Even if you cannot see any soldiers in your area, you should keep your doors locked at all times and never talk to any suspicious people or soldiers.

Meanwhile in a tiny town in Wingen-sur-Moder:

...49...50, now he should be coming, but wait, where is he? This position is so uncomfortable, so just hurry up, Leon.... Mary was crouched in the chute leading to the laundry room, waiting for her older brother Leon to find her and her friends Pierre and Laurie. Geez, I never knew that Leon was this bad at playing hide and seek. Even though no one can be bad at a finding game, Leon sure can. 51...52, where is he? Mary's back was hurting every second she was sitting there.

Finally after what seemed like forever, she heard Leon yell, "Ha, I found you, Laurie. Now help me find Pierre and Mary so someone else can be it." All her thoughts were stopped by Leon yelling, "I found you, Pierre. Now it's time to find Mary."

Mary then heard Laurie loudly sigh and loudly murmur to herself, "How come she always gets found last?"

Mary smirked in the pure darkness, listening to her friend envy her. *Maybe I should've hidden somewhere else. This space is too tight.* But Mary knew that any second they would say...

"We give up!" Leon shouted. Mary sighed with relief, released her position, and fell down into the darkness, landing in a basket filled with dirty clothes. "So there you were. You were hiding in the laundry all along. I searched there three times. I guess I need to look harder," Leon said. Mary just sat there, smiling, not saying anything. After all, a good hider never reveals her hiding spots.

Then from upstairs, Mary heard her mother, Mrs. Crump, yell, "Kids, I'm home from my shopping." Mary, followed by Leon, ran upstairs to greet her mother.

"Hello, Mother. Do you need help with the groceries?" Mary asked.

"No thank you, honey, but I just got calls from Pierre's mom and Laurie's grandmother, and they're both needed at home right away. They both say it's urgent," Mary's mother

replied as she unloaded the eggs, cream, and bread from a bag. Both Pierre and Laurie mumbled, but hastily said goodbye to Leon and Mary and shuffled out the door.

As soon as Laurie and Pierre left, Mary's father walked through the door with a worried look on his face. "Has the news said anything more about the Canadian soldiers, Jim?" asked Mrs. Crump after seeing the worried look on her husband's face.

"Yes, and it isn't very good," replied Mr. Crump. "Take a look." He slid the daily press across the splintery wood table. Mrs. Crump picked it up and skimmed the front page.

"You're right, Jim, this isn't good news at all. And to think that we left the children alone. Which reminds me, where's Amelia, Mary?" she asked.

"She's sleeping upstairs on the cot," Mary replied. "Mother, what's going on with the soldiers?" she asked.

"Nothing you should know about, dear. We don't need you kids to worry about anything else right now. You already have school to stress about," said a worried Mrs. Crump.

"Please," begged Mary.

Mr. and Mrs. Crump exchanged looks and Mrs. Crump said, "All right, we'll tell you. You know how the Canadian soldiers came here to fight?" Both Mary and Leon nodded in at the same time. "Well, now they're coming to towns and searching people's houses to look for any valuables," Mrs. Crump said.

Mrs. Crump got up from the table, remembering Amelia in the cot, and went up the five steps leading to the upstairs. Mary, Leon, and Mr. Crump sat at the table in silence until Mrs. Crump came downstairs with a tear-stained Amelia, who obviously had been recently crying.

"Mother, why was Amelia crying?" Mary asked, stroking Amelia's hair.

“She dropped her blanket,” Mrs. Crump answered. She set Amelia in her wooden highchair and looked sternly at her husband. “From now on we can’t leave the children here by themselves,” Mrs. Crump said. “And that’s final.”

The rest of the night was spent in silence except for the dinner prayers giving thanks to god. Later, Mary got into her chilly bed and went to sleep with too many thoughts in her head.

The next morning, Mary was woken up very early by her mother. “Mary, we think your sister broke her ankle when she fell out of her crib. Your father and I need to take her to the doctor. Leon is already up, but hear this: I don’t want you to open the door to anyone, not even Pierre or Laurie. Keep the door locked at all times, do you understand?” Mary’s head was spinning from dizziness, but she nodded and said she understood. When her mother gave her a tiny kiss on the cheek and left the room, Mary fell back asleep.

It felt like Mary had been asleep for only a couple of minutes when she was woken up by her brother. “Mary, get up fast. There are soldiers coming towards our house and we have to get out of here now!”

Mary sat up, dazed and confused. “How do you know that they’re harmful?” she asked.

“Because I saw the newspaper that mother and father were looking at yesterday, and it talks about soldiers invading houses and killing innocent people. I don’t know what they’re doing here, but we have to run,” Leon said.

Gunshots echoed through the air, and Leon ran downstairs and out of the house. Mary tried to run downstairs and out the door, but it was too late. Soldiers were already surrounding her house. There was only one thing left to do: hide.

Mary ran to the first place that came to mind: the laundry chute.

Mary ran into her parents' room and grabbed two black pillows from the bed. She climbed into the chute and got into a position as fast as she could. Then she shimmied further down the chute until she was about halfway down, and stuffed a pillow above and below her so she would blend in.

As soon as she got situated, she heard the soldier's voice from above. One soldier yelled, "Search the house for any valuables. If you find anyone hiding, you know what to do."

Mary bit her lip as she felt her heart beating inside her. What if they found her and Leon? What if she never got to see Mother, Father, Leon, or Amelia again? She silently whimpered.

"Wait, I think I heard a voice," she heard a soldier say. She could tell that the soldier was near her. From above she heard her parents' bedroom door creak open, and saw a blinding light. She prayed silently, hoping that no one caught her.

"Do you see anything, Bill?" she heard a voice ask.

"Nope, but let's finish searching the house," said Bill.

After what seemed like hours, she heard the front door slam. She kicked the pillow below her down the chute and shimmied down carefully. When she looked out the laundry room window, and saw ten soldiers, each holding a rifle, walking away from her house. She knew the coast was clear.

She crept out the back door and ran into the forest. Mary was running so fast that she didn't see where she was going and tripped over herself. When she looked up and saw Leon there smiling, she ran over to him and hugged him. Surprisingly, he wrapped his arms around her and hugged her right back.

Tears were streaming down Mary's face as she realized that she was going to be okay. And for a moment, she didn't remember anything: not the hide-and-seek, not the laundry chute or Amelia breaking her ankle. None of those thoughts were in her head. All she knew was that she was safe and out of harm's way.

Hostage Rescue

*In **HOSTAGE RESCUE** by **Arie Zeidner**, the fate of the innocent depends upon the skill and determination of the armed forces of the United States. This battle is not an easy one for either side.*

One day in Oman, a group of terrorists attacked an American embassy and took five Americans hostage. These hostages were the ambassador and four officers from the embassy. That started a war between Oman and the U.S.A. The Americans sent boats, planes, and submarines to Oman to rescue the hostages.

On one plane was an officer named Joe. Joe's job was to plan a strategy to stall the army and get the hostages back. "The plan is for us to blow up the gas supply and the ammunition bunkers so their planes and vehicles won't work, and they can't attack us."

When the rescue team parachuted out of the plane, they were separated. When they rejoined, Private Tommy said to everybody else, "Where is Private Ryan?" Everybody went searching.

They found his parachute on the ground and a communications receiver next to it. The receiver was transmitting a message and it said, "Go back to the U.S.A. and pay us five hundred million dollars, or Ryan and the other five die." Private Shan, the communications expert, traced the message from where it was transmitted and told Captain Joe, "I found that the message was transmitted from underground in the middle of a desert near Oman."

Captain Joe said, "I need the coordinates of the transmission, Private Shan." Now they were on a search and rescue mission to disable the enemy army and find Ryan and the hostages.

They traveled by humvees across the hot, dry desert looking for the army base. After three days of searching they found the base and ambushed it. Firing missiles, they killed 75 men and blew up two oil depots and three ammunition bunkers. "One of our men, Private Ben, has a bullet in his chest, although he is still alive," said Private Harrison, the medic, "and two men are dead."

On the fourth day Captain Joe sent seven of his best troops to the location of the underground bunker to rescue the hostages, while the rest of the troops held off the army of enemies. As they were nearing the location of the hostages, suddenly Private Jalen spotted a piece of a metal handle in the ground. It was a door. Private Jalen said to the rest of the troops, "This is the entrance to the enemy's bunker. The hostages are inside."

Then Private Arie said to Private Jalen and the troops, "I will open it, and Andrew, you throw the flash-bang grenades, and then we will all charge in." Private Arie opened the door, then Private Andrew threw the flash-bang grenades, and everybody charged in, shooting their way through. As they stormed the sandy, loud underground bunker, they took over the enemy forces. Far back, deep in the bunker, they found the five hostages and Private Ryan.

After releasing the hostages and Private Ryan, they searched the base and found a huge room with hidden nukes attached to a truck. They radioed back to Captain Joe. "Captain Joe, we found a truck with nukes attached to it," said Private Andrew. When Captain Joe heard the news he sent Private Calvin, the bomb expert, to disable the nuclear missiles. When Private Calvin arrived he got to work right away and disabled the nukes.

Back at camp after rescuing the hostages and finding the hidden nukes, the seven troops were awarded the best medal, The Medal of Honor.

GET YOUR HEAD
IN THE GAME

The Close Game

In THE CLOSE GAME by Nicholas Kizy, World Cup soccer is the subject of a dramatic match between Brazil and Italy. The winner is...well, see for yourself.

In the World Cup of 2007, Brazil played against Italy. The game was very close the whole time. Midway through the first half, Italy missed a penalty kick and Brazil quickly responded with a breakaway goal. Italy tied the game in the second half to force overtime. Due to exhaustion from the long game, no one scored in the overtime period, so they had to go into the shootouts.

The pressure of the shootouts fell heavily onto Jack, Nick, and Mike. Jack was Italy's best player and captain of the team. He was a good leader and would help excite the rest of the team. Nick and Mike were Brazil's best players and captains. Nick held Brazil's record for the most goals in shootouts, and Mike held Brazil's record for most career goals.

Italy kicked first in the first round of the shootouts. The first player to shoot kicked the ball right at the goalie. The goalie didn't even have to move! The next player shot the ball to the top right corner, but the goalie blocked it. The third player shot the ball at the bottom right corner, but that was blocked, too. After missing the shot, the player got so mad that he head-butted the goalie. The goalie got taken out of the arena on a stretcher, and the player got a red card. The backup goalie came into the game. Jack came up last and, with the

crowd going wild, he kicked the ball very wide left and missed the goal.

For Brazil, the first player shot the ball so high that it went into the stands. The next player shot the ball very far to the right, and he wanted to kill himself for the terrible shot. After that, the third player kicked an embarrassing shot that slowly rolled to the goalie for an easy save. Nick kicked next and hit the top crossbar. Mike was the last to kick for the round. He hit the pole on the left side of the goal. The goalie jumped so far he almost hit his head on the goalpost.

In the second round, Italy's first player kicked the ball the same way as in the first round, right at the goalie for an easy save. He knew the coach wasn't going to let him do shootouts for a while after those two kicks. The first player on Brazil's team shot the ball so hard that it bounced off the crossbar and hit him in the face. He got a very bloody nose. The second player on Italy's team shot the ball and hit the post on the right side. He was obviously mad at himself as he stomped back to the sideline, cursing and kicking the dirt. Brazil followed with a shot that was so hard that it bounced off the goalie and knocked him down. The goalie thought that he was scary. Italy's next player booted the ball up into the stands. His teammates stared at him in disgust. Nick stepped up next and, as captain of the team, he felt the pressure of needing to score. He knew that a score now would be a huge lift for the team. After that, Nick shot the ball just wide of the goal for Brazil. Nick fell to the ground in disappointment with his face down in the dirt. Mike finally came over to lift him up.

"Don't worry, Nick, it was a good try," Mike said to him. "I still have a chance to win it for us."

"I'm so mad at myself because I knew that should have gone in," Nick responded. "Now, go kick some butt!"

Italy's last attempt came from Jack. If Jack made the shot, the team would have a chance to win. Jack kicked the ball so fast and hard that the goalie flew into the net, and the ball flew out of the goal. Jack got so mad that he grabbed the trophy and tried to run into the locker rooms, but the big security guards stopped him.

Finally, Brazil's last player, Mike, nervously approached the ball. If Mike made the shot, Brazil would win. Mike closed his eyes and drowned out the sound of the crowd. His palms were sweaty. His heart was pounding a mile a minute. The butterflies in his stomach were going wild.

"It's just you and the ball!" he heard his coach yell.

"You can do it!" Nick screamed.

Mike made the sign of the cross, much like Ivan Rodriguez in baseball, and he slowly stepped up to the ball. He took a couple of slow, deep breaths, and he eyed the top right corner of the net. He kicked the ball as hard as he could. The ball flew toward the top right corner as he turned his head facing the left lower corner. The goalie jumped left because Mike faked him out so badly, and he looked foolish as the ball soared in the other direction and into the net. With his eyes closed, Mike didn't see the ball go in, but he heard the loud roar of the crowd as the fans went wild.

Brazil wins in a nail-biter!

The Game of a Lifetime

*The road to the NBA is difficult even for the most talented players. One man gives everything for a final shot at glory in **THE GAME OF A LIFETIME**, by **Declan Gibbons**.*

There was a person named Danny Jordan. And there was another person named Declan Pippen. Declan and Danny were both great basketball players. Declan would usually make brilliant plays and get the ball to the man in the post. But that's just the type of player he was. As for Danny, he was the type of player who would deke the defender and get under the hoop and get fancy.

Danny and Declan both wanted to be basketball players in the NBA. At the NCAA tryouts they were so graceful and artful. Since they were both on the same team, they just could not be stopped. A week later, they had both made the team.

They were the team's anchors. They were sharing in the team's limelight each night. Declan and Danny were the country's two top players, and always played on national television. In fact, they were being looked at by the Detroit Pistons.

But something bad happened to Danny Jordan. Danny was also a great cook, and was slicing a tenderloin he had just prepared. He was going back and forth and suddenly he hit a bone. He pulled the knife out and it hit the vein in his leg, which meant his leg couldn't work and that he could never play hoops again. In fact, the doctors warned him that if he played basketball again, Danny would be risking his life.

When Declan was at the 2017 draft, it was tight to see who would get drafted first. It was between Jalen Williams and Declan Pippen. Since two NBA teams had an identical record, both players were drafted at the same time. Declan was drafted by the Pistons.

Since Danny didn't get drafted, he was poor. Declan gave him one of his mansions. Declan was really good friends with Joe Dumars, the Piston's general manager, who gave Danny a job as the Piston's head coach. Danny was a great coach, and his team's record was 82-0 in its first season.

In the playoffs, the Pistons destroyed every team. But Declan was injured in the last game and there were no backups. Declan said, "WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?"

Danny yelled back, "DECLAN, I'LL DO IT!"

Declan responded, "Are you out of your mind?"

Danny made a remarkable comment: "I'll do it for the team."

As Danny limped onto the court with five seconds left, he dribbled three times. The crowd counted down, "5...4...3...", but then suddenly Danny took the shot from half court and made it. The announcer shouted, "PISTONS WIN! PISTONS WIN! Wait, Danny's on the ground!" Danny didn't have the strength to take that last shot.

After five hours, Danny was pronounced dead. Every Detroit Piston attended Danny's memorial service. Above his coffin there was a sign that read, "I took one for the team." And for that moment, they all forgot that Danny's last name was "Jordan."

Never in a Million Years

*Is there really such a thing as luck, or is it just a word for the coincidence of happy circumstances? **Donovan Hertz** considers the nature of luck in **NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS**.*

John and I were walking down the street on a summer day when I nearly stepped on and ruined the best chance of luck that I could possibly have.

Let me tell you how it all started....

When John and I got home from school, we finished our homework and studied for our Social Studies test. Then we went outside and we called our friends Jim, Tim, Bob and Jack to come over to play basketball with us.

After that we went to the park and played some basketball. The teams were Jim, John and I versus Tim, Bob and Jack. My team won, but not by much. And can you believe it? I hit the game-winning shot. And everyone calls me the klutz of the school. But I knew I would prove them wrong. And here is how I did.

After that John and I kept walking and almost stepped on the luck that I had all day. Man, oh man, was I lucky. I almost stepped on an eight-leaf clover. I don't know how that was my luck, but I thought it was. I don't know how I saw it, but I did. And I was pretty sure it was my luck for today and the days to come.

I went home and my luck kept going. This time my favorite TV show was on. The next day I went to school and got an 83 percent on my Social Studies test. That was good

for me because I usually get Cs and Ds. After we got our test back, it was lunchtime. I had just enough money in my wallet for lunch.

The next day I only had \$1.21 in my pocket for lunch. My mom told me I could buy a can of pop for a dollar, and that's it. And so I did. On the can it said if you get the numbers 777 you are a winner, and you will go to a Lakers game in Los Angeles. And I got those numbers. The can also said that if I win and I hit the half-court shot, I will get one million dollars. And to top it all off, I get to meet all the players, too.

I ran home and told my parents that I had won. They couldn't believe my luck.

It was January 10 and the game was on February 23. I couldn't wait until the big day.

And finally it came. I got to skip school and go to Los Angeles. The plane ride was so boring I actually read a book, and I hate reading. My mom fell asleep and my dad was listening to my iPod.

After I got to the Staples Center, I got to meet all the players. The players gave me some tips on how I should take the shot. They said to run up to half court and shoot the ball.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" said my mom.

"I am sure," I said.

At half time the score of the game was 41 to 35. I looked around and saw thousands of people. I noticed on the big screen on the scoreboard was the guy that took the shot last year. I felt my heart beating as fast as a rabbit can run, and I almost fell down, but I kept my balance. I got the basketball, I ran, and shot it. I watched it as closely as a hawk watches its prey. I was ready to walk off the court when I saw it hit the rim. And hit again. And hit again. And then I saw my mom and dad watching from the stands, and then I saw it going out of the net.

I was so devastated that I couldn't think about anything else for the rest of the day. But I was happy to even be there to have the chance to take that shot.

Always look where you're walking because you might find an eight-leaf clover like I did. Of course, when you find it, you might not get the chance to win a million dollars.

That was not too happy of an ending for me. I don't know about you, but let's make a better ending for you people that like happy endings. Let's start off where the ball hits the rim, okay?

The ball hit the rim. And hit again. It hit again, and then it went in! I was so happy I was ready to run around the whole Center and do 100 push-ups, but I didn't, because that would look stupid.

I was happy on the plane ride home. When we got home my mom and dad treated me to a large ice cream cone from Ray's Ice Cream. That is my favorite ice cream store. Now that I am rich, maybe I can open up my own ice cream store. Besides, why do I have to go to school anymore?

Always look where you're walking. You might find an eight-leaf clover like I did—but it probably won't happen in a million years.

Reaching the Top

*Jason Clover dreams of leaving the minor leagues behind him to play for the New York Yankees. **REACHING THE TOP** by **Daniel Hackert** is a story about working hard to achieve one's dreams.*

Jason Clover stepped up to the muddy plate as the pouring rain fell down on the Columbus Clippers minor league baseball field. He had climbed his way up the minor league levels and was now at Triple-A, one level away from the major leagues, one level away from the New York Yankees. Jason took in a deep breath, adjusted his batting gloves, and began staring down the pitcher in his batting stance as if he had laser eyes.

Jason, who had tremendous power when it came to swinging a bat, watched the first pitch smack the catcher's leather mitt. "Ball one!" the umpire bellowed into his ear and throughout the field after deciding that the ball had been thrown outside and low.

He knew that if he ever wanted to put on a Yankee's jersey, he would have to come through in big situations like these. There were runners on first and second, in the ninth inning, and two outs with his team down by three runs. The game would be tied if he hit a home run, and even a single would load the bases.

Right when he saw the next pitch sail toward him, he knew he was going to hit the ball. Jason took a long, level swing and made contact with the baseball. He sprinted to first base while the ball rolled softly on the drenched grass toward the center fielder. He stood on the white leather of first base, heaving in air after his mad dash.

The bases were now loaded since he had advanced the runners on base to second and third with his single. Jason's best friend Jeffrey Rogers jogged up to home plate from the on-deck circle, beads of rainwater dripping off his helmet. They slept in the same crummy hotel rooms that smelled like a peanut butter cup made of mud and stale peanut butter, and shared the rent at their apartment in New York. Jason and Jeffrey always sat next to each other on the long bus rides to away games, and even had their lockers side by side in the dirty team clubhouse.

Jeffrey gazed toward the pitcher's mound, locking eyes with the pitcher. It seemed as though super glue had cemented his eyeballs so he could see nothing but the pitcher.

The first pitch came zooming to Jeffrey with so much speed it would make about half the people in the world close their eyes and tense their muscles. Jeffrey swung hard at the ball, hoping to make even the slightest bit of contact. "Strike!" screamed the umpire. The next pitch came and went along with strike two. The count was now zero balls and two strikes. One more strike and the game would be over. With all the pressure on him, Jeffrey swung so hard at the next pitch that he nearly fell.

The wooden bat hit nothing but air, and the game was over. "Strike three, y'er out!" cried the umpire. All the Clippers slumped off the field except for Jeffrey, who was taking this as an opportunity to improve and heading over to the batting cages.

Although the head coach of the Clippers wasn't very happy with the disappointing loss, he had some very exciting news for Jason. He stopped Jason as he finished trudging down the concrete stairs that descended to the clubhouse. "Jason, could I have a word with you?" asked Coach Ocave.

"Sure, Coach," replied Jason, wondering what he had to tell him.

Coach Ocave led Jason to his office where there was nothing but a desk, a couple of chairs, and a clock that ticked very annoyingly. "Please, have a seat." Coach Ocave gestured to a

rusted metal chair that was situated in front of his desk. After Jason was seated on what he thought was a metal rock, Coach began.

“You played a good game, Jason, but it’s a pity you had to lose your last game in the minors.” Jason dropped his jaw, wondering if he was really saying that. “Yes, congratulations, the manager of the Yankees asked me to send you over. The Yankees are going to play their last game of the regular season, and if they win, they will go onto the playoffs,” said Coach Ocave. “You will leave today in the Yankees’ private airplane to get to Yankee Stadium.”

“Oh my gosh, are you kidding about this?”

“No, why would I kid about something like this?”

“I don’t know; I’ve been dreaming about this my whole life and...I’m speechless.”

“That’s okay; you’re not the only kid that has acted like this when I promoted him. Except for one guy about three years ago who just sat there staring at me for about five minutes. When I tried to talk to him he just tipped backwards on his chair to the ground.”

“Well, anyway, thank you so much, Coach,” said Jason. He got out of the chair and left the office.

As he got dressed back into his street clothes, a lot of his teammates came up to him exclaiming things like “good luck,” or “congratulations.” Word about his promotion must have spread rapidly.

“Hey, Jason.” Jason looked up and there stood Jeffrey. “Congratulations on your promotion; I’ll miss you so much. I know you’ll do great on the Yankees.”

“Thanks, Jeffrey. I’ll miss you, too.” Jason gathered his gear and opened the door to the player’s exit. “Jeffrey?” Jeffrey looked over to Jason. “I’ll be waiting for you.”

Jason hailed a taxi to get back to the hotel. When he got to the hotel, he ran through the lobby, leaving the people at the front desk with confused expressions on their faces. He jumped

the stairs two at a time to his room. Jason swiped his room key through the lock on the door and soon began packing all his belongings into his expensive leather suitcase that had his name and the Clippers' logo stitched carefully onto it. He smiled, remembering when his father had first given it to him as a going-away gift.

He grabbed some leftover stale bagels that the hotel offered as breakfast to eat on the way to the airport. A taxi drove him to the airport where he boarded the Yankees' team plane that was waiting for him.

It was a glistening double-level plane. Inside, there were navy blue chairs and sofas, along with a huge plasma TV that hung on the wall at the front of the plane. There were tables and a café and deep, plush carpeting. Jason, although he was alone on the plane except for the captain, still managed to have a good time.

He spent the whole time eating sandwiches and drinking soda from the café, watching movies and playing video games on the plasma, and lying around on the couches. When he reached the airport, he got his suitcases and took a white stretch Hummer to Yankee Stadium.

The change from the minor leagues to the major leagues was huge. Pretty soon, Yankee Stadium was towering above him. He couldn't believe he was actually going to play at Yankee Stadium.

The locker room amazed Jason as he excitedly explored. He found his locker right next to David Stonder's, a past MVP and All-Star. His uniform was hanging on hooks with his number 27 visible on the back of his jersey, his own Yankees jersey.

David Stonder looked up from gripping his baseball bat. "Hey, welcome to the Yankees."

"Thanks," said Jason, trying to hold back his urge of asking for an autograph.

“Here’s a tip,” said David. “When you go up to bat, don’t think of anything except how and where you’re going to swing; it helps you to concentrate.”

“Thanks,” was all Jason could say. He vowed to himself that he wouldn’t say thanks again that night. If he did, it might make him look like a fool.

In his locker, he found bats with his name and team engraved on them, jackets, winter hats, helmets and baseball caps. There were exercise rooms, a TV room and an arcade. The locker room was actually carpeted. It was a dream come true for Jason.

That night, Jason sat on the dugout bench, getting ready for his first game. As soon as he stepped onto the field before a sellout crowd of fans waiting for the game to begin, he pinched himself to make sure this was real. Fans were holding up posters with his name, Jason Clover, on them with four leaf clovers below. After warm-up, he walked back down the stairs to the dugout. “Jason, you’re leading off!” exclaimed his new head coach.

Jason grabbed his helmet and trotted to home plate in front of Yankee Stadium. It was a rainy night, much like his last game as a minor leaguer. Except in this game, he was a Yankee.

Jason Clover stepped up to the muddy plate as the pouring rain fell down on the New York Yankees major league baseball field. He had climbed his way up the minor league levels and was now at the major leagues. Jason took in a deep breath, adjusted his batting gloves, and concentrated on how and where he was going to swing.

The first pitch of his major league career came, and he swung a powerful swing; there was a loud “crack!” that shook the night air. The ball rose high over the center fielder’s head, looking as though it would never come back to Earth, seeming as though it would shatter the moon into a billion different pieces.

Sarah's Lessons

In SARAH'S LESSONS by Katie Donnellon, a young girl takes a journey through true friendship. She finds that no matter what her friends say, an important decision remains in her hands.

Far, far north where Alaska touches the Arctic Ocean, a young girl named Sarah Mallont had just moved in. She was staring out the window longing to be with the kids outside. "I want to go and meet them, but I don't want them to not like me," she thought.

BANG BANG! Sarah got up and ran over to the door. She placed her hand over the shiny brass doorknob. "I wonder who it could be," she thought. Sarah quickly swung the door open, excited to see who was on the other side. When the door was opened to its full extension she saw a girl almost the same height as her. This girl looked older than Sarah. She had brown hair and big blue eyes.

"Hey," Sarah said in a sweet voice. "Would you like to come in?"

"Oh, yes, thank you. My name is Suzie, I live across the street, and I was just coming to welcome you to our town." Suzie had a high-pitched voice and sort of sounded like a mouse.

"I am Sarah. Would you like some hot chocolate?" Sarah asked.

"Yes, thank you," Suzie replied.

"You can sit down and make yourself at home."

Suzie sat down on the couch and took off her coat. She reached up and took off her earmuffs. They had wrapped around the back of her head rather than the top making them easy to miss. As she pulled them away, her hair fell around her face layer by layer. It was like a slow motion movie scene. When her earmuffs were totally removed her hair looked rich and full.

The two had a long talk about general things. Suzie learned that Sarah had played for an all-boys hockey league in Oregon as a goalie. Sarah learned as well that Suzie loved to play hockey with an all-girls team right there in Alaska!

Later that night Sarah asked her mother if she could try out for the hockey team.

“Yes, of course, Sarah. That would help you make new friends, and it will be cool to play with other girls!” Sarah’s mom said.

“Yes, yes! Thank you, Mom, thank you!” Sarah said with mountains of joy in her voice.

Sarah was so excited when she went to bed that night. “I am going to have friends that I have something in common with. I can’t wait to meet all of Suzie’s friends, like Sammi and Lauren!”

RING! Sarah shot up as her alarm clock went off. “Let’s go, Mom! It’s time for hockey!” Sarah shouted down the hallway as she threw on some clothes and shoes.

Sarah blasted down the stairs, and grabbed a muffin out of the basket on the table. She quickly peeled the wrapper off the bottom. As she went to take a bite, her mother came running down the stairs.

“Are you excited? I am, and I am not even trying out!”

“Well, actually, I am a little nervous. What if I don’t make it? Then I will be just a girl who goes to school with no life!” Sara said.

“You are going to make it. You’re a goalie! Well, you’ll do fine. Let’s just go to the rink and check it out,” Sarah’s mom said.

Sarah and her mom got into the car and got ready to go.

“Wait!” Sarah shouted. She got out of the car and ran back into the house. As Sarah walked back to the car she was holding her lucky purple hockey stick that she got two years ago for her birthday. “Okay, now I am good.”

When Sarah got to the ACA (Athletic Center of Alaska), she saw Suzie walking into the arena. Suzie was with her friends.

Sarah jumped out of the car, grabbed her equipment and ran to the door. “What’s up, Sarah?” said Suzie. “These are my friends, Lauren, Sammi, and Alicia.”

“Hey,” all of the girls said at once.

“Let’s go get ready,” Alicia said.

The girls all walked to the locker room together. After they all got ready they started to skate around the ice.

“I am so excited. There will now be a girl on the team that is closer to my age!” Suzie said to Sarah as they stepped onto the ice.

“Okay, girls, we are trying out. Unfortunately, some of you will be cut because we have 50 girls and we only need 20 and two goalies. I want to work on basic skills because I need to see how you skate. Sarah and Alicia, you can get into the net. Let’s start with strides. Down and back! Ready, GO!”

“That was a hard practice. But the best part is we know we are going to make the team,” Alicia told Sarah.

“Yeah, I guess. Let’s go see the list!” Sarah said.

“Okay, girls, here’s the list. Suzie, Lauren, Sammi, and our alternating goalies Alicia and Sarah....” The coach kept talking, but the girls stopped listening.

“YES! We did it. We all made it,” Suzie said.

Travel Team

*You don't win many basketball games without teamwork. **Jalen Williams** knows that and shows that in **TRAVEL TEAM**.*

The travel team is a group of five basketball players. The players consist of Jalen, Sahil, Declan, Billy, and Carlos. The actual name of the team is the Rockets.

The Rockets is a part of an Alphawolf league. The team meets three times a week to practice its basketball skills. Jalen is the shooting guard and captain on the team. He makes all the big shots and has the highest shooting percentage on the team. Sahil plays forward because he gets a lot of rebounds and steals. Declan is also a guard because he is the second best shooter on our team. Billy is also a forward because he is good at blocking and defense.

During practice each player must spend at least thirty minutes just shooting the ball and trying to make as many baskets as possible. After shooting is complete, the players spend ten minutes on fancy tricks. The most time is spent on guarding and practicing defense. Guarding is the most critical part of the game. In the real game of basketball you never leave a man wide open.

Jalen, being the captain, has the hardest job of all. Not only does he have to practice his basketball skills, he must also make sure the team gets to practice on time, attend special practice three times a week, and attend captains' meetings.

Jalen has been the captain of the team for five years. He started playing basketball when he was in elementary school.

Outside of the Rockets, this is the third team that he has played on. Declan and Billy both attended the same middle school. Each guy has been playing basketball for ten years. Declan has won MVP for two seasons. Billy won MVP once in his basketball career. Carlos is the team's best defensive guard. When on the court it would be hard to pass the ball with Carlos guarding his opponents.

At practice, the team prepares for big plays with only seconds left on the clock. The team captain Jalen puts all the players in special spots on the floor, and then blows the whistle to start the clock like it is a real game. Carlos takes the ball out and passes it inbounds, and they practice passing the ball to each other. The guards pass the ball quick and fast to get their hand control together. The forwards throw long passes back and forth across the court. They practice these passing drills for two minutes without anybody missing a ball or letting the ball get away. Jalen blows the whistle to stop the passing practice and shouts, "Practice is over."

The Rockets travel schedule is to Ohio, Texas, and Georgia. The teams from the other states are tough competition because only the best teams from each state get to travel. When playing another team, the Rockets must play that team for seven games. The winner will be the best in four of seven games, but Jalen always say, "We can do this. We are going to be the champions!"

The Rockets and Ohio are playing in the championship in game seven. In the championship game the Rockets faced a team with a better record. Ohio's record is 7-0, and the Rockets record is 6-1.

By halftime the Rockets were losing by fifteen, and it did not look like they were going to win. At the end of the third quarter they were able to cut the lead down to eight points.

In the fourth quarter with three minutes left on the clock, the captain Jalen called a time-out and got the team in a huddle to remind them that they were the champions.

Sahil crossed over on the defense, the Ohio player flew out of bounds, and then Sahil hit the shot. After he made the shot everybody ran to him. They all cheered and laughed.

As the game wound down with one minute left on the clock, Declan dribbled the ball down the court. The defense put on a full court press. As he ran across the half-court line to beat the shot clock, he shot a running jumper and “swished” the shot. The score was now Ohio 64 and Rockets 63. Ohio rushed the ball down court and scored fast. The Rockets were now down by three points.

Carlos threw the ball to Jalen. Jalen dribbled the ball down the court. The ball got passed around to three other players and then back to Jalen. Jalen faked the tight-playing defense on a drive to the hoop, spun around, and pulled up a jumper for a three-point shot. *Swish*. A foul was called on the shot!

With the game tied, Jalen went to the line wondering if he if was going to make it or not. The crowd was noisy while Jalen stood at the line looking at the basket. He bounced the ball twice and shot the free throw. The ball hit the rim and rolled around twice and fell in.

They did it! They won the championship! The team rushed to the floor to celebrate.

INFINITE
POSSIBILITIES

The Adventure of Amos Williams

*Amos travels to the past to improve his present. The result is in your future by way of **THE ADVENTURE OF AMOS WILLIAMS**, by **Eli Jensen**.*

It was the year 2187 when an inventor named Amos Williams invented a time machine. Amos decided to be the first person to make history in a time machine. But before Amos tried it out, he put together a bag of gadgets in case he needed them.

He set the timer to 1938 (he chose 1938 so he could witness the start of WWII and possibly stop it from ever happening) and pressed the start button. He started counting down: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5...0! All of a sudden there was this terrible screeching noise, and things all around him started spinning and whirling as he went into a spiraling wormhole! Finally he came to a stop.

Using common sense, Amos had turned on the invisibility cloak when he took off. When he landed, Amos realized he was floating in the Japanese military headquarters. He took out his pocket-sized instant translator and listened to what they were saying. "Let us bomb Hawaii and take over the United States," said the general.

Amos knew he had to do something and fast. He decided to overshadow the general, which meant using his earthworm device to take control of the general's body without his

knowing. Once Amos had taken over his body, he had him propose taking over Germany instead. All the other people in the room started to cheer at the thought of bombing Germany because it would take their ally completely by surprise.

Amos was so relieved that he had not been suspected of anything. It was then when Amos realized that he could prevent a huge thing like World War II from happening with his futuristic technology.

There was one more thing he wanted to do before he went back to the future. This was to change Adolf Hitler's face so that no one would take him seriously. He would never consider killing Hitler because he wanted to change the future and past without hurting anyone.

Amos flew his time machine to Hitler's house, took out his instant plastic surgery gun, and snuck in. He crawled into Hitler's room, pointed the gun at Adolf, and fired. When Amos looked at him, he saw a huge hairy nose and very, very bushy eyebrows. He could barely breathe because he was laughing so hard. Luckily Adolf wore earplugs at night.

Finally he found his way out of Hitler's house and got into his DeLorean time machine, only to find that the Flux Capacitor was out of plutonium. Amos had a hunch that the German missile research plant had some plutonium.

Luckily, the machine only ran on plutonium during warp speed. Amos drove to the plant, took out his phazer, and shot the guard with a non-lethal stun shock. He then he went in.

The building was a large box-like structure that looked like a bomb shelter. He found the room that had all the Haz Mat suits in it and put one on. Amos was amazed the Germans put a back door on the building and went out it with the plutonium without getting caught.

He snuck over to the Delorean and put the plutonium in it. He had just enough to make it back to the future. He put the radioactive rock in the Flux Capacitor. He got in the Delorean, pressed 2187 in the timer, and pressed the start button. He counted down: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5...0. There was a terrible screeching noise, and things all around him started spinning and whirling as he went through a spiraling wormhole. Finally he came to a stop in his basement from where he had taken off.

Amos destroyed the time machine and the plans for it in fear that in changing the past back to normal, he would mess something else up. Amos went outside and was startled by what he saw. His small, sparsely populated town was now a greatly overpopulated town.

The Airlock

How important is reading? Consider its relationship to the grim situation of **THE AIRLOCK**, *by* **Matt Allen**.

In the year 2213, three construction workers were planning out the location for a boarding school. One of them tried to find a spot to build it. He checked again.

“Uh, I don’t think we have enough room to build this school.”

“Well, I guess we are going to have to find somewhere else to build the school,” another man said.

“There aren’t any more places we *can* build it,” the first man said.

“Except....”

“Except what?”

“Space.”

“Sounds like a good idea considering the fact that we have 23rd-century technology. But we are going to have to gather a ton of people, and we’re going to need a whole lot of money. I’m talking big money because we also need several rockets.” They then gathered all of the necessities for the boarding school.

Three years later, the school was ready to be built. They had the money for the rockets and a lot more recruits to help build the school. All of the recruits bought the rockets, then got started.

Ten years later, the school was done. It would have taken three years to build the school if it wasn’t for technical difficulties. The school looked like a giant sideways rhombus

with no windows, a big ball on the top, two arch-like thrusters on each side, and a mobile mirror that was about one-fifth the size of the school. For convenience and to save time, the school was built in space above a rocket landing field.

It was the first day of school on August 15th, 2226 at 8:30 a.m. A stampede of teenagers fled out of the school gym. The talking of that group altogether was so loud that when you said something, you wouldn't be able to hear or understand what you were saying. The principal, Mr. Slowinski, had just finished a thirty-minute speech.

“Hey, Joey.”

“What?”

“Did you find that speech interesting at all?” Tony asked with a questioning look on his face.

“The articulation was pretty good, but I was not interested at all, and I was asleep for the first 25 minutes,” Joey replied. “I’m going to my room.”

Joey started to walk down the hall to his room. Tony then looked straight ahead and saw a silver door that looked nearly identical to his own. It had a turn handle under a card swipe. He reached in his pocket and took out his card. He swiped the card, and the door started to open slowly. Tony thought, “No doors in here are automatic!”

Then he started to feel a strong, cold pull as he looked up at the door. There was a sign that said:

**AIRLOCK
DO NOT OPEN**

There was a big fan inside the door. Tony got sucked out instantly.

Tony was scared half to death. He thought, “I can’t breathe!” Within 20 seconds, Tony lost control of his breathing and died.

Alien Dog

*Perhaps you only think you understand your pets. **ALIEN DOG** by **Marine Lallemand** could cause you to give Fido a little more attention.*

Once upon a time a boy named Mac Jeffrey had a dog named Tom. Tom wasn't like the other dogs. He was special, especially when there was an eclipse. Then he disappeared all night, but Mac still loved him as he was.

On the night of an eclipse, Mac followed his dog when he left. He was curious about knowing where Tom went during those nights. Quietly Mac followed Tom through the park and hid in a Dumpster where he looked and saw a bright yellow light coming out of something that looked like a parked spacecraft. Mac got closer. He looked in the weird-looking ship and saw Tom talking to aliens!

Mac got caught by guard aliens who took him to their leader—Tom! Mac asked “Who are you really, Tom, and more importantly, why are you here?”

“I have been stuck here for many years because my spaceship broke down. I have had to wait for five eclipses to come or else we would not have enough fuel. It is something that does not exist on this planet, I think,” said Tom, the leader.

“What kind of fuel do you need?” asked Mac kindly.

“Sunflower seeds.”

“We have a lot of that here! I will go get you some if you promise to never invade planet Earth or do anything bad to this planet!”

“Why would we invade Earth? We do not invade any planets. We only try to make peace with everyone, and make everyone peaceful and happy.”

“Wait. You mean that all those stories that people said about aliens invading Earth are not true?”

“Yes. Now please get the seeds.”

“Ok, I’ll be right back.”

Mac ran to his house to get the sunflower seeds. He came back and gave the seeds to Tom. Mac didn’t want to let Tom go, even though he was an alien. He had been his pet for many years now, and he knew that both of them were great friends no matter what. Mac knew also that he had to let Tom go because they were great friends.

Both of them said goodbye to each other, and Tom left, leaving Mac behind. But they both knew they had to let go, so Mac turned around and went home.

Aliens Invade Earth

*Are you ready for an exhilarating tale with aliens at every turn? In **ALIENS INVADE EARTH** by **Christopher Alder**, the invaders come fast and furious, leaving the future of the Earth in the balance.*

The year was 2217. Gunfire could be heard in the distance in a destroyed city with half-broken windows. Flames everywhere were slowly destroying buildings. Lots of big booms of fires and weaponry going off could be heard by all.

There was a human (a top secret organization employee) on Earth fighting to protect his planet. He had a giant gun, and a giant white ball with electric currents going around shot out of the gun with a big *boom*. It hit an alien leader, and half his slimy blue arm fell off. Both parts of his body started to dissolve from the wound outward to the other parts of his body. The alien was screaming with a high-pitched voice until he disappeared. All of a sudden two small aliens that were inside of him popped out of the ashes with tails like spears. The little guys jumped at once and stabbed the human in the windpipe. But with his last breath of air, he squeezed the aliens to death.

Mr. Roboto (the secret organization leader who was here because he was the second one left), walked over him and said, "He was a good fighter but not a good leader." He walked over the body and found a cat (an alien in disguise). Mr. Roboto asked, "Why are aliens attacking Earth?" There was no answer.

Then he shook the cat, and the cat said, "Stop, you're making me dizzy. All right, I'll tell. They are attacking Earth because they believe their mortal enemy is on this planet."

“Where is this thing?” Roboto said.

The cat answered, “I don’t know.” Then the agent started shaking the cat again. “All right, all right... I’ll tell. He is in front of you,” the cat said.

“No. You are the enemy?” the man exclaimed.

“I’m not. Look behind me,” the cat said. Mr. Roboto reached out to open the door behind the cat when the adjacent walls fell down, revealing a very ugly alien unlike any alien he had seen before. It was an alien with large teeth, a dagger-like tail, slimy, long claws, and alien blood all over him, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of dead aliens.

“Whoa!” Mr. Roboto said, shocked. As soon as the very ugly alien saw him, the alien started running at full speed toward Mr. Roboto, arming himself. All of a sudden there was a big flash.

When Roboto woke up, he looked around. He found himself on a really comfy bed. Then he exclaimed, “Where am I?”

“You’re in a secret base in the Earth’s inner core,” the alien said calmly.

“How do we get out of here?” he shouted.

“Easily,” the alien boasted.

“What’s your name? Why did you bring me down here?” he murmured.

When the alien pressed the big orange button that said *big orange button*, he answered, “My name is Jonathon, and I brought you down here because you are a secret key to our victory.” Jonathon said, “Now what is your name?”

“My name is Mr. Roboto. How come I know a lot of other alien races but not yours?”

“Because we are a hidden and very secret species,” Jonathon answered.

All of a sudden, Jonathon pulled him into a spot next to him, and they launched up through the core, faster and more easily than any human. As they moved toward the Earth’s

surface, the light got brighter and brighter. The rocks they dodged were big and orange, and the closer they got to the surface the bigger they got. As they started to accelerate, Mr. Roboto felt so light-headed from the extreme pressure change that he almost fell over.

Then all of a sudden an alien base appeared in front of them in the mantle. The base had huge firearms weaponry and lots of troops moving around not knowing what to do. They were very shocked. With a huge turn, Jonathon dodged the base.

When they left the lithosphere, still heading up to the surface, they saw a giant missile heading toward the base they had just passed. The base was hit so hard that it launched through the Earth's crust into the air with entire units of alien troops falling off. The explosion was enough to also blast them out of the Earth.

They continued through the atmosphere, leaving the rubble of the base behind them on the ground. Then all of a sudden it got dark and they were in space.

"Why is this happening?" Roboto asked politely.

"This is why it is happening," said Jonathan. "Long ago the aliens thought they were all-powerful because they conquered a couple of planets. Then they discovered our race and knew we would be a threat to their plan to rule the universe. Anyway, they started a war with us. We have lost about 60 troops over 22 years, while they have lost a couple trillion. Now that you have destroyed their leader, they have no tactics and they are left defenseless. But this war has caused the destruction of many worlds. We are going to reward you by rebuilding your planets with more advanced buildings."

Roboto asked, "Are there more than three kinds of aliens?"

Jonathon answered, "Yes, many more, but you've only seen the beginning."

All of a sudden a kid pulls off a helmet and says, "That's a cool way to preview a movie."

Brain Science Laboratory Tests

*Scientific experiments require careful control of all variables if the results are going to be worthwhile. A young scientist's miscalculation of his level of control has devastating consequences in **BRAIN SCIENCE LABORATORY TESTS**, by **Alexandre Rochaix**.*

I got up from my bed on Sunday morning and went to change. It had been a long night after that celebration party for my big success, and my stomach agreed. My stomach started to rumble at the very thought of having a big and tasty breakfast.

I replayed last night's events: The mayor coming to the party, his congratulating me with my discovery of how to make brains work twice as fast, everyone congratulating me. I remembered giving my speech, thanking the entire University for its support, and explaining the process of my new discovery. However, I felt with a sad feeling that something could go wrong. It was only when I got back to talking with a few people that I thought about the monkeys' latest behavior and, for some reason, that things could go out of control.

After a good breakfast, I decided to go check on the lab and the monkeys. I was in the biology building, just behind the advanced physics building, when I heard some strange noises. I rushed to the lab, and I realized the monkey cages were empty. I looked around in search of the distinctive noise and ended up in the hallway. That's when I realized that

everything was going wrong. In this catastrophic situation, I couldn't help thinking, "It's the end of my work."

Monkeys were running all over the place, throwing and breaking things here and there. I tried catching them, but with no success. One of the monkeys activated the alarm switch, causing a very loud and screaming sound. The effect on the monkeys was quick and unbelievable: The monkeys were really out of control! They were acting like this was a game, and in fact "enjoyed" the game. After that, I felt something hit my head and I saw stars everywhere.

When I woke up, I felt the pain come back to my head, and I remembered everything. I looked around, and they were gone!

Everything was too quiet. My hair was standing on its end and there was a weird tingling in the air. As I was recuperating, I looked at the clock close to the hallway exit. It was already 2:00 in the afternoon. I felt a sense of urgency and started wondering where my monkeys could be.

My first thought was to check on the monitor back in the lobby, and that's when I saw the broken doors. Like all good universities, there was a TV in the lobby. I turned it on, and what I saw on the first channel told me that it was too late. I saw everybody screaming and running away from something. The news reporter was talking about dinosaurs attacking people. The camera then turned around to show a *T. rex* bending over and crushing a car with its teeth. So this is what had happened last night. I realized what the monkeys had done, and I needed to put things back to normal.

I ran outside, but there was nobody there. I came back inside to hear that this was happening in the big city.

I ran out to my Maserati. I slammed the pedal and sped towards the city. I made it to the first apartments of town and looked around. The streets were completely deserted, and I knew it was too late.

As I was searching for the dinosaurs or the monkeys, a pterodactyl came straight at me. I couldn't avoid it and it hit the windshield. I heard a big, horrible crack and the sound of a last breath. It took all my strength to push the pterodactyl body off my windshield. Ready to move on again, I saw the dinosaurs.

I panicked, and in a desperate move I chucked my Hawaii doll at them. They all stopped and looked at it. During that moment, I barely noticed the monkeys further beyond the dinosaurs. The monkeys were now out of ownership memory and started to act as if they could no longer think quickly.

I knew I had to reach them, so I stepped on the gas and drove through the dinosaurs. One of the raptors slashed through the window with his claws and got my shoulder. I felt an unexplainable pain and let go of the steering wheel, which made the car spin. I hit an unlucky raptor that died on impact.

With my wounded arm I drove the best I could and spotted a police station. Arriving there I saw a horrible sight. It was a mutilated policeman's body. I picked up the gun near the body and came back outside.

The dinosaurs were gone, but I realized that it was a big mess. I took the opportunity to think about the past events and what led to this. I played them back in my head: monkeys out of their cages, my getting knocked out after trying to catch them, and my feeling static electricity in the air.... Wait. Why dinosaurs? This is the big question! Then I thought about the teleportation machine (known as a time machine). The monkeys must have activated it. I would try to find the answer later.

I was getting back to the car, but my Maserati was blown up. It had a missing wheel, the stuffing was ripped out of the cushions, and springs were everywhere. The bumper was

bent and off the car. It was horrible. I really liked that Italian car. I knew I couldn't do anything for my car, so I left.

Three raptors turned the corner. I pulled my gun out of my pocket and shot one of them. He fell dead and one of the others charged. I dodged his attack, and he banged his head on the wall. He looked dazed. I took my gun out and hit him on the head with the butt of my pistol. He fell over unconscious.

I hadn't realized that the third raptor had gained on me, and I received a full-force tackle. I was thrown against the wall and felt a little trickle of blood in my hair. Luckily the raptor had tripped over and fallen. I kicked him in the head and escaped. I found an abandoned car and immediately sped back home.

I called the mayor of the city and explained the reason behind this mess. He told me that the army was already taking care of the dinosaurs, but he had contacted one of his friends who worked for a special army unit to clean up the mess and take over my experiments and the monkeys. After that I went back to the laboratory and found that the teleportation machine was activated!

The teleportation machine was one of my tools that I used to collect samples from the past and understand our evolution. It was part of my experiments to understand how our brain changed over the years so I could take the same long process and accelerate it to the speed of a computer.

Right there were a few monkeys. I realized they must have come after I was gone. But they kept slamming the button that brought more dinosaurs in. So I had to hide.

I could count three dinosaurs inside the laboratory, because it took a while for the machine to work. I threw myself into one of my closets and thought of what I could use to reach the monkeys and stop them. I opened the door and jumped out and started to shoot the dinosaurs in the head so

they wouldn't hurt anybody. Catching the monkeys wasn't easy, but eventually I managed to get them back into their cages.

Hearing a loud siren outside, I realized that the army was in the building looking for me. I quickly shut the teleportation machine off and went to meet with the army guy appointed for this job. I felt kind of scared with a big sense of guilt as I started to explain the story to the general, but most importantly I was so happy that things were getting back to normal that I just let him take control.

As far as the research, I had to cancel it, at least for now, until things got back to normal (as suggested by the general who supervised the pick-up of my monkeys and equipment). This research was about altering the brain functions so the brain would become a "High Speed – Dual Core Brain," or in other words, a brain that can compete in speed and size of memory with the most sophisticated computer. However, the monkeys, which are considered the closest animal to human, didn't handle all the tests and manipulations very well, and their brains were as good as a bad disc. After the escape, they used their memory and "computer intelligence" to operate my "time machine," or teleportation machine, to bring dinosaurs from the Jurassic era. At that time the monkeys were not controlling their behavior. They became mean not by necessity, but by malfunctioning.

I knew it would be really difficult for a young brain student scientist to achieve such a miracle, but if it would have worked, I would have tried it on the human brain...well, my brain...and then gotten my Ph.D. just in time for my 26th birthday, October 21, 2180.

Alexander XIAHCOR
Brain Scientist
University of Michigan (October 25, 2179)

Earth Being Invaded by...

*Don't look now, but some unwelcome visitors are dropping in—literally. Earth's destiny is in the hands of two no-nonsense cousins in **EARTH BEING INVADED BY...**, by **Brandon White**.*

It was one happy summer day. I'm Brandon White and this is my story.

I was at my house, and Sierra (my cousin) and I were about to go swimming, but my mom's hair looked like a mad scientist's hair, just not white. So my mom had to do her hair.

Sierra and I sat down. I looked at the sky. I saw a big spaceship. "Whoa!" I screamed.

"What?" said Sierra.

"Look, it's a spaceship, and it looks like a jar, I guess."

The spaceship stopped over our house. Then a human-sized peanut dropped from the spaceship. The peanut wore a ninja suit. "Who the heck are you?" I asked.

"I am your worst fear," said the peanut in a dark voice.

I tried to punch the stupid peanut (no offense, you peanut lovers), but instead, the peanut grabbed my fist and punched me in the gut. I fell to the ground. "By the looks of that belt, it is a ninja master," I thought to myself.

I got to my feet. Sierra ran inside. I tried to kick the peanut, but it grabbed my foot. I acted like I was stuck, but then I jumped and kicked it with my other foot. The peanut hit a tree.

Sierra came flying out with a mallet. She smashed the peanut into dust. “Oh yeah, look at that mad skill,” bragged Sierra.

Then the spaceship dropped thousands and thousands of peanuts. Sierra and I both dropped our mouths. Then we zoomed inside. “There’s NO WAY I can beat those peanuts. I need a proton cannon or something in five minutes.”

Ding dong. The doorbell rang.

I opened the door very slowly. When I opened it THERE WAS....

“Phew! You gave me a scare there. How’s it going, Bill?” I said.

“You know, the usual.” Bill was my mailman. “I have a present for you,” said Bill.

“Thanks, man” I responded.

“No problem. Hey, Brandon!” yelled Bill. “What’s up with all these peanuts?”

“It’s a long story, man,” I said.

“Whatever.” He walked away.

“HEY, BILL!”

“YEAH?”

“HOW DID YOU GET THROUGH THE PEANUTS?”

“I TOLD THEM THE MAIL MUST BE DELIVERED, SO THEY LET ME THROUGH. SEE YA, BRANDON.”

“LATER, BILL!” I yelled. I opened the box. “I got my Shonen Jump manga!” I said, excited. On the front it said, “How to Make a Proton Cannon in Five Minutes.”

“I’m a lucky man,” I thought to myself.

I finished my proton cannon. “Stay here, Sierra. It’s going to get dusty.” (It’s ok to laugh.)

I went outside. “Hey, peanut brain!” I yelled. “Say hello to my little friend.”

Boooooooom! There was a lot of smoke. When the smoke cleared all there was left was dust.

“TURN THE RUCKUS DOWN!” yelled Miss Roth, my neighbor.

“Sorry!” Then I aimed at the ship. “GOODBYE!”
BOOOOOM! CRASH! BANG! BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

“It’s finally over,” I thought.

“Ok, I’m ready,” said my mom.

“It’s about time,” I moaned. “Human-sized peanuts could have invaded our home, I could have talked to Bill, I could have built a proton cannon in five minutes, I could have blasted thousands and thousands of peanuts, I could have talked to Miss Roth, and I could have taken out a whole ship by myself before you were done.”

“No more late night movies for you.”

And this is the story about Earth being invaded by human-sized peanuts.

Escape! To Where...?

*A rural Canadian camp is meant to be a safe haven for children as world events threaten the cities of North America. But no place is free from the deterioration of society once nuclear war breaks out. Five children decide to take fate into their own hands in **ESCAPE! TO WHERE...?**, by **Andrew Hausman**.*

“*Et-hem*. May I have your attention please?” said the ancient camp counselor with a short-cut beard and bald head. The five-foot eight-inch man started, “Last night...”

Before he could finish, nearly all the kids at the Canadian wilderness camp started screaming or yelling at the same time.

“Quiet!” the camp counselor snapped into the microphone from the platform in the corner, immediately stopping the frenzy.

“Last night...” the man who looked to have stainless steel hair on the sides of his otherwise bald head started again. His gray eyes stared a stare that felt like piercing ice. His ears pricked up like an elf’s, except higher, and pointier. “...a country dropped a bomb on Seattle, Washington, United States of America. It happened at approximately 3:34 A.M. Pacific Standard Time.”

Nearly everyone panicked except for a few people: Daniel; his six-year-old brother Billy; Billy’s five-year-old friend Elizabeth; and all the other younger kids at the camp. The younger ones didn’t know who “they” were that everyone was murmuring about, and “Danny,” as his youngest brother

Billy called him, was just too calm to let out his emotions, even in the middle of a nuclear war.

Daniel definitely agreed with almost everyone attending the camp about one thing in particular. He, like practically all campers over age ten, thought that all the suspicious camp counselors were part of “Them.” “Them” was an evil country that had a name so long and horrible that no one ever said it anymore. The people that lived in a country that was an enemy of “Them” (which included the United States and Canada) just called this terrible country “Them.” Most of the older kids at the camp thought the so-called “counselors” had been deployed as spies in Canada to then move on to the United States, the main rival of “Them” to world power.

Daniel was a calm, quiet boy and very smart. He almost never let out his emotions that he hid under his long brown hair.

While the camp was in commotion, Jason whispered to Laura—his older brother Daniel’s friend— “This is our chance to get out of this terrible camp that our now dead parents sent us to. It may have saved our lives, but let’s go while no one notices.”

Laura paused, and asked, “Where will we go?” as she leaned her head quizzically, tilting her long blonde hair. She had lovely blue eyes on her gorgeous face. Laura was talkative, tall, and liked to be the leader.

“I don’t know! Think of something,” replied the technology guru of the bunch. Jason had short cut brown hair to match his brown eyes. He was super smart and especially good with “tech stuff,” like computers and TVs.

After waiting a minute or two, Laura replied, “Of course! I’ve got it! Let’s go get Elizabeth, Billy, and Daniel and leave! I’ll tell you the plan on the way.”

Once they were clear from the camp, Laura told them her plan, and they all agreed, for now, except Billy, who asked the thirteen-year-old, “Where is that?”

They arrived at Hidden Three Oaks, British Columbia right when the sun was going down. The older ones had survived hours of “my legs are tired” complaints, and after what seemed like a century, they arrived.

“Hey, wait! Where will we stay?” questioned eleven-year-old Jason.

“We’ll just go to the boat,” replied Laura, who had luckily been given a copy of all the family keys. Her parents thought she was responsible at thirteen, and were worried about an incident occurring.

“Of course, I should’ve known that you had *the* boat here,” realized Jason.

The kids went to a fast food restaurant on the way to the boat. They decided to get the supplies in the morning for the *Fire Bomb*.

As they arrived at where the *Fire Bomb* waited, Billy remarked, “Whoa! That’s a big boat!”

Laura replied, “With an appropriate name.”

Only the older kids understood. The little ones were left dumbstruck.

They slept on the boat for that night. The only problem was that there were only four beds, so Laura reluctantly slept on the floor.

In the morning, they went to the supermarket and a few other stores to get their supplies before placing them all on Laura and Elizabeth’s family boat. The dock was right by their cottage on a bay that led to the Pacific Ocean.

They loaded up the supplies, including many containers of gasoline, and headed out. They knew that fuel was *very, very* important, so they filled up almost two thirds of the supply level with containers holding gas for the boat. There was some

question as to where they were going, but Laura acknowledged those concerns with a simple statement, “Maybe some island in the middle of the ocean. It’s better than waiting around for ‘Them’ to start dropping nukes on Canada. Anyway, let’s go while we can, and before someone figures out that we have escaped that camp and tries to return us.”

Once they had gotten all set, they headed out on the amazing *Fire Bomb*. There was a deck with controls and a GPS and seats with a perfect view in the front of the top level. There was a kitchen and eating area in the back of the first level that had stairs to the main floor. The main floor had a “trap door” to the storage area, which was below the water level. The storage level could be released if the boat was starting to sink from a leak. There were two bedrooms on the main floor. One had a bunk bed, regular double bed, nightstand in between, and a dresser. The “master bedroom” had a queen bed, a nightstand on either side of the bed and a dresser also. It was linked to the only bathroom on the ship. Both of the bedrooms had closets. Outside of the bedrooms was a living area to see the ocean and an 84” plasma screen TV. There was also an area where people could go outside on that level.

Once they had departed, with Daniel and Laura taking turns behind the wheel, they waited until that night to tell the younger ones about their parents. “Billy and Elizabeth, I have some very sad news,” Laura said. “Our parents are probably dead.”

“Huh?” they exclaimed.

“We can’t explain now,” Jason said to save Laura. The younger kids headed to their room, the one with the bunk bed, to mope. Daniel wanted to stop them, but then realized, “If I were a five- or six-year-old, I would want to cry, too.”

“Okay, Daniel! Hurry up! It’s time to do the dishes,” yelled Laura a couple of seconds later, knocking Daniel from his thoughts.

“Laura is definitely the leader now, I guess,” Daniel thought. “What happened to all of *my* power?”

They had been going for at least two days. Daniel and Laura had been kept pretty busy by the captains’ duties. There was always Jason there to take over for a couple of minutes, sailing to the middle of the ocean, except when he was trying to get the television to work. The younger ones spent most of their time playing “lookout” for Daniel and Laura.

On the third day, though, they spotted something to the right, or northwest: a little tiny dot. Daniel slowed down the boat and called a meeting.

They decided to approach what they thought was an island, though not marked on their GPS, at a very slow speed since it could be an aircraft carrier of “Them.” They thought it would be a good idea not to get killed, so they planned to approach it cautiously. Jason, the technology guru, stopped messing around with the television and tried to pick up radio waves. He could find none except for one signal, which could be really bad. He found what he thought was a submarine or boat of “Them,” even though he had never heard one of “Them.” It had a variety of men’s voices, for sure. The weird thing was why would they be communicating with walkie-talkies if they were on a submarine or ship? He was sure it was handheld radios, but it must have been one big vessel, whatever it was.

As they approached “the dot,” they figured out it wasn’t moving, but they concluded it must be a secret enemy base. Jason still couldn’t figure out who the radio voices were or what they were saying. It was all too jumbled.

Laura called a meeting. “What are we going to do?” she exclaimed in panic. Though normally calm, her emotions

were catching up with her. “They could bomb us at any second, or be sinking us right now.”

“Whoa! Chill, Laura. I say we just approach what we know is an island,” replied Daniel. “There is nothing else we can do besides keep sailing. There’s no reason to think any other island in the Pacific is any better than this one. And anyway, why would ‘They’ bomb or send a torpedo at a random boat, which might even contain one of their allies or their own people?”

“We agree with him,” replied Billy, Elizabeth and Jason.

When they approached the island, there was an eerie feeling. They could tell someone was on the island, but they didn’t know where.

They landed on the island at night so they wouldn’t be spotted. Jason and Laura went searching for signs of life while Daniel stayed with the little ones and set up a camp on the island.

Jason and Laura found exactly where the radio signals were coming from, in a sand clearing on the low-vegetated island, and they could hear the voices clearly over the radio. The voices were just having a normal conversation, but talking about “old stuff,” like phonographs. Laura and Jason were perplexed. They decided to head back to camp.

When they went back in the morning, they still couldn’t find anything, not even a footprint. When they had figured this was a waste and they had better start building a home here, something totally strange happened. Billy *actually* said something by himself, *without* Elizabeth mimicking him. “Why don’t we start adjusting to the wilderness because that’s what we’re going to need to do anyway?” Everybody stared at him.

Meanwhile, below their feet, people stopped to listen.

“Actually, he’s right!” proclaimed Daniel. Everyone then agreed.

When they started to go back to the boat, Billy tripped on something and the tree trunk began to slowly creak open.

Billy stood face to face with a grown man about a foot shorter than himself (a four-foot three-inch six-year-old). The short man must have been the lookout. Soon, someone that looked much more important than him rushed up what looked to be very tall stairs.

The “leader” had brown hair that was getting greyer and thinner by the second. His huge grey beard looked as if it were a cat, especially since his beautiful blue eyes were almost covered by the huge mass of curly hair. He wore a small, grey top hat on top of his “fur ball.”

[As the reader, you’re thinking that these people were “Them” or one of their allies. I will tell you right now, these were not people having anything to do with “Them.” These were very respectful Hungoslaviczzechgermibelviakins, a tiny minority group spread throughout Europe before World War I. They fled to “the other side of the world” to escape the violence. They were all very short and mild-mannered amongst themselves, but when it came to strangers, they were ruthless to protect themselves and their heritage and culture.]

“I am afraid we have too many differences. You need to leave the island in a second... or DIE!” said the leader of the munchkins as he stepped forward. “CHARGE!” he yelled as he pointed his hand into the air, with pointer extended.

“WHOA!” exclaimed Laura. “Hang on a second! We just got here. We’ll leave! Okay?”

“Is that good enough, captain?” said another munchkin as he stepped forward from the few munchkins that had joined the leader at the top of the steps. His young face gleamed with the thrill of excitement, but he had obviously been taught by his dad, the captain, to be serious. His long brown hair rolled down the sides of his head, curling at the bottom half. His sharp blue eyes by now were the only things showing

figured it to be a town square, and found out that it was one, bustling with excitement, as they were led up the level of stairs to the house they were to be locked in.

The kids didn't know what to do. They luckily realized that they could talk to each other through the vents.

"What are we going to do?" Laura exclaimed through the vent.

"Shush! Don't be so loud," replied Daniel. "Listen, everyone. Can you all hear me?"

"Yes," they all replied.

"Okay, everyone, I've got a plan."

"Hello, sir," said Daniel as he greeted the leader of the munchkins that night after they had released the kids for dinner. "I was just wondering if we could go get our canoe tomorrow, then bring it back here to show it to you."

"That sounds like an excellent idea. I am afraid that I and a few others will need to accompany you, though. Meet at the exit at eight o'clock tomorrow. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"Okay, guys, we have a problem," reported Daniel as he told the rest about the conversation.

"We could leave before eight," suggested Jason.

"How could we leave before eight? We're locked up in this house, remember?" replied Laura.

"Hey, keep it down. They'll hear us," said Jason as they started to get loud.

They decided on a plan and went to bed, but not before trying to escape the munchkins' house.

They weren't let out of the house until 7:50, and were forced to go directly to the exit after having a very quick breakfast. They did pass through the village square this time on the way to the exit, which was already in its normal hubbub that they had seen from the windows of the house.

What was weird, though, was that ten or twenty munchkins seemed to be missing from the 100 that they had seen the day before.

When they arrived at the exit, they found the captain, second-in-command, and a few others waiting for them. They all left promptly.

While they were walking to the shore, the kids weren't closely guarded. Instead, the munchkins lagged behind, talking amongst themselves, practically ignoring the kids.

While the party was walking, the kids came up with a better plan.

When the whole party got close to the shore, the kids started to run. This way they could escape and find a much better island than this crazy one. At first the munchkins didn't notice, but in about half a minute, they were off, too.

The kids arrived at the shore way ahead of the munchkin leaders. There was one huge problem, though.

"Where's the boat?" cried Laura. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know! They're going to catch up any second now and take us back to that crazy underground city!" said Jason.

"Hey, wait! I just realized something. Last night the captain probably sent out some people to come and see what we actually have," Daniel replied.

"But how did they steal the boat? I have the keys right here!" interrupted Laura.

"You know how Jason realized there were twenty less people in the town?" replied Daniel.

"Yes," responded Laura.

"The captain probably sent them out to find out more about how we came, and if it was worth anything to them," said Daniel. He finished his explanation right when the captain's party was arriving on the beach.

“What are we supposed to do?” asked Laura as they approached.

“I don’t know! Just run!” said Daniel as he started running.

“To where?” asked Jason.

“Just follow me! This island can’t be too big. We’ll find the boat in no time.

They ran around the whole island, and on exactly the other side, they found the boat. The kids arrived first, since they were much better runners and way more in shape.

They decided to be cautious because they saw footprints leading to the boat, but none going away.

The kids got the *Fire Bomb* ready to go in a hurry and started to pull away, but not fast enough.

The captain’s party ran through waist-high water (for them), with the captain leading the way and yelling “CHARGE!” to the boat, which was now about 30 feet away from the shore. The group of munchkins jumped onto the boat, seeing their prisoners sailing away to safety. But what not even the captain remembered was there was something else on the ship waiting until when the boat was just far enough away from the shore.

When the people crouching in the smaller bedroom heard screams and yells on the deck, they waited.

The kids and munchkins got into a brutal fight. The captain wasn’t going to stop for a girl’s “WHOA!” this time as he led his team onto the deck.

The captain charged at Elizabeth, easily defeating her, and pushed the crushed five-year-old into the corner. But Billy wasn’t going to let his friend suffer.

He got so mad that he charged and swept the captain right off his feet when he was laying down Billy’s defeated friend.

With the captain lying on the deck, Daniel and Laura joined in the fight. They left almost all the munchkins scared to death or hurt. Most of them huddled in a corner by the window between the deck and the kitchen, while Jason took on the second-in-command.

This time Jason decided he would have no fear. He went charging at the captain's assistant, who was right about to charge at him. Their collision was atrocious! They collided right by the side of the boat. Jason was left flat on his back. The second-in-command had so much force from the collision, though, that he tumbled backward and fell to the sea.

Noticing that one of their leaders had plummeted to where he could help no longer in battle, the companions took action.

They charged at the ones who were guarding them. But it was to no avail. About ten fell to the sea and swam back to their island to join their fallen second-in-command and the rest of their society. They first attempted to get their best glimpse of the end of the fight, though. The two or three others were left defeated and lying on the deck.

The captain thought he was his culture's only chance now. He tried to get up, but Billy was quick to react. He gave the captain a nice lunch of knuckles, and a couple teeth. Besides that, the captain went flying over the edge screaming "NOOOOOOOO!" thinking he had been the failing last chance to try to reclaim his civilization's prisoners, only to remember the squad he had sent out last night to seize the boat. "Where are they?" he thought in fury as he swam back to shore.

Hearing their leader's cry, the hidden warriors were about to charge up the stairs to the deck, but they heard someone coming. Luckily for them, Laura placed her overpowered

sister in the master bedroom across the hall. She wasn't expecting another "little man" to jump out.

They all tackled her and left her injured, but not before she screamed.

Hearing their friend's cry, Daniel, Jason, and Billy rushed downstairs.

There was another brutally fought battle between the kids and the munchkins. Jason fell early, but seeing their brother get over come, Daniel and Billy worked harder to win the battle in the tiny hall between the bedrooms. They were so glad that their dad had been a boxing coach at the local high school and that they had hung out with him. Daniel took care of many, and Billy served more lunches of knuckles to the other munchkins.

The two remaining brothers decided to make a raft, and that's exactly what they did. The brothers taped some of their empty gas cans together with duct and Scotch tape. They weren't sure if it would hold, but they laid out all the defeated munchkins anyway. They didn't want their ex-captors to drown, but they also definitely didn't want them on their boat.

The boys ate dinner with their friends and brother after the brothers had helped them recover. The sun was going down, gleaming like lipstick on a red rubber ball. Billy and Elizabeth were playing, and Jason was helping Laura do the dishes as Daniel drove.

Daniel smiled as he thought, "The sun may be going down, but all of us are entering a new horizon, and hopefully a good one."

15-Minute School Day

*Every day is children's day, or so adults think. Kids might begin to believe that if they could experience the future foreseen by **Jack Arvai** in **15-MINUTE SCHOOL DAY**.*

“You had living teachers!” Jack Arvai exclaimed to his great-grandpa. Jack was a 12-year-old in Berkshire Middle School. He lived in the distant future.

“Of course I did,” his 153-year-old great-grandpa told Jack. Jack’s great-grandpa was so old because of the amazing advances in technology. That’s why he is 153 years old. When someone is 153 years old, your nose shrinks and crinkles from the stench whenever you walk by them. Also, you try and look away from their face because it looks like a million miles of wrinkles and liver spots.

“Hey, don’t blame me. It was just surprising to me,” Jack said in defense. “Now, we just have caps. It makes it a lot easier, and we only have to go once a week for 15 minutes,” he said. The 15-minute day really pleased Jack. He instantly felt sorry for his great-grandpa when he heard he had seven-hour days, five days a week.

“Well, when I went to Berkshire, that’s how it was, and it was a lot harder,” Jack’s great-grandpa said in annoyance.

“Yeah, I’m lucky...no homework, no long classes, and no teachers. I wonder what it was like back then when there weren’t any caps,” he said. Caps were these metal, rounded, bowl-like caps that would fit on your head. They would feed information into your brain. They kind of looked like those metal spaghetti strainers.

“Jack, you can find out on Google. Yeah, well, I wonder how the those cap thingies work,” his great-grandpa told him.

“Good idea, Grandpa. I don’t know how they work, either. All I know is that you place them on your head and you get smarter,” he told his great-grandpa as he ran to get his laptop. As he searched for something about school in the past, nothing came up. “Dang it!” Jack said. “Grandpa, they’re not there! It says they were destroyed by hackers recently!” he exclaimed.

“Wow,” his great-grandpa replied in awe. “But there is another way.... In my room there’s an old book. It’s titled *The Boring Times They Had*,” Jack’s great-grandfather told him.

“Okay, thanks,” he said excitedly as hurried to his great-grandpa’s room. When he got into his great-grandpa’s room, it started to smell like an attic, or maybe it was the attic. Either way, it was what great-grandpa called his room, and it didn’t smell too good. His “room” was so dirty because he wouldn’t let the vacuum up into his room.

Jack saw his great-grandpa’s bookshelf. His great-grandpa’s bookshelf was a board of warped wood. Jack finally found what he was looking for in a stack of real paper books. This was surprising because paper books weren’t published anymore, and they were hard to find.

Luckily, it was just a short book, so it was easy for Jack to read it in about an hour, although it took a little bit longer than that because he had to get used to words not moving across a screen. When he was done reading he felt really lucky to be in the kind of school he was in. “Those suckers! With their homework, long classes, and annoying teachers!” Jack exclaimed.

Back then, the sixth-graders at Berkshire were writing a story to go into their own book. Little did Jack know there was a Jack many years before him that suffered through what was in the book. And yes, the Jack way before him did survive through all the living teachers and homework. In fact, he even wrote this story.

Five Best Friends

In FIVE BEST FRIENDS by Aaron Lewis, a team of adventurers must adapt to the vast changes that the future brings. One thing stays the same, though—the ease with which a person can put his foot in his mouth.

Five friends went to a space academy. They volunteered for a space program. This space program required that the participants undergo a cryogenic freeze for two weeks. Due to unfortunate timing, the friends were frozen for 2,000 years. The friends were forgotten.

After 2,000 years passed, the friends awakened to a new world. They were frozen on Earth but had been taken to Jupiter. They were relocated because of nuclear war in year 2526.

The Earth was still healing from the war. Global famine and radiation sickness plagued the planet. All military and civilians who were healthy enough were transported to the scientific colonies on Jupiter. There was much confusion and disorder on the colony during this period. As time passed, the colony of Jupiter grew.

The five friends' bodies were used to Earth gravity and were perfect for long space flights. The colonies on Jupiter were in need of raw materials. Scientists had been searching galaxies for a planet like Earth that would fill their needs. That's when they found Girlotopia, a planet in a far solar system. The time had come for the friends to train for this mission.

After their hard training, Commander Aaron Lewis would take his friends on this mission. Lieutenant Commander Elliott Wolf was second in command. He was a superior navigator. He could sense the gravitation fields of a planet and star systems before the instruments. Chief Engineer Harrison Brode had mechanical skills unsurpassed in the solar system. His theories of propulsion were legendary in the whole solar system. Doctor Ashanti Seabron was at the top of his class and a graduate of Harvard medical school. He specialized in genetic improvement of human DNA. Major Max Mitzman was the security officer. He was trained in the mystic arts of mortal combat and advanced weapon systems.

The night before they left, everyone was nervous. Elliott was practicing his piloting skills. "I need to get this perfect," said Elliott.

"Dudes, have a soda and watch some TV," said Max.

"That's easy for you to say, Max. All you have to do is security."

"Where are Aaron and Ashanti?"

"They're picking up a pizza for us."

"They'd better hurry."

The next morning they had to go on their mission. During their mission they had to go through an asteroid belt. Millions of asteroids were coming at them at speeds faster than anyone could think of. It was a good thing Elliott was their pilot, or else they would have died. Still their ship got damaged, and all the air was sucked out of their ship. It was a good thing Ashanti was there to save all their lives. He had to alter their DNA so they could live without air, enhance their skills, and slow their aging process.

When they safely landed on Girlotopia, they looked at the landscape. Flowers, trees, and waterfalls were everywhere. That is when they found out they were out of fuel. The damage had cut the fuel line, so Harrison and Elliott stayed on

the ship to fix it while Aaron, Ashanti, and Max explored the planet.

The team found a town with girls and no men anywhere. Max, feeling lucky, entered one of the buildings. The next thing to hear was, “Hi there, my name is Max. What's yours?” Then they got to talking, Max said something to make her mad, and a slap was heard.

There was one rule on the planet, and that was to never, ever make them mad. They took Max as a captive. That was when the team knew the planet was dangerous, so the team went back to the ship to plan a rescue.

The damage to the ship was fixed. The ship was able to leave except for fuel. Harrison and Elliott were told what happened to Max in the town. The friends gathered their weapons and made plans to save Max.

Before they went to save Max, they had to get the raw materials and fuel needed to travel back to Jupiter. That wasn't easy to do since they didn't have any money to buy goods. So they looked for houses with no one home so they could steal the things they needed to take back to Jupiter. This town had so many alarm systems they were almost caught thousands of times.

After they loaded the ship they went to save Max. When they located his cell in the prison they told him their plan. They had to blow a hole in the wall to let him out. As soon as it blew they would have to run as fast as they could because the explosion wouldn't be quiet.

They set the bomb for five seconds. *Boom!* It set off every alarm in the town. When the girls heard the alarms, they realized their prisoner had escaped. That was when they got really mad. They chased the five friends in their hover cars.

The five friends were running as fast as they could, but the three hover cars were overtaking them. Aaron realized what was happening and stopped and faced the oncoming

hover cars. That was when Aaron used his special skill. He was able to control metal by mental power.

The metal in his shoes caused him to lift off the ground. He yelled at his friends to keep going. The hover cars were going over 100 miles an hour. He smiled and said, "Watch this."

He put out one of his hands. He motioned with his hand and flipped one of the cars. The off-course car was then thrashed against the other cars.

The five friends were able to escape their pursuers. They got in their ship and it took off. When they get to Jupiter, they were heroes.

They become the League of Super Brothers, and they all have super powers.

In the Year 3000

*A keyboarding mistake sends a boy a thousand miles from home. But could that turn out to be a good thing? Go along for the ride **IN THE YEAR 3000**, by **Justin Burris**.*

In the year 3000, cars could actually fly. They no longer needed the road to travel. They traveled above the road on invisible tracks in the sky through a satellite. You could drive a skytrack car at the age of eleven.

There was a boy named Zorax. Zorax's family owned three skytrack cars: one for the mother, one for the father, and a spare one. When Zorax went to school that day, after a little while he felt sick. He was so sick that he had to go home.

Zorax got into his skytrack car. He typed in on the computer "Oklahoma," but he thought he typed in home. Zorax fell asleep and woke up in Oklahoma.

Zorax got up and asked a man where he was. The man said, "You're in Oklahoma." Zorax was so scared. He called his dad.

His dad said, "Stay right there."

After that, Zorax started to feel better and was going to type in "Home," but the skytrack was out of gas. Zorax didn't like his old school because the teachers thought he couldn't stay still. When Zorax saw a circus across the street, he asked his dad if he could join. His dad said, "If that's what you want, then it's okay." So Zorax joined the circus and worked there forever.

Kards

*One day, things stop being normal for Damien. It is the day he learns that his life on Earth so far has been a trivial sideshow to his true destiny. Maddie Perfitt explains how this comes to pass in **KARDS**.*

With a yawn, Damien woke up at exactly 6:30 on Tuesday, February 12, 2007. He did some stretches, then hopped into the warm shower. At 6:45 he got out and put on his jeans and sweatshirt. He ate breakfast at 6:50 and then turned on *Bugs Bunny*. At 7:38 he started to walk to Aaron's house. Damien decided to call Aaron to tell him he was coming.

Aaron got up at exactly 6:35 on Tuesday, February 12, 2007 with a stretch. He yawned a bit, and then hopped into the steamy shower. At 6:50 he got out. Aaron threw on his blue jeans and T-shirt quickly; he was about to miss *Bugs Bunny*! At 6:55 he ran out to the kitchen and forced his breakfast down his throat. At 7:40 he got a call from Damien.

"Hey, Aaron, it's Damien."

"Nice job, Captain Obvious. I have caller ID, you know."

"*Rarr!* Someone's a little moody today."

"Just saying, just saying. Now what was it you wanted?"

"I'm on my way and only a minute away."

"Ok. Bye."

"Bye."

Aaron threw on his backpack as Damien was making his way down the driveway. "Bye, Mom!" hollered Aaron.

“Bye, sweetie! Have a great day!” He blushed at the sound of her calling him “sweetie.” She was VERY embarrassing sometimes.

“I like your Spongebob watch,” Damien said to Aaron.

“Thanks. It’s my lucky watch. I wear it everywhere. So how’s your ‘dragon?’”

“You mean Bob? Oh, he’s good. Still won’t eat meat, though. He’s quite an odd Komodo dragon if you ask me. Strictly eats lettuce and cheese,” complained Damien.

“What’d the vet say?”

“He doesn’t think much of it. The past two visits we’ve had, he just said ‘don’t worry. He’s fine.’ Blah, blah, blah. I mean, aren’t they supposed to eat meat?”

“Obviously not all of them do.”

Aaron and Damien have been best friends for over 11 years—their whole lives. Damien’s dad left him and his family when he was five. He hasn’t heard from him since. His mom just said, “Your dad was always lazy and gave up. One day he just wanted a new life.” But that’s all they could get out of her. Damien also never had met his grandpa, either.

Damien had a sister named Elizabeth. Now they weren’t the kind of siblings that fight over everything; they were the kind that were very close. They always did everything together. But when Elizabeth was six (two years ago), she became very, very ill. She ended up dying just a couple of months after the first signs of bad health.

Damien took it the hardest of all. He’d have tantrums that’d last hours. There was nothing he could do. He just had to let go. So he saw a psychiatrist to help him feel better, and it worked. It got to the point where he didn’t break down at the sound of her name.

Damien and Aaron arrived at school right on time. They were walking up the stairs when Damien noticed a very strange, suspicious man. He had a long brown leather coat that reached his

knees. His hat matched the coat: brown leather. Damien could barely see his face, but what he did see shook him. The man's face was almost white. There was a scar that ran from his right eye to his lip. His eyes were red—there was no white, only red. And you could see he seemed to have no hair and a very strange figure. It looked as if he had no legs.

“You see that creepy guy?”

“Damien, stop fooling around. We need to get to class.”

“No, I'm serious! Don't you see him?”

“Ok, whatever...weirdo.”

He obviously didn't see the creepy image Damien did. “I just need some water.” Damien was too scared to admit the truth. He tried making up excuses for it. “Yeah, that's all I need.” He knew there was something wrong. He could feel it in his gut.

Damien sat next to the window in all his classes and stared at the man. After every hour there was a new man there; they were multiplying. They would follow him to each window in each of the different classes. Damien chilled more when he remembered that Aaron had basketball practice after school today. He would have to walk home alone.

The time had come to walk home. Damien stalled going as much as he could, but his mom needed him home, and the janitors needed him out. Damien collected all the courage he had and traveled outside.

There were about seven men out there now, and Damien was more scared then ever. Damien stayed on the opposite side of the street, but the men followed closely. They moved swiftly, quickly, and quietly without their legs.

Damien decided to run now. They followed. He ran faster. They were still on his trail. Damien turned around and said, “What do you—” Damien was cut off by a swift and graceful swing at his head. Darkness covered and gnawed at every corner of his being.

When Damien awoke, he was in his bed. He looked at his watch. It was 6:35 a.m., and the alarm went off. He rolled over

onto something hard. It was some sort of journal with a red leather cover and a tight brown string. On the cover there was a name, “Damien Hundles.” That was him. Damien opened it and read:

Dear Damien,

I’m sure you have many questions. You have been called upon to help. The West Scroop of Hunch needs you. Where is the West Scroop of Hunch, you ask? Well, it is in a universe quite different than yours. Here we have elephants as pets, and alligators roam among people. And we people—well we’re very different ourselves. For example, some of us have no legs. (That reminded Damien of the men.) Some of us can fly. Yet some of us have nothing special about us.

Your father is here. (Damien gasped.)

You’re probably wondering exactly how you should trust me. Well, I am your father. The scary-looking men that sort of stalked and attacked you were not really trying to harm you. They were just determined to get this journal to you.

They’re trying to get a religious group called the Kards out of our territory. That’s why we need your help. Our religious group is called the Yumesn. The Kards crave power and have nearly taken over our sector! These people have ruined my home. No one’s the same. They all walk around like robots, just following the orders. The Kards are very strong people, since they believe so strongly in independence. But you have to defeat them

There has been a series of battles between the two rightful heirs, and we have lost the past battle. If you win this battle, there will be another battle after this one to then

decide who is the winner. This is a VERY dangerous mission and you might not make it out.

Meet me at 7:00 pm at Burberry Park to confirm your mission.

Thank You,
George Hundles.

Damien knew it was his dad. He could tell by the way he signed his name. It was him.

His day went by very slow. Finally school was over and it was 6:30. He told his mom he was going to the park with Aaron and he was off.

He arrived there at 7:00, and he saw some of those scary men. Then another man appeared in the middle of them all. He stepped out. Damien recognized the face clearly. It was the same warming smile and black beard, except the beard was a little longer now. It was his father!

“Damien! I’m glad you came. Now listen to me. We need to get back to the West Scroop. It’s quite important.

“Wait, what?” And there was a flash of light. He felt like he was weightless, and then he finally fell down onto hard ground.

The place he landed on was wet but solid. He looked around to find a place that looked exactly the way it did back home, except for a few things: There were people with no legs, people that could fly, people walking elephants, and alligators walking around.

“Good. Now any questions?”

“Ummm. Yeah. Where have you been all these years?” Damien said with a smirk.

“Well, son, when I left, um, you have to understand it was important. My father lived here and he needed my help. See, it’s been a tradition in our family. My father’s father and so on has come here to battle. Now it’s your turn. My father called me to tell me my time had come. He told me I had to abandon

everything for the good of my group. I accepted. I won in the battle. Now it's your turn. It won't be simple. Your battle will start next week. We must train you."

"Whoa."

Damien and the others were directed into what looked like a very nice hotel. But when they walked in, he found it was more of a workout center. There were treadmills, weights, lifts, mats—everything. Damien spotted some canoe-like beds hanging from the walls. Some men were sleeping in the strange beds, and some were still working out with sweat rolling down their faces.

"This is where you'll train. Best get some sleep." Damien's dad lead him to one of the "beds: and made him drift off to la-la land.

Damien was awakened by the sound of a trumpet. It nearly made him jump right out of bed. He saw his father waiting for him right near the door. "You have three weeks until the battle. It's time for your training. We'll have to train you mentally and physically, starting with the physical. Let's go!"

George started off down a hallway, and then took a left into a room that was full of treadmills.

"Here you'll learn how to pace yourself. The treadmills have a mechanism switch that will change speed every so often for at least three miles. This shall help." Damien was placed on the treadmill and it started slowly.

"This will be easy," he thought to himself. After about forty-five minutes, he was starting to slow down and lose his breath. That's when the machine all of a sudden went faster, faster, and faster. Now Damien was in good shape, but didn't have that much muscle and wasn't that much of an athlete. He just could not keep up. The sweat was running down his cheeks even faster. His legs began to wiggle. The pain shot to them, then back up to his head. The next thing he knew, he was on the floor, elbows and knees burning with pain.

“What happened?” Damien said, very slowly trying to make sense of what just happened.

“You passed out,” a figure that looked like his dad said.

“How long have I been out?”

“Oh, no more than a minute. Now, it’s time for the weights.” Damien made a big shrug.

The weights were all set up on a wall. Five, ten, twenty, fifty, one hundred and two hundred pound weights were lined up.

“Now, we will start you off with a fifty-pound block, then make our way up to two hundred.”

“That’s just dandy.”

“I don’t appreciate your sarcasm. Now sit down on the bench.”

A weight suddenly started floating over to Damien quickly. It finally got over to the bench and dropped, almost hitting Damien in the face, but stopped in mid-air. Damien could almost feel tears coming out of the corner of his eyes from the shock!

“Well, are you going to put your hands on or not?”

Damien hesitantly grasped his hand around the bar.

“Drop.”

Very suddenly all the weight fell upon him, unwelcome to his brittle body. The weight dropped immediately onto his chest. Then he felt as if all his air in his body was sucked out, and never returned. The weight lifted and Damien curled up into a ball on the floor.

“Okay, next activity.”

Damien clutched his stomach and forced out, “Yeah. Please.”

They went into a gym. The gym looked humongous. There was a machine throwing out balls—dodge balls. The gym looked almost as big as the whole “hotel.”

“How come on the outside, it doesn’t look as big as it does from the inside?”

“Looks can be deceiving. Now, this will help you with your footwork. All you do is dodge the balls. Easy.”

Damien got out there and quickly realized it wasn't as easy as his dad had explained. The balls were coming out one after the other, up and down, side to side. About ten balls hit Damien at once and he fell to the floor, crippled.

"Okay. Enough for today. Go rest. We'll start again tomorrow."

For the next two weeks, he practiced every day. By the last day, he was able to run the treadmill, lift two hundred pounds, and dodge every ball, even catching some.

"Your physical training is now completed. It's time for the mental part." George took him into a room with lit candles, pillows, and the calming scent of lavender. "We'll start with some strategies. Then yoga. Then focusing exercises. Now sit down. I'll explain some strategies.

"If your opponent ever injures you, keep your focus. Don't think about the wound. Focus on your movements and each action of your opponent." They did yoga and some breathing exercises and repeated this for the next week.

The day of the battle came, and Damien was as nervous as ever. "We have to be sent to the battle arena. Just look out for one of the creepy, no-legged guys."

Damien and George were searching for more than half an hour before they found one of the men that still made Damien shiver. "Mr. Hundles, Mr. Hundles," he said in an extremely low voice, "let's go." He snapped his fingers and Damien felt weightless again. Then he fell onto hard ground, just like he did before. But this time, instead of being in a park, he was in a pond.

"Oh. This will be fun! It's overboard, man!" Damien saw what looked like plastic lily pads. There were helmets, sticks, and shin pads. He saw his opponent. He had his head down but he could see his dirty blonde hair, blue eyes, and a Spongebob watch. The kid looked up--it was Aaron.

"Dad, I can't do this."

“What do you mean? The whole group is depending on you! You can’t give up now!” George sounded very panicky.

“But Dad! The opponent’s—”

“Are you afraid because he’s bigger than you? It doesn’t matter. Now listen up! In this game, there will be three rounds. All you want to do is knock the opponent off the ‘lily pad’ and into the water. Now go get ready!”

Damien ran over to his equipment and got dressed.

The referee called him and Aaron over to the lily pad. They shook hands, but as they walked off, you could hear Aaron swear. He knew it would be hard to hurt his best friend.

The referee blew his whistle. It was go time. Aaron quickly swiped at Damien’s legs. A gash of blood began to become exposed. Damien arched his stick at Aaron’s hips, but Aaron quickly blocked it and twisted his stick around Damien’s, throwing him off balance into the water.

Damien quickly jumped up onto the lily pad again. This time Damien got the head start, thrashing at Aaron’s legs, forcing him into the water.

Aaron jumped back onto the lily pad. Damien looked at Aaron. Aaron looked at Damien. They both smiled immediately. They bowed to each other, and then jumped into the water at the exact same time.

Most everyone gasped. The referee hollered, “It looks like we have a tie, folks! The next battle will determine the winner!”

George came up to Damien and gave him a hug. “Good job, son. I love you.”

“I lov—” Damien began, but was suddenly weightless again. The next thing he knew, he was in his bed. He heard the alarm go off at 6:30 on Tuesday, February 12, 2007.

The Lost and Forgotten

*A family loses its child while traveling to Australia for a Thanksgiving family reunion. But the non-stop trip from the United States takes only minutes in the 31st century, which makes the story of **THE LOST AND FORGOTTEN** by **Austin Lessnau** something other than your typical missing person story.*

“Hurry up, everyone!” yelled Mrs. Carbon, the wife of Jon Carbon and the mother of three kids: Lisa, Emily, and you can’t forget little redheaded Marty. “We’re going to miss our gravity train! It leaves in one hour!”

Every one should know what a gravity train is, since it IS the year 3017. A gravity train travels though a tunnel in the earth at many times the speed of sound using the earth’s gravity field to get you to your destination. There are underground gravity train tunnels between nearly all major world cities. Then you stop at the gravity train station, get on a train, and in 42 minutes you are at whatever city you chose to travel to. If that city doesn’t have a station, you’ll stop at the nearest one. The only downside is a momentary blackout effect during travel that is completely harmless.

“Come on! Get your gravity bags packed! We have to get there at least 25 minutes before it leaves, and you know how bad Seattle traffic is!”

Of course no one really wanted to visit old Aunt Agnes down in Australia, but it was Thanksgiving and the whole Carbon family was going to be there. Not even Jon wanted to visit his sister.

“Mom, do we have to go?” whined Marty.

“Yes! Now get in the hover car or no virtual reality for a week!” she screamed.

Mrs. Carbon was always getting so frustrated with Marty, for he never cooperated with her.

The whole family finally got in the hover car and was off to the train station. They were almost late for the train, getting there exactly 25 minutes before it left.

They boarded the gravity train with all of their luggage. The seats on a gravity train are almost like roller coaster seats the way they lock you in place for your high-speed ride.

In 42 minutes, which seemed like seconds due to the blackout effect, they were in Sydney, Australia. Only they realized that Marty wasn't with them. Mrs. Carbon hesitated.

The family, without Marty, went over to the customer service booth.

“What's the big deal?” cried Mrs. Carbon in a semi-loud voice. “Our whole family got on the train, but my poor little Marty isn't here! Where is he?”

“Calm down, ma'am,” said the woman at the booth. “Do you have his ticket with you?”

Mrs. Carbon searched her purse for the ticket, only to find nothing.

“I must have left it on the train!” she yelled.

“Well, do you remember your travel number?” asked the person at the booth.

“Of course, it was...” this time Mr. Carbon answered, but blanking out. “I think it was travel number 19336. Yes, it was.”

“Okay, thank you,” said the booth lady, looking the flight up on the computer. “And what is your last name?”

“Carbon,” answered Mr. Carbon. “That's C-A-R-B-O-N.”

“Mmmmkay, it says that only four people boarded that train ride,” answered the booth lady. “Jon, Lauren, Emily, and Lisa were the only ones. There's no Marty here.”

“You have to be mistaken,” said both of the worried parents, almost at the same time.

“Are you sure that you brought five people with you?” asked the booth lady. “I mean things like this don’t just happen. Kid disappears, no ticket, no record of him ever boarding. You know?”

“No, I don’t know! This is my son we are talking about. You think that I would just make-believe bringing my kid with me?” cried Mrs. Carbon.

“That’s not what I’m trying to say. What I mean is there has to be something going on,” she said.

“Like what?” asked Mrs. Carbon.

“I don’t know,” she said. “Never mind. Look, maybe he somehow got exactly to the place you wanted to go—”

“My sister’s house,” interrupted Jon.

“Right. What I was trying to say is he’s probably at your sister’s house. That’s happened once before. Try calling her.”

So Jon did call his sister.

“What? Who’s Marty? What are you talking about?” replied Aunt Agnes on the phone.

“Come on, Sis, you know, Marty is my son. Your nephew.”

“Jon, I have no idea what you’re talking about—”

Jon hung up. “What? Why wouldn’t my sister remember who Marty is? That’s the only place possible for him to be,” said Jon, frustrated.

“We’re going to go to the police. They’ll probably figure this out,” said Mrs. Carbon. “Kids, you’re going to stay at Aunt Agnes’s house until we find Marty.”

“Okay,” said both girls, a little scared of the situation.

Mr. and Mrs. Carbon arrived at the police station. They ran inside almost as fast as they could, frantic to get their son back.

“Help! Police! We’ve lost our son!” exclaimed Mrs. Carbon to the tall, dark-haired man at the counter. “We came

here for Thanksgiving by gravity train and our son, Marty, wasn't there when we arrived."

"Calm down, ma'am," said the police officer. "We'll take care of this. What was your son's name?"

"Marty. Marty Carbon; six years old; red hair; hometown: Seattle," said Mr. Carbon.

The police officer typed the name and other information in the computer, finding no one under the name of Marty Carbon.

"Sorry, but there is no person named Marty Carbon matching the description," informed the police officer.

"Ugh! Not this again!" yelled Mrs. Carbon, frustrated. "Let's just go home, Jon. Maybe Marty will be there."

They got the kids from Agnes's house.

"What are you doing?" yelled Agnes as they pulled away in the hover car they rented.

"We're going to find my kid!" yelled Jon out the window.

"Your kids are in your car! It's Thanksgiving! Come back!"

They got to the gravity train station within a few minutes, got a train ride and were back in Seattle in minutes.

They picked up their hover car and were on their way home.

"Why doesn't Agnes remember Marty?" asked Mrs. Carbon.

"You think I know? What do you want me to say?" replied Jon.

"Well, she's your sister," Mrs. Carbon said.

They finally pulled up to their house, but there were two hover cars in the driveway.

"That's weird," they both said.

They opened the door, stepped inside, and a family ran to the door.

"What's going on?" asked Mrs. Carbon.

"What are you doing in our house?" asked both families.

“Who are you?” asked the Carbons.

“Uh... we live here,” the other family answered. “Wait, are you the Carbon family? You sold us this house fifteen years ago. Remember?”

“No,” the Carbons replied.

Mr. Carbon looked at an old newspaper framed on the wall from about four years before.

“Why is this paper on the wall here?” asked Mr. Carbon

“Well, we just thought that since you were the family that sold us this house...” said what looked to be the dad of the other family.

The paper was headed: LOCAL BOY MARTY CARBON DIES IN CAR CRASH.

“Because, honey, you better look at this” said Jon.

Mrs. Carbon walked over to where Jon was. Both parents’ faces went pale as they stared at the outdated newspaper.

“Oh my god,” said the parents in a whispering voice.

New Time

*When Jack finds himself pitched forward in time, he must get a handle on the situation before events spiral out of control. William Crorey charts Jack's progress in **NEW TIME**.*

"Jack," said Jack's mom, "would you please get me my china from the attic?"

"Fine," Jack said.

Once Jack got to the attic, he went straight to the shelves. But when he reached for the china, he heard a rumbling sound to his right. He looked to his right and heard it again. But this time he saw a box jingling. He stepped toward the box, and heard and saw it again. He was so amazed that he shot off toward the box. He opened the box and saw that there was only one thing in the box...an old dusty watch.

He picked the watch up and dusted it off. Then he heard a loud ticking sound coming from the watch. His curiosity was extremely great.

But once he was done with staring at it (he was staring at it for a long time because he was so confused why a watch would do such a weird thing), he saw three buttons on the watch saying "Time," "Light," and "Reset."

He was so happy to finally get a watch that he pressed the "Time" button right away to, well, put in the time. It felt obvious to Jack that the first thing to do when you get a watch is to set the time. But instead of him being able to put the time in, the watch said out loud, "What time do you want to go to?"

“Wow!” Jack screamed. “This is an odd watch!” he yelled sarcastically. He knew this was a joke by someone else, so he played along and said, “2400!” sarcastically. (While he said that he was getting ready to start laughing with one of his friends who, in his mind, was just playing a joke on him). But instead of someone jumping out of a box laughing, he got what he asked for. Within seconds, he was overstruck by tremendous light.

Jack was amazed more than ever after the light went away, and everything was mind-boggling to him. “What the heck!” Jack yelled. “Where am I?” Soon he was overwhelmed with a giant gust of wind that took the breath right out of him. He knew he was in the future then and there.

He saw something like cars, but he knew it couldn’t have been. It looked more like dragsters, but in the air! Being an average 12-year-old boy, Jack, with a wallet full of money, in a town that looked like a carnival of fun, did anything he could to stay long.

The first place Jack went to was the sports shop. (He found the sports shop because of the sun in his eyes. When he turned his head, there it was). It was beyond belief for Jack when he walked in. He saw five different sports he’d never seen before. They were called Flacketball, Tiplonball, Quiqualball, and two others that he couldn’t even pronounce. The thing he really thought was beyond belief was that the clothes were all shiny in that time of the future. But he really didn’t want to stay long because the people were staring at him like he was an orphan wandering in Beverly Hills, California.

He left the sports shop as quickly as he could. But once he got out, he smelt a great aroma of chocolate, and quickly looked around. He didn’t know where it came from, but he knew that whatever and wherever it was, he’d try his hardest to find it. Before he knew it, he walked probably about a mile until he found it (well, technically, his nose found it). It was a diner that

apparently had chocolate in it. (He noticed it was a diner once he looked up above the stained-glass door.)

When he got in, he noticed that there was no one there. "Where is everyone?" The reply was a loud echo of what he just said. "I guess there's no one here," he said and heard his echo again.

After searching the building he finally saw that there was actually something worth staying for. There was a large rectangular metal box that had in gold lettering "Food Satisfaction Guaranteed" on it. He was quite happy to see that it actually looked like an oven. "Well," he said. "How do you work one of these?" He saw then that there was an "On" button. "That's weird," he thought out loud. "But I'll try it" he thought.

Then he pressed the on button. Almost in an instant, the "oven" said, "What is the Order?"

"What?" Jack said. But it did not repeat. "Wait, if there was a chocolate scent coming from here, and this just asked me what I want, then this must be where I can get food! Hmm, what should I get?"

Jack said, "I'll get a chicken Parmesan with shrimp." He said it as if he were a king (he felt like he deserved whatever he wanted). And just within a few seconds, the "oven" dinged (he still hadn't decided what to call it, or found out what it was called).

When he opened the lid, he saw exactly what he asked for, a chicken Parmesan, with shrimp. But he paid no attention to anything else except the food in the "oven," and forgot to pay (I know this sounds weird) the "oven." He ate like a king, and was full enough to burst when he was done.

After he left the diner, he was almost paralyzed with fear to see cars surrounding him in a half circle, and in the cars were men in uniforms pointing shiny and odd shaped guns at him. They were yelling for him to put his hands up for burglary.

He still was holding the stained-glass door open, and knew that the only way to survive this was to RUN. He leaped back in the building as fast as he possibly could. He could hear panting right behind him, and he took a quick glance behind him. He only saw one policeman chasing him, but amazingly, Jack didn't see a gun in his hand. (That was probably because the gun he saw the other policemen holding were about six feet long). He headed straight for the restroom and climbed out through the window.

But tragedy struck. Three more policemen were surrounding him as he got out. One of them bear-hugged him. The other two policemen and the policeman chasing Jack went back to the front of the restaurant to tell the other policemen. But Jack was not about to give up yet.

Jack and his older brother have been beating each other up since four years ago, so Jack remembered his most efficient (and his favorite) move to get people to let go of you and give you time to catch your breath. So he did it. First as the policeman looked away, he gave him a "Charlie Horse"(which is whacking them in the front of the thigh), and then right as the policeman was about to whack him, Jack elbowed the policeman in the stomach. Finally, he pulled the policeman's chin to his chest and held it there with one hand. With the other hand he karate chopped the back of his neck, which made the head fling backward. The policeman fell to the ground in pain.

Then Jack ran away. It hadn't taken him a long time to knock the policeman to the ground, so no one caught Jack. After a long while of running, Jack found an extremely dark ditch to hide in. He jumped in without hesitation. And now he had time to think.

"How can I get back to my anti-criminal life back in 2007?" Jack thought. Then he remembered his watch. He just took his chances with the watch, and hoped that his prayers would be answered, so he wouldn't end up in a jail for the rest of his life.

It was very dark in this ditch so he really had to think. He knew that the time button wouldn't work, because the time button is year specific, and he was looking for a way to set the watch for an exact second. But first he had to find out which button controlled the light so that he could see.

He remembered that each button had a different color. "Hmm?" Jack thought out loud, still panting from running his heart out. "I'm pretty sure—*pant*—that the time button—*pant*—was black, which—*pant*—does not shine at all in the dark. And I'm confident that the reset button was red, and red kind of shines in the dark. And I'm almost entirely sure that the light button was silver, which shines well in the light. So the light button is the button that shines the most. Oh, here it is." And just in a blink of an eye, Jack was covered with light. "Well, so if reset in most things means start over, or from the beginning, then would this take me back home?" Jack said to himself out loud. "Well, it's worth a try." Jack made sure he didn't press the wrong button, and all at once he was back at the attic.

Once he was back in the attic, he took the watch, threw it in the box he got it from, and duct-taped the box closed, so that no one would get in as much trouble as he got that night.

The *Random* Incident

Life is messy. Some things happen that seem to have no reason. But what if almost everything seemed to happen without a purpose? In THE RANDOM INCIDENT by Byron Larson, anything can happen—and usually does.

“Robert! It’s time for the first day of school. Let’s go! You might miss the bus! “...ZzZzZ...”

11:37 a.m.

“...Oh...what time is it... Holy crud! I’m late for school!” I went downstairs to the kitchen and, to my surprise, saw my mom making pancakes.

“Hello, honey,” she said with a smirk. “Sleep well?”

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” I asked, ignoring my mother’s question.

“Oh, I tried to, but you were fast asleep—as usual. Now, grab your lunchbox and walk to school.”

“I give up. Why can’t you take me in the car?”

“Oh, it’s in the repair shop. Remember, the accident with your remote control plane last week?”

“OK, Ma. See you.”

I opened the door and got a whiff of autumn air. It was clean and cool. The sun beat down on my face and nature presented itself all around me. I took a few steps.

Bam!

I felt like I was punched in the stomach. All I could remember was a hand, and then everything went dark...

“Oh, my aching...! Wait. Where am I?”

Just then a little chubby boy leaned over me and said something strange. “Ko uoy era?” He asked. “Are you OK?”

“I guess so. Where am I, and who are you?”

“You are in Bowbby’s home! And Bowbby is me.”

Just then the floor moved, and it felt as if the house were floating.

“Make it stop!”

“Bowbby says relax.”

“How can you say relax when we seem to be defying the laws of gravity!”

“Bowbby says you are too serious.”

There was another flash, and everything changed before me. Instead of Bowbby’s living room, I found myself treading water next to Bowbby in a jet-black lake.

“What just happened?” I gulped.

“We are in a different sector. It is hard for Bowbby to explain, but someday you will understand.”

I scanned the horizon looking for anything familiar. All that I could see was the water and a platform...then a vague faraway beach.

I sighed. “Well, we better start swimming for the beach.”

Bowbby grabbed my foot. “Wait. That wouldn’t be wise. That’s where the cannibals live. Let’s make for the platform, but we need to get moving.”

“What’s the hurry?”

“We can still get eaten.”

“By what? Sharks?”

“No. A giant guppy.”

In no time, we climbed up onto the platform. “This is all so strange,” I said. “I’ve heard that other dimensions may exist, but never thought it was possible.”

“Bowbby brought you here to show you that it’s true. It is your destiny to explore them and show them to your later world. You will find much help for your race. Bowbby has seen it...and Bowbby is here to help you. You will see me again. Now you must attend your ‘learn place.’”

The familiar flash exploded again, and I found myself in the school hallway. The clock on the wall said 7:57 – three minutes before the first bell! Somehow Bowbby had brought me back in time. Wow! Time travel! But who was Bowbby?

In no time I found my homeroom. My teacher told us the news that a late student would be joining us after lunch. We went through our morning lessons, and the lunch bell rang. While I munched on a sandwich from my lunchbox, I told my friends about my morning adventures, and of course, none of them believed me.

When class started again, our teacher introduced the late student. A chubby little boy appeared before us.

“Class, this is...um...”

“Bowbby,” he interrupted. “Bowbby my name.”

The class giggled. I looked at him in amazement. He glanced at me and gave me a wink. It seems we had already met, and I was sure that we would become the best of friends.

The End

P.S. This is the beginning of a larger story; it may not be such a **Random Incident** after all.

P.P.S. It’s a *short story*.... Deal with it!

Space Wars 2

*In a war between planets, the good guys need a hero. Harrison may be the one to fill the position in **SPACE WARS 2**, by **Harrison Brode**.*

“What are we going to do?” Enver whispers as he and his team get on the Covenant’s ship.

“Just follow my lead, guys,” Harrison whispers to both Enver and CS3.

“Can I get my belongings in my room so I can give them to you?” Harrison says to the Covenant guard.

“Make it quick,” the guard says as he unlocks Harrison’s handcuffs.

“Oh, me, too. I’ll get my money.” As the guard unlocks Enver’s handcuff, Harrison screams “NOW!”

“Huh?” the guard says, shocked as Harrison pulls out his laser sword. “Not so fast!” the guard says to Harrison as he pulls out his double laser sword.

“Bring it on, Covy,” Harrison says. “RAGHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” Harrison yells.

“RAGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH,” the Covenant yells as he and Harrison dash into the air. They yell as they both attack each other with fierce strikes.

“CS3, close those doors!” Harrison says as he takes another fierce swing at the Covenant. “There are more Covenants coming!”

“On it,” CS3 says as he limp walks (like a droid always does) to the panel of the two slide doors.

“Now let’s see, the code is...” CS3 mumbles as he types in the code.

“Hurry! They’re coming!”

“RAGHHHHHHH! LET’S GET ‘EM!” one of the three guards yells as they get closer to the sliding doors.

“CS3, do you have it? I’m running out of lasers!” Enver says as he does a power shot at one of the running guards. (A power shot is one of a blaster’s charge shots, which is a shot that can do great amounts of damage to the target it’s after.)

“It’s not going to work!” the running guard says as he deflects Enver’s power shot.

“Almost done,” CS3 says as he enters more numbers and letters of the code.

“They’re like 50 feet away!” Enver says.

“I’ve had enough!” Harrison yells loudly. Harrison finally finishes the Covenant with a kick up at his head, and while he’s stunned he stabs a powerful blow right into the Covenant’s chest. “Let me do that stupid code,” Harrison says as he runs incredibly fast right by CS3 and gets to the control panel. “Now just three more letters,” Harrison says. “Got it!” The two side doors close right on the three Covenants, slamming their three bodies right into the side doors.

“Ok, they’re gone. But what do we do to him?” Enver says as he points to the corpse of the double-laser Covenant.

“Hmmm, I think we should throw it with the garbage,” Harrison says. “Enver, you pick up his feet, and I’ll pick him up in the front.”

As Harrison and Enver carry the corpse of the Covenant, Harrison unlocks the door and throws him in. Then he pushes the eject button and watches the pods go. “Well, now it’s time to save Ta’hara,” Harrison says. “CS3, get the hyperspace coordinates to Ta’hara. We’re going to save the citizens,” Harrison says.

Harrison and his crew go to back to the cockpit of their ship (on which Harrison and the Covenant were fighting) and activate the coordinates to Ta'hara.

As they reach Ta'hara's surface, they start to see Covenant ships. "I'll take care of this," Enver says as he gets out of the passenger seat. "Just keep her steady." Enver gets into the Hawk's top turret and starts to aim the turret directly at the enemy's ships. Then he fires. They were gigantic explosions everywhere! "YEAAAAAAAAAAAA! TAKE THAT!" Enver yells as he shoots fiercely at the Covenant ships.

After the smoke and dust cleared up there were thousands of Covenant bodies on the ground. "Nice job, Enver. That will hold the reinforcements," Harrison says. "Now time to land."

As they land on the warcraft planet, they find the temple. There were two elite Covenant guards guarding the door. "Ok, that must be the place where they're holding citizens hostage," Harrison whispers to Enver.

"Yeah. I'll take 'em out with my silencer." Enver pulls out a cylinder-shaped handle and twists it where the lasers come out. Enver aims his blaster at one of the elites. "Now to attach the silencer to the top of the gun...and to adjust the silencer to quiet...there! Now, it's going to take five seconds after I take this shot to take out the other one. So don't make a move," Enver whispers to Harrison.

"Right. Not a sound."

Enver takes a shot at the left elite first. As he does the other elite doesn't notice. "That was weird," Enver thinks. "Oh well." He takes another shot at the right guard and hits him in the head.

"Now that that's over, let's save the citizens," Harrison says.

As Enver and Harrison are just about to get up, someone says, "Not...so...fast." They turn around and see a guy with shiny red armor and a medium-sized staff.

“You...” Harrison says madly. “You monster!” Harrison leaps into the air, pulls out his laser sword and takes one of the most powerful swings he ever took at the Covenant commander. The commander blocks Harrison’s powerful attack and pushes Harrison into the wall.

“RAGHHHHHHHHHHH!” Enver yells as he shoots power shots at the commander. The commander uses a spell to block these power shots, and hits Enver in the chest and kicks him hard into the wall.

“Now I’m going to finish you,” the commander says. He points his magical staff at the two heroes, and a big magical ball forms at the tip of his staff.

“NOOOOOOOOOO MASTER!” CS3 screams. CS3 points out his hands at the commander and a machine gun-like laser comes out and heads straight at the commander.

“Huh?” the commander says questionably.

The lasers hit the commander all over: his chest, his face, and even his ribs. The commander fell. After that, there was nothing but silence.

“CS3, you did it!” Harrison yells happily.

“Yea!” Enver cheers as he gets up from the crumbled wall. “And they say droids can’t do anything.”

All of a sudden they see big ships coming their way. “Get ready, guys,” Harrison says as he pulls out his laser sword. The ship lands and the hanger slide opens. There is nothing but smoke. Then someone comes out, but it is not just someone. It is people running and screaming...no, cheering! It’s Harrison’s troops! They all come out, tackling Harrison and his team, and cheering, “We won; we did it; no, they did it; yea...!”

“Wait, guys; we need to get the citizens out of the building.”

They all run to the door and break it open. Over a million people come out of the building. Everyone cheers and says, “WE WON! They did it. They saved Ta’hara and the galaxy!”

The Story of the Night I Saved the Human Race

*Rudely awakened in the middle of the night, Sampson Schmitt must do one thing before he can go back to sleep: Save all of humanity. Root for him in **THE STORY OF THE NIGHT I SAVED THE HUMAN RACE**, by *Evan Kosik*.*

Hello. My name is Sampson Schmitt. Yes, I am the one who encountered something quite strange a while ago. You remember, don't you? It was all over the newspapers and TV, and don't forget I was interviewed with the President. Well, if you don't remember, I might as well tell you. Listen closely to all of the "great detail." Back in the day, when I was about twelve years old, I had blond hair (and still do) and blue eyes, and I always wore a shirt with a pattern on it and torn pants.

Thanksgiving was the next day, but I had an early Thanksgiving with my parents. We were planning on saving the food for my grandparents who were coming the next day. After we ate, we went to bed in our rooms. My room was large; it had a shelf, a dresser, a bed (of course), and a TV.

That night there was a loud *CRASH!* I ran toward my bedroom window only to see a bunch of trees. That is why I hate my window; it doesn't have a view of any sort. So I snuck downstairs hoping to find a good window.

I went into the kitchen and looked out that window only to find a GLOWING GREEN UFO! When I pressed my face to the glass, I only heard a small beeping noise, and it

sounded like someone was talking. Little did I know, if I opened the door to my backyard, the noise would get even louder. But I did it anyway, and, my, was it ear-piercing!

I walked closer to the UFO while holding my ears. It felt like being next to a big firework when it explodes, except louder. As I got closer, I could hear someone talking more clearly. Voices said, "So why are we doing this again?"

"For the last time, if we're going to stop the human race, we must find a house with lots of trees!"

"Then why don't we use those houses?"

"Because, we already stopped here. Come on, we have work to do. Go get Tiny, and make it snappy!"

"But, sir, the only way to do that is make it mad."

"No, you moron, 'make it snappy' means be really fast!"

"Ooooh, ok, got it, sir."

"Good. Now let's move. We have a human race to destroy."

"You mean, there's more than one?"

"No, it means... well, I don't know what it means, but trust me, there isn't more than one."

"Got it, sir."

I could hear them walking toward the front of the ship. I then hid near the back of the ship so they wouldn't find me. They stepped out of the ship carrying heavy machinery. I couldn't see their faces, but I didn't want to, so I kept backing away. Because of my clumsiness, I tripped, and my head hit the ship with a loud BANG! After that I was knocked unconscious.

I could feel my arms and legs being tied up, then a door closing, and then it got really quiet. When I woke up, I realized I was in a coat closet and the door was locked. I tried to get up, but it was way too hard since I was tied up. So I crawled toward the door and pressed my face against it.

I could hear the creatures talking again. They said, “Now once we put Tiny in here, he will start eating and be a tiny little monster no longer.”

“Yeah...how does that work again?”

“(Sigh) All right, fine, I’ll tell you again. Because of the minerals in Tiny’s body, when he eats he grows twice his size, allowing him to eat bigger things.”

“I see.”

This was terrifying news. I had to do something, but what? I couldn’t just barge through the door, because who knows what the creatures would do to me next? So I waited and waited and waited and waited.

When finally the creatures left, I broke through the door only to find that lots of my kitchen furniture was ruined. I had to stop that creature.

All of a sudden I found this thing on the ground that said “HOW TO MAKE THINGS GO BACK TO NORMAL BY: ΞΡΥΠΤΗΘΩΝΕΠΥΡΩΨΨΨΨ ΨΥΨΡΝΥΨΥΝ.”

With the odds very slim, I started reading, although it was hard to read with the monster chomping on everything. When I was all done reading, I then knew I had to look for the rare Flosmuck berry. The directions said that it lived 70 feet below the Earth’s surface.

I grabbed my shovel and started digging. As I dug, I hit a lot of rocks, but I kept digging.

Then I finally found it. I was full of sweat and dirt, and I was tired out, but that didn’t stop me from saving the human race.

I read more of the directions. The last one on the next page said, “Throw the berry into the creature’s mouth.” It seemed easy enough. All I had to do was get a clear shot at the mouth and—CRASH! The creature broke through the wall of my house.

It was big, green and slimy, and its teeth were huge, sharp and not clean. Its eyes were as big as two pianos. I was about to throw the Flosmuck berry when I thought, “Wait, if I miss, it might destroy the Flosmuck berry.” I knew I had to sacrifice myself with the Flosmuck berry.

I started running toward the monster, and the monster started backing away. I jumped into its mouth and *BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMM!* There was a huge flash of light, and there I was back in my room. I really wanted to tell my mom and dad, but who knew if they would believe me? So I kept it a secret for later.

That’s my story. I hope you enjoyed listening.

Visitors from Space

They're coming. Is your school safe? Autumnne Parker offers some direction in VISITORS FROM SPACE.

It all began as a normal school day. Rachel was in Ms. Moore's art class at Macmillan Middle School. Bryan was getting his nose into trouble, and being especially mischievous today. He kept on talking about this space convention our town held when Ms. Moore was giving us one of her lectures. He seemed like he was obsessed with spaceships and the possibility of life on other planets, although that was the least of anyone's concerns. "The space convention this year was way better than last year's. I mean, the wax figures seemed so realistic! I felt like I was right there on Mars! If I ever had the chance to get onboard a real spaceship, I would do it, no questions asked," Bryan explained.

"Shut your mouth! You've been blabbing all day about all that alien mess! I'm sick of it! Listen to what I have to say because you certainly need to hear about taking responsibility for your actions," Ms. Moore scowled.

In the middle of a lesson, the class heard a sound kind of like when an airplane is right above you. Everyone dashed for the window. A giant saucer-like disk had just landed itself in the parking lot of the school! Tall, green creatures were coming out of a small, hidden door. No one knew what they were, but hopefully they would soon find out.

Moments later, Principal Freeman was on the school intercom speaking in his stern and I-mean-business voice. His

voice had a bit of shakiness and fright today, though. “Attention students, our school is under alien attack. The aliens have just landed their spaceship in our parking lot and are entering the school. It is mandatory that all classrooms must have their doors shut and all students out of the classroom must be brought back in.”

“Oh my gosh! We’re under attack!” Rachel yelled in fear.

Every student in Ms. Moore’s class was scared and frantic. They were running around the classroom in fear. However, Bryan had his mouth wide open in shock. He motioned his lips as if he were saying, “Wow.”

While the classroom was in chaos, Bryan swiftly opened the door and crept into the hallway. Out of concern, Rachel followed him without being noticed by anyone.

She raced after him, trying to grip his T-shirt that he had gotten at the space convention. She finally caught up. “What are you doing? Are you trying to get yourself killed?”

Before he could reply, they saw a slimy, green tentacle whip around the end of the hallway.

The creature was sliding toward them now. It was a pale green, with eight tentacles. It had piercing red eyes and a large head. Rachel and Bryan heard its heavy breathing when it was just two feet away.

They were about to sprint back to their classroom, but the space creature said that it came in peace. Rachel and Bryan looked at each other, in complete shock, with their mouths hanging open. They both nodded, signaling that they were going to listen to what this alien had to say. “My companions and I were lost in space. We need directions to Mars, our home planet. Would you happen to know where that is from here?”

“Ummmm.... yeah. It’s the next planet to the left,” Rachel babbled in shock.

“Oh my gosh! I can’t believe I’m talking to a real alien! Will you take me with you? I’m sick of this boring town!” Bryan excitedly said.

“You’re weird, kid. I’m out of here. Oh, and thanks for the directions,” the alien said.

The alien crawled away, leaving a trail of grayish-green ooze as he retreated. Rachel and Bryan then walked back to their classroom. “That was pretty cool!” exclaimed Bryan.

“You think this was pretty cool? We were risking our lives out there. We trusted those aliens where we shouldn’t have because they could have been dangerous!” Rachel explained.

“Yeah, but they were good aliens. They just wanted some directions!” Bryan argued.

“Whatever. I’m just glad we’re safe in our classroom,” Rachel said.

Moments later, police, firefighters, navy jets, and reporters were on the scene. The students at Macmillan poured themselves out into the parking lot. Everyone was watching as firefighters and policemen tried to attack the spaceship.

The students screamed as the spaceship rose above them and dodged the shootings and bullets. The aliens soon enough flew out into the sky.

Everyone was in great shock over what had just happened. But one thing is for sure: All of the people at the scene will remember this until they are no longer on planet Earth.

When Martians Take Over My House

*It's not every day that something valuable falls from the sky. You should find that reassuring after the events of **WHEN MARTIANS TAKE OVER MY HOUSE**, by Adam Hennard.*

My name is Adam Hennard, and I'm going to tell you about the strangest day of my life. This thing came from the sky, and I didn't know what it was at first. I thought it was a terrorist weapon. It had a plastic silver coating, and was about the size of a regular game controller. I looked at it, and the markings on it made me think it had directions to blow up our house and directions to our house. I hoped that I was wrong.

Five minutes later, the Martians come crashing through the roof of my house. They wanted their terrorist weapon. My brother was bawling his eyes out, my mother was freaking out and my father was panicking. As for me, I acted like I was scared because I didn't want them to know that I had the toy. They tied up my family and me. While they weren't looking, I cut myself free with a knife from the kitchen.

I grabbed the toy and ran to the house of my friend, Jake Mouhammed. I told Jake to take it. He said, "What's this for?"

I said, "It's the Martians' captain's toy. They want to blow up Earth because we killed one of their species."

The Martians' captain had a football-shaped head and suspenders. His name was Stewie. He was a short kid. I

think he knew English, which was weird because he was a Martian. When I got back, he was gone. He must have gone to Jake's house.

He was just tying him up when I got there. Jake looked scared. He said, "Why did you get me into this?" I had no idea why I did.

I said to the Martian captain, "Why do you want this so badly?"

Stewie said, "Because it was my dad's. He gave it to me before he went away to another planet." Then he ran into his spaceship and flew away.

That's my story of an insane Martian. You don't have to believe me, but I know Jake does.

IT'S A JUNGLE
OUT THERE

Beethoven and George Save the World

*The insect world is full of complex societies that have been studied by scientists. Here is one they haven't found yet. In **BEETHOVEN AND GEORGE SAVE THE WORLD** by **Evan Simon**, two housefly brothers summon the power of their ancestors to defend their world against their evil third brother named Macrot.*

Two flies named Beethoven and George, who were brothers, lived in Mrs. Pesick's classroom at West Maple Elementary School. They liked living in Mrs. Pesick's town. Their home was large and beautiful. They had plenty to eat, especially when the town flies held parties.

Most of Beethoven and George's time was spent on the computer, checking to see if other flies needed to be saved from attacks by evil flies. The rest of their time was spent training their bodies to be in top condition, so they could be strong in battle against the evil ones.

It was two weeks before Christmas. Beethoven and George were helping the other flies put up the town's Christmas decorations.

"Careful with the gold star, George. It's very delicate."

"Okay, Beethoven. You know I will be extra careful."

When the work was done, the town gave them the honor of placing the star at the top of the tree.

Their evil brother Macrot and his two minions were in the crowd wearing disguises. The two suddenly dropped their costumes and flew up to Beethoven and George at the top of the tree. The two minions

punched Beethoven and George so hard that they fell right to the ground.

“Ha, ha, ha!” Macrot laughed at the damage inflicted by his minions.

Meanwhile, Macrot proceeded to destroy the town. He burned the tree and smashed the decorations. When his minions joined him, they went on a rampage that didn’t end until everything that was worth anything was demolished. By the time Beethoven and George recovered, Macrot and his minions were already back at their castle.

Beethoven and George had to avenge the town’s destruction.

“We need to train hard. Otherwise, we will die at the hands of our enemies,” Beethoven told George.

George replied, “You’re right, brother. We do need more training.”

Macrot was always evil, even as a kid. He always enjoyed wreaking havoc. Their parents said he was a demon seed. He was mean to everyone in the town, including his parents and brothers. He disrespected his teachers. He was cruel to animals. He took pleasure in destruction and in inflicting pain. He was a rotten fly.

Beethoven and George entered the leaf forest (Mrs. Pesick’s terrarium), the best place to train.

George said to Beethoven, “There are many dangerous animals and mazes here that will help improve our speed, strength, and fearlessness. Let us seek, once and for all, the temple of our ancestors.”

“Perhaps we will discover a new power,” Beethoven responded.

The brothers went deep into the forest, deeper than they had ever gone before. They were seeking the temple their parents had once described to them. It was a place where special powers could be gained. Suddenly, an ancient temple appeared before them.

The brothers entered the temple. “Wow!” they said together. “A lot of these statues look like us, don’t you think?” Beethoven asked George.

“Yeah, they really do,” George responded with excitement.

In the middle of the temple sat two old, dusty wooden chairs carved with secret symbols. The brothers sat in the chairs. The chairs began to glow yellow. The brothers felt their strength grow within them. They stood up and practiced their best moves with newfound confidence.

“I know we are going to beat Macrot this time,” said Beethoven. George nodded in agreement.

Beethoven and George flew to Macrot’s castle (a structure in the terrarium). First, they battled Macrot’s two minions. They punched, kicked, and executed their new special moves. Their opponents flew straight into a wall and stuck there for a minute. With their new moves, Beethoven and George were able to kill them right where they stuck.

“Now it’s time to get Macrot,” Beethoven told George.

The fight began. Macrot punched George so hard it was like 100 punches. The punch damaged George 50 times less because of the special power. George recovered quickly and flew fast at Macrot. He punched him so hard that Macrot fell to the ground. Beethoven kicked Macrot through the roof. The fight turned into a sky battle.

Macrot recovered and punched George with his powerful dragon punch. This was a punch so powerful that a dragon would actually come out of his fist and squeeze his opponent. George *almost* couldn’t continue the fight. Then Beethoven and Macrot used their dragon punches on each other. Macrot fell back into his castle. With the small amount of energy he had left, he flew off to a different hideout in the classroom.

Beethoven and George flew back to their town, victorious. The town flies cheered for Beethoven and George. “You saved the day! You are our heroes!”

They helped the town flies repair the damage caused by Macrot and his minions. Christmas was saved! Soon the whole fly world heard the news. Beethoven and George would be remembered as heroes for all time.

The Big Adventure

*The identity of the main character and the setting of **THE BIG ADVENTURE** by **François Mutschler** may not be apparent at first. That's where the fun is! Enjoy your adventure in reading.*

One day, as I was in a huge backyard, quietly walking on a huge wooden stick fallen from the sky a few days ago, I suddenly felt myself flying in the sky at an unimaginable speed.

Suddenly, the wooden stick that I gripped fell on a strange red and grey place. I jumped from my stick and arrived in front of a stiff and sliding cliff that I could hardly climb. I thought I was saved, but I was not! I found myself again on the grey and red place, but now I was really, really hot.

I was in front of a big pit, orange and red. I could hear huge metallic sounds. Huge wooden sticks were flying above my head to light immediately as they arrived in the reddish pit. I ran away as fast as I could to avoid this terrible death.

I found myself in a forest of bent grey trees. I walked for 30 minutes before being blocked by a gigantic wall. I finally found a pipe that entered the wall. I didn't know where it was going, but I entered it and went up and up for a very long time. At the end, I arrived in a funnel. I looked down: It was very, very high! I climbed it to arrive on a huge slide. I jumped on it and slid to its end. I walked again when a huge thing fell on me. Fortunately, one of its grooves was just above me and saved me from being crushed.

I walked the same path again, but the other way, up to a staircase covered by a blue thing.

I entered a huge room, one so huge that I couldn't see its end. This room contained incredible objects that I did not recognize. It was a big rectangle, I think, with two big things to support its "roof." The ground was covered with an incredible big blue "forest." It was really humid here and slightly lighted with two neon lights. A strange smell was floating in the humid air. The walls were white and the paint was cracked at some places, letting me see the wood that covered the cement. A tiny window was placed on the top of one wall. Many cars with different colors were lying on the ground. A giant ball, placed on a cement base, was blocking the main part of the room. Frightened, I ran away towards the staircase by which I had arrived.

I found myself in front of a giant door. I passed through a hole in the door and ran out. I now regained my good old anthill.

Carinna's Adventure

CARINNA'S ADVENTURE, by **Marie Kent**, lets you in on a secret of the jungle. But you won't read it in this introduction! Follow the young tiger Carinna as she travels around the world and discovers something important about herself and those who share her home.

In the deep jungle of Africa lived a small tiger cub named Carinna. Carinna was lonely because her mom and dad left her so they could make some money in the city. All of the other animals in the jungle all speak a different animal language, so she didn't understand anything they were saying. What Carinna didn't know was that she had something very special about her. Carinna could learn different human languages super easily.

Since Carinna was so unhappy in the jungle, she decided to wander out into the world. This is where it all began. She hopped on a boat to France. When she got off the boat, she bumped into a girl her height and realized that the girl knew how to understand Carinna. Carinna asked the girl to teach her to speak French. Carinna realized she could learn and understand French very easily.

Carinna left France by sneaking into the trunk of a cab, and traveled to Italy. Inside the cab was a family coming home from vacation. When the cab got to Italy, the cab driver opened the trunk to get the luggage and Carinna hopped out. The boy who was part of the family traveling in the cab saw Carinna hopping out, and took her to his apartment. She found out he could understand her just like

the girl in France. Carinna asked him to teach her to speak Italian. Carinna realized she could learn and understand Italian just as easily as she learned French.

Then she continued on her adventure. She walked to the airport and got into someone's luggage and ended up in Germany. The luggage belonged to a group of kids who had been to the United States to visit their grandmother. When the kids opened their luggage at home and found Carinna, she jumped out and spoke to them in her language. The kids could understand what she said, so Carinna asked them how to speak German. This went on and on while she traveled the whole world.

After she had traveled the whole world and learned all of the human languages, Carinna decided to go back to the jungle. She thought it was time to go home because she wondered if she could now be able to learn the other animal languages the same way she learned how to speak the many different human languages.

Carinna found her way to the airport and snuck into the luggage of a passenger going to the same part of Africa where her jungle was located. She walked quickly from the African airport to her home in the jungle.

The first animal she saw in the jungle was a young monkey. She realized the monkey did not speak animal at all. The monkey actually spoke French. The more animals she ran into, the more she realized that none of the animals spoke animal at all. Each different type of animal spoke a different human language.

She could now talk to all the animals in the jungle in their own language. She became friends with all the jungle animals. Now she was not lonely anymore.

Family

In FAMILY by FARAE, an important member of the community seems irreplaceable. How would everyone cope if something were to happen to Grandfather?

My name is Amy. I am a 17-year-old brown bear from Mississippi. My grandfather is the leader of the pack. He hunts for food for the whole town.

One time a major disease came over all the townspeople except for him. So Grandpa went out, fished and fed all 200 of us. He fed everyone before noon.

He is so cool. My five-year-old brother looks up to him, too! He always talks about “Grandpa this” and “Grandpa that.” He goes fishing with him every week. Now you are asking me how a five-year-old child goes fishing with his grandpa every week. He only goes to school for half of a day—unlike me. I’m in school *FOREVER!*

Bearview High School is where I met my best friend Lacy. Lacy is a pink-haired bear. Now I know what you’re thinking. How can a bear have pink hair? Lacy is a “Pretty in Pink,” punk rock type of person. When Lacy and I went to get our hair dyed they asked her what color hair she wanted. I wasn’t surprised to hear her say, “Pink.”

RRRRRRRRRRRIIIIIIIIIIIINNNNNNNNNGGGGGG
GG.

“School’s out for summer!” yelled Lacy.

“So what do you want to do?” I asked.

We both shouted happily, “Shopping!”

We both ran toward my bright red Honda and drove off to the mall. I was just about to buy an orange top when I heard, “Da, a, bah, bah, bah,” over and over again. It was my diamond-studded cell phone.

“Hello.”

“This is Amanda. I’m calling from Bearwood Hospital,” said the nurse. “Your grandfather just had a massive heart attack. You need to come here as soon as you can.”

“Oh my gosh! Is he okay? I will be right there,” I said. The tears started pouring from my eyes. I grabbed Lacy and we ran for the car.

“What’s wrong?”

I never answered. I kept my eyes on the road and kept driving.

When Lacy and I got to the hospital, we rushed to the sign that read “ICU” (Intensive Care Unit). As soon as I heard my brother’s voice, I ran through the swinging doors to the waiting room. My brother was sitting on my mama’s lap. He knew something was wrong by the look on my mama’s face. A few minutes later the nurse rushed out of the ICU and into the waiting room.

“Is he all right?” asked my mother.

“I’m afraid not. We did all we could to save him.”

We all started crying. My brother was crying because Grandpa’s death meant no more fishing. My mom was crying because she was afraid for the pack. Lacy and I were crying because he held us together. How will our pack take the news? Grandpa had always been the leader, guide and protector. But the major reason we were crying was because we had lost someone we loved.

The next morning my family made a public appearance and told the village everything.

“Who will protect us now?” asked a townspeople.

“We will all protect each other,” I said. “Ben, you can fish for us.”

“Okay,” said Ben.

“Amy, you can shop for everything else we need. We will all help each other,” I said.

So we all worked together. I knew if we put our minds to it we could uplift the city. That’s exactly what we did.

We decided that we would do something for Grandpa. He had a very special place in all of our hearts. We wanted to do something in his memory. We all started working and built Grandpa a memorial. It read:

**FISHERMAN,
PROTECTOR,
FRIEND,
TEACHER,
GRANDPA.
YOU WILL BE MISSED.**

Now every year on the anniversary of his death the whole town plants flowers around his memorial.

Getting Antsy

*Sit down. Relax. Cross all six legs and enjoy a different perspective on life in **GETTING ANTSY** by Leah Cohen.*

As I was sitting at my computer for hours doing my research report on ants, I guess I got sort of antsy and dozed off. I had the weirdest dream. I dreamt I was reading this long uninteresting book on ants. I could not find the information I needed. Then I saw this brownie on the floor, and it was being attacked by ants. I decided to get down on the floor and do my own ant research.

I started observing their behavior. I began crawling around like an ant, and decided to steal a piece of brownie from them. Boy, was it delicious! I could not stop eating this brownie. I kept taking it from the other ants. Then I heard my mother call “lunchtime.”

I ran upstairs, and it seemed to take me forever. Everything looked so huge. Either I was shrinking, or the world was getting bigger. I saw a reflection of myself in a mirror and freaked out. I realized it was the most dreadful day of my life. I was an ant!

I decided to make the most of my “small” situation. I explored outside to see if there would be any answers to my ant questions. I found a little anthill, and I started to observe their behavior.

I must not have acted like a typical ant, because they were pretty rude to me. They looked at me like I was crazy. I tried to be friendly, but they just continued crawling, working, and ignoring me.

Although I had the body of an ant, I still thought like a kid. I decided to try to talk to my human friends, but they pretended not to hear me and almost squashed me several times. I screamed in fear, and I think it woke me up.

When I realized it was all a dream I was so excited, because I was tired of my life as an ant. I did dream I got an A on my ant research paper. I hoped that part came true.

I came to many conclusions about the little buggers. First of all, it is very claustrophobic being an ant. I almost went nuts! They were constantly climbing all over me and not respecting my space. I also noticed how uninteresting their lives were; it was crawl after crawl after crawl. The only thing that kept me from falling asleep was watching these tiny creatures lift huge amounts of food and actually eat all of it. It would be like me carrying a huge pig around, and then eating it. Gross!

There were some positive things about being one centimeter tall. We got to climb everywhere! I sure wish I could do that all the time. I would just stay on the ceiling the whole day. The thought of that gets me excited. I could spy on my older sister whenever I wanted, and she would never know. (As a matter of fact I did! My sister and her friends are not as exciting as I thought; boys, boys, boys is all they talk about.)

The thing that I liked most about being an ant is that life was very simple. You didn't need a lot of things to survive, such as clothes, toys, cars, or fancy houses.

I did learn a lot about myself and ants. It's good to think outside of the box and picture yourself as something else. It makes you appreciate your life. Although there are a few good things about being that small, I realize my life is pretty good and better than an ant's life! I get to play sports and games, chat with my friends, and live in a house with my family. I guess being an ant is a pretty simple life, and I like a little more excitement in mine.

If You Were a Penguin...

*A.J., a baby penguin, is lost. Despite his limited experience in the world, he realizes that he must do something about his situation. The adventure continues in **IF YOU WERE A PENGUIN...**, by **Anna Thomas**.*

Just imagine:

I am absolutely starving! I just woke up, and my tummy is rumbling! I have no idea where my mother and father are, and I am freezing out here. All night long I was roaming around my iceberg trying to find where my home is.

Accidentally, I sleepwalked about a week ago and left my home. Now I don't know where I am. I have been stranded on this iceberg by myself for days, and I wish I could just find my home. What would happen if I went this way? Or this way? Ugh...I *wish* I could just find my home.

I roamed around the iceberg for days, just looking for my family.

About five days later while I was wandering around on the iceberg, I came across a friendly penguin named Gloria. She was on her way back to her iceberg where she was to feed her baby penguin. I was so excited to finally see someone come across my eyes.

I looked up sadly and said, "Hi...I'm AJ...Have you seen my family?"

Gloria replied, "Well, who is your family?"

I answered, "Never mind..."

I shrugged and wandered away. I should have never wasted my time talking to a worthless stranger.

On my journey back to my home, I encountered a leopard seal. I got really afraid and tobogganed away. I tried to look for Gloria, but there was no sight of her.

Later on behind me I heard, “Hey! Wait up, AJ! Follow me! I think I know where your flock of penguins is!”

I caught up to her and trusted her to guide me to my flock of penguins.

I’d say we walked for about four hours until Gloria and I saw a mountain ahead of us. It was my iceberg!

Gloria started to sprint. I waddled behind her, and she came to a dead stop. Right in the middle of the iceberg, there it was: my home. It was right in front of my eyes. The shining sunlight reflected off my home. My cheeks glistened with the sunlight shining in my face. I ran so fast that sweat was dripping off my face.

I looked up and there she was: my mother. So much joy was running through my blood. I was so excited I almost fainted. Tears of happiness ran down my face.

I jumped into my mom’s arms, hoping she would catch me. When she caught me, I smiled and just thought in my head...just imagine.

Ivy

*You can take the animal out of the wild, but can you ever take the wild out of the animal? A young girl faces that question in **IVY**, by **Rachel E. Goldstein**.*

“Mom, tell me a story tonight; don’t just read one,” Alice said.

“All right, but I’m telling it, not you,” her mom replied.

“Okay, Mom, you’re telling the story.”

“Here it goes.” And she began.

“She never had a name; she never thought she needed one. The animals just called her ‘she’ or ‘the cat.’ She lived in the wild her whole life, so she was different than the other cats. All the animals feared and respected her, except the chipmunks, who just respected her. She just couldn’t bring herself to eat them. She thought they were so cute. The chipmunks told her a lot of things, like what snow and rain were called.

“She was brown with a white stomach and black splotches surrounding her eyes and covering her ears. She thought her life was perfect. She never interacted with the monsters, until one day....

“Spring mist filled the air, blocking off all other smells. She walked to the river for her morning drink. It smelled odd by the river, but she took a drink anyway. The water tasted horrible! It choked her and made her dizzy. She couldn’t see; everything was blurry. She couldn’t stand straight and she stumbled around. The world was fading in and out of focus. Her body was engulfed with pain.

“Somehow she made it across the road and back to the place she called home, her bush. She collapsed on her nest and fell into nightmare.

“She awoke with a yowl and a huge pain in her side. It was hard to breathe. Then she saw it. A monster had found her and pulled her out of her nest and into the sun. This monster was squishy and bald except for the top of its head, which had long brown fur falling down it. This monster wore odd sort of cloth things. They were blue and pink. But the scariest thing was this monster’s feet. They had no fur, pads, or claws, just five little pudgy bumps.

“‘Hello, little one.’

“‘This thing talks!’ she thought, “and I am not little!”

“Then the monster (more commonly known as a human girl) picked her up. She struggled and bit, but the monster wouldn’t let go. The monster walked up to a house-nest and yelled, ‘Mom!’

“‘Why doesn’t this creature just keep walking? There’s nothing there!’ she thought. Then another, bigger monster walked up and everything went black.

“When she and the monsters returned to the house-nest, she regained full consciousness. And her instincts were saying ‘Get out!’ Being a smart cat, she listened to her instincts, but she couldn’t get out. She tried running through holes in walls (door walls), but just got hit in the face. She still didn’t understand. There was nothing there!

“Eventually she decided there was an invisible wall. She tried running through open doors and jumping out windows, but nothing worked. The monsters were too quick to shut the doors, and a metal screen was behind each window.

“She was forced to eat tasteless little pellets and drink icy pink liquid. Twice a day, every day, the monsters would pick her up, hold her mouth open and pour the liquid in it. When they poured the liquid in her mouth, she just couldn’t stop wailing and

struggling. It took forever to get the taste out of her mouth. She hid when she saw one of the monsters take out the pink liquid. Sometimes she hid for hours, just to be found again.

“She was growing fond of the monster who found her, though. One day, the monster said, ‘My name is Chelsey.’ Chelsey looked at her and said, ‘Your name is Ivy.’ Ivy liked it. Whenever she heard her name she ran to the monster who said it.

“Ivy liked the house-nest, but every day she hoped Chelsey would let her go. Ivy stopped trying to run away, but she still missed her home. Every night before Ivy fell asleep she thought of chipmunks, the river, the taste of fresh meat, the trees, the wind, and even the rain. She grew sulky, and Chelsey noticed.

“One day Chelsey decided to let Ivy go. It was a very hard decision. She kept thinking about Ivy sleeping on her bed, running into her arms, and Ivy’s purr. But in her heart she knew what she had to do.

“That day Chelsey picked Ivy up, carried her outside, and put her down. Ivy looked at her in a way that said ‘Bye’ and ran to her bush. She felt so free and happy. She was home!

“‘This is what I wanted, right?’ Ivy thought. ‘Then why do I feel so sad?’

“Chelsey smiled and went into her house. She knew it wasn’t really goodbye, and so did Ivy.

“Ivy always visited Chelsey, even if it was just mewing outside a window. The animal mothers no longer warned their children to ‘Beware the cat.’ What they said was ‘Watch out for Ivy.’”

“Alice, are you awake?”

Alice didn’t answer. She was asleep.

Alice’s mom sat in the room for awhile. She watched her daughter sleeping, and remembered her childhood pet, Ivy.

My Life As a Dog

*Belle is rescued from the streets by Animal Control. What happens next in **MY LIFE AS A DOG** by **Abby Holloway** will have you saying, “You lucky do.”*

It was a cold stormy night. I was walking down the street, and a guy came up to me, picked me up, and threw me into his car. I was scared. It was the same night when my family left me out in the cold. They didn't even feed me that day. My stomach was roaring like a tiger, because I was so hungry!

Hi! I'm Belle. I'm the Newman's family dog. See, I was adopted about three years ago. And it all started like this....

He was a tall man and he looked angry. So I minded my business. I was really scared. But then again I was happy that somebody cared about me. He gave me some food and water, and then he went on driving. But I was still so scared that I stood in the back corner of his truck and whined. He was going really fast, and even though I'm colorblind, I knew he was running red lights. Then he yelled at me with this big booming voice, because I was whining. I was scared. But I had to stop making noise. Like I said, he was going really fast, and I was watching each raindrop hit the window of his car, one by one by one. Except, you should think of the rain hitting the car really fast.

So he finally stopped and took me to this place where there were a lot of animals. There were dogs, cats, and birds, and I even saw a hamster. They all looked so lonely. I think the place I was at was called a “kennel”(sounds dirty).

Well, anyway, one of the workers took me into a back room. I was wearing a little dog tag, and they did some research on me. They found out where I lived, and called the little number on the tag that I was wearing. Nobody answered the phone. Later, that guy got impatient and left.

Well, after that they found out that I didn't have my recent shots. So they stuck these pointy shiny silver things in me (when I say things, I mean five of them!), and it really hurt! I was barking up a storm!

After they did that, they gave me dinner. It was gross. It had no flavor! And then they shoved me in a crate! I thought to myself, *How rude!* There were a bunch of other dogs in the kennel that were barking and barking. But I just sat there.

About three or four days later this man came and got me. (Yes, it was a different man. He was lot nicer and cleaner.) His name was Matt Newman. Matt put me into his car. And when I say he "put" me into his car, I mean that he did not shove me into the car, like that other man. He let me sit in the front, with him! He was a pretty fast driver! I felt like I had butterflies in my stomach!

A lady was walking by with another dog. Matt waved like he knew her or something!

Well, when we arrived at his home, he took me inside. The house was HUGE! This girl Marie came up to me and hugged me really tight! She was the girl that I saw walking the dog! Well, anyway, Marie walked me upstairs. From upstairs she showed me everybody's rooms. She showed me her room, Matt's room, and Suzie's room, which was the other dog. That was the dog I saw walking with Marie. Suzie was a golden retriever! "Hi," said Suzie. And of course I didn't want to be rude, so I said hi back.

Marie's dad, Matt, called Marie, so she left. Well, when she left, Suzie showed me my room. Suzie seemed really nice! As we were walking, Suzie said, "You're going to love it here."

“I have a feeling that I will,” I said back.

In my room there was a TV, a huge bath (with jets), a closet, and even my own bed. My bed was surrounded with stuffed animals! The color of my walls was white; and my bed was really comfortable.

When Marie came back, she turned on my TV. She started talking to me about what I wanted to wear. I knew what she meant when she pointed to my closet. Then she got an outfit out of my closet and laid it on my bed. The outfit was a blue t-shirt and black pants. There were also little slippers. Those slippers were the cutest things. They were pink with bunnies! They might be a little uncomfortable, but I didn’t really care!

Then she pulled back my shower curtain and Marie gave me a bath! And she positioned the TV where I could watch it while she gave me my bath! The movie that I was watching was *Lassie*. When I got out of the bath, she dried me off and blow-dried me. She combed me and gave me a treat. When she combed me I had so many tangles! I barked, and when I did, she was a little bit gentler. Marie then put that outfit on me. I smelt very good! The scent was peaches! Yummy!

I got on my bed, and it was surrounded with toys! On the TV she had the Disney Channel, and a different movie was on. It was *Shiloh*. She programmed it to be only dog-related movies! I thought that was thoughtful and nice! Suzie came in and sat with me, and we watched the rest of *Shiloh* together!

As I watched TV, this funny-looking guy came in and gave me dinner! The guy was a fat man. His name was Mark. He was wearing a black suit with a white tie. I think he is my “butler.” I think my dinner was ham with mashed potatoes and some kibbles and bits. Oh my gosh, was it good! It was better than that kennel food! I thought to myself, *I love this house*. Suzie ate with me.

While we were eating, Suzie explained who everybody was and how the household works. “Every morning, afternoon, and night, that guy Mark will come in and feed you. Now when you see somebody in your room who starts to clean, that’s Nina. She is our maid.” Suzie just kept going on about my new home.

That night like every night, Marie took off my outfit, brushed my fur, and took me for a walk. Sometimes she would train me. The thing she taught me every night was how to lie down, sit, and stay. Every time that I did something right, she gave me a treat! And every time Marie would do something with me, she would do it with Suzie, too! Marie was a hard-working girl!

It was 10:00 p.m. and it was Marie’s bedtime. I was pooped after playing games at the park (which was where we went on our walk) and from walking all over town! Before bed, Marie turned off my TV and said goodnight. She went to sleep, and I fell asleep.

From that time on I knew I was in heaven!

Odd Dog Out

In ODD DOG OUT by Emily Prosygniuk, dogs aren't very nice. In fact, in this all-dog world, dogs can be quite catty!

In an-all dog world, you find out that some days you're treated like the queen of the pack, and others you're treated like an unwanted stray. My name is Daisy and I am a Pembroke Welsh Corgi. I live at 47539 Bernard Street. I am in the middle of the social ladder at West Bridge Middle School. I am not hugely popular, but I am not a dork.

My best friend in the entire world is Jodie. She's a Golden Retriever. The most popular dogs are Sammy the Shih Tzu, Paris the Poodle, and Chi Chi the Chow Chow. I am dying to be like them. They are the best-groomed dogs in school. Their nails are always done, and they have the prettiest designer collars.

The cutest dog that all the girls are after is Bryan the Great Dane. He is so handsome, but he is so rude and way too full of himself. The word that's going around school is that Bryan and Chi Chi are going on a date tomorrow night. Everyone, including me, is hoping that the date will go horribly—even Sammy and Paris, who are supposedly Chi Chi's best friends.

Sammy and Paris made Chi Chi and Bryan's date a disaster. They paid the waitress at a really fancy restaurant to dump a bowl of water on Bryan's head and blame it all on Chi Chi. "Oh, I am so sorry," the waitress woofed. She pointed her paw at Chi Chi and woofed, "She paid me to do it." Everyone knows that dogs hate being wet.

Bryan snarled as loud as he could, "Why would you do that? This is the worst date I've ever been on. I am going to tell everyone at school how rude you are!"

As Chi Chi was leaving, she spotted Sammy and Paris laughing hysterically. Chi Chi then knew that her friends had set her up. "You are the worst friends ever. I never want to talk to you again!" She walked home alone, sobbing. Now you can see how mean the dog world can be.

The next day at school everyone was talking about Bryan breaking up with Chi Chi because of their horrible date. Chi Chi was telling everyone, "It wasn't my fault. Paris and Sammy paid the waitress to spill the water bowl on Bryan. Oh well, he deserved it anyway. He's a complete jerk."

Paris and Sammy tried to tell everyone their side of the story. "Chi Chi is so mean, we just wanted to get her back for treating us badly." Some of their classmates agreed, while others were in shock that they did such a rude and terrible thing.

Chi Chi stopped hanging out with Sammy and Paris, and she started to hang out with me! I felt like I was the coolest and most popular dog in the school. The next day I went over to Chi Chi's house. When I got over there, we decided to go to the mall.

While I was at the mall with Chi Chi, I saw Jodie. She was in the same boutique that I was in. There was one problem: Earlier in the week, Jodie had asked me if I was able to hang out at her house on Tuesday. I had told her I would be studying for a big test at the library. "Why are you here?" Jodie asked.

"I knew that you would be really mad if I was hanging out with Chi Chi instead of you," I replied.

"I would have been fine with it if you had just told me the truth instead of lying," Jodie said.

"I thought that you would be angry with me because I blew you off," I whimpered.

“Well, now I am really angry. I thought we were best friends. I guess not. Bye!”

I continued shopping with Chi Chi, but I was feeling really sad about the argument with Jodie. I found a really cool Frisbee and walked up to the register to buy it. Just then I remembered that I had spent all of my bones last weekend shopping with Jodie. So I told Chi Chi what had happened. I asked her, “Could you loan me a few bones?”

Chi Chi said, “No, I don’t have extra bones to give you. I am spending my bones on me. It is such a shame that you don’t have any bones left. Oh well, we can shop for me now. It’s not like that Frisbee would have matched your collar anyway.”

Once I heard that, I was appalled. I asked her why she said that, and she said, “Because it’s the truth. You’re broke. Too bad, so sad!” I was so mad at her. I left the mall and ran home.

The next day at school I told Jodie I was really, really sorry. Jodie said, “I don’t care. You lied to me. You told me you were studying when you were having fun with someone else. You broke a promise to never lie to me. When I saw you with her I wanted to cry. Friends don’t treat friends like that.” For the rest of the day I thought about what Jodie said. I felt awful, and so alone.

The following day I thought that I would try to apologize to Jodie again. “I sincerely am sorry and I will do anything to be your friend again,” I told her.

Jodie said, “No, I don’t want a liar as my friend.”

For the next two days I asked her the same thing, and she gave me the same reply: “No.”

I thought that I should ask just once more. “Will you please be my friend? I wish I had never gone to the mall with Chi Chi.”

Jodie said, “Sure, on one condition: You promise not to lie to me ever again.”

So I agreed to never lie again. In the end, everything turned out okay. Jodie and I are attending the Doggie University, and we are still best friends.

The Three Big Cows

You may think you have heard this fairy tale before. You have not. Tom Power takes some familiar elements and turns them on their heads in THE THREE BIG COWS.

There once was a group of pigs that became very lonely in their house. They were talking one night and decided that they should adopt some more pigs for helping around the house. They went to the orphanage and found what they thought were three cute baby pig brothers. At that time, cows did not have spots and pigs were colorblind, so these pigs thought the baby cows were pigs and adopted the three brothers. The cows' names were Hilbert, Wilbert, and Rob.

Hilbert, Wilbert and Rob lived a typical life in a pigsty. They learned to do typical pig things instead of typical cow things. While other cows were grazing along, eating grass, Wilbert, Hilbert and Rob were eating homemade slop and rolling in the mud. The years passed in their typical life and their parents were very proud of them.

Soon enough, the cows were all grown up, so they decided to have a talk with their parents. They said, "We would like to move out of the house and start a life of our own." The cows and their parents had a long talk and finally decided the kids could move out as long as they looked after each other. They agreed and set off looking for where they would build their house.

Hilbert, Wilbert, and Rob found a place after hours of walking. It was a big open field, and they all thought it would be a good place to live. The brothers started to build their house in the middle of the field. After they finished the house, they decided to make it a farm.

Hilbert and Wilbert went to the store to buy some seeds. Rob was walking around putting some finishing touches on the house, and he saw out his window a posse of mice. These weren't ordinary mice. These mice were in leather jackets, and their teeth were so sharp he thought they could bite his leg off in one bite. He ran around the house locking all the doors.

The mice banged on the door and said, "We will chomp and chew your house down."

Rob at the time was running around the house thinking of what would happen if the mice got into the house. He thought, "Will Hilbert and Wilbert be mad at me for not protecting the house against the posse of mice? Or will I be a one-legged cow? What will I do? What will I do?"

Again, Rob heard, "We will chomp and chew your house down" from the mice, but in a much more threatening tone. Now Rob was terrified, and he was curled up on his couch with his feet up off the floor, sweat all over his face and his eyes wide open.

Then again he heard, "We will chomp and chew your house down!" By this time, Rob was totally exasperated and fainted to the ground.

Meanwhile, one of the mice said he saw two cows coming and thought they lived at that very house.

A couple of minutes later, Rob woke up to laughing on the porch. He knew the evil mice would not be laughing, so he looked out on the porch and he saw a very strange sight. There were Wilbert and Hilbert sitting on the mice! Rob was glad to see Wilbert and Hilbert, and even gladder to see them sitting on the mice.

Rob never asked Wilbert and Hilbert how or why they ended up sitting on the mice. He and his brothers were safe and sound, and that is all that really mattered. After all that happened, they went outside and planted the seeds that Hilbert and Wilbert bought, and of course, lived happily ever after.

REALITY CHECK

The Difficulties That Sixth-graders Face

*Entering middle school can be like entering a new society. In **THE DIFFICULTIES THAT SIXTH-GRADERS FACE**, Lily Indenbaum illuminates some of the pitfalls that come with such culture shock.*

The difficulties that sixth-graders face are bullies, combinations, being tardy, detentions, grades, peer pressure, clothes and the way they look. Boys and girls face these problems. Even boys worry about looking good and what they wear. I don't have bully problems, but that doesn't mean everyone doesn't. The worst things are cliques. I am going to tell you about two girls that face these problems.

Once there were two girls named Nicole and Emily. These girls were both sixth-graders at the time. Nicole was the sporty, good-grades, never-tardy kind of girl. Nicole wasn't a popular girl, but she wasn't a loser, or geek. Emily, on the other hand, was the girl that was the popular one, and everyone loved her. She got not-so-good grades, though, was tardy a lot, and hung out with the wrong people.

Nicole and Emily used to be best friends. They would shop together, they did homework together, and they did everything together! But one day, Emily started making poor choices. Emily started hanging around with the bad girls, or should I say naughty girls. When Emily started to hang out with them, they pressured her into drinking.

Nicole didn't want to be Emily's friend anymore because she was scared that Emily was going to pull her into drinking, and she didn't want to waste her life on something that was not important. Nicole went up to Emily the next day and said, "Why are you doing this?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Emily.

"Why are you hanging out with those girls?"

"Those girls happen to be my friends!" said Emily angrily.

"It doesn't seem like it. They are pressuring you into drinking! I wouldn't want to be popular if I had to start drinking! I wouldn't want to waste my life on something that isn't going to be important when I grow older! They are bullies!"

This made Emily realize that this was all true. Emily was beginning to feel more tired and wasn't remembering things as well as she used to. She was late to class every day. She couldn't remember her combination.

Finally one day, Emily went up to her new friends and said, "I don't want to be your friend anymore. I don't want to keep drinking and keep being late to classes. I want to do well in school, not waste my time drinking and not being able to remember things."

The next day Emily went up to Nicole to ask her if she could be her friend again. Nicole said, "I don't know."

"What?" Emily said.

"I don't know if you will stop drinking. Will you just keep doing it, and can I trust you not to?"

"I will tell you it will be hard, but I will do anything to be your friend!" said Emily.

"Okay, you can be my friend again!" said Nicole. "And you aren't going to be in that clique any more, right?"

"Of course not!" Emily said.

This story is not what happens in general in sixth grade, but what happened to these two girls. This is an example of the difficulties sixth-graders face.

Freezing Tantrum

Even the best of friends get into fights. How they end, though, is usually more important than how they began. Sarah Schneider knows this well after her experience in FREEZING TANTRUM.

I was running now. Even though my heart went at a hundred miles an hour, I ran faster and faster. I thought, “Why am I doing this?” Just yesterday I had been walking up this very hill....

When I rang the doorbell, Esther’s mom answered. She welcomed me: “Hi!”

I replied to her greeting and asked, “Where’s Esther?”

Her mom answered, smiling, “You know that you could always find her yourself since you’re almost family.”

I found Esther in the living room. I told her, “Let’s go upstairs. I want to bring my backpack into your room so that we can play.”

Esther answered mockingly, “Hi, Sarah. You know that you don’t have to ask if you’re allowed to go upstairs.”

When we got to her bedroom I unpacked, and we played with Esther’s pet rat until Esther’s annoying, eleven-year-old brother Peter called us for dinner.

After dinner, we got ready for bed, and at nine o’clock we crawled under our blankets. Since we giggled and told stories until 1:00 a.m., I couldn’t believe it was already morning when we woke up at 6:30.

After breakfast Esther and I went out into the unusual cold November weather. It was so cold that we wore gloves, scarves,

and hats. When we got outside, we threw snowballs at each other.

After a while, my hat fell on the ground because Esther had hit it with a snowball. She took the hat and threw it as far away from me as she could. Esther was no perfect thrower, but she managed to throw the hat out of my reach. I tried to catch it anyway, but both of my gloves got caught on a branch, and Esther caught those, too. I played a little more trying to get my hat and gloves back but soon gave up, because I was cold and tired (I think Esther was, too).

I asked, “Can I please have my stuff back? I’m cold.” When Esther didn’t respond and ran farther away, I sat down on the swings and shouted again, “Can I please have my stuff back!”

Esther shouted teasingly, “Get them if you can!” and waved the gloves above her head.

I was so exhausted that I didn’t know what I was doing. I took off my coat, threw it at Esther and ran toward the street. My friend tried to run after me but soon realized that it wouldn’t help either of us to run away without her parents knowing.

I was running now. Even though my heart went at a hundred miles an hour, I ran faster and faster.

When I was about halfway home, I heard a car coming up behind me. As I turned around, I saw that it was Esther’s mother. First, I didn’t know what to do, so I just went on running, but when my friend’s mom stopped right next to me and opened the door, I crawled in the car and buckled the seat belt.

She asked me, “What happened?”

I told her how Esther had taken my hat and gloves and how I had gotten angry and run away. I also admitted that I had been wrong to run away, but that Esther shouldn’t have taken my things, either.

She agreed, and when we got to their house, Esther, her mom, and I had a small conversation. At the beginning, Esther

was stubborn and wouldn't talk, but I told her that I was sorry about running away and what I thought about her actions, so she let go. "I think that you were too serious about the whole thing," she told us, "but I understand the fact that you were cold, and I should have given back your hat and gloves. I'm really sorry." I accepted her apology, and we talked a little longer.

After a while Esther's mom stood up and said, "Now, that's settled. I'll go downstairs and make some lunch."

After her mom had gone, Esther went to get her rat and we played hide and seek, as best friends.

From Here to Nowhere

*In this true story, **Mona Ruzicka** takes us along as she leaves Germany behind in **FROM HERE TO NOWHERE**.*

- For Leonie Kaenders -

With a loud, deafening noise, the plane took off.

Under the plane, the country I had lived in for ten years, that all my friends and family had lived in, and that I really loved got smaller and smaller until I couldn't see it anymore. I knew I was not going to see this country again till winter break. This country is Germany.

"Mona!" That was my mom. Of course she called in German.

"Chew gum until the pressure gets less," my dad said from across the aisle. I followed his direction. He always reminded me of that, although we had already flown in a plane about seven times!

I could feel the stinging pressure in my ears, so I quickly put one piece of yummy green-pink watermelon-apple gum in my mouth. It felt kind of slimy since it was warm, but the pressure stopped (a little).

"We have reached our altitude now. You may take off your seatbelt. For your safety, fasten your seatbelt when you're seated. As a reminder: No smoking or electronic devices are allowed in the airplane. Thank you." The electronic voice of the stewardess faded away. I hated this voice. It always reminded you of something or told you to do something.

Oh! There was the stewardess with drinks.

I can't understand how people drink tomato juice with salt and pepper!

"And what do you want, young lady?"

I didn't realize the stewardess had come to my seat. "Uhm...Coke, please. Just a little ice and lemon slice, please." Oh, I liked to order everything like in a very fancy restaurant. There was my Coke. Luxurious! I took a sip of my Coke. Adorable.

I was three-quarters sad and one-quarter excited. My family had to move to a country I didn't know where I didn't understand the language. I wouldn't be able to see my friends for a loooooonnnng time. But I thought I would be able to find new friends and learn the language.

But it did not turn out so easy.

It was loud in the airport in the new country. The airport almost exploded with so many people waiting, checking in, eating, talking, or just hanging around in the hot, stinky air. And I was in the middle of all this, not understanding anything! Imagine that!

I felt kind of homesick already. Tired and exhausted, I let my mom and dad pull my brother Tim and me through all those people. In Germany it was already 11:00 p.m. But here it was five p.m. Weird country.

So many people were overweight. I looked, amazed, at a man that was about my dad's height and three times my width! Think about your width three times!

When we finally (thank god!) got out of the airport, I could understand the man's extra weight. There was a McDonald's to the left of me, a Burger King in front of me, and a little further away was a KFC. In Germany we had to drive about 15 minutes to reach our next McDonald's or Burger King.

A woman with way too much ugly red, pink, and blue makeup (it looked like somebody had punched her in the face) led us to our car. She looked like Barbie!

Our car was another surprise. It was just...HUGE! Everything was unusually large for me. It even had a TV, seat warming, and a navigation system! I'd never seen anything like that in my life.

After a long, melting hot car ride, my family and I arrived at our apartment (our house wasn't ready yet). There was a pool, a tennis court, a very dusty road, and a lot of brown-grayish apartments.

Since we were kind of dizzy and bored, my mom decided to take a walk to the pool. It was empty and looked very dirty. Dead insects like flies and bees were lying on the bottom of the pool. It was disgusting.

On the front gate was a sign with the weird language on it. My mom told Tim and me it said, "No children under 13 years allowed in the pool without a parent/guardian." Wow, those people are overcautious! We can't even go into a simple pool without a parent. Crazy!

After we were home, my thoughts went around Germany again. I missed my home in the peaceful little village Steinenbronn with all my friends so much. And I couldn't email my friends. The laptop of my dad didn't work. Darn it! And I had sooo much to tell my friends!

After a little while of thinking, my stomach told me to stop and see what as for dinner.

That night I had to share a queen-sized bed with my brother. He always lies across the whole bed and me, and I'm almost lying on the floor. And I can tell you, to lie on a dirty, hard carpet is not the best thing to do if you are trying to sleep.

That's how my first day ended in the new country: not really well.

“Mona! Wake up!” My first day in the new school started not very nicely. I was still kind of dizzy.

After a while I forced myself out of the bed and changed. After that I was awake.

Since it was my first day of fifth grade, my mom and dad drove my brother and me to the new school. We had already met the principal because when we signed up for school, we were introduced to her.

I knew a little tiny bit of the new language already because we had to do some stupid, boring exercises from a book while we were on break. But it was still not enough to understand a conversation.

After we brought Tim to his class (an ugly, white room), it was my turn to go to class. My classroom was even more ugly (white, small, windowless). I think my teacher welcomed me, but I wasn't sure.

After my parents left, I felt lonely and confused. All the kids seemed to know each other!

I sat down at a table that had a little tag saying “Mona.”

First, we had to do some stupid kindergarten activities (I don't know what age the teacher thought we were!). To me those activities seemed boring and really nonsensical. But I guessed that's what you do on the first day of school in this weird country.

After an hour I already felt overwhelmed and hopeless. Nobody tried to help me understand what they were saying, or even talked to me! Only the teacher tried to help me, and he acted like I was a baby, not knowing how to do anything.

After this first day of school, it became clear to me that I had to learn a lot more than I had thought. Just everything was different!

It was tough. Most kids just ignored me.

I still missed my home and friends in Germany.

Today, one and one-half years later, I'm writing this. IT IS TRUE. The story is my history.

Today I know most of the words I need to know in order to read, talk, and write. And I have friends—not a lot, but still some. Three of them are German, three are French, and only two are from the “weird” country. It did take a long time, about six months, for me to really call them friends. Most people still just ignore me.

It was and still is very difficult for me to change countries, continents, and cultures, and to go away from my home and everything I'm used to. But I handle it, even though some things are still not normal for me.

I look forward to going back to Germany. But I want to stay the three years I have to. It is a great experience I will never forget.

The overcautious people are Americans, the weird language is English, and the new country is America, Michigan, Bloomfield, Raven Road.

The Greatest of All Time

Based on a True Story

*How many among us get to meet our childhood idol? In **THE GREATEST OF ALL TIME** by **Arielle Towns**, a young man not only meets but also forms a friendship with his idol, Muhammad Ali.*

Like most young boys growing up in the 1960's and 1970's, one young boy had a dream of meeting his idol, Muhammad Ali. And that man was my father.

Muhammad Ali was a world-famous boxer who won the gold medal in the 1960 Olympics. He went on to become the greatest boxer in history and one of the most recognized and famous persons in the world.

In the 1970's Muhammad Ali lived in the Hyde Park section of Chicago, and my father and his family lived a few blocks away from him. It was pretty common for my father to see Muhammad Ali in his driveway while he was walking to school. Sometimes he had his exotic parrot on his shoulder, or my dad saw him driving through the neighborhood.

My dad also has vivid memories of Muhammad driving his car that had "The Greatest" painted on the driver's side of the car.

Later while in college, my father worked for an insurance agency in Chicago. In insurance industry circles it was widely discussed by African American insurance agents that Muhammad Ali was the client that everybody wanted to land, but nobody could. During this time Muhammad's career was being tightly managed by

Herbert Muhammad, one of the sons of Nation of Islam founder Elijah Muhammad.

One day, my dad stopped by Muhammad's house before he went to his job to see if he could talk to anybody about his insurance. My dad arrived at Muhammad's mansion early that morning and the gates were open. He parked and walked up to Muhammad Ali's front door and rang the doorbell. To his surprise the door opened and there stood Muhammad Ali! Wow, "The Greatest," "The Champ," my father's idol, was standing right in front of him. He introduced himself and Muhammad stopped him from talking and asked him to come in.

Then Muhammad asked him if he wanted to see the rest of his house. That day my father spent a very long time with his idol Muhammad Ali.

Of course the next day at my dad's office he told everyone about his experience with Muhammad Ali. People thought that he was sort of a risk-taker because very early on he showed signs of being a risk-taker.

My dad started stopping by Muhammad's house, finding Muhammad there most of the time, and got to spend a lot of time with him.

Over the next few weeks, my dad made a really good new friend, Muhammad Ali. Eventually, my dad helped Muhammad Ali purchase ten million dollars of life insurance and other financial products that Muhammad Ali needed.

Muhammad Ali in the 1970's was the biggest sports figure of the time and the most popular man on the planet. He was also one of the most generous men my dad had ever met. My dad witnessed Muhammad giving away cars, cash and homes. Muhammad Ali also talked to my father about everything from animals and cars to his religious beliefs.

Over the next year or so Muhammad Ali boxed for his heavyweight title and lost to Leon Spinks in February, 1978. He then re-earned his title by beating Spinks in September of that same year.

Later, Muhammad announced his first retirement from boxing after he won the title back, shocking not only the world, but everyone around him. Soon after, Muhammad was co-starring in a mini-television series called *Freedom Road*. Muhammad invited my dad to come visit him. It was my dad's first time seeing a movie being made. My dad spent almost one month on the movie set of *Freedom Road* with Muhammad Ali.

Later, after my dad got back to Chicago, he got a call from someone he met working on *Freedom Road* who wanted to know if my dad wanted to give the movie business a try, and he did. The movie turned out to be *The Blues Brothers*.

After this experience for my dad while he was working on *The Blues Brothers*, he thought to himself, "Wouldn't it be a cool idea to make a documentary about Muhammad's comeback from retirement?" Muhammad Ali had announced to the world and my dad personally that he was going to fight his former sparring partner Larry Holmes in late 1980.

Muhammad thought the documentary was a good idea, too.

When my dad and his friends started working on this project, they talked with David and Albert Maysles who are two famous documentary filmmakers who agreed to help my dad make his movie. My dad made his documentary while Muhammad trained for his fight.

My dad went to Las Vegas to see the fight, but when he got there, he didn't want to go watch. He didn't want to go watch because he thought Muhammad was going to lose. And even though Ali trained hard, he lost in his comeback fight with Larry Holmes because, as my dad says it, "Muhammad Ali could not beat time. Ali was a little too old, and Larry Holmes was too young for him."

A little time after the fight, my dad got to go see Muhammad in his hotel room. When my dad got into the room, Muhammad was lying in the dark.

When Muhammad realized that it was my dad, he said to him, “Boy, I just couldn’t move my arms.” They talked for a few moments, and my dad showed him the finished documentary film titled *Muhammad and Larry*, and he was blown away. After my dad and Muhammad’s time talking with each other, my dad stood in the hall afterwards, and he started to cry because he knew that life for him and for Ali was going to be different.

Ali went on to fight again, and my dad’s movie career was on the fast track. My dad had become a motion picture assistant director, and then he became a director, which he still is to this day.

Over the years, Ali and my dad didn’t see much of each other, but they have occasionally stayed in touch with each other.

Most of my dad’s memories and pictures that he had from the time with Muhammad have been lost in his cross-country moving. Probably my dad’s favorite souvenir that Muhammad gave him in an early time in their friendship was a jump-rope called the “Rope a Dope” because it was a gift that Muhammad gave him during one of his early visits to his house.

The “Rope a Dope” is in a glass case that is displayed in my house in the family room.

My dad’s life was forever changed by his friendship with Muhammad Ali. He would have never ended up in the career that he has been in for over 25 years, and he would have never seen the world and met so many interesting people, had it not been for his experience with Ali.

He is forever grateful for what Muhammad Ali gave him. History has shown that Ali has had a positive effect on many people and has touched the lives of millions of people.

No matter how many fights Ali lost, he would still be the “greatest” to my dad, just not in the ring. I know that my father is bigger in spirit and inspired because of his life years ago with Muhammad Ali.

Just Try Hard

*Trying is just as important as succeeding: Almost no one achieves the second without the first. In the true story **JUST TRY HARD** by Autumn Sehy, meet a competitor who understands the definition of trying.*

A rather large woman with bright clothing on stood in front of the line of girls. She looked like she hadn't brushed her hair in days. Her hand went into the air, and I saw the gun. A *bang!* rang through the sky. The race was on.

My brother Nick and I were in Orlando to run the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) nationals meet at the Disney Wide World of Sports area. Just a couple of minutes earlier, all of the girls had gone through a long line. The line was to organize the runners on the starting line. Afterwards all of the girls in my age group got to the starting line. Nick was probably watching me start from an area where the families and friends could see the runners.

This race was in December, but it was about 90 degrees Fahrenheit (even for Florida this weather was odd). The race was a 3k, or 1.8 miles.

My heart was hurting, and my legs were full of sweat. I was in fifth place, and we were going around four ball fields. It seemed that the sun wouldn't move from right above the runners' heads. This was the first part of the race. Soon I knew that if I looked around a corner I would see the one-mile mark.

The dark brown trees of a forest were approaching. I was dreading going into the forest. The forest started right after the one-mile mark. In the forest there were no people to cheer all of the runners on. People that cheer help most bodies keep a pace and run well. When a runner is running by herself, it is hard to keep a pace.

We were finished with the first mile. I was starting to hyperventilate. Up ahead I could see trees, some short like mice and some tall like giraffes. I was having trouble running into the forest because I am used to having a hill lead me into there.

I am used to running on hills, and am what you would call a hill runner. Hill runners use hills to their advantage. On a hill, a normal person goes up slowly but down quickly. A hill runner, though, goes at a medium pace up the hill and flies down it. This championship course was called a flat course. On a flat course, hill runners have trouble because of not having the extra speed of a hill.

I was in the forest when my body shut down on me. I found it hard to keep my pace, and was passed four times. This led to my being in ninth place. "Soon," I thought, "soon I will be done with this race."

About two minutes after my thought, I was out of the forest. I started speeding up because I knew that there was about half of a mile left of the race. By now I was using my legs as my brain, and my stomach as my subconscious. (In running, your brain and subconscious sort of fight. Your subconscious tells you to stop, and your brain tells you to keep going.) I was still in ninth place, and was trying to stay in line with the eighth-place person.

I saw the open metal gate up ahead. There were only four hundred yards left. I was tied with the eighth-place person, and wasn't about to give up. My body was hurting badly. It was as if a car had run over my stomach. There were now

only about two hundred yards left. I could see hundreds of parents running to the finish line screaming whatever their kids' name were. My ears drowned out all sound because there was so much of it. I was still tied with the eighth-place person, and then I passed her, but she passed me back. Then we crossed the finish line.

My parents congratulated me for getting ninth place in the country. We had to hurry if we wanted to make it to Nick's race, so they said that they would talk to me later. I speed-walked to the starting line whispering, "Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow."

The odd lady again raised her gun, and shot it into the air. I didn't see it, though, because I was lying on the ground trying to take a nap. I found out that it is difficult to take a nap right after you run 1.8 miles.

I got back up in time to see my brother run past my parents and me. My mom told me that I could stay where I was, and that they would get me at the end of Nick's race. I did just that except, when I walked to the finish line to see Nick finish the race. He got eleventh place.

Our races show our courage to do our best. Running is more than just a physical process. Running is 25 percent mental, 25 percent guts, and 50 percent physical. If you only think that running is physical, you don't do your best. Think when you do something and you will do it better.

The Lifelong Lesson

*Every now and then, something happens that shakes things up and helps us see the world around us as if with new eyes. This is how what is truly important comes into focus in **THE LIFELONG LESSON**, by Sarah Szekely.*

“Do you think she’s doing a grass job?” I asked as I watched the car speed up.

“I don’t think so,” Lauren replied as if she were scared.

ERRRR!! BOOM!!!

Ok, I know no one knows what’s going on, so I’ll start from the beginning.

Wham! “I hate you, Lauren! You’re the worst sister ever!” I yelled with anger in my eyes after I slammed the door with such force I almost knocked it off its hinges.

“Well, you’re not such a walk on the beach, either!” yelled Lauren, also with anger in her eyes, but with more intensity. We had just had a fight about how she always yells at me for no reason.

Five minutes later Lauren knocked on my door. “Listen, I know we just had a fight, and I really would rather not, but I can’t leave you by yourself, so you have to come with me to Shardea’s house.”

“No!” I yelled from across the room with the door still closed, because I absolutely did not like this friend of hers at all.

“Fine. On the way back, I’ll buy you your favorite candy bar to make you move,” she said with a voice that let me know she really didn’t want to.

“Fine,” I yelled, opening the door and giving myself up.

We walked out of the house and walked along the sidewalk staring at the blossoms on the sunlit branches of the trees before I started whining, “Why are we going there?”

“I need to pick up something,” she said.

“Fine.”

We walked until we got to a big, white Victorian house with blue shutters and a red door with a pond in front. We walked on the porch and knocked on the door. Shardea’s brother Shaton answered the door.

“Shardea is not here right now, but you can wait for her here.”

We had been waiting for about five minutes when a black 1994 Ford station wagon skidded down the street, and rapidly made its way up to the curb in front of the house. At that moment, I knew what was happening, and it was bad. I also knew that Lauren and Shaton knew it, too, but no one could move. It was like our feet were glued to the floorboards. Lauren, Shaton, and I watched as the car sped up, and up, and up.

The moment happened as if it was occurring in slow motion before our eyes. The wheels were spinning as fast as they could, but it was as if they were spinning as slow as they could. I could smell the car exhaust in the air tickling my nose, but I couldn’t bring myself to sneeze.

Then suddenly the moment sped up again. The car was now in front of the pond and slammed right into the front of the window as the water and some seaweed that the tire kicked out landed on Lauren’s shirt. We jumped out of the way onto the grass just in time. Shaton, who was the first one to get a grip, ran inside and called 9-1-1.

In about ten minutes, the police and ambulance arrived. I was still on the grass getting my head together and watching it happen. The police appeared at the door of the car and asked the woman inside a few questions.

The ambulance man picked the woman up, and then put her on a large, bright white gurney and put the woman in the truck. Meanwhile, Lauren was on the phone with Mom telling her all about it. Shaton was just getting off the phone with the towing company.

That's when I realized it. When I saw my sister and myself almost die, I realized that family is sweeter than anything else. I learned a lesson that day, and I will always remember it.

Ten minutes later the tow truck came and hauled the car away, and we were allowed to go home. I told Lauren that I didn't want to go to the store and just wanted to go home.

We were almost home when I decided to tell Lauren what I learned. "Lauren, today when we almost died, I learned that family is the most important thing in the world."

"I know, so did I."

My Christmas

*Reality has a way of tempering one's expectations. When circumstances fail to match the image she has constructed, **Elizabeth Foulston** tries to find the right angle from which to view her holiday in **MY CHRISTMAS**.*

Everyone expects to have the perfect Christmas, but it might not happen. My family and I had just flown in from Michigan to London, England. Boy, what a great Christmas it was going to be.

The next morning we were on our way to go shopping, when we saw our family friends Jon, Helen and Jamie. They decided to join us. We were having such a great time that I got distracted and forgot to buy a present for my sister, Samantha. While we were on the train home, we agreed to go to Christmas Eve services together.

When we got to my Papa's house, we found out my uncle had caught four pheasants in the local fields for us all to dine on. My grandmother, Anna, was preparing an apple pie for all of us to eat. It was going to be the best.

Anna put the pie in the oven, set the timer and went off to sit down and read. Ten minutes later we heard this *bang*. My Papa jumped up and went into the kitchen. He found it was filled with a wonderful smell but was puzzled because the oven door was open. He looked up at the ceiling and saw there were pieces of apple and piecrust all dripping off it and the walls. The kitchen was a mess, the cupboards were covered in sticky,

apple-sugary goo, and the pie tin was in the middle of the floor. The whole scene was total carnage.

Anna hobbled up behind me and I heard her gasp. Mom told her not to worry, but to just go sit down and we'd take care of it. We all joined in to clean up the mess. Nobody said very much. I knew Samantha was probably disappointed, and since Mom doesn't really like pie, I knew she didn't care, but I was really upset. In fact, I didn't want to admit, it but I was feeling pretty angry. The only time I get pie is when I come here, and now it was spread all over the kitchen walls, instead of piled up on my plate. This was not a great beginning to my perfect Christmas.

I stood there staring at the last pieces of pie dripping down the oven door as my mom cleaned them off. I just couldn't believe what a disaster this was. My mom was so calm and had the nerve to try and tell me that it would be okay. I wanted to scream at her that it didn't seem okay to me, but instead I just stood there quietly steaming.

She finished and went back in the lounge to read. Meanwhile, my dad and uncle were outside gutting and preparing the pheasants. When they finished, they left them on the outside picnic table and went in to watch the rugby game. While everyone was distracted by the game, the dogs snuck outside to have a nose around.

My mom asked where Tetley and Renny had gone, and my grandma went out to have a look. All of a sudden we heard her scream and shout. We ran out to find the pheasant carcasses all scattered on the ground and the dogs looking very sheepish.

When my dad and uncle had first heard my grandmother scream, they thought that something was seriously wrong with her. They were actually relieved when they realized she was okay, so when they came back into the house and told us what had happened, they burst into laughter and started making jokes about it. I think my mom and sister were a little bit

disappointed, but I was beginning to wonder if there was going to be anything good this Christmas.

Once everyone recovered we realized: What were we going to eat? Immediately my Dad suggested Indian take-out. We all groaned because that's always his first choice. Anna wanted fish and chips because she doesn't really like Indian food. We tried to bribe her but it didn't work, so we finally gave in and all ate fish and chips for dinner.

Afterwards we met our friends for Christmas Eve services at church. While I was sitting there, I was thinking, "I hope I get that new iPod I want for Christmas. So far my Christmas has been a disaster, but it could turn around and be great if I get the things I want."

When we got back to Papa and Anna's, I was so excited because I couldn't wait to open one of my gifts. It's a family tradition that everyone gets to pick one gift to open Christmas Eve. As I looked at the gifts, I was thinking, "For the past two years, I've always opened up Uncle Jack's gift on Christmas Eve. This year should I keep the Uncle Jack tradition up, or should I pick someone else's? He usually gives me a gift that's not my taste or is for a much younger kid." After thinking about it, I decided I'd rather open up a crummy gift now and not have it ruin my Christmas day. When I opened his gift, it turned out to be chocolates, a dog toy, a funny-looking, dusty bunny on skis, a yarn doll and a rubber ducky with my name on it. I was disappointed but not surprised, as he doesn't have a clue about what we would like.

I sat there thinking that so far ALMOST everything had been a disaster. First I forgot to buy my sister a present, and then the pie exploded, which was very disappointing. Next the dogs ate the pheasants that I was looking forward to eating, and now, Uncle Jack's gifts to Samantha and me were weird. What other bad things could happen? I hoped that getting the gifts I wanted tomorrow would make my Christmas day better.

The next morning I ran downstairs to see all the gifts under the Christmas tree. I got excited when I saw a box with my name on it that looked the right size and shape to hold the iPod I had asked for. I tried to be patient while everyone opened some of his or her gifts. The more I looked at that box, the more I was sure it was an iPod.

It was finally my turn to open a gift. As I reached for THE box, Mom said, “No, open this one from Papa and Anna.” As I opened it I couldn’t believe it was another doll. Don’t they realize I’m a little too old for dolls? I still tried to be thankful, but I think my Papa could kind of tell that I wasn’t very excited.

Finally it was my turn to open THE box, and I ripped the paper off as fast as I could. I was a little puzzled to see the Macy’s sign on the box. I opened up the box and saw a watch. I thought I was going to burst into tears. How could they possibly think I wanted a watch? I felt horrible. I had to hide my tears from everyone. When everyone asked me if I liked it, I had to smile and say I loved it.

Later, my grandmother asked if I would like to make some clothes for the doll. She seems to always know how to distract me when I’m upset. I agreed because I always have fun sewing with her. She pulled out the gigantic ragbag she keeps in the cupboard. It’s filled with material scraps, and we started to make a dress for my doll and her old porcelain-head dolls.

As I sat there with her, I started thinking about how much I’ve always enjoyed doing this with her. I started realizing that what makes Christmas important is being with your family and friends. I saw that even though I thought getting an iPod was so important to me, years from now my iPod would be dead. However, I will always have the wonderful memories of the special times I have spent with my grandparents.

My Vacation in Peru

Arianna Commins is an international traveler with family in Peru. In this true story, she shares her insights into family, culture, travel, and her fascinating second country in MY VACATION IN PERU.

It's funny how certain things happen. There are things that at first you don't know if you'll like, yet in the end you feel as if you can't part from them. That is how I felt when my time in Peru was up, and it was time to go home to Michigan. I didn't want to leave my family and their kindness I learned to know. I didn't want to leave the spicy atmosphere of the city streets. And last, I didn't want to leave the cool but salty ocean I learned to love. Don't get me wrong; I totally missed my family back in Michigan. Yet when I was away from Michigan or from Peru, I felt as if something were missing.

OK, so let me give you the lowdown. My aunt and uncle from Peru were staying here in Michigan to have their first baby. My aunt Maria Julia and my uncle Carlos were staying at our house as guests to have their first baby boy (Joaquin) in the United States. You are probably asking why Joaquin was born here instead of Peru, right? He was born here for two reasons: One, his parents wanted Joaquin to have American citizenship, and two, Joaquin was born here because that's how this story starts, period.

After Joaquin was born, my aunt and uncle planned to spend another month visiting with the family here in Michigan. Once that month had passed, I was also done with school and was ready for my summer vacation. The catch was I was going to spend half of my vacation in Peru. My mom and I had talked about this possible

trip to Peru months before. I was to go with my aunt and uncle and their newborn baby back to Peru. I knew what was to come, but I still didn't know if I liked the idea, even if I agreed to it.

I was at the Detroit airport with my aunt, uncle, mom and Joaquin. The airport was crowded, just like my head with so many thoughts shuffling around. I couldn't think straight. A shot of dizziness made me want to scream. I felt claustrophobic for the first time in my life. I mean, I was about to go to Peru with my aunt and uncle that I hadn't seen for five years. I would spend two weeks in a country and with a family that speaks only Spanish. I was really overwhelmed. "Calm down!" I said to myself. "Everything will be OK," I thought. I was looking on the bright side, but now I was talking like a shrink, to myself!

I looked at my mom. She strode so confidently that I had to catch up.

"Flight to Lima, Peru now boarding," called the attendant. That was all that was said besides our goodbyes before we boarded the flight. I was the last to get on because a part of me couldn't leave.

During the flight to Lima I was trying to imagine how things would be there: the buildings, houses, streets, the people and my extended family I had yet to meet in Peru. At the same time I was already missing Michigan, my room, my pets and all of "my things" I would not have during the next five weeks I would be away from home. To my surprise, I must have fallen asleep in between all of these thoughts running through my mind because soon enough I woke up to Joaquin's cry. My uncle Carlos said I had slept better than Joaquin through some of the bumps in between Miami and Lima. I had flown to Peru before I was actually born and quite a few times after that, so I guess I'm a "natural born" air traveler. However I was very excited to go back to Peru this time. It had been so long ago since the last time I had been there that my most recent memories of Peru were very fuzzy.

It was very late when the flight attendant said we would be

descending soon. I looked down and far below me was the beautiful city of Lima. From the plane Lima looked like a Christmas tree decorated with lights of all sorts.

The plane landed and all the passengers evacuated. I was completely exhausted as we were pushed and shoved, as passengers were anxious to exit the plane. Everyone stood in line, and we slowly advanced to go by a booth where you were required to show your passport. My uncle, aunt, Joaquin and I went through almost unnoticed, and then we advanced to get our luggage. After miraculously collecting all of our belongings (I'm still surprised everyone got their luggage, because that airport looked like a complete nightmare!), we were on our way to my grandparents' house. My grandparents and my aunt Irma (my grandmother's sister) live together. Their house was built over a pharmacy they once owned, but now they lease the property to other people who also run a pharmacy business in the first floor of the building.

All of my emotions had gone away as the doorbell echoed upstairs. There was silence, then footsteps, and soon after the door opened. My grandma was very happy, as you are when you haven't seen someone for some time. She gestured all of us to come in, but my aunt and uncle had to catch some rest after the long trip from Michigan, or at least Joaquin did! That was such a long trip for such a young and little one like him that I could completely relate. The three of them continued on the taxi ride and did not come into my grandparents' house, as they still had a ways to go until they got to their home.

In a selfish way I wanted them to stay a while with me in my grandparents' home, but I'm sure my aunt and uncle wanted to rest in their own beds after being away from home for a few months in Michigan. "Oh, well, here I go," I thought. This is definitely the beginning of my stay in Peru "on my own"; no more English or translations by my aunt and uncle.

My grandparents' house was kind of dark and shadowy. For a

moment I felt isolated and alone. Suddenly I heard a distinct bark of a dog. Footsteps like the pitter-patter of raindrops on the window were the sound of Pirula's paws on the wood floor. Pirula was my aunt Irma's puppy, and her bark was worse than her bite.

Dora is my grandmother's name, and my grandfather's name is Mariano. I call my grandmother by her first name, but I just call my granddad "Abuelito," which means "grandpa" in Spanish. They showed me my room and I quickly dropped my belongings and came out to the living room. Dora, Abuelito, and Aunt Irma smiled at me the whole time and tried to say some words in English, but most of all they smiled, hugged and kissed me a hundred times, I think. I smiled back, but did not know what to say. I soon realized I had used all of my Spanish words and I was out of additional vocabulary to use with them, so there was a lot of smiling back and forth and some nervous laughs. Soon Dora signaled somehow that it was late, so we all went to sleep, yet I knew I was not going to be able to do so.

I sat on my bed, which was blanketed with pillows. The light in my room was still on but I lay down anyway. I was exhausted, but I couldn't fall asleep. I switched on the TV, but all that came out was Spanish, Spanish, Spanish and...more Spanish! I thought, "This is boring!" There was almost nothing to do. Then I thought, "Oh my God! I'm going to die of boredom here."

The next day I was comfortable and at ease, or you could just say sleepy! Something smelled like oranges in the kitchen: orange juice, duh. There was bread, avocados and a strange white fruit with black seeds on the kitchen table. "Well, I would've had cereal, but this is good," I thought.

I spent exactly three weeks in Peru. All but two of them were really slow. Today we were going to go to the zoo, but it was closed due to the rain. I sighed. I really missed Michigan. I could have been at Cedar Point or at a pool right now sipping iced pink lemonade. "Maybe I can explore," I thought.

I stood up from my chair in the kitchen and walked into the

living room. The living room was dull and uninteresting like a black and white movie. I walked back and came into a short corridor. There was a room to the right and a room to the left. Then there was a metal stairway leading outside. I ascended the spiral stairway to the upper floor. A draft could be felt, and the room smelled like laundry detergent. Straight across the room was a plain wood door. I slowly opened it, and the sound of the street filled the room. Whoa! I could see the street from where I was. I heard footsteps; I shut the door and ran downstairs immediately. Abuelito smiled at me, then he turned away. Whew! That was close.

That night I heard my mom arrive. I knew she was coming, and I had been waiting for her every day during the last week. One day (it was very late) I heard the chatter of voices and one of the voices was very familiar. I stood up and wandered outside my bedroom and into the kitchen. Then I realized why the voice was so familiar: It was my mom. I was happy and exhausted, so it was a weird mix of emotions. I went up to my mom and gave her a hug and did my best to give her a smile. It was kind of awkward after that because everyone (Dora, Grandpa, Tia Irma and my mom) was speaking Spanish. After that, I just slipped back into my room and fell on my bed with a sigh. That night I just slept silently under the glow of the moon from my window.

My mom's arrival in Lima completely changed my outlook for the remainder of the whole trip. Every morning after waking up I would want to go places and try something different, so we scheduled a couple of trips in Peru. We planned to go to Ica in the south and Mancora in the north of the country.

It had been five days since my mom arrived. We were picking up my cousin Jaime, who lives in Florida. I had seen Jaime many times and I was fond of him and his mom. He was visiting Peru, too, along with his family, so we invited him to come with us for a trip. My mom, Jaime, Dora, Abuelito and I were going to Ica.

Ica is another city in Peru. Actually, Ica is located right in the

middle of nowhere! And guess what? It takes seven hours by bus to get to Ica! At least you get to do nothing but sit for seven hours straight. Now doesn't that sound like fun? Oh, and I forgot, I got to sit next to my cousin Jaime, who turned out to be my ever so annoying cousin, especially after the seven-hour bus ride. Are you jealous yet?

But I do have to say it was worth it. I got to ride in a dune buggy in the sand dunes of Ica. That was so awesome. If you haven't done this yet, put this on your "things-to-do list."

I went to Mancora also (another city in Peru), except by plane this time, thank goodness. I don't know why but going to Mancora was one of my favorite things I did in Peru. OK, about the airplane thing: It only took us part way. We had to hail a taxi, which was no big deal because you could find them anywhere in Peru.

The car drove down the gentle slope of the mountain. The slope might have been gentle, but not the road. So I guess you could say we bumped down the road. There were a lot of resorts, though. Our taxi swerved to the right to one of the resorts. My mom, Jaime and I stayed in one cabin, and my grandparents stayed in another.

Today was really hot so I grabbed my swimsuit and hit the water. Jaime and my mom followed along. I splashed in the salty water that splashed on my skin. I turned around to look at something in the sand. I came up to it, and it looked like a clear bubble, and in the sand I nudged the "bubble" with my foot. Ewww! That thing felt wet and cold. Jaime had just caught up. "Hey, what are you doing?" he asked.

I just replied with another question: "What is that?"

"That is a jellyfish!" he said.

"What? I just touched a jellyfish!" I said.

"Does it hurt?" asked Jaime sarcastically.

I yelled at him, "Shut up!" and I chased him and shoved him in the water. I laughed so hard I fell over. Jaime had sand on his

face and mouth and seaweed in his hair. He came up to me with sand in his wet palm.

“Wait, look,” I said. I pointed across the shore where a bunch of crabs were crawling. I ran over the crabs, which scattered in my presence. The crabs were about as big as my hand. “Hey, Mom, come here! Jaime, get a plastic bag. I have a good idea!” I yelled.

My mom, Jaime and I chased around catching crabs with the plastic bag. We managed to successfully catch three before exhaustion.

All three of us went back to the cabin with our crabs to dry off. I put them in our bathroom sink. Later that day we met up with Dora and Abuelito to have dinner. We let the crabs go and we went back to Lima because our vacation in Peru was coming to an end.

It was kind of sad for me, but I realized I was beginning to enjoy my stay in Peru and actually had found a way to somehow communicate with my family. I had also begun appreciating the differences between Michigan and Peru and the uniqueness of the food, traditions, and everyday life in Lima. I almost wished I would have had a second chance to start my vacation again in Peru, this time knowing that I couldn’t waste any time being bored or sad or missing Michigan, but enjoying every minute and new experience in Peru.

We were going to start to pack up. I was tired and I didn’t want to go. Yet I wanted to go home and tell the rest of my family about Peru and how much I missed them. I guess you can tell I didn’t feel good. I kind of felt sick.

I said goodbye to everyone there, and their faces made me smile. I was happy in words I can’t explain. I felt happy the sort of way you are when surrounded by friends and family and you’ve found the confidence to move on. I wouldn’t be gone forever, anyway, and Peru is just a plane ride away. I was just going home to my friends and family in Michigan where I could share the wonderful memories I was bringing back from Peru.

The Runaway Story

A girl's new puppy means the world to her, and she must learn to take care of it and keep it safe. There is a hard lesson on responsibility in the true tale **THE RUNAWAY STORY**, by **Sydney M. Tappin**.

It was a hot, blazing summer day in 2004. My dad was having some people over for a little get-together with my family—my grandmother, aunts, and cousins—and as my aunt Kamani opened the door to help my grandmother out of the house, but before anyone got out of the house.... This is where the terror begins for me.

I'd just gotten a new puppy. Her name is Dakota Dana Tappin. Dakota was only 18 months old when this situation happened.

Anyway, back to the story.... When my aunt Kamani opened the door, my dog ran outside (and she wasn't even trained to go outside without a leash). I ran outside the door to try to get Dakota, and when I saw her, she was just doing her thing outside in the green grass (if you know what I mean). So from that point I thought everything would be ok. Really quickly, I went inside to the dog's tote, and I got her favorite thing, a doggy treat.

My family had already left by the time I got back outside. But when I got outside she was not there anymore. From that point I started crying hysterically.

The next thing I knew I saw my dog running around in circles around the house. She was running like a cheetah chasing

its prey. When I saw Dakota running I ran off, chasing her with my flip-flops.

By now it was around 5:00. My dad came outside and told me I wouldn't catch her that way. Then my dad gave it a try. He tried calling Dakota into the house, but Dakota was just sitting there wagging her tail. Dakota probably thought this was a game, so she still went running around the house. (I was also surprised because I thought dogs usually listened to the man of the house).

By that time I was crying so hard that my head hurt, I was getting cramps in my stomach, and I almost threw up.

I even had gotten a cracker to try to get my dog. The cracker was actually working; IT WAS REALLY WORKING! I was getting happier and happier every time I'd gotten her closer to the house.

That was when she saw...A BUNNY! A dog's dream is probably to catch at least two bunnies in its life. They might even dream of having a "Catch A Bunny Award" if there were such a thing.

Dakota ran down the street to the right, chasing after the bunny. My dad was talking to a man that was trying to sell him a discount book before he even saw the bunny coming. My dad really didn't know that Dakota was chasing the bunny. He thought that Dakota was running around the house like a weirdo.

During their conversation when I was still chasing after my dog, my father told me to go into the house. Dakota wasn't even listening to me, so he said there's no reason to waste all my breath.

When the man was finished talking, my dad went to go get Dakota. However, she had run across the street, and she was nowhere to be found.

My father came inside when I was watching TV and told me the bad news. By now my eyes were swollen and bright red. I just couldn't believe that my new puppy had run away from me. Everyone had just started getting used to her, and now she was

gone, nowhere to be found. I went upstairs and looked out the window, crying, seeing if Dakota would come back home.

Now it was about 7:00. A few minutes later I heard the phone ringing with its annoying little ring tone: *duunnngg, duunnngg*. When I looked at the caller ID, I saw my mom was calling, probably coming back from the hair salon.

I picked up the phone, saying “Hello” in my whiny, sad voice. My mother said hello and asked me what was wrong, and why I was crying. I told her about Dakota, and how she had run away from home. When I told my mother that, I heard her start crying, too.

She told me that she wanted to talk to my dad. I went downstairs and gave my dad the phone. He was downstairs folding and washing clothes. After my dad finished talking to my mom, my dad told me to go look in my dog’s cage.

I didn’t really feel like looking in the dog’s cage because I didn’t really feel like crying anymore. But when I looked in there...Dakota was in there!

I was so excited that Dakota was safe, and that she didn’t run away. I came to find out my dad was telling my mom how he tricked me about my dog running away. Dakota had been in the house the whole time!

I brightened up like the summer sun when I saw Dakota in the cage. I went back downstairs, and hugged my dad to death, and said, “Thank you, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!”

Dakota was punished for the rest of the night. She had to stay in her cage unless she had to go to the bathroom or she got hungry. I was just glad to know that my dog, Dakota, was safe at home with my family and me.

Well, now you know about the runaway story, and how miserable this experience was for me.

P.S. To all the readers that read this story, here’s a tip:

DON’T LET YOUR DAD TRICK YOU!

Shaldon

*Samantha can't wait to explore Shaldon, the small seaside village her dad has told her so much about. In the true story **SHALDON**, **Samantha Foulston** reveals the allure of this historic locale.*

I was looking forward to our vacation in Shaldon, England. My dad had told me many stories about when he had gone there as a young boy, and I was really excited to do some of the things he had told me about. I wondered if I would enjoy it as much as he had.

As we came across the bridge, my Dad pointed out a cottage he had stayed in when he was a boy. It was named Wheel Place and it had a ship's wheel outside by the door. He also showed us another cottage he had stayed in called Mariner's Cottage. It had wooden beams on the ceiling that had come from a shipwreck. I wondered what kind of ship it was and how the wreck had happened.

As we drove around the town, I realized how much of this village is the same as it was more than 100 years ago. It's a cozy little place because it's tucked between the river and the hills. Most of what is there was built in the 1700's, and there is almost no room to build anything new. Many old parts of Shaldon are conservation areas with many listed buildings. They date back to the 17th century and cannot be torn down because they are protected by law. If an owner wants to change something, he or she can only make approved renovations.

When we got to our cottage, I was excited because it was so cute. It had a little white wall with a tiny garden behind it. There was an old bench where you could sit and watch people going down the street to the river.

The cottage was painted white and the door and trim were black. It is on a side street filled with similar tiny cottages and is wedged between the neighboring ones. Although it's been updated, it has a second toilet outside the back door, in the teeny little courtyard where you hang your laundry.

We took our luggage in and put it into our room. Then my sister and I threw our flip-flops on and ran down to the beach. When we got there we slipped our shoes off and felt the sand ooze through our toes and the water slap on our legs. Finally our parents joined us and we walked down the street to the pub.

They have an outdoor area on the beach across from the pub. The pub is right where the sea turns into the tidal river, and it's fun to sit there and watch the tide come in and out. My dad taught me how to tell whether the tide is going in or out by looking at the moored boats and seeing which direction they are facing. When the tide is out, the boats are on their sides in the riverbed, looking glum and uncomfortable lying on the stones. When the tide starts to come in, the water rushes downriver and the boats are gradually lifted up. Once they are floating, they face towards the sea as the current races by on its way inland. Later in the day, I watched the tide reverse and saw how the boats swung round on their moorings until they were headed upriver as all the water emptied into the sea. When the tide was completely out, I thought how sad and useless they looked lying there on their sides again.

When we finished our food, we ran back down to the beach to go crab fishing. I was excited about crabbing

because I had not done it in two years. When my dad first told me about it, it was hard to understand how it could be fun until I did it myself. When you crab, you usually do it off of a pier, a jetty or even the edge of a harbor. It is different from regular fishing because you don't use a fishing rod with a reel and a hook. You just use a line with a weight on it and tie the bait to the end of the line. The crabs hold on with their pincers and you pull the line up and shake them into a bucket of water. One other thing that's different is instead of keeping them and eating them for dinner, you just dump them back into the water and try and catch them the next day. They're too small to keep. Actually, I don't think most kids care about eating crabs. The fun is just being there with lots of other children. Getting to know each other, screaming when a crabs drop off your line, talking about what kind of bait is working, finding out who's caught the most—it's just the fun of being there with everyone that makes it so special.

The funny thing is even though I was so looking forward to doing it, I had forgotten to bring our crab fishing gear, so we had to go to the little store down the beach to get some. We also bought some bait, which were sand eels, and boy did they have a horrible stench. But they worked.

When I went back to the cottage, I was looking at a book with old photos of Shaldon. As I looked at them, I realized how much of Shaldon was the same. I could recognize the buildings and knew exactly where the photos had been taken.

The next afternoon we went tide flying, which is really fun. It is when you jump off of the jetty into the water and go with the current. You do this as many times as you want. You don't go tide flying when the tide is going out because you could get washed out to sea! I always do it with my Dad because it is fun doing it with him, and I go faster. One time I got caught in a boat's anchor line. IT HURT A LOT!

When we finished, we were tired and hungry, so we sat outside at the Jetty Café, and I had a Coke and chips with my Dad. We talked about all the adventures he had in Shaldon when he was a boy. One of his most vivid memories is when he nearly got washed out to sea. He was playing about in a rubber dinghy when he realized the tide was carrying him out towards the mouth of the harbor. He said he was so scared when he recognized what was happening that he desperately grabbed onto the last boat that was moored in the bay. He sat there holding on and trying to think of what he could do. He decided to go with the tide, which he thought would carry him closer to shore, then jump out and swim, holding the line of his new inflatable dinghy. He managed to do that and was fine but much more careful after that!

Later on my grandpa arrived and I asked him what Shaldon used to be like. He said that Shaldon started out as a shipbuilding port. Along the seafront they built houses for the sea captains and shipbuilders. Later with the invention of the railroad, people came to visit for holidays, and so many of those houses were converted into hotels for them to stay in.

When I went to bed that night, I was thinking about the way my Papa and Dad loved Shaldon so much. I thought about all the things my Dad had done in the stories he had told me. I thought about what I had enjoyed over the past few days and realized that most of the things he had told us about, I had now done.

I can't believe that this little seaside village is so special to so many generations of people in England, yet most people around the world have never even heard of it. Now I can understand why kids in Michigan love their places 'up north' so much.

Taking It Slow

*Nona Campbell tells the true story of her early life in **TAKING IT SLOW**. Through one challenge after another, she learns that the biggest fights are won by facing the little battles one at a time.*

In every life a little rain must fall. It takes time to recover, so you take it slow: step-by-step.

December 15, 1994, I was born. “It’s our little girl, but why isn’t she crying?” is how it all started. Like every other baby, I could not breathe right away, but my experience was longer than others. Usually it’s about one minute until a newborn baby starts to cry, but mine had been longer. The doctor couldn’t clear my throat, and I turned black and blue like the colors of a shoe. My parents were worrying as if I were running into a busy street. Then all of a sudden, there was a noise from out of my mouth: the sign of breathing!

I was born with a cleft palate and was said to have a type of dwarfism called acrodroplasia. My father became very concerned about how hard my life would be, so my doctor had a specialist come in that Sunday to check on how I was. The specialist set me on a bed next to my mother and measured me to be nineteen inches. Then he stretched me on a table and said, “This girl doesn’t have acrodroplasia. She’s gonna be fine!”

But there was my cleft palate. It was hard for me to drink milk because it would go up the hole in the roof of my mouth and come out of my nose. As I got to drinking out of a bottle, I had a different nipple than a regular milk bottle. Also

my cleft palate caused me many earaches, and when I was about nine months old I had surgery to put tubes in my ears. I had a lot of hard times during my days, but that isn't the end.

I had many surgeries in my early years. These surgeries were designed to close the hole in my palate. My first surgery happened at the age of one, and took place at the Children's Hospital in downtown Detroit. Everything was going fine until one night I couldn't breathe. My doctor didn't want to, but he had to suction me, or I would die. To suction a patient is to use a device like a vacuum that clears fluids out of your body. Because of the suction my surgery did not heal properly, and the next morning I was put into surgery for the second time.

About ten days later, my dad noticed something was wrong, so he took me to the emergency room, and found out that I had an infection. This infection broke open my surgery again. So when I was two, I got another surgery, and once again that surgery didn't heal. My parents decided not to go back to the Children's Hospital anymore. Through the ages of three and four, we just let my immune system calm down, and I started speech therapy at the University of Michigan.

Eventually I started kindergarten and was scheduled for a September 1999 surgery for my first time at the University of Michigan. My recovery was rough, and I had to stay in the hospital for five days, but the surgery worked!

I remember being scared at the time and not knowing what would happen. When I heard I had to be put to sleep, I tried as hard as I could not to go to sleep. I blinked and blinked, starting off the speed of a traffic light, then getting faster and faster until I was the speed of a jaguar being chased by a predator, until finally I crashed!

I woke up in a dull, white room with a television on. I didn't remember what had happened until my mom started

talking to me. I smiled so big you could see my teeth from a mile away!

Epilogue

I, Nona E. Campbell, continued speech therapy until I was the age of seven and am now a very talkative social butterfly full of love and happiness. My friends support me in all I do and keep me going in life.

I started my school days at West Maple Elementary. I am now going to Berkshire Middle School, and will go to Groves High School. I wish to grow up and go to the University of Michigan and learn the arts to become an interior designer. I would like to have a caring husband and wonderful children who will grow up and be able to live their dreams! But for right now I'm living the life I live!

The Trip Home

Based on a True Story

*Conor is anxious about his first school bus trip—with good reason. **THE TRIP HOME** by **Conor O’Leary** is the story of one kindergartner’s memorable ride.*

“All right class, settle down,” said Mrs. Vechazone. “I want everyone to get your backpacks and sit down on the rug.”

Conor O’Leary was a young five-year-old kindergartener in Mrs. Vechazone’s class. He liked school, but sometimes when Conor was nervous he had some trouble feeling homesick. It was the first day of school and Conor’s first time riding the bus. Conor went to his locker and started to get anxious about getting on the bus for the first time. Conor went over to his best friend Tom and asked “Tom, are you riding the bus?”

“Yeah,” Tom replied. Conor felt a little relief come over him, but he was still a little nervous. When the class sat down Mrs. Vechazone said, “Raise your hand if you are riding the bus.” Conor raised his hand and saw that the majority of the class was riding the bus, too.

When Conor got on the bus he thought that it was pretty cool. There were no seat belts and he could sit wherever he wanted! Conor was a short kid, and one of the shortest kids in his class. Of course he sat by Tom, but Tom got the window side, so Conor couldn’t see which stop the bus was at. Conor waited a while for his stop, and sat there quietly.

When Tom got off, Conor was very disappointed because he didn't know anyone else on the bus.

He waited patiently, stop after stop, as boys and girls got off the bus and ran to their mothers. "I wish I was next," Conor said to himself after every stop. Conor's mom and dad had taught him to always be patient, so he sat there quietly.

Before he knew it, he was alone. Suddenly a wave of panic came over him. He knew he should be a brave boy, but he couldn't stop the tears flowing down his cheeks. "I want to go home," he whispered to himself. The streets started to look unfamiliar to him and minute by minute he became more upset. "Where is she taking me?" thought Conor.

After a while he saw that the bus stopped at a big parking lot with a lot of other school buses parked there, too. The bus driver went down the aisle and said, "Oops! I didn't see you there."

Conor replied with a shaky voice, "I thought you forgot about me. I live on Forest Drive"

"Well, do ya now," the bus driver said with her hands on her hips. "We ought to get you home now. Your mom's probably worried sick."

"Ok," Conor said a little sadly. He was tired and getting very hungry.

The bus driver spoke into her walkie-talkie back to the transportation department and said she had another stop to make.

"My name is Miss Carol. You make sure you check in with me when you get on the bus tomorrow, okay, honey? We don't want this to happen again." Miss Carol drove him home and handed him a sucker on his way off the bus.

Conor ran inside and told his mom all about his first bus ride home before his mom could ask him what took him so long.

The Wild “Turkey” Chase

During their community service labors, a boy and his mother take a break. This simple action leads them somewhere unexpected in the true story **THE WILD “TURKEY” CHASE**, by **Brett Michael Schwartz**.

My mom, dad, and I were doing community service in Ortonville, Michigan at Camp Tamarack. We were divided into two groups. One group gardened, and my group hauled woodchips. We were making a new nature trail. I took 24 wheelbarrows of woodchips.

When we were almost done, I said to my mom, “Let’s go on a tour of my village!” I assured her I knew my way around. My mom and I decided it would probably be okay to take a break from our work and walk around. People were so busy they probably wouldn’t even miss us!

We set out for my “village” called Levison. At Tamarack, each age group is divided into villages (girls separate from boys). I took my mom for a very long walk to my village, and the swamp, and the theater, and the lake and pool. We walked and walked for what seemed like forever.

After a while my mom asked, “Brett, where are we?”

I said, “Mom, don’t worry. I know where we are...I think.”

When we got to an area I had never been to before, I came to the conclusion that WE WERE LOST! I looked back at my mom and I could tell she was getting a little nervous, but as all moms do, she was assuring me we would

find our way back. It was getting hotter and hotter and we just kept walking.

Just when I thought things couldn't get any worse, something happened that really freaked me out. As we were walking on a trail trying to find our way, a HUGE WILD TURKEY (which seemed to be five feet tall) ran across the trail right in front of us. I said to my mom, "Maybe he is lost, too," and we both laughed. Even though my mom and I were nervous, neither one of us really showed it. We actually had a good time being together out there.

Maybe that incident was when things began to change, because all of a sudden I spotted a familiar place. It was the amphitheater that was near my village. I knew my way back to the rest of the group, this time for sure.

Finally, when we made it back to our beginning site, my dad was gone...and so was his car. He was looking for us while we were looking for him. It was like a wild goose chase (or wild turkey chase in my case).

We started to walk a little bit and heard a car horn honk. We turned around and were relieved to see it was my dad. When we got in he asked, "Where were you guys?"

Then my mom and I looked at each other and laughed and said, "Wow, have we got a story for you!"

A
REMARKABLE
LIKENESS

Alex and the Ice Cream Man

*Alex's summer appears ruined when his best friend moves away at the end of the school year. But a new friendship emerges from an unexpected source, and things have a chance of getting better in **ALEX AND THE ICE CREAM MAN**, by **Parisa Shifteh**.*

As I was running home from my last day of school on a beautiful, sunny day in San Francisco, I was so excited for summer vacation to start. I slammed the door shut, and ran up to my room and called my best friend, Josh. I listened to the phone ring, impatient for Josh to pick up. To my surprise, a very sad voice answered the phone.

"Hello, may I please speak to Josh?" I said.

"This is Josh," answered the sad voice.

"Hey, Josh, what's up, dude? Why weren't you at school today?"

Josh responded quietly, "I was sick."

"Well, you better get better, dude, because we have a whole summer ahead of us," I happily cried out.

Then Josh said, "I am sorry Alex to tell you this, but I am moving away tomorrow."

I quietly choked back the tears in my throat and tried to be strong as I said to Josh, "What? I thought you were moving away after break."

Josh replied, "Yeah, but my parents told me they wanted to move early."

“Well, can I at least come over and say goodbye?” I asked.

“No, sorry. I’m about to have dinner and my mom wanted me to pack. She wouldn’t like visitors right now,” he replied.

“Wait!” I said, as I tried to think of a way to keep him on the phone just a while longer. “What about school?”

“I am already enrolled at a new high school,” he replied.

As I struggled to think of things to say, only one thing came to mind. “Do they have good food in the cafeteria?”

“I think so, but I have to go. My mom’s calling me. I will call you when I get settled in the new house.”

“Oh, ok. I guess I will just hang out with my older brother this summer,” I said to make Josh feel that I would be fine. But I knew, deep down inside, I wouldn’t be all right.

As I hung up the phone, I said to myself, “Gosh, hang out with my brother? Never in a million years! I can’t believe my best friend is moving away. It’s like the world is ending.” As I thought over that statement, I started to think about what was going to happen during a summer all alone without Josh.

That night as I climbed into bed, all these thoughts were running through my mind. I kept on thinking about how I was going to survive the summer without my best friend, Josh. Whenever I get sad, I listen to sad songs on my iPod. Sometimes, when I am really down in the dumps, I listen to James Blunt singing “Tears and Rain.” I don’t know why, but that song always gets to me. As I was crying myself to sleep that night, I had bad dreams about my friend Josh.

The next morning was a Tuesday, and summer vacation had already started. I lazily walked down the stairs to the kitchen. I grabbed some cereal and I ate in front of the television. As I was flipping mindlessly through the channels, I came to a station where I stopped. It was a commercial about sunny beaches in San Francisco. I thought about those

sunny beaches, and it came to my mind that Alex plus sunny beaches equals hot chicks! Therefore, I threw away all those bad thoughts about a summer vacation alone without Josh, and booked my summer at the beach with the girls. At that moment, I could picture myself at the beach with all the most popular (and hottest) girls in the whole school!

My mom headed out to work. She left me some money on the table and a cell phone, too. "Ok, Alex, I'm leaving now to go to work. I want you to know I left you one hundred dollars on the table and a cell phone in case something happens, ok? Oh, and your brother is at his summer job," my mother said.

"All right. But you know, Mom, today I am going to the beach!" I said.

"Oh, but what about your summer with Josh?" Mom said.

"Well, Josh moved, but it's ok," I said in a sad voice.

"I'm sorry, honey. We'll talk about it later tonight! I've got to go!" my mom said in a rush. She blew me a kiss and went out the door.

As soon as she left, I knew it was time to rock. I ran upstairs to my dresser and put on my bathing suit and a shirt over it. Then I took a second and looked in the mirror, and said to myself, "You're one good-looking man!"

I quickly ran downstairs and grabbed my stuff off the table, and then I was out the door, getting my bike and riding it to the beach.

Ten minutes later, I was there. It was very crowded, and boy could I see a lot of B-E-A-utiful girls. As I locked my bike to the pole, I had my eye on one girl. Her name is Olivia Sanchez. She is the most popular girl in the school. If only Josh were here, I thought to myself.

While I was walking to an open spot to put down my towel, a voice caught my ears. "Don't swim out that far!"

Then I looked over. “OH NO!” It was my brother Trevor! He became the lifeguard this year, now that he meets the age requirement of nineteen. If he saw that I was here, he would know that I was here because of the girls, and tell Mom and Dad. I forgot about Olivia, quickly packed up, unlocked my bike, and went as fast as I could back home.

While riding home, I heard something. I turned around and looked. As I looked, I lost control of my bike and fell off. I scraped my knee and was bleeding heavily. Then a truck came right behind me. It was an ice cream truck.

The ice cream man pulled over and stuck his head out the window, saying to me, “Are you all right, kid?” I turned around and nodded that I was ok. When he saw my knee, he looked concerned, and came out of the truck, running towards me with napkins and a bottle of water. “Let me help you,” he said. I looked up, and to my surprise realized that the ice cream man was a young man, maybe a year or two older than my brother Trevor. I was taken aback by his kindness, as I was used to my brother’s constant teasing and bullying. The ice cream man handed me the napkins and poured some bottled water over my knee.

“Thanks.... What’s your name?” I asked.

He looked at me in a friendly way and said, “The name is Connor Mason.”

“My name is Alex,” I replied, as I started to become aware that Connor did not have any hair on his head or eyebrows.

Connor noticed that I was staring at him and then he said, “You must be wondering what happened to all of my hair.”

“Yeah, I was.... What happened to you?”

“Well, Alex, I have cancer. That is why I am an ice cream man. If I had a regular job, I wouldn’t be able to miss a lot of work.”

“You are so young; this is so terrible,” I consoled him.

For the next hour, I sat and talked with Connor about his life, his cancer, and all the hard times he and his family have been going through. At the end of our conversation, I realized it was getting close to dinnertime. My bike was in no condition to ride, so I politely asked Connor for a ride home, which he agreed to.

When I got home, I said goodbye to Connor and he told me that he is always working near the beach in case I ever want to hang out with him. "Cool," I said. Walking to my front door, I was thinking about how lucky and blessed I am to be so healthy. Then I went into the house to get ready for dinner.

After dinner, I was thinking about going back to the beach and hanging out with Connor. To tell you the truth, he is a really nice guy.

The next morning, I put on my bathing suit and got ready to go to the beach. When I got to the beach, the first thing I did was look for Connor. When I finally found him, I ran over to his truck and yelled, "Connor, let's go hang out at the skate park!"

"Sorry, little man, but I am working. I can hang out after my shift I guess," Connor replied, while placing chocolate ice cream on someone's cone.

"Okay, um, I guess I'll just go see a movie. I'll be back at four, and maybe we can go then," I said.

"Okay, see you then," Connor said, while giving some kid his change.

A month went by, and Connor and I were best friends. We hung out almost every day after his work. We mostly talked about life, video games, and school.

One day, a few hours before dinner, I went out in front of our neighbor Mr. Miller's house to the spot where I usually meet up with Connor. I waited for over an hour and Connor did not show up. I felt hungry and tired of waiting so I

headed home, all the while worrying about my new best friend, Connor.

I ate my dinner in front of the television, flipping through the channels to find something good to watch. Suddenly, I passed by the news channel and heard Connor's name mentioned. At first, I thought it was a mistake, so I turned up the volume on the news and listened carefully.

"Today a tragic accident happened on Sunny Street in San Francisco," the announcer began. "A young man named Connor Mason was killed in a terrible accident when he lost control of his ice cream truck and flipped over. It appears he was on his way to meet a friend when the accident occurred. Now to sports with Bryan Williams...." The announcer faded out.

I turned off the TV. I felt the tears run down my cheek, and a big lump in my throat. I ran to my room and called Connor's house. Mrs. Mason picked up the phone in a sad voice. We were talking and crying. She said she would come and pick me up and take me to the funeral the next day to say goodbye to my best friend.

It was so hard for me to even go to the funeral to say goodbye. Mr. and Mrs. Mason were crying so hard, it was hard for them to take a breath. I kept trying to see if he would wake up. "Wake up, Connor! Please wake up!" I cried. As the preacher was talking, I kept thinking of all the great times Connor and I had. I just wish I had known Connor longer; it feels like it was just yesterday we met. The song "Goodbye My Best Friend," was running through my head. I couldn't stop crying.

That was when I decided that when I get older, I want to be just like Connor.

Backstabbers on Prom Night!

*The prom is the only thing on the minds of a group of privileged high school girls in **BACKSTABBERS ON PROM NIGHT!** by **Crystal Thompson**. Will Madison realize her dream of becoming prom queen, too?*

MADISON'S ROOM 8:30 P.M., APRIL 1 TRYING ON DRESS

"I will be prom queen," I said to my best friend Brittany as I was trying on my dress for prom. It was pink with purple sparkles and sheer at the bottom. It was about ten inches from my feet. I had the perfect shoes the same exact color as my dress, and they were strappies. "OW!" I said to my best friend as she was making my dress better. "You did it too tight, dummy!" I said.

"Goshalosh, I'm sorry. Can I try on my dress now?" Brittany said.

"Yes, right after you fix my dress." She laced it up again, and it was perfect. So I said it again: "I, Madison, will be prom queen!"

Then Brittany put on her green apple-colored dress. It was about one foot from her feet. The dress was super sparkly and sheer at the bottom, too.

I knew I was going to win because we were the most popular girls in our school.

A loud voice interrupted us: my mom. “MADISON! BRITTANY! Do you want to go to Nordstrom and buy a pair of Uggs?”

“No! We have to get ready for prom,” I said.

“Prom is in three weeks,” my mom said. We did not respond.

**WEST VALLEY HIGH
7:30 A.M., APRIL 2
DATES**

Brittany and I were walking down the halls of WVH, and we turned every head. I loved that Brittany and I were the most popular girls in school. It was two minutes until the bell would ring. Brittany and I were in the same first hour.

Two hours later... It was finally lunch. At lunch we had our usual, salad and lemonade. “Brittany, do you have a date for the prom yet?” I said.

Brittany said, “Of course I do; it’s Devin. Whom are you going with?”

“Oh, Cameron,” I said.

**BRITTANY’S ROOM
4:05 P.M., APRIL 4
GOODY GOODY**

“Brittany, do you think I’m good material for prom queen?” I said sarcastically. Everyone knew that I would be prom queen, except for Lisa Pannell. She was determined to beat me at something. But she would have to cheat, and Lisa Pannell was not a cheater. She was a goody goody. That’s why I beat her all the time.

**MADISON'S CAR
12:50 P.M., APRIL 6
FERGALICIOUS!**

“Madison, can we listen to Fergie’s ‘Fergalicious?’” Brittany said.

“Yeah, ‘cause you know I’m fergalicious.” I turned on the song. Brittany and I were on our way to the mall to meet up with Alicia and Amber. Until then, we were jamming to “Fergalicious.”

**OAKLAND MALL
1:20 P.M., APRIL 6
WHEN IS PROM?**

“So when is prom again?” Amber said.

“April 10,” I said.

“Prom is in only four days; I’m so excited!”

“What are you talking about? Prom is in two weeks! Wait, what is today’s date?” I said, scared.

“April 6.”

“O.M.G.”

To calm us down, Brittany and I went to Big Cookie and bought four Ices and one big cookie. After we ate we went into Forever 21 and tried on almost everything in the store, and came out with five heavy shopping bags. We had two pairs of pink pants, three pairs of skinny jeans and eight Abercrombie shirts. Then we went to Macy’s and bought four pair of red leather boots that were up to our knees. Finally Brittany and I left, and Amber and Alicia stayed.

**MADISON'S CAR
6:50 A.M., APRIL 7
WHAT CAN WE WEAR?**

Brittany and I were on our way to school when I had a clothes idea. I text messaged Alicia and Amber.

Madison: Alicia tl Amber 2 wear red boots

Alicia: OK can we wear our skinny jeans wth em

Madison: Ok and wear a juicy hoody

Alicia: OK cant WB.

Madison: WB, The Juicy hoody has to be red

Alicia: Lets wear our hair in a messy bun.

Madison: Jean-yus !

On our way to school we turned the radio to 95.5. The song that was playing was “Fergalicious” again. Brittany and I sang it together. The song was interrupted by my phone. “Hello,” I said.

“Hey, are you at school?” Amber said.

“Yeah.”

“Well, go to the cafeteria.”

**WEST VALLEY HIGH
7:20 A.M. APRIL 7
I HAVE THE BEST DATE!**

I went into the cafeteria, and my date was putting up posters of me up that said *Vote Madison for prom queen, since she is one*. I went over to Cameron and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. “Thank you,” Cameron said in a smooth way. The rest of the day classes were interrupted by prom announcements.

**SALLY’S HAIR SALON
10:30 A.M., APRIL 9
WHAT DID LISA DO?**

Brittany and I were so excited for prom. Our excitement moment got interrupted by Brittany’s phone. “Hello,” Brittany said.

“This is Alicia and I have gossip. I heard that Lisa was trying to bribe people.”

“How?” Brittany said while putting her phone on speaker so I could hear the gossip.

“She gave away five hundred dollars to each student.”

I interrupted Brittany. “She’s just trying to act like she’s richer than me.”

“Isn’t that against the rules?” Brittany said.

“Duh! God, Brittany, that’s why I’m telling you. You can be so dumb. Bye!” Alicia said.

Brittany gave me a call-the-principal look. I dialed the school phone number. “Hello Principal Clone speaking.”

“Hi, this is Madison, I heard about a girl who gave away money to be prom queen.”

“Well, whoever did that will get kicked out of the race.”

“Well, it was Lisa Pannell.”

“Oh, she can’t be kicked out, because she already was, but her dad would sue us if we kicked her out.”

By the time I got off the phone it was time to go.

MADISON’S ROOM
7:48 P.M., APRIL 9
SLEEPOVER!

“Hey,” Amber and Alicia said.

“Hey, guys, let’s pick something out for the prom after party,” I said.

“Where’s Brittany?” Amber said.

“She just left her grandma’s; she’ll be here any second.”

“So I think me and Amber should wear pink pants and knee high Uggs with long Abercrombie shirts.”

“Hey! You started without me!” Brittany came in with her red leather boots on.

“Yeah, you and Alicia can wear skinny jeans with knee high Converse, and also long Abercrombie shirts.”

“So can we listen to music?” Alicia said. The rest of the night we listened to music, danced, and eventually fell asleep.

MADISON’S ROOM
4:30 P.M., APRIL 10
TOUCHUPS

Brittany and I were putting the finishing touches on our faces and hair like sparkles, makeup, and other things. When we were done we heard a doorbell. My mom opened the door. When we went downstairs Cameron’s tie was light pink and Devin’s tie was apple green. They couldn’t even blink because we were so pretty.

CAMERON’S LIMO
6:20 P.M., APRIL 10
EXCITED!

“Dude, are you excited for prom?” Cameron said.

“Yeah, I have the best date.” Devin looked straight at Brittany with a sweet smile.

“You are so sweet!” Brittany said as Devin was pointing at his cheek so she could kiss it. She did.

I interrupted their moment. “Well, I’m excited because Cameron and I will be King and Queen.”

LISA’S LIMO
6:30 P.M., APRIL 10
SCHEME

“So, Brad, you know the plan?” Lisa said.

“Yeah,” Lisa’s date Brad said.

“So, I’ll text you when I’m ready,” Lisa said with such a big smile you could see all of her braces. “So here are the directions. When they are about to announce the prom queen, replace the envelope with this one.” Lisa held up a

gold envelope. "Then I can dance with Cameron, and Madison will be mad. This is perfect."

"Wait, I thought I was your date," Brad said, looking sad.

"You are my best friend. You're only my date because no one else would go with me," Lisa said.

SUNRISE HOTEL
6:50 P.M., APRIL 10
PROM!

"Oh my god, this place is nice," I said as we walked in.

"You want to dance?" Cameron said holding his hand out so I could take it.

"Yes!" I said.

There were tables in a circle, and a huge dance floor, and it was dark, but you still could see. There were about 12 chandeliers. The tables had silver tablecloths on them. After we danced to about 56 songs straight, we got tired. So we ate. All I had was salad and pizza with everything on it. Cameron had the same. We looked on the dance floor and saw Brittany and Devin dancing very crazily. We could not help but laugh.

.....

Lisa: Brad r u ready

Brad: Yes

Lisa: I 2 ready go!

Brad went behind the stage and found the ballot box that had the envelope in it. He switched the envelopes and ran off the stage as fast as he could.

.....

“This year’s prom king is ... Cameron Michaels! And this year’s prom queen is the one the only... *Lisa Pannell?*”

Lisa ran on the stage and grabbed Cameron’s hand and pulled him down to the middle of the dance floor.

.....

Principal Clone was walking behind the stage and saw an envelope that said *WVH Prom King and Queen*. He went on to the stage and said, “Hello, students of WVH. There has been a mistake the real prom queen is Madison Vicki!”

“O.M.G, did I just win?” I said to Brittany, Amber, and Alicia. I ran over to Cameron and pushed Lisa off of him, and she fell in a puddle of red punch. Then she ran away, grabbed Brad, and they both left. Finally I got to dance with Cameron in front of everyone.

**WEST VALLEY HIGH
12:46 A.M., APRIL 11
AFTER PARTY**

Amber and I were wearing pink pants with knee-high Uggs and long Abercrombie shirts. Brittany and Alicia were wearing skinny jeans, knee-high Converse, and long Abercrombie shirts, too. Alicia went over to her date, Brian.

“Can you believe her?” I said as Alicia ran over and hugged him.

“Yes,” Brittany said as Devin was coming our way.

“Hi, babe,” Devin said and put his arm around Brittany.

“Hi, sweetie,” Brittany said, blushing.

“You want to dance? It’s easier without that green dress on,” Devin said with a bright smile.

“Sure,” Brittany said. They ran off to the dance floor and started dancing crazily again. Amber and I cracked up. When I looked up, Cameron was standing right there.

“What’s so funny?” he said. I pointed to Brittany and Devin. “They’re doing it again,” he said smiling, trying not to laugh. “You want to dance?” he said.

“Well, if Amber won’t be lonely,” I said.

“I won’t. I see Elliot, my date,” Amber said as she ran over to Elliot.

“You’ve been standing here all night, the party is almost over, and I want to dance with you,” he said.

“Ok, I’d love to dance with you,” I said and ran on the dance floor for the last song.

This day has been a dream come true. I am prom queen, Lisa is not, and Cameron is prom king, and I got to dance in the spotlight twice!

MADISON’S HOUSE
2:24 A.M., APRIL 11
I’M QUEEN.

“Hi, honey, how was prom?” my mom said as I walked in the house.

“Great. Everyone loved my dress.”

“Did you win as prom queen?” my mom said.

“Well...ummmm... of course I did! Now I can say it for real! I, MADISON, AM PROM QUEEN!” I said proudly.

Bad Weekend

*A simple plan becomes less simple with each additional step. Three boys find their seemingly simple plan is difficult to carry out in **BAD WEEKEND**, by Kyle Hall.*

One day there was a boy named Tom. Tom has two best friends. Tom's two best friends' names are Bobby and Billy. Bobby and Billy are brothers, and they would disagree with each other all the time.

On a Friday after school, Bobby, Billy, and Tom decided to create a list for the weekend. The list would have different things that they wanted to do on the weekend.

Later when everyone was at home, Bobby and Billy made four things for the list:

1. Go to the game store
2. Go to the park and play catch.
3. Go to Tom's house and play the game.
4. Wait until Tom comes over and play basketball.

Tom also made a list with four things he wanted to do:

1. Go shopping with Mom to get some food for the house.
2. Go with Mom and Dad to look at a certain dog.
3. Wait until Bobby and Billy come over.
4. Go to Bobby and Billy's house to play basketball.

The next day came, which was Saturday. Bobby and Billy had gotten all cleaned up, and they asked their parents for permission to go to the game store.

Tom had gone to the store with his mom to get some food for the house.

Meanwhile, Bobby and Billy had forgotten to watch the news. It had said that it was going to rain with a chance of heavy showers all weekend. After a couple of moments, it started to rain on Bobby and Billy. Bobby and Billy were thinking that it was nothing but light rain, so they kept on walking toward the game store.

As Bobby and Billy kept on walking, the rain became heavier. When Bobby and Billy reached the game store, it turned out that the store was closed. Too many people had called in sick, so the owner just closed the store for the day.

Bobby and Billy were so angry that they had gone through all of that trouble for no reason at all. Bobby looked for his cell phone, but he could not find it. He realized that he left his cell phone at home.

Bobby asked Billy if he had 50 cents to use the pay phone, but all Billy had was the 20 dollars he had to pay for the game. So Bobby and Billy had to run back home in the rain.

On Tom's side, he had checked off his first item on his weekend to-do list. The second thing on Tom's list was "Go with Mom and Dad to look at a certain dog." Tom asked his parents if they could go and look at a dog. Tom's mom and dad said, "We can go next weekend. It is raining too hard outside."

About an hour later Bobby and Billy made it home. Bobby and Billy took their list and marked off the first two things with an X. Tom had done the same thing with the second thing on his weekend to-do list.

The next day, Tom called Billy and Bobby's house. Tom, Bobby, and Billy were talking to each other, and agreed that they would have to put an X on their third weekend to-do list items, which was to play the game that Bobby and Billy were not able to buy. So Bobby and Billy had an X on numbers 1, 2, and 3 on their weekend things-to-do list. Tom had to put an X on numbers 2 and 3 on his weekend things-to-do list.

Tom went to Billy and Bobby's house to play basketball. After Tom was over at Bobby and Billy's house for three hours playing basketball, he left and went home. Bobby and Billy's list showed they had completed their fourth weekend thing to do. All Bobby and Billy had done was mark number 4 with a check mark by it. Tom did the same at his house.

The next day, Tom, Billy, and Bobby went back to school very disappointed because they didn't do all of the things they wanted to do. In class, Bobby, Billy, and Tom were trying to forget about what had happened all through the weekend. Then the teacher asked, "What did you do all weekend?"

The Blizzard of Adventure

In THE BLIZZARD OF ADVENTURE by C. Bradley Miller, the snow comes thick and fast. So does the bravery, as our young hero must battle the elements in order to save lives.

It all started after school when Jimmy's dad went to go rock climbing. This was something he had always done because they live in Oregon. It's a hobby for most people.

"Mom, is it okay for me to go to Reese's house?" Jimmy pleaded.

"Yes. Be sure to be back by ten o'clock on the dot," Jimmy's mom replied.

"Ok. I'll be right on time today."

As Jimmy headed to Reese's mansion, a friend of Jimmy's named Charlie stopped him and asked if he had heard the weather forecast.

"Who would spend leisure time listening to the same old boring news?" Jimmy replied.

"I think you should today because it's big," Charlie exclaimed.

"What is it?" Jimmy said with a sigh.

"There is a huge, I mean, enormous blizzard coming in less than an hour. It's going to bring at least twenty-four inches of snow with winds at seventy-five miles per hour, and it will be four degrees below zero at sea level. You'd better head home before it hits," Charlie replied.

“I’d better get to Reese’s house before—oh, no! Dad is going rock climbing in a blizzard!” Jimmy said nervously.

As Jimmy rushed back home he noticed the temperature was decreasing. “It’s ge...tt...tt...tting cold.” Jimmy shivered.

Once Jimmy got home he rushed to his mom.

“Mom, Dad is going to be caught in a blizzard while he is rock climbing,” Jimmy said, out of breath.

“I know, son. I’ve tried to call him five times but there is no service. I can’t do anything. If I don’t hear from your dad soon, I’ll have to file a police report,” Jimmy’s mom cried.

It has been an hour and the family is starting to get worried.

“Hello, my husband is lost on a mountain. And I want to file a police report,” Jimmy’s mom said into the telephone.

“Hold on, ma’am. We’re sending out a search party. We’ll keep you up-to-date on the status,” the police officer stated.

“This stinks! All we can do is sit and watch the news because the cable is out. We’ve only had one blizzard as bad as this one, and Dad was here,” Jimmy moaned.

The next morning the skies cleared up to a light-gray color. Jimmy woke up to the horrific sound of his mom crying.

“Mom, what’s going on? Why are you crying?” Jimmy said, scared.

“The police have searched all night and haven’t even found a trace of where he is on the mountain,” Jimmy’s mom replied nervously.

It took them about two hours of crying to do something other than crying.

“Mom, I’m going to save Dad!” Jimmy said strongly.

“No you are not,” Jimmy’s mom said.

“Yes I am. I will save him. He’s my dad, and it’s my responsibility to rescue him. I’m also taking DeAngelo and Reese with me,” Jimmy said furiously.

“I won’t let you leave this house, young man, and you can’t leave your room,” Jimmy’s mom screamed.

At nine o'clock, Jimmy got an idea to save his dad. He called DeAngelo and Reese to discuss the plan.

"Reese, Angelo, you there?" Jimmy said quietly.

"Yeah," they replied.

"Meet me at the gas station because we're going onto the mountain my dad was on to find him. He's up there with almost no food and only a few supplies. Bring extra supplies for the trip. There won't be any stores open during this blizzard. And hurry!" Jimmy said sternly.

"Jimmy, you've had some weird ideas before, but this is the most outrageous one yet!" Reese exclaimed.

"Yeah, Jimmy, that doesn't sound very smart," DeAngelo added.

About a half hour later...

"Are you sure we should have sneaked out of our windows and met you at a gas station to find your dad who is lost on some mountain, Jimmy?" Reese questioned.

"Well, don't you want to find my dad and become heroes? Don't you?" Jimmy pleaded.

"Ok. I guess so," they said

"Hey, do you kids need a ride?" said Mr. Greenwich, Jimmy's neighbor from across the street.

"Yes, we would love to have a ride," Jimmy said anxiously.

"All right, hop on the snowmobile, and just tell me the way to go," Mr. Greenwich said with his southern drawl.

"Take us to the big mountain that has the rock climbing place on the other side," Jimmy said.

"Why are you kids heading there?" Mr. Greenwich questioned.

"To find my dad. He's trapped in the snow with only rock climbing supplies," Jimmy said with expression.

“Oh, no! I got to get you guys there quick. Do your parents know you are out here on such a dangerous task?” Mr. Greenwich replied.

“Yes!” the boys said quickly and at the same time.

“Ok, let’s ride.”

On the snowmobile Mr. Greenwich and the boys got to the mountain in record time. “Ok, I’ll drop you guys off here. I’ll be leaving now. Are you sure you’ll be okay?” Mr. Greenwich said.

“Yes, we will. We have plenty of supplies. Bye, Mr. Greenwich,” the boys said thankfully.

“Well, we’re here. Let’s start looking. We don’t have much time before my dad is completely smothered in snow,” Jimmy said anxiously.

“I hate these stupid pine trees. They’re so prickly, and the snow will make it difficult to search diligently,” Reese said uncomfortably.

“Well, we have to deal with it. We might be here for a couple of days,” DeAngelo said.

“We’ve searched for an hour and nothing. This is harder than I thought,” Jimmy said.

“Where should we go next?” Reese questioned.

“The only place I can think of is the main part of the forest, and even adults aren’t allowed in that part. Even if we are in the right area, we’ll have to dig him out of twenty-four inches of snow,” said Jimmy.

“True, but what will happen if one of us goes missing, or one of us gets injured? What will we do?” Reese said cautiously.

“I don’t know. Let’s try to think positive about this, ok?” Jimmy said impatiently.

“Ok, guys, let’s head into the main part of the forest,” DeAngelo said

As they went through the forest they got tired and decided to set up camp for the night and continue in the morning.

In the night a pack of snow wolves are looking for a midnight snack, and they come across the boys' camp. The wolves are sly. They start to attack DeAngelo. The wolves rip off his shirt and eat it for a snack.

"Ah! Where did these wolves come from? Jimmy, help!" DeAngelo yelled.

"Let's get our knives, Reese!" Jimmy yelled.

"DeAngelo!" they yelled, running with knives.

They scared off the wolves, but DeAngelo ended up with excruciating wounds on his legs.

"Hey Jimmy, Reese, I survived those wolves, but I don't know how much longer I can last out here. They ripped my left leg to the bone and I'm freezing cold, even with these blankets on me. I don't know how much longer I can survive in these conditions. The blood is throbbing through my veins so hard my heart feels like it is burning," DeAngelo said faintly.

"No, you're not going to die out here. We'll bandage it and carry you on the pull out stretcher," Jimmy said confidently.

"Ok. I'll try to hang on while you carry me on the stretcher," DeAngelo stated.

They searched the rest of the day until they saw something up about one hundred feet above their level.

"Is that Dad? Yes, he's still alive. Let's go!" Jimmy said with excitement.

"I can't believe we found your dad and we didn't die ourselves," Reese stated.

As they climbed up the mountain, DeAngelo even had a little smirk on his face, which was surprising considering his condition.

"Jimmy, what are you guys doing out here? You could have been killed!" Jimmy's dad said, confused.

"I didn't believe that the search party would find you, so I decided to do it myself," Jimmy said, crying on his dad's shoulder.

“Son, thanks, but don’t ever do this again. This was a very dangerous thing to do. Now let’s get home because I’m cold and hungry,” Jimmy’s dad replied.

“Yeah, but I’m just glad that you’re back with me, and not out here freezing and starving to death. I couldn’t let that happen to you,” Jimmy replied.

“Mom, we’re home! Dad and I are home! We went to save him from the mountain and only got a few cuts and bruises!” Jimmy said with the greatest excitement he had ever shown before.

“Oh my gosh! I was so worried about you two,” Jimmy’s mom said thankfully. “Jimmy, I’m glad that you went to rescue your dad, and that you’re safe at home again. But next time, let someone know what you are doing. I was afraid I was going to lose both of you.”

“Not to worry, Mom. With my friends DeAngelo and Reese, we can accomplish anything!”

“How is DeAngelo doing?” Mom wanted to know.

“He is doing well. He is in the hospital now, and the doctors said that Reese and I did a good job of keeping his wounds clean and helping him get over the shock.”

“Well, I’m just happy everything turned out to have a happy ending,” Mom said.

Cambridge vs. Yale

*The collegiate experience begins as a hectic one for many. Two sisters handle the situation differently and contend with the strain it puts on their relationship in **CAMBRIDGE VS. YALE**, by **Cassidy Cyr**.*

Every person expects college to be the best thing in his or her life. What people don't think about is how hectic it really is.

Lilly and Jenna Cambridge are twin sisters who wanted to attend Yale University from their early childhood. One minor problem that Jenna had to overcome was her learning ability. While learning came easily to Lilly, Jenna had to apply herself a lot more. Lilly was breezing through high school, but Jenna had to study very hard to keep her grades up so she could be accepted into Yale. This sometimes put tension on the sisters' relationship.

"Jenna, if you want, I can try to help you with some study habits that have made learning easier for me," Lilly offered.

"Just what I need," Jenna thought to herself, "my sister being another teacher."

Jenna knew that she needed some help. She just wasn't sure it should come from her sister, which would be an admission that Lilly was superior to her when it came to learning.

"No thanks," Jenna replied. *Now I really have to study, even if it means I have to stay up late at night*, Jenna thought.

Jenna made many sacrifices in her social and personal time, but the result was okay because her grades improved by graduation time.

When the sisters graduated high school, they both were accepted into Yale, and the jealousy was finally forgotten. *This is a new start!* Jenna thought. Reality did not take long to slap Jenna in the face, though. Her college courses were a lot harder than she had expected.

The girls' mother, Dorthia, had laid out the living arrangements before the first semester. The girls had to live at home until their first semester grade reports were sent home. If the girls had less than a B average, they had to continue living at home. Guess who had a B average and who had a C average? Well, Lilly moved into a dorm, and Jenna stayed at home with mom.

"Mom, I don't feel you're being fair!" said Jenna. "Lilly managed a B average easily, while my C average required a lot more work. I think you should consider my grade on a curve system like some teachers do, and allow both of us to move into a dorm," Jenna said to her mom.

Dorthia thought for a minute, and then replied, "That wasn't part of the deal. Sorry!"

Jenna studied extremely hard, and by the next semester she had raised her grades above Lilly's. Now her sister was a little jealous. Living together is not easy when sisters are not happy with each other. They agreed to help each other and live as sisters and as friends!

Well, both girls graduated from Yale at the top of their class, and our Jenna went on to assist younger people that have learning difficulties. You don't have to worry about Lilly, either. Everyone now calls her "Dr. Cambridge." The nicest part is they no longer have a jealous bone in their bodies!

Jenna and Lilly advise all students to learn good study habits at an early age. It takes the "hectic" out of college.

Camp Blue Lake

*Sometimes the best experiences in life are the ones you least expect. But in **CAMP BLUE LAKE** by **Katie Miller**, will a mall rat like Becca adapt to a new environment?*

“Do I really have to stay here for a whole two weeks?” asked Becca for the tenth time.

“Yes, your father and I think that Camp Blue Lake will be a great experience for you,” replied Becca’s mom Betsy.

“I would rather be at the mall with my friends!” cried Becca.

“There will be plenty of time for that, after camp,” said Betsy.

“Oh, would you look at the time,” said Becca’s dad Bill. “We have to get going. Write lots of letters. We love you!” said Bill.

“Fine,” said Becca as her parents hugged and kissed her goodbye. She watched the black BMW drive away until it was only a speck down the road.

Two boys playing catch accidentally knocked into Becca. “Sorry!” they called and ran away. As she rubbed her sore head, she wished she could talk to Kiley, Lauren, and Liza, her three best friends. She hated being here in this dump.

“Excuse me, are you Becca Brown?” said a perky blond-haired teenager.

“Yeah,” said Becca, wondering who she was.

“You and seven other 12-year-old girls are in that cabin. I am your counselor.”

As Becca walked into the small cabin full of bunk beds, she didn't think she could make it two weeks there. Lisa assigned the beds. Becca was bunking with a girl named Alexis, who looked a lot like Kiley. They started talking, and it turned out that Alexis didn't want to be at Camp Blue Lake either. They became immediate friends. Becca still regretted coming and missing two whole weeks of shopping, but she was making the best out of the situation.

Becca still couldn't believe that she was going to water ski! Alexis was a very convincing person, especially if it meant making Becca water ski.

"Come on. I dare you to try it!" said Alexis to Becca.

Just the thought of water-skiing made Becca feel sick. "I barely know how to swim," replied Becca.

"You are such a baby!" said Alexis.

Becca, not wanting to be thought of as a baby, said, "Fine. If I try it, you can't make fun of me!"

"Would I do that?" said Alexis with her most innocent face. They both laughed.

As Becca jumped into the water, she could feel the sun beating on her face. She was actually excited about doing this. She felt the wind rushing through her hair. As she was skinning the crystal clear water, her foot felt slippery. She fell down. Becca got up by pulling on the rope and balancing on her skis. After three times of failing and falling, she was skiing around the lake. Wait until her parents heard this!

Becca and Alexis told each other that they would try a new thing each day. Together, Becca and Alexis tried rock climbing, arts and crafts, volleyball, tennis, horseback riding, and basketball.

Because time flies by when you're having fun (and Becca and Alexis had tons of it), they savored every moment. But before they knew it, it was time to go home.

Becca couldn't wait to see her parents. Although she was excited about seeing her parents, she was going to miss Camp Blue Lake so much! A million thoughts were rushing through her head about leaving camp and seeing her parents when she saw that same BMW drive up the dirt road.

"Did you have fun?" asked Betsy.

"It was the most amazing experience ever!" exclaimed Becca. She was trying to find the perfect words to describe it. "I really went out on a limb to try new things. I loved it," said Becca.

"We knew you would," said Bill.

"I would rather be here than on a shopping spree!" said Becca.

They laughed and drove away. No matter how much time went by, Becca would never forget her first summer at Camp Blue Lake.

Caught in the Breeze

*Since when does “field trip” mean skipping out to Marshall Fields? Two middle-school girls tempt fate for the sake of a Chicago shopping spree in **CAUGHT IN THE BREEZE**, by E. A. Lammers.*

We just sat there, waiting for it.... All of a sudden, we heard, “Second hour and sixth hour!” shouted in a booming voice by Mr. Spillihp (our science teacher, whose name is pronounced *Spillip*; the *h* is silent).

Second hour and sixth hour were to be the two science classes that would be traveling to Chicago! My best friend (Emelia) had Mr. Spillihp for second hour, and I had him for sixth! We rejoiced like mad for a couple of moments, and then sat down again in silence because almost everyone was staring at us.

On our “field trip” we were supposed to visit several different famous museums and aquariums over the course of two days. We arrived at our hotel that night, and the next morning we headed out bright and early for Shedd’s Aquarium. Oh, the fish were beautiful! I’d love to tell you all about them, but that’s not the point of the story.

Before we took off on our charter bus and headed to another museum, we took a break and ate at McDonald’s for lunch. That’s when stuff started to go “wrong.”

As Emelia and I were finishing up, Mr. Spillihp thought he did a correct head count, but obviously not, because they all left without us. Yes, I’m telling the truth. Lucky for us, that was all part of our plan. You see, the classes were split up

and there were multiple, smaller groups with individual chaperones. We convinced one chaperone that we were being transferred into another chaperone's group and vice versa. After that, everything fell into place quite nicely.

We each had 100 dollars of birthday money left over that was sitting in our back pockets. I said, "Em, why don't we take a couple of taxis around the city and go shopping? That'd be fun, right?" She agreed, and we did.

We shopped in SO many stores! We bought a *lot* of stuff. Then we went out for lunch at a local Panera Bread.

When we got back into the taxi after lunch, we noticed that it was the same taxi driver that we'd had earlier that morning. We eventually got to know quite a bit about each other; it was like we were neighbors. The taxi driver's name was Pam, and she was super nice and was always cracking jokes.

We could barely see out of the windows because the back seat was absolutely stuffed with shopping bags and shoeboxes. Emelia and I were rethinking our day so far. "I feel so awesome! This is oh-so amazing. I can't believe that we actually pulled this whole thing off. It's the work of masterminds! We rock SO hard."

While Pam was talking on her cell phone, Em and I decided to talk quietly between ourselves for a little while. "Ericca, are we lost?"

At first, I sat there dumbfounded, not knowing how to react. Then reality hit me and I woke up.

"I mean, c'mon, Ericca; we've convinced ourselves that it's only a big shopping spree. But that's not what it really is, is it?" Emelia asked me the question that I, myself, had been wondering.

"You know what, Em? I think—"

Our all-important conversation was ended by Pam's hanging question: "Hey, guys, I'm not trying to be a party

pooper or anything, but couldn't you try to call the hotel, or your parents or something?" she asked curiously. At that point, she kind of became a motherly figure to us, which made us feel the first pang of guilt about ditching our tour group.

"Well..." Emelia and I stuttered; we didn't know what to say to that.

"We don't know the hotel's number, Pam. Heck, we don't even know the *name* of the hotel, much less the number. Or else we would've called a while ago. Okay, maybe we would've called a little later on..." We all laughed.

"Seriously, though, girls; did you even think of calling your parents?"

Emelia and I paused for a moment before we answered. "We don't want to get in trouble or worry our parents," we said, still grasping for words. "If we tell them, then they'll ask if we're all alone. And then we'll have to say we're with a taxi driver that we've only known for about five and a half hours. Plus, that's a long-distance call and it would cost a lot of money, right?" We only said that because it sounded grown-up. "That's exactly why we didn't want to call our parents," Em and I said matter-of-factly. Right then is when we felt our second pang of guilt.

"Oh, okay...very smart, girls," Pam said thoughtfully, while smiling.

Eventually it got to be about six forty-five, and we were getting only a little worried. The three of us went to California Pizza Kitchen for dinner.

"Em, it's getting dark out and we don't even know what the name of our hotel is," I complained. Boy, that pizza sure made us crabby!

"Isn't it 'Western Inn' or 'World Hotel' or 'Best Eastern' or something?" Emelia asked hopefully.

"I don't know!" I answered rudely, crushing her hope. "Hey, you don't want to make a pit stop at these outlet stores,

do you?” I smiled mischievously. Emelia and I still had about fifty-five dollars left in our wallets.

“Well, only if you want to...” replied Emelia, smiling a pleading smile.

In about ten seconds we were inside those outlet stores having a ball! “Now, why can’t we do this at the Somerset Mall back home?” I asked Emelia, the both of us still laughing.

She paused for a second, not quite sure what to say. “I think it’s because we’re in Chicago by ourselves; plus, we have a *lot* more money than we usually do,” then she quickly added in a hushed voice, “and if we make complete fools of ourselves, these people will never see us again, so it doesn’t matter what they think!” We had a good laugh about that one.

It had officially gotten dark now. Even though we were at the point where we were seriously panicking, we weren’t crazy enough to shout it to the world. But I could tell that Emelia was definitely tempted to do so once or twice. Right now, we were driving through the streets just as we had earlier today, but now it was more frantic and anxious.

Sadly, it was time to say goodbye to Pam, because she was actually running low on gas. She told us that she’d have to get a good night’s sleep in order to wake up early tomorrow morning to make up for today, since she didn’t charge us anything. We swapped e-mail addresses and said thanks for all that she’d done for us. Our final words were: “We’ll never forget you, Pam!”

“I’ll never forget you either, girls!” With a honk of her horn and a last wave, she drove off into the starry night. “Ericca,” Emelia asked sheepishly, “can we find a bench and sit down—because I think I’m going to cry.”

Finally, at about eleven-thirty at night, we stumbled into a hotel that was surprisingly still buzzing with people. We were

extremely close to making beds out of the couches and chairs in the lobby when a night clerk came up to us and said, “May I help you ladies?” I nudged Emelia to ask him if there was a tour group here from B.M.S. (our middle school). She nudged me to ask him, but we were both too tired.

I decided to shriek, “Is there a ‘Berkshire Tour Group’ on the sign-in sheet, by any chance?” Emelia just stared at me in awe, because now the whole hotel was looking at us as if we were lunatics.

“Yes, there certainly is,” said the clerk.

Once we got up to our room, we didn’t want to wake anybody, so we just slowly crept into our beds and fell asleep in thirty seconds. I timed it.

The next morning, Emelia and I were very nervous. Suddenly, I noticed that everybody’s hands were swollen, their faces were all red, and they held an ice pack on top of their heads. But now we had to answer the burning question that determined whether we would get suspended or not.

Mr. Spillihp asked us, “Were you girls on the ride back with us to the hotel? You were sick the whole day yesterday along with the rest of us, weren’t you?” We just about jumped out of our skin!

Emelia and I paused for what seemed like forever. (It turns out that the sea creatures we all visited that morning at Shedd’s Aquarium had an airborne virus that spread through everybody except Emelia and I. We left the tour group too early on for the virus to get to us. That being true, because it was, everybody came back to the hotel and stayed there all day while we were out shopping and having the time of our life. We thought they had continued with the field trip. Now, think about it, what are the odds of that?)

Before it was too late, Emelia and I had to answer Mr. Spillihp’s question, because we could tell he was starting to suspect something.

“Um, of course Mr. Spillihp, w-why wouldn’t we be?” I said shakily.

“Yeah, w-what gave you the idea that we w-weren’t?” asked Emelia, who was trembling now. I almost laughed; she was trembling so hard.

“I was just making sure,” he said, looking at us warily for a moment longer.

Yes, we lied. We also skipped out on a class field trip that would’ve been otherwise spent lying in bed for a whole day. But it was for the sake of our parents, so that they wouldn’t be worried and ground us because we got lost in a city like Chicago. It was also for the sake of Mr. Spillihp, because he could lose his job for doing something as foolish as misplacing two students on a field trip. See, it helps out everyone by not knowing about our rendezvous! Anyway, no one ever found out about Emelia’s and my little secret, thank goodness. But the best part was, we never got in trouble for spending half of our money shopping and having fun instead of learning.

The whole ride back home on the charter bus, Em and I kept stealing glances at each other, smiling, and then bursting into giggles. When we tried to sneak peeks at the sweet stuff we bought, we’d have to stuff it under the seat, because Mr. Spillihp kept walking up and down the aisle. He even stopped to stand there and just look at us with an ever-so-curious face.

That day was the best and worst day of our lives; at least that’s what we think. It’s just what’s bound to happen when two eleven-year-old girls get lost in the depths of the mixed up city of Chicago!

The Chanukah Present

Meleny receives gifts for Chanukah that have strange qualities in **THE CHANUKAH PRESENT**, *by* **Stephanie Lester**.

One night on the first day of Chanukah, there was a girl named Meleny. Chanukah was her all-time favorite holiday of the year. Her parents give her a present each day of Chanukah. The first day she got one hundred dollars from her parents. On the third day she got a puppy. On the third-to-last day her parents discussed something while Meleny was asleep.

“What do you think we should get Meleny for the last day?” said the mom.

“I think we should play a trick on her. Remember last year on April Fool’s Day?” said the dad.

“You mean when she put whipped cream on my hand, and tickled my nose?” asked the mom.

“Yeah,” replied the dad.

“So tomorrow, go to the prank store and get a magician bag, and a voice activator for the puppy. Also get a rigged version of her game,” said the mom.

On the last day of Chanukah the parents held out to her a bag the size of a ring case. “What is this? I don’t want a bag for Chanukah!” yelled Meleny.

“Just reach into it, honey,” the mom told her.

The weird thing was she got a GameBoy and a collar for the puppy—two things that should never have fit inside such a small bag. The collar was yellow and orange, which were Meleny’s favorite colors.

Meleny went to play her new GameBoy, but the weirdest thing happened when she was facing a very hard boss. When she was about to lose, the boss just died. She kept playing, but when she did, all the bad guys coming at her character just died. It was like she was invincible or had a bubble around her.

“What just happened? This game is so weird.” Then Meleny put the game away and went to sleep. It was about 9:30.

When Meleny was sleeping, her parents set up the voice activator, which came with a tiny speaker and a walkie-talkie. The speaker could be attached to the collar on the puppy. The mom kept the walkie-talkie with her while she slept.

The parents woke up at 8 o’clock to set up the trick. The mom went in the kitchen to see if the walkie-talkie worked. “Testing, testing, 1, 2, 3.” It worked.

Meleny woke up at 9 o’clock. She went straight downstairs to pet the puppy. “Hey, girl,” Meleny said to the puppy. The puppy said, “Hello” in a baby voice, which her mom was doing in the kitchen.

“Meleny called, “Dad! Can you come here, please?”

He said, “Yes, honey,” in a very calm voice.

“The puppy just said hello to me!”

Then the dad said, “Hey, girl” to the puppy. The puppy said, “Arf.” Meleny was speechless. Her dad started to laugh.

“Why are you laughing?” Meleny asked.

“We got you,” the dad said.

“What do you mean?” Meleny said.

The mom walked in, saying, “It was all a joke.”

“The bag was a magic bag from the prank store,” her dad said.

“The puppy has a tiny speaker on the collar. So when I talked into this walkie-talkie, it sounded like the puppy was talking,” the mom explained.

“What about the GameBoy?”

“Your dad went to the prank store and got a rigged version of your game,” the mom told her.

“Why did you play those pranks on me?” Meleny wondered.

“Well, you always play pranks on us, so we wanted to get you back. You will never, ever play another prank on us again. Right, young lady? Except for April Fool’s Day,” the dad said.

This was one Chanukah Meleny will never forget.

Christmas on a Farm

*In the mid-1800's, America was a significantly rural society. In **CHRISTMAS ON A FARM**, **Caroline Biehl** takes us back to those days of self-sufficiency and happiness during a magical time of year for one close-knit family.*

It was a few days till Christmas. There were two little French girls named Marie and Caroline Gillere. Marie was nine, and had long brown hair. Caroline was ten, and had long, golden hair. They lived on a small farm in the year 1865 in the middle of Ohio.

Mother and Caroline were making breakfast, while father and their two brothers—David, the eldest, and Charley, the second eldest—did their chores. It was the middle of winter, so they were getting ready for Christmas. All the crops had grown beautifully that summer, and the cellar and pantry were full.

Finally breakfast was ready, and father, David and Charley came in. Marie brought their baby sister, Helen, to mother.

While they all ate their breakfast father said, "There's news that Uncle William and Aunt Grace are having a Christmas party at their farm on Saturday. So Aunt Anna and Uncle James's family are staying here for Christmas." Marie, Caroline, Charley and David looked at each other in joy!

After breakfast Marie and Caroline did the dishes. Then they began to do their sewing. Caroline was making a new dress for Helen, and Marie was making a new apron for

mother. They were doing this in their room because it was for Christmas.

Caroline asked, "Marie, what do you want for Christmas?"

Marie answered, "All I want for Christmas is for mother to love this apron!"

Then mother called, "Girls, come down to make dinner!" So they put away their sewing in their secret spot and went downstairs to make dinner. Then they dished up the food and had dinner.

While eating dinner, mother told the girls and boys to get some chickens, eggs, apples, green beans and corn for tomorrow's supper. The girls did the dishes and did as they were told to do. Then they began to play in the house.

That morning, when they were dressed and breakfast was on the table, mother announced, "Aunt Anna and Uncle James's family will be here at supper. So Marie and Caroline, you two are cleaning the parlor, kitchen, quilts, and rooms today." So after breakfast they cleaned all of the rooms, quilts and bedding in the farmhouse.

Then finally it was supper and Uncle James's family was there. Their cousins' names were Henry, John, Elizabeth, and Jane. They had supper and went to sleep.

That next day, father got the wagons and horses ready bright and early with Uncle James. Then in the afternoon they all began to get ready for the party. The girls put their Sunday dresses on. The boys did the same with their Sunday suits.

Finally they all got into their wagons and drove to Uncle William's home.

When they got there, Caroline and Marie went to see their other cousins. They decided to go outside. Some made snowmen, while others made snow angels. Everyone was having a lot of fun and did not want to go inside until Aunt

Grace called them to supper. They were as hungry as a pack of wolves.

They had delicious roasted turkey so warm it was like summer came again. They also had mashed potatoes, corn, bread and chicken. Everyone ate till they could eat no more.

Then their grandmother and Aunt Grace brought the pies out. When Caroline and Marie saw all the pies they felt every pie known to man was in front of them. There was apple, cherry, blackberry, blueberry, and even chicken pie. Everyone ate all the delicious pies till there was not even a crumb left.

It was getting quite late, so they thanked Aunt Grace and Uncle William for inviting them and went home.

All the children got into their nightgowns and went to bed.

Finally it was Christmas morning. They all exchanged gifts. Caroline got a new shawl and a new dress, which made her quite happy, seeing that her old shawl was worn out and that her old Sunday dress had been patched for the third time. Marie got a new dress and a rag doll. The minute she saw the rag doll the only thing she could do was hold onto it with great thanks.

Then Marie gave mother the apron she had made for her. Mother looked greatly surprised and thanked Marie. Then Caroline showed mother the beautiful summer dress she made for Helen. Helen didn't seem to know what was going on, but still acted excited for no reason. Both David and Charley got new work clothes and Sunday suits. They were happy about what they got and thanked the girls and mother. Father had also got his own work clothes, plus a new pig from the boys.

They were all so happy with what they got. They all did the day's chores and thought of the very busy spring ahead.

Dancing Like a Devil

*A girl's dream to dance in an out-of-state competition is in jeopardy when her mother denies permission for her to travel. You may be surprised how the girl handles the situation in **DANCING LIKE A DEVIL**, by **Kirpa Sahni**.*

Dancing on the stage was great, and everyone clapped for you and cheered, but the hard part was worrying if they would like you or not.

Friday, September 9, 2006, our dance teacher Jessica told us that we were going to L.A. to dance against the L.A. team. They had won every dance performance. I knew that Mom and Dad would say yes for sure because they know it's my dream to go to another state and perform.

When I got home, I saw Mom watching TV in the living room. Dad was out in the backyard doing some work, and Jack, my brother, was upstairs playing some video games. I closed the door and my mom said "Hi, Lily."

"Hi, Mom," I replied. I jumped up and down, all excited, and ran to her in a rush. I asked, "Mom, can I go to L.A.?" I was saying in my head, "Yes, yes, yes," but then she opened her mouth and the answer was no. I looked at her all weird and said, "NO?" and she just turned around to finish watching her show.

Oh, my gosh, I couldn't believe it. I had to ask her why. She said, "Well, I just can't let you go all the way to L.A. for two weeks. You know that."

“But, Mom, you know it’s my dream. Why do you have to ruin it?” I said.

Then Mom said, “No means no.”

I ran up to my room and shut my door. I knew I couldn’t ask Dad because he always takes Mom’s side, and that’s it. So I knew what I had to do. I called up Jessica and told her I could go. The bus was leaving tomorrow at 9:00 a.m.

When I went down for dinner, I told Mom and Dad that I was spending two weeks at camp with Alicia, and her mom would pick me up at 9:00 a.m. Mom and Dad said it was ok because camp was only 30 minutes away from our house. After I ate dinner, I watched a little TV and then fell asleep.

Before I knew it, it was 9:00, and Jessica was waiting for me outside. I didn’t have enough time to say goodbye, so I just left a note.

Four hours later we were in L.A. I didn’t feel guilty at all, but I felt bad that I lied. We got to the hotel room and then Jessica told us that tomorrow was our performance and also in the morning were our practices, so “Go to sleep,” and I did.

At 8:30 a.m. I woke up, and then in shock I saw Mom and Dad standing in front of me, each with a mad face. I said, “Hi, Mom; hi, Dad.”

They didn’t reply to my greeting. They just said, “Pack your bags and let’s go home.”

I looked at them in an odd way and said, “No. I am not going home. This is my dream. You can’t do this to me.”

Mom was struck with silence, but then said, “You can stay for the show, and after, you have to quit dance class.”

I thought about it and said, “Ok, when we get home, I will quit dance class.”

I went to dance practice and worked on my solo part. It took about five hours. Right after the practice I went straight to the dressing room and changed into my clothes. I had on a

pink tank top with sparkles and a miniskirt that was a light blue with sequins. My hair was all curled, and usually it was straight.

After everyone got dressed and got her hair done, each person stepped out onto the stage with confidence. Next came me. I stepped onto the stage. I wasn't nervous at all because I have been on stage about millions of times.

The music started, and everyone started to dance. I knew my solo was coming up, so I looked at Mom and Dad to see their faces. They actually had smiles on their faces, which put a smile on my face.

My solo was here. The light struck my eye, and it was a feeling like I had never had before in my life. I danced and I couldn't stop thinking, "Did the crowd love me or not?"

Then they gave me a signal. Everyone was clapping and cheering for me like crazy.

Finally it was the other team's turn to perform. The girls were applauded like crazy.

I thought that they would win, but that wasn't true. After they were done, the judges made their choice, and we won! Every single girl on our team was jumping up and down.

I got off the stage to see if my parents liked it our not. I asked Mom, "How did you like the play?"

She said, "It was wonderful, Lily. Now I understand why you came here without telling us. You knew dancing was your life, and you will stick to it forever.

"The reason why I didn't let you go is because I didn't want to lose you at all. It's just that you're growing up. You don't have to quit dance class."

I gave a big hug to Mom and Dad, and then I said, "Dreams do come true!"

Don't Hate Me for My Country's Sins

*A true friend could be the person you least suspect. In **DON'T HATE ME FOR MY COUNTRY'S SINS** by **Hailey Tushman**, two girls from different cultures must figure out how important their differences really are.*

Iran and America have never gotten along that well, and I doubt we ever will. But the war between them seems never-ending. It's 2006 and we're *still* at war! I wonder if it will truly ever really end.

When I was young, so young that I didn't have to cover all my skin yet, my father went to war to defend Iran. Every night I would pray for his safety. I could only dream of what he was going through.

One day, when the sun was just setting and the mist was settling down on the dewy grass, a truck pulled up to our home. A grizzly man limped towards my house, and heavily climbed the concrete stairs to the door. His loud knock sent my dog into a barking frenzy and made my mother jump.

Mother opened the door and greeted the old man. Wordlessly he held out a ripped and coffee-stained note towards my mother. She stared at it for a few seconds, doubtful. Mother took the crinkled paper and bid the man good night and good luck. She read the note over several times before I was allowed to look at it.

Dear Ms. Marina,

Iran is a very dangerous place to go to war in. The American soldiers that we are at war with have unfortunately shot down your husband's jet. His mangled body was indeed found, and is already buried. Before he died he said these words exactly: "I love my daughter and wife very much, and if they ever need me I will always be with them." He was a brave soldier and aided us greatly in a bloody war. Iranian forces send all of our wishes to you and your daughter.

-Iranian Forces

Inside the envelope was my father's dog tag that said his name.

My mind was racing, and I couldn't make anything out of what my brain was thinking. Dad had promised he would be back after the war. Our small house seemed to be closing in around me.

I clutched the note and, without thinking, threw it into the fire. I watched it as the sides turned black and curled in protest of certain death. A ripple of rage went down my spine and ripped into my blood. I sat next to my mother and looked into her troubled eyes.

"Daddy promised me he would come back after the war," I whispered.

Mother tore her eyes off of the fire. "I know. Just always stay true to Iran, and spit on the ground where Americans have walked," Mother spat. She cursed silently to herself. I could tell she was in the worst mood of her life.

After that night my home was always bleak. Without daddy's booming laugh, the future seemed hopelessly dull. Finally one day mother told me we had to move to America.

"We can't go to America. We just...just...can't! Besides, we don't have papers, or passes, or whatever those things are to get on a plane to America," I stammered.

"I don't wish to leave Iran any more than you do. But, Americans are trying to show hospitality. I think that because of the death of your father they owe our family much. We should take advantage of their resources, considering we have not much nourishment to sustain us. There are many complicated reasons that you would probably not understand. We must go to America," Mother preached.

The plane was full of Iranian women. I saw many children on the plane with us, but I didn't wish to look at their mournful eyes. How could Mother do this to me? I just couldn't grip the fact that I was going to *America*. I could only imagine what ill-dressed eyes would stare at me. To my knowledge, most Americans don't wear large dresses like us, and they barely cover any of their skin. I'd seen a photo of a woman wearing a *very* short shirt with skin-tight denim pants. Mother said the pants were called "jeans." At first glance the woman looked so free, and I wanted to wear what she wore. Mother scolded me harshly for this thought, and I never looked at the photo again.

When we got off of the plane, everything I'd known was crammed into the back of my mind at that instant. There was a rush of emotion, and confusion went straight through me. There were so many people, and so much skin! Little children were wearing jeans. I clutched Mother's bony hand in mine. I thought about what kind of trouble all of these people were going to get in when they were seen so uncovered. Mother clung to me tightly, too.

One boy kept staring at me. Mother said it was because we were dressed so "beautifully" that he couldn't keep his eyes off

of me. Even in the fourth grade I was still not fooled. What she was saying was, we looked odd to these people, because we didn't dress the way they did. I was miserable in my own skin. I wanted out.

Since we arrived in America around May, I skipped my first year of elementary school. Mom said that since a month was left of the school year I didn't have to go to fourth grade. So I started in fifth grade, and it was tough!

Our new home was an apartment. We were on the ground floor where I could hear children's pounding footsteps above me all night. In the morning we would go to the main dining room and have breakfast. I eventually got into the habit of wearing long-sleeved shirts with jeans, so we didn't get as many stares. Mother wore her traditional clothes every Friday, and so did I. We would pray many times throughout the week, and I would beg G-d to return me to my homeland. Mother said the lord always heard my pleading; he just didn't think it right for us to go back to suffering. At this I looked up at the blue sky, and grimaced at her remark.

Every night was much like the last. Every day was much like the last. Every time I thought about the month I'd already spent in America, the more I hated it. June was hot. Many people stared at me. I shrank from their wandering eyes.

I finally got my mom to buy me shorts and T-shirts. It felt...good! Although I was accustomed to wearing long-sleeved shirts in warm weather, I wasn't accustomed to being stared at.

Mother wouldn't wear shorts or a T-shirt. She stuck to jeans and quarter-length sleeves. All the other women in the apartment questioned her. "I won't expose my skin to men," she would reply. I would eye the women suspiciously as they eyed my mother.

Finally, August rolled around. It was the month I was going to fifth grade. My teacher's name was Mrs. McSawzy.

She had long black hair with equally long gray streaks. She had a large brown mole on her cheek with an oily hair poking out of the center of it. Her eyes bore a lifeless, hopeless expression in them, despite their deep, beautiful ice blue.

Her room was very interesting, though. It had a fat, bright-eyed guinea pig in the left corner of the room. Its cage was plastic mahogany on the bottom with black bars for the top. Mrs. McSawzy's desk was a brown polished rectangle. A clutter of books, pens, pencils, and paper were shoved onto its shiny surface. The room had large chalkboards with half-erased marks on their surfaces. My favorite part of the room was the desks. The lids opened and shut, and I was able to put all of my belongings into the bottom of mine.

Mother drove me to school the first week. I hated school from the start. Mrs. McSawzy didn't pay much attention to me. All eyes were always on me. I was the only Iranian there. Plus, many children knew about the war and practically spat in my direction (not that they ever really did spit at me).

One day a boy named Oliver Canercokinn approached me. "We don't want you here. You don't fit in 'cause you aren't an American. We've seen what you did in the war. Just get outta here," he said.

My face flushed and my eyes grew wide with horror. It had happened. They did know who I was, and the school didn't like me at all.

I dropped my backpack and ran to the bathroom. I cried and cried. My eyes burned from the salty tears exploding from my eyes. My head pounded like a brick was repeatedly being dropped on me. The dismissal bell rang but I wouldn't budge from my spot. Outside the bathroom door I could hear Oliver talking about how he "ran me out of town."

"Oh my Corita, how was your day at school?" My mother's eyes glistened with wonder. I desperately wanted to tell her what Oliver had said to me, but I couldn't bring myself to do it.

I don't know why; maybe because I knew she didn't want to go back to Iran, or perhaps I was afraid of what Mother might do. All the same, I didn't tell her.

"Oh Mother, it was wonderful. I learned how to spell more words in English," I announced semi-joyously, as I was proud of that actually.

As we climbed into the car to go home, I realized something. The school was much more efficient than the ones in Iran. I felt I learned more in one day than I did in a whole week in my homeland. Whatever was going on with my friends back in Iran was irrelevant. It didn't matter anymore; America was my home now, unfortunately.

It was Saturday, and the leaves were a rich green. Squirrels were chattering furiously at one another, then turned to me and chattered piteously in protest of my sudden intrusion. I laughed at them, and stuck my tongue out. I had to open the window. It was so hot outside. The hot weather reminded me of my home back in Iran.

Suddenly a small nest caught my eye. A large sparrow swooped down with a gob of wriggling worms in its mouth. A bird popped its head out of the nest and moved aside so her chicks could be fed. Why did the birds have a father but I didn't? It just wasn't fair.

The weekend went by slowly, but I hardly noticed. I was afraid to go back to school. What if Oliver was ready for me again? What if the teacher ignored me if Oliver did something? Was I ready to take care of this myself? I'd find out soon enough—too soon.

Monday came around with an alarming presence. I was riding the bus today for the first time. Luckily, Oliver wasn't on my bus. I sat at the front of the bus pressed into a corner. One girl my age I noticed always looked at me awkwardly. I would eye her until she looked over at me, then I would quickly change my gaze, embarrassed to meet her gaze.

When I arrived at school I was astonished to find the girl was in my class. I wondered how I hadn't noticed her before.

We had plenty of morning work. Much of it was addition and subtraction, and a small fraction of it was writing. I had just finished a writing sheet when I got the chill of a pair of hateful eyes staring at me. I looked up and found that Oliver was glaring at me with cold eyes. By the time lunch came around I could barely breathe. He had the most vicious look on his face. Then lunch ended and recess began.

"Hey, you!" It was Oliver. I spun around to find a group of his "buddies" and him staring me down. "I thought I told you to never come back," he growled at me through narrowed eyes. He gave chase and I ran for fear of him catching me. His friends fanned out as if it were planned and chased me to the farthest end of the playground where no one could see us. Oliver grabbed my arm.

"Let go of me, let me go! Ouch, stop, you're hurting me!" I screamed as he wrenched at my arm. He punched me in the head, and threw me to the ground. The recess whistle blew, and the boys all scurried away to get back inside. I stayed far behind; the shadow of hate etched itself into my mind. I let my breathing go back to normal, and I struggled into my classroom.

Mrs. McSawzy paid little mind to my scrapes and bruises. "You'll be fine. Go take your seat before I call the principal to come get you." She scowled wretchedly.

"But, it hurts, Mrs. McSawzy. Can I go to the nurse...?" I persisted.

"GO SIT DOWN!" the teacher screamed. "I don't want you going to the nurse's office. You're so dumb right now; I need to teach you our American ways! Sit down." My face flushed. My teacher in Iran was always kind to me. She always helped me when I was hurt. I didn't want to be in America.

“Oh, Corita, what happened to you?” my mother cried as she scanned my bruised body.

“Nothing, I just fell off of the...um...swings, at recess,” I lied half-heartedly. She looked unconvinced, but still nodded.

“Come; let’s get you home so I can clean you up,” Mother said.

That night as I lay in my bed I thought about what had gone on that day. What would happen tomorrow? Would Oliver launch another assault on me again? I thought of the squirrels that had been chattering outside my window yesterday. It would be so nice to say and do as I wanted without being looked down upon. But that was never how it was going to be.

On the bus I sat in front as usual. The strange girl got on after me, but this time she stopped at my seat.

“May I sit here?” she asked shyly. My heart raced. What was she trying to pull? Everyone hated me.

“I...um, yeah,” I said, very hesitant to answer. She looked relieved and sat next to me.

“I’m Connie. I heard about what Oliver did to you yesterday,” she breathed, hoping it wouldn’t offend me. My head shot up, and my attention was immediately taken.

“You did?” I muttered under my breath, recalling yesterday’s “issues.”

“Yeah, I think that was horrible! I mean, how could the teacher treat you like that? Oliver is a big jerk anyway. He doesn’t like new kids,” she said, her flaming red curls bouncing up and down as if they were nodding in agreement.

“Well, as you know, I’m from Iran. America is in a fight with Iran, so no one really likes me. I’m Corita, by the way,” I huffed. It didn’t feel right to be consulting with an American. But she seemed different. I could almost like her, almost.

“Do you want to sit with me at lunch? I could hang out with you at recess. Oliver’s my boyfriend. He’ll listen to me,” Connie said quickly. I could tell she liked to talk.

Just then another fifth-grade girl leaned over the back of the seat.

“You don’t have a boyfriend in fifth grade, Connie,” she teased, jabbing Connie in the ribs.

“Ethel, you know I have a boyfriend! Oh, this is Corita,” Connie said cheerily. I shrank back a little bit as Ethel eyed me skeptically.

“Hi, I’m Corita. N-nice to meet you,” I stammered, afraid that Ethel would be mad that I was on the bus.

“Hi, I’m Ethel; I think I’m in the other fifth-grade class next to your room,” she said, giving me a bright smile. Maybe America wasn’t so bad after all, sort of.

I avoided Oliver’s menacing eyes all morning. Mrs. McSawzy didn’t call on me, and for once I was extremely relieved after the performance she put on yesterday. By the time lunchtime came, I felt a lot more comfortable than before.

“Hi, Corita! Come sit by me!” shouted Connie across the lunchroom. I walked briskly towards her table. I didn’t want too many eyes on me.

“What do you have for lunch?” I asked, trying to strike up conversation.

“I got a cheese and turkey sandwich, a cookie, grapes, and an apple juice. What about you?”

“Oh, some PB&J, yogurt, and a water bottle,” I replied, hoping that they would think my lunch was okay.

“Cool,” said Connie, chomping down on her cookie.

“Hi, Connie. Oh, who’s she?” said another girl sitting down across from me. I guessed she was in a fifth-grade class other than mine also.

“Amy, this is Corita. She’s my new friend,” explained Connie. I could almost hear a tinge of defensiveness in her voice.

“Hi, Corita, I’m Amy. Alex, Patty, come over here!” shouted Amy across the lunchroom. Two girls with bleach

blond hair trotted up to our table. I'd seen them out at recess, but I didn't think they were in my class either.

"Wow, who's your friend?" they said rather boldly. I winced at the word "friend." I wasn't quite sure if I was even friends with Connie yet, let alone Amy.

"This is Corita. Why don't you guys sit down with us today?" said Amy. The two girls skipped away, and came back with their lunches.

"So, Corita, I'm Patty and this is Alex," Patty said.

"Lunch is now over, all of you may go to recess," boomed a voice over the loudspeaker. I liked these girls. Maybe I would someday grow to like America, maybe.

Weeks passed and things grew better for me every day. I gained more acquaintances, and Connie, Patty, Alex, and Amy did eventually become my friends. Oliver never really did bother me, except for the occasional shove in the hallway or ominous gesture. I learned to ignore his threats.

Mother eventually found a job as a waitress at one of the finer restaurants. It wasn't the best job, but it paid enough so that we were able to move into a house and out of the apartment. I still prayed every Friday, and stayed true to my Iranian ways. But the longer I was in America, the less I remembered Iran.

Connie stepped onto the bus, bright-eyed as usual. I decided that maybe it would be okay to discuss the war with Connie.

"Did you hear about that unit that crashed three months ago?" I asked Connie.

"What unit?" she frowned.

"It was my dad's unit. Like, back in April or May, yeah, May. His unit crashed somewhere in the southern part of Iran," I said to Connie.

"W-when did you say your dad's unit crashed?" she asked suddenly.

“Like, May 12. They recovered my dad’s dog tags later that night when the fire died down enough to get near,” I responded flatly. The subject was becoming more fragile. Connie knew something; I could see it in her eyes.

“Corita, my dad’s unit shot someone down in May.” Connie’s words were dry; she wouldn’t look me in the eye. My heart skipped a beat.

“It was probably just a coincidence,” I said more or less reassuring myself.

“My dad came home wounded about three months ago. He said he was in a huge battle and was at a disadvantage since Iran had their planes. His unit started firing at the planes; one of them lost a wing. Part of the broken metal hit him and that’s the last he could remember,” she said.

I silenced myself. There wasn’t proof that it was *her* dad that had shot the plane down. My mind raced. “Where did the battle take place?” I prodded urgently. “It wasn’t in *far* south, was it?”

“It was at 10:00 a.m. Far south, right on the border,” Connie replied.

“That was-was my d-dad. M-my dad!” I could hear my voice lifting into shrill gibberish. It wasn’t true. It couldn’t be true.

“Corita?” Connie’s voice broke the silence. I wouldn’t look at her. I turned my head away and ignored Connie. I felt Connie get up and move to a different seat.

During the day I could feel Connie staring at me. I wouldn’t look up to meet her gaze, though. During lunch I sat alone, and during recess I stayed in a bathroom stall. I wanted to be hidden from the world. Nothing made sense anymore.

When school ended that day I threw myself into my mother’s outstretched arms.

“What’s the matter? Oh, Corita, what’s happened?” she cried, yanking me to my feet.

“Do you remember Connie?” I asked. I could feel myself shaking all over. Mother nodded. “Her dad’s unit was the one that shot Daddy down!” I screamed. Mother dropped me in bewilderment. I let out a small grunt of pain, but was too shaken to really feel anything.

“Are you sure?” she asked blankly.

“Yes. I hate her!” I sobbed. Suddenly I felt extremely tired.

The next thing I knew I was in my bed, and it was Saturday. I’d slept the whole night!

“Are you awake?” my mother called through the door.

“Yeah,” I muttered sleepily.

“I was on the phone with Connie’s mom earlier this morning,” she told me. I snapped to attention.

“Why?” I demanded. Mother was crazy! First she dragged us to America, and now she was talking to the family that shot Daddy’s unit down.

“You need to realize something, Corita. Connie wasn’t the one that shot Daddy’s unit down. Her father did. And technically he had no choice. War makes people do things they don’t want to do.” Mother spoke in a hushed voice.

“I don’t care,” I said blankly. How could I forgive? That wasn’t just an embargo placement or something overcomable. My daddy was gone because of her father. Maybe they didn’t know it was my dad, but it still was him.

“Well, you should care. Connie was the first one to welcome you. It takes true courage to admit something like that to a friend,” Mother scorned, patting my cowlicked hair down. “You and Connie are going go-carting this afternoon.”

“No, we’re not,” I said flatly.

“Corita, don’t test me; you will go-cart with Connie,” she said irritably.

“No, she’s part of a family that killed my dad. I won’t have any more fun with her,” I replied.

“Don’t play games with me, Corita. I gave you an order and you will obey it,” she said, raising her voice swiftly.

“Fine, but I’m not going to speak with her, and I won’t have any fun,” I announced sulkily.

“So, get dressed. You look like you slept in a barn last night,” Mother urged me, ignoring my comment.

I swung my legs out of bed. When mother left the room I threw on a pair of jeans and a white T-shirt with a puppy on the front. Last, I wrapped father’s dog tag around my neck.

“Corita, get downstairs! Your breakfast is getting cold!” Mother shouted from the kitchen. I raced down-stairs. The sweet aromas of sugared waffles curled around my nose. I could practically feel the scents kiss the tip of my nose.

The rest of the day went by rather quickly. I was actually excited to go go-carting. I’d heard amazing things about it. I wouldn’t let my mom know, though. I still was unhappy about the fact that I had to share such a joyous sport with a killer’s daughter.

“Five more minutes until we go! Get ready, comb your hair, and grab something to read in the car,” mother called from the living room.

When we arrived at the track it was empty. Connie and her mom came into view.

“Hi, Corita,” she said carefully. I half-smiled at her in return. I couldn’t choose the words to say.

“Hold on, I’ll be right down!” I heard a voice call from a steep slope. A man came racing down a hill in a go-cart. He was towing the other one behind him. I saw the first tire hit a bump. I took little notice.

“Who are you?” asked Connie’s mother politely.

“I’m going to set you two up today,” he said pulling his helmet off. He handed me the sweaty one.

“Um, can I have a different one?” I asked shyly.

“Why?” he asked.

“This one is sort of sweaty,” I answered carefully. He ignored me and handed Connie a newer one. She handed that one to me and took the sweaty one.

“All right, so do either of you know how to use a go-cart?” he asked, slapping his palms together. I shook my head. “I’ll turn them on. Basically, the right pedal is the gas and the brakes are the left. Use the steering wheel to obviously steer. If something goes wrong, stay where you are until I can get to you,” he said coolly. I crammed my helmet on and jumped in the second car. Connie took the first and we started racing around the track.

It was so much fun! I could feel the wind playing with my long dark locks of hair. Suddenly Connie’s front left tire wobbled. I watched her body stiffen as her cart swerved. Then, her tire flew off, landing in the bushes. Her go-cart spun and crashed into a thick, sturdy tree.

I braked with everything I had. My whole body moved in a sort of trance. I thrust myself out of my go-cart and flung my helmet off.

“Connie?” I half-choked, half-screamed. My voice wavered. I felt a huge lump in my throat. A small puddle of blood formed around her go-cart. I took her helmet off gently. Blood spilled out onto my hands from her forehead. Connie had lost consciousness.

“Corita! What happened? Are you okay?” my mother screamed as she ran up the track to us. Connie’s mother wasn’t far behind. The man trotted up to us.

“What did you do to her?” he yelled, thrusting me out of the way. My heart leapt into my throat. What *had* I done to her? A wave of guilt landed on my shoulders and crushed me.

“I...didn’t. You did,” I replied, glancing at the bleeding body.

“What are you talking about?” he raged, his face inches from my face.

“When you came down the hill towards us, you let the left tire bump hard into a rock,” I recalled.

“You’re crazy!” he screamed.

“We need to get her to a hospital immediately!” screamed Connie’s mom. The man pushed me out of the way again and scooped Connie up into his arms. Mother drove me home and I didn’t see Connie for a long time.

As I lay in my bed that night, I thought about what that man had said to me. Had I done something to Connie? I made Connie feel like it was her fault that my dad died. Now she was barely alive and had guilt wafting all over her, even though it wasn’t her fault.

The next day I begged my mom to bring me to the hospital. I found Connie’s room and opened the door quietly. Connie sat up slowly on her pillow. Her head was bandaged and her face was sickly pail. She’d lost a lot of blood.

“Hi, Corita. Sorry I couldn’t go-cart with you longer,” she said.

“Connie, I...um...how are you feeling?” I asked. I didn’t know what to say.

“I’m doing okay,” she said. Connie lay back on her pillow. My heart jumped. I didn’t want her lying down again. I wanted Connie to be strong and happy again. I laid my upper body down on her bed like in the cheesy movies you see on TV from the 1970’s.

“You’re going to pull through, Connie. I know you will. You can’t leave me. I won’t let you,” I said roughly. I wasn’t much saying it to her; I was saying it to comfort myself. I gripped her hand tightly in mine, hoping to squeeze some life into her clammy hands.

“I’ll be okay, I promise,” she said, closing her eyes. “I’m just a little tired, that’s—” she yawned mid-sentence “—all,” she finished.

“Don’t fall asleep. Stay awake, stay strong,” I whimpered more fiercely. I could hear our parents talking outside the door. I’d asked for a moment alone, but Connie’s mom would go no farther than outside the door.

Connie’s breathing slowed. She looked so peaceful. I squeezed her hand harder. Connie stopped breathing.

“Connie?” I whispered. “CONNIE?” I choked. “CONNIE, WAKE UP! COME BACK! DON’T DO THIS TO ME! COME BACK, IT’S NOT YOUR FAULT, it’s not your fault!” I sobbed. I could feel my sobs come up uncontrollably. I wailed in vain. Connie was gone. She died thinking it was her fault. I had to watch it happen. I screamed for her to come back. She remained still.

Connie’s mom and my mom burst into the room. Connie’s mom covered her face with her hands. My mom grabbed me. I wrenched free and threw myself down on Connie’s bed. She was gone. Connie was really gone, and she had gone in vain.

Everything else was a daze. I remembered getting in the car to go home. I remember throwing myself onto my bed and weeping.

That night I dreamed that Connie was up in heaven. An angel came down to me and touched my shoulder. In a sweet gust of wind she turned to a small sparrow. It sang sharp and sweet. I could make out words from its tune. It said Connie didn’t die in vain. She felt not blamed, but loved when she passed. I felt relieved. Then I woke up, still loving Connie, still loving my dad, and starting to love America.

“Someday, Connie,” I promised, “I will meet you up there, and I’ll show you my dad, and we’ll be happy once more.” I breathed in a sigh of relief. My life was just starting. A great part of it, though, had finally finished. I knew how to love, truly love.

Double Dare

*Two boys have gotten so used to daring each other that neither one ever backs down from the other. When the dares become dangerous, will common sense prevail? The answer comes from **Shivani Prasad** in **DOUBLE DARE**.*

“I’ll take any dare you give me!” boasted Danny.

“Oh, yeah? Well, I dare you to jump off of your roof!” said Aaron.

Aaron and Danny had been rivals since first grade, and their main competition was dares. They were always daring each other to do silly things, which would often end up in trouble. Once Danny had dared Aaron to ask their teacher how much she weighed. Aaron had done it, and ended up getting three detentions and a parent/teacher conference. Daring was always a little way in which they could compete.

“D-did you just say that I have to jump off my roof?” Danny stammered.

“You bet I just did!” retorted Aaron.

Though their dares had been going on for years, none had been as serious as this one.

“Ok then, just watch and see how I do it!” Danny said, sounding much more confident this time.

“Meet me tomorrow; same time, same place. Let’s see if you really have the guts to do this!” smirked Aaron.

That night, Danny had butterflies in his stomach. He had no idea why he had accepted that dare. But if he hadn’t, Aaron would have humiliated him for the rest of his life!

* * *

The next day, Danny was at the side of his house at 5:43 sharp. His mom was out shopping, and his brother was at a friend's house. Only his dad was inside working on a project. One minute later Aaron arrived.

"So, I guess you aren't that much of a baby after all," said Aaron.

"I wouldn't reject any dare you gave me," replied Danny.

"Ok then, climb up on your roof, and jump!" said Aaron.

Danny climbed up the ladder he had set up, and steadied himself on the roof.

"Are you sure you aren't gonna chicken out?" teased Aaron.

Danny didn't feel like replying. He was already feeling dizzy. He couldn't believe that he was actually doing this. Then after a few seconds, he jumped.

He landed feet first on the ground. At first he was surprised that he had survived. Then all at once he felt a flurry of pain in his mouth. When he had landed, his teeth were clenched onto his tongue. They had pierced it, and he was bleeding badly. When he opened his mouth to scream, blood poured all over the cement. He felt sick.

Aaron also felt light-headed from all the blood, but he managed to run inside and call for help. When Danny's dad came outside, he was at a loss for words. He pulled Danny inside and called the hospital.

* * *

Four hours later, Danny was at home and in bed. Over the past few hours, he had jumped off his roof, gone to the hospital, and gotten yelled at by both of his parents about how idiotic it was to accept that dare. Danny, of course,

thought that Aaron should be blamed, but sadly, nobody else felt this way.

Danny heard someone knock on his door. "Come in," he managed to say, with gauze in his mouth to suck up the blood.

"Hi," said Aaron.

"Oh, so it's you. What, do you want to give me another dare so that I break my arm?"

"No, I came to apologize," Aaron said in a quiet voice.

"Oh, so you're trying to be nice now!" Danny said.

"I really mean it. I shouldn't have dared you to do that," said Aaron.

"I guess it's kinda my fault, too. I should have been smart enough to reject the dare, even if it was from you."

"I should have known that you would accept any dare that I gave you," said Aaron.

"Apology accepted."

"I don't even know why we have been daring each other so much for so long!" said Danny.

"Yeah, it all seems sorta stupid now!"

"I remember how in kindergarten we became friends," exclaimed Aaron.

"When did our friendship become so competitive in the first place?" asked Danny.

"It was probably for some other stupid reason, like daring each other, and I know I wouldn't start anything like that," said Aaron.

"How do you know that you weren't the first one to dare? You were the one who just dared me now, and almost got my tongue cut off!" Danny said angrily.

"Well, it was your choice to accept it!" Aaron said with a tone of irritation in his voice.

"Wait a second; this is how we became competitive, by fighting over something meaningless," said Danny.

“Yeah, quarrelling is so pointless, and it ruins our friendship,” said Aaron.

“I think that we should just get on with life, and become friends again,” said Danny.

“Yeah, and let’s make a pact to never dare anyone, or accept a dare from anyone, ever again!”

“That’s a good idea. I bet even if we hadn’t made this pact, I wouldn’t have accepted a dare again!” said Danny.

Neither Danny nor Aaron dared or accepted a dare ever again, and they remained good friends through high school.

The Easy Days of Sixth Grade: Oh, How It Changed

*With age comes increased privilege—and increased responsibility. A sixth-grade girl finds that juggling what she wants to do and what she has to do is no easy feat in **THE EASY DAYS OF SIXTH GRADE: OH, HOW IT CHANGED**, by Cassidy Sandercock.*

The moment I walked into room 112 for the girls' swim team meeting, I knew middle school would be way different. The swim coach was yelling at the girls to shut up while passing out packets. As I looked through the pages of the packet, I noticed that there were swim practices twice a day. There was a two-hour morning practice and a two-hour practice after school.

At the first swim practice, I got into the blue, ice-cold water and did my normal workout. After practice my mom came and picked me up. When I got home all I wanted was to eat and go to sleep, but I still had to do my homework.

I was getting really tired, and I still had to do two more subjects. I was writing sloppily and that led to incorrect answers and bad grades.

After a while I noticed my grades were dropping. I didn't know what I was going to do to work swimming out with homework. I kept practicing, but I had to find time to get my

homework done for the day it was due. So I worked out a plan to get my homework done. I did some homework on the night before it was due and the morning it was due. After I practiced that schedule for a while, I got it down. It started getting easier for me to fit homework in with swim practice.

To prepare for the first swim meet I had to swim hard at practices and eat healthy.

It came down to the first swim meet, and it was almost time for my event. It felt like sharp knives were stabbing into my stomach. When I dove into the pool I swam as hard as I could, and I even could feel myself sweating.

When I climbed out of the pool my swim coach came up to me and said, “Cassidy, you did great. I think you should only come to one swim practice from now on.” That moment, I felt a big weight lift off my shoulders. I felt like I would actually be able to get my homework done.

My grades started improving and I started to feel more confident in myself.

Coming down to the last month of swim season I was improving in school and swimming tremendously. It wasn't easy at first, but as you work out a plan and schedule, it is much easier. You need to be organized in middle school, too!

Famous Tiffany

*A girl who was born to the stage discovers she has committed herself to two separate public appearances on the same evening. She is determined to honor both obligations in **FAMOUS TIFFANY**, by **Jodi Fouché**.*

Tiffany Meyers was a girl that always wanted to be famous. Tiffany's parents realized this when she was young. At a young age, her parents had her taking piano lessons, voice lessons, ballet, tap, and tennis at the local athletic club. Tiffany stayed busy all the time. She felt that being enrolled in all of these things would help her to become famous.

Tiffany was now an eleven-year-old attending Westberry Middle School. As usual, Tiffany was in the hallway singing one day when Ms. T. walked by. Ms. T. was Tiffany's choir teacher at school. She knew that Tiffany really wanted to have the lead vocal in the upcoming choir concert, and that Tiffany could handle the lead vocal position. Ms. T. asked Tiffany if she wanted to be the lead vocal for the upcoming choir concert.

Ms. T. announced to the class that on January 30, their first concert would be held at the school. Ms. T. mentioned in front of the class all the vocal positions. Tiffany was congratulated as lead vocalist, along with other support vocalists. The class applauded those individuals for being selected, including Tiffany's two childhood friends, Katie and Melissa. They were all excited.

Once the girls made it to Tiffany's house, Mrs. Meyers greeted them at the door, and mentioned to Tiffany that the community play was being held on January 30 at 8:30 p.m. Mrs. Meyers told Tiffany that Tom, Tiffany's older 18-year-old brother, would pick her up for the play, and that she would meet Tiffany there later because she would already be there helping to set up. Tiffany said, "Ok. Mom." She told her mother that Katie, Melissa, and she were going up to her room to do homework.

When they got up to Tiffany's room, Katie and Melissa asked, "Why wouldn't you tell your mom that we got lead parts in the choir concert?" Tiffany explained that her mother wouldn't let her do both things in the same night.

Once Tom got home from work, Tiffany rushed into his room and told him all about the two lead roles in one night. She told him that it could be possible if he helped her out. She also told him not to say a word. She asked him to pick her up at 8:20 and take her to the play at 8:30. Tom said, "Ok," and promised her not to be late.

The morning of her two exciting events was finally here. Tiffany was both excited and nervous about the vocal part and play. Tiffany went downstairs to find that Mr. Meyers, Mrs. Meyers, and Tom were sitting at the table eating breakfast to get ready for their day. Mr. Meyers had to leave for the dealership. Mrs. Meyers had to run around town to get some odds-and-ends things for the play that evening. Both parents told Tiffany and Tom to have a good day, and then they left. Tiffany asked Tom, "Do you remember your promise?"

Tom said, "Don't worry, I'll be there at 8:20 sharp." They both left for school.

That evening, Tom picked Tiffany, Melissa, and Katie up at Tiffany's house for the choir concert. When the concert was done, Tiffany ran outside and found Tom sitting and

waiting there for her. Tiffany looked at her watch. It was 8:20. Tiffany told Tom that she needed to make it to the community building by 8:30. Tom stated that they could make it there in ten minutes if they hopped on the freeway. "At this time of night it shouldn't take long because traffic's not usually busy," he said.

After entering the freeway, they drove two miles down the road and noticed that the cars were stopping ahead of them. Tiffany was wondering what was happening, and knew she was going to be late for the play. They ended up being 20 minutes late. They ended up at the community center at 8:50.

Tiffany rushed into the auditorium where the play was to be held. She saw that the play hadn't started yet. She saw her mother still helping to set up. Mrs. Meyers was wondering why Tiffany had run out of breath with a worried look on her face. She explained to her mother that she thought she was late. Mrs. Meyers stated that the play was at 9:30, and she was 40 minutes early. Tiffany then decided to tell her mother the truth.

"Your father and I would liked to have seen you, if you would have trusted to tell us from the beginning," her mother stated, "I hope you learned your lesson from this."

Finding My Way

Liz is a privileged girl who has every material comfort she could ever want. But life is about more than possessions. In the face of a family crisis, Liz's happiness is uncertain in FINDING MY WAY, by Caileigh Papp.

I sat hidden on the stairs crying, but still trying to stay strong. I was listening to my parents' conversation about getting a divorce. It was actually more like an argument. I loved my dad. He was kind and generous, and he was always up to doing things with me. It isn't like I didn't like my mother, but she and I didn't have the same connection as my dad and me. My mom was a writer for the newspaper here in Florida. She was constantly leaving the house to go to work.

Then, I heard something that almost broke my heart. My dad was going to move all the way to Los Angeles, California. And I'm not stupid. I knew that was pretty far from Florida where I live.

I just couldn't hold it in any longer. I screamed and cried. My dad ran from the kitchen, up the stairs, and straight into my room. My face was squished into the pillow, and I was sobbing. Even though nobody could hear me, I knew my dad felt my pain. He sat at the corner of my bed and said, "Liz, I'm really sorry, I truly am. I really wish I could take you with me, but I can't. I love you lots, and you know I never wanted you to feel like this."

I slowly lifted my head from my pillow, wiped my tears and said, "Dad, you can't do this to me. What am I supposed to do with Mom: sit around for five hours and wait for her to say, 'Go do your homework?' Things just won't be the same!" Not knowing what to

say next, I shoved my head back into my pillow and cried once again.

Unable to comfort me, my dad eventually left my room. I got up and walked to my computer, opened up my blog and wrote:

June 5, 2006

WORST DAY EVER. My life has come to an end. My life was perfect. I lived in probably the biggest house in Florida, and I had the best friends in the world, and most important, I had the best dad. This was all going to end now. Yeah, I still have money and a big house, and amazing friends, but never would I get this back.

My dad, he was going away, and actually it felt like he died or something, because my mom would never fly me out to visit him. Then I closed out of the box that was on my computer screen and walked over to my bed. Then I thought, if I couldn't write about this I couldn't even think about it. And then I thought, "How am I supposed to live it if I couldn't even write about it?" I was done with this day. I turned the lights out and fell asleep.

The next day was terrible. I took a walk before anyone had woken up. It was around 5:00 a.m. I ran all the way to the horse stable, which was around a half mile from my house. When I got there, I took out my horse. She was like my best friend. Well, she couldn't talk, but oh well. I still felt like she was listening. I washed her and fed her. Then we set off for the trail. I told her exactly how I felt and how I wanted things. She nodded her head. I just assumed that she was nodding about what I was saying to her. I wished she could talk; then I would know if she was really listening. Then we rode back, and I ran home.

I opened the door and walked in. I was surprised at what I saw: all my dad's things in boxes in the front room. I walked into the

kitchen, and I saw my mom talking on the phone. She was getting moving trucks and a cab for my dad? I didn't think this was happening today!

My dad walked down the spiraled stairs, with George (our server or something like that; he made us dinner and did our chores-stuff like that) carrying his five bags of luggage.

I started to cry. I ran over to my dad and gave him the biggest hug ever. His cab had arrived, and he put his things in the car and drove away. I cried and I swear I chased the cab all the way down the street. I got to the end of the street and I fell. I covered my face with my hands and cried. I couldn't hold it in. I screamed, and not in my head, but out loud. George drove the car down the street and picked me up, and we drove back to the house.

From then on I blamed everything on my mom. I barely even talked to her. She didn't even care, so it seemed. She was too busy with her work. My mom never seemed to care. She was very pretty and young, still in her 30's (but her late 30's). After a couple of months it was August, and my mom started leaving the house more. She was seeing a man. He was very handsome, but I still hated him. More of this man around the house made me start thinking about my dad. I wanted to visit him so badly. But I knew my mom didn't. I really had no idea why they got a divorce anyway.

I had come up with an expert idea, but I needed some help. I needed George. I told him my brilliant plan about his driving me to the train station, then my going to California to see my dad while my mom was gone on her business trip. Brilliant, right? Well, George didn't think so. I had to beg him for like three days, but of course, he got sick of it, and we made a promise that he wouldn't tell my mom, even though I didn't really think he would keep his secret. I didn't accuse him of anything, because then he might not drive me. But, if I only knew: He told my mom or something just hours after I left. Seconds after I arrived at the train station, George called my mom. You're probably thinking, "Wouldn't her mom come and get her?" Well, she had George following me the entire time.

The day my mother left for her trip, I left for the train station. I already had my things packed in my pink suitcase that I had gotten for my birthday. And then George put it in the trunk. I had to admit, I was pretty scared of being alone with a bunch of strangers, being in a lot of different states, and again ALL ALONE. As I was thinking about my fears of being alone, I was watching George drive along the highway.

Once I finally got to the train station I said goodbye and was on my way. I walked over to where I was supposed to wait. And I sat for like 30 minutes or so. Then I got on.

Once I was on my train, I started to get comfortable. Then I thought of my horse. Boy, I missed her. It's too bad they don't put horses on trains, well, not that I knew of. At least I was going to see my dad. After all, that was why I was on this train in the first place.

I fell asleep text-messaging my friends. They thought I was crazy getting on a train alone. But oh well, I didn't care.

The train attendant woke me up, and she asked me if I was okay, and if I needed anything like a pop, or pretzels. I asked for a grape pop. I got grape pop because my dad and I always had it together. It was a favorite I guess. She brought it back, I said thanks, and she walked away.

The ride was over, and I was in the Texas train station. People were talking funny, and I was a little scared, I have to admit. I went to pick up a magazine. After that, I picked up my luggage and I was on my way.

I was walking when I suddenly ran into this girl. It went like this. I was walking, walking, and walking, and then *BOOM*. We collided. We both dropped all of our bags.

“Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry!” said a tall, slender brunette.

“It's okay; it was my fault. Um... I'm Liz. What's your name?” I said.

“Oh, Sara. I'm Sara. It's nice to meet you. I'm on my way to Las Vegas to visit my dad. My parents are divorced. What are you doing here?”

“Wow, that's weird. I'm on my way to see my dad, too. But my dad is in California. Maybe we could sit next to each other on the next ride, because my next stop is in Las Vegas also.”

“Of course. Okay, let's go and get some food. I'm starved,” Sara said as she picked up her bags and started walking.

After we sat down, we started talking about how our parents divorced, and how we felt. I was also learning that even though my mom works a lot, she still loves me. All that time I thought she didn't care about me. I felt terrible. She probably feels bad because I always dump on her about things, even if it wasn't her fault.

We got on our train, and we both were tired, so we slept. Once the train had stopped, I said goodbye. I thanked her, gave her a hug, and she was on her way.

My pocket started playing one of those really annoying cell phone ring tones. I just got a text message.

It was my best friend Laura. She said, “Oh my god, I rode my horse this morning. You weren't there. I like remembered that we were supposed to meet here this morning. And I got there, and I was like she's going to California.”

I replied, “Aww, poor baby. I'm so sorry, and I miss you. I'll see you in a few days or maybe even a week. I got to go. XOXO.” Then I slapped my phone shut, and I slipped it in my pocket.

Since there was still an hour or so until my train came, I went to pull out the magazine in my bag that I had gotten the other day. I must have spilled something on it. The words were smeared and the paper was thin and torn. I got up and walked to get another magazine.

Once I got to the little gift shop, they had a huge line. I decided to wait because I thought my train was coming in a couple hours or so. I was standing at the counter when I herd my train was at the station and was now having people get on. I threw my magazine and ran! I was so scared. There wouldn't be another train in like two days.

Of course, I had to choose the farthest gift shop. I was still running, determined to reach my destination.

I got there after they closed the gate. I couldn't get in. This was terrible. The people would have let me in, but the train was gone. Now I was going to be delayed by like two days! Yeah, so much for getting to my dad's house by tomorrow.

Well, I had no choice: I had to get new tickets. I was so mad! It was pretty late anyway, so I fell asleep at the train station. I put my iPod earphones in my ears and tried to fall asleep.

I was awakened by a man with a familiar voice. He told me I needed to get up if I didn't want to get squished by other people's luggage. I laughed and I woke up slowly. I was about to hear important news, because the person who woke me wasn't a security man. It was GEORGE!

I was so happy to see him, and he had brought the jet! I could get to see my dad by tonight. I asked George how he had known I missed my train. I guess someone had contacted him or something, since the tickets were in his name.

George and I had to get into the rental car and go all the way to some airport, which was where the jet was. Luckily, that wasn't too far away.

I gathered my things and headed into the jet. I felt so at home, and as if I was with my dad, since he was the one who had designed it. George and I had a talk. He told me my dad didn't know I was coming (which was true) and my mom still didn't know I wasn't at home (false, but I didn't know that). He made me call her. I was so scared. I thought she would hate me. I dialed her number.

"Hello?" Mom asked.

"Mom?" I said.

"Oh, hey honey, how is everything?" she said sweetly.

"Um, that's what I was calling about. You see, I am not really at home."

"Wait, what?" she said, acting frantic.

"I'm in the jet with George. We are going to go see dad," I said softly.

"OH MY GOSH, honey; does he know?" she said as if she were going to cry.

"Mom, I'm okay! But, yeah, he doesn't know..." My voice faded as I said it.

"Oh god, where are you, though?" She sounded like she was starting to calm down. Before I could say anything she said, "Wait, did you say HE DOESN'T KNOW?" She sounded angry.

"No, he doesn't know, but I'm going to call him right now," I said very fast before she could interrupt.

"Fine. I can't come and get you, though. I'm going to an important meeting. Call if things aren't going right, okay?" she said.

"Yeah, Mom, love you, bye," I replied.

"Bye," she said, and then she clicked her phone off.

I threw the phone to George to call my dad. He didn't want to. But, with my puppy dog face, he had no choice.

While George was talking to my dad, I thought about the conversation I had with my mom, and it seemed like she cared. Maybe she could spend more time with me or something. I think this is going to be a whole new relationship. And it felt good. I fell asleep thinking about all of this. I think George slept, too, because he was pretty quiet.

When we got to California, I was so excited. I arrived at my Dad's new house. It was located by the beach, and it had a swimming pool. I thought that was pointless since there was an ocean right across the street, but oh well; it's his money. As I got out of the car, the front door opened and my dad ran out and gave me the biggest hug ever. I actually started to cry, but I wasn't going to tell him that.

We went inside, and he asked me what made me run away. My answer was almost indescribable. I was almost going to cry while I said it. I said I couldn't totally describe it, but that it was pain. It was sadness.

I settled into the guest room in my dad's new house. I was very happy to be with my dad again. Dad and I were going to go see a movie that night, and we did. Then we went out to dinner. It reminded me of how things were. The next night was fun, too. Even though it was just us hanging around the house, it was fun just because we were with each other.

My mom called the next day. She said she was going home, and that I had to go home, too. But I didn't have to go on trains. George and I were just going to take the jet.

I was really mad. I had only gotten to be with Dad for two days. It was a bummer for two reasons: one, because I spent more time at the train station than I did with him, and two, because I was scared of what my mom was going to say to me when I got home.

The next morning, George was already packing my things. I said goodbye to Dad and hopped into the rental car. This was going to be the last glance of my dad for a while. George told me there would be other times, but I wasn't quite sure of that.

After we got to the plane, I fell asleep. I was super tired. And I guess for a 13-year-old, I had a lot of stress, which was sort of weird. I hated stress. It was ruining my life. I decided to think that, whatever happens, happens. I can't change the past, and I can't fully change the future. But, I could change my life. And I didn't have to be a grouch anymore.

If I were still the person I was—after my parents divorced, I mean—I would be like angry and stuff, but that's not good. Now I can go back to being happy and hanging out with my friends. I realize that my parents getting a divorce wasn't that big of a deal—well, not big enough to ruin my life over. Sure, family is a big thing, but if one thing happens, it shouldn't make you miserable. Well, that's at least what I learned.

A Good Laugh

*Don't let the title fool you. In **A GOOD LAUGH** by **Laura Charles**, a visit to a mysterious house leaves a teenaged girl fearing the worst.*

“Honey, you’re going to be late for school!” yelled Nichole’s mom from the kitchen. The tall girl could barely hear her mother under all the blankets heaped on her bed. A smell of fried bacon invaded the whole house, and the fourteen-year-old girl could hear the popping noise of the toaster once the bread was nice and crunchy.

The thought of breakfast usually made Nichole jump out of her bed and rush down the stairs, but today the teenager did not feel like being the first one to come down and eat her fried bacon. So she stayed under her mountains of blankets and yawned a couple of times.

Downstairs the family was in a rush. Nichole’s dad had just stained his new suit and was late for a meeting at his work. Her mom was putting on a vest, but the sleeves were dangling down in her coffee. She then realized that it was her husband’s stained suit. Finally, there was her brat of a brother. The seven-year-old child was playing with his motorcar in his pajamas.

Nichole’s mother was trying to get Nichole out of bed while her husband kept yelling at Andrew, their son, to get dressed. The teenager did not want to cause any more trouble for her parents, so she got out of her “Cinderella” bed. She silently and lazily entered the bathroom. She took the brush and brushed her long brown curls. She got dressed and went downstairs.

She was about to start eating when she heard the bus. She grabbed her backpack and her coat and ran to the bus.

In the bus she sat with her best friend Priscilla. Apparently the girl was looking at an ad about a house. But it was not just any house. “The haunted house of Tarannavile” said the headline. Nichole glanced over at the newspaper and read: “This house is the scariest anyone has ever been to. There have been several reports about missing people, and we are predicting that there may be a killer in the area.” Then she read a caption under the ad: “We are in need of people from the ages twelve and up to come and try to get as much information as you can.”

Priscilla looked at Nichole and said, “Do you hear that? They’re searching for kids like *us* to investigate. Don’t you think this is a great opportunity to test your investigation skills? I mean, you’re always talking about how we should do some missions. This is the perfect chance.”

“I...” Nichole stopped when she felt something sticking to her back. She reached and grabbed something that felt like paper.

“What’s this?” she asked. In her hands she held a piece of paper in the shape of a fish.

“Today’s April Fools Day,” said Priscilla. “Didn’t you remember? Anyways, what about that investigation thing? Great. I’ll see you after school.” Nichole didn’t have time to answer. Priscilla was already getting out of the bus.

When Nichole got home from school she asked her mom if she could drive Priscilla and her one block away from Tarannavile. She didn’t want her mom to know that they could be in danger, or else she would worry too much and not let her daughter go do some investigation.

When they got to the house, no one was there. Nichole looked at her watch. Today was a half-day of school, and it was now 12:00. The girls thought that the crew must be at lunch.

On the patio the girls tried to open the door. They were very surprised to find that it was opened. It opened very slowly,

making an ominous squeaking sound. When it was wide open, the girls stepped in.

The inside of the house was horribly nasty. There were spider webs everywhere. Beetles and scorpions were crawling on every piece of ugly furniture, and the girls could barely see anything in the little bit of light. But what scared them the most was that they heard footsteps coming from the living room. Or at least it seemed to be from the living room....

The two girls hid under a table. But that didn't seem to help because they could hear the footsteps increasing. Then Nichole thought of something. "Follow me," she whispered.

"Where are we going?" asked Priscilla.

"To that closet over there," responded Nichole. As she crawled on her knees, her face turned pale. The footsteps had stopped. Even though that sounds good, it's bad. This is bad because the footsteps stopped right in front of Nichole. And in the dead of dark, Nichole screamed.

Suddenly, she saw light, bright like the sun. And she heard laughter from everybody in the neighborhood. Her brother, her mom, her dad, her best friend, the man from the post office, Julio, and all the neighbors, including a family she did not recognize, were standing over them.

"That was a funny joke, wasn't it?" her brother said.

"A joke? You did all of this for a joke?" Every body nodded. "But how did you do it?"

"Simple. We asked Julio to print out a fake ad. We knew you'd be interested in this. But in case you weren't, we told Priscilla to convince you to go. Mom and Dad helped us decorate the house to look haunted. We used the Vincents' house." At that moment he pointed to the family Nichole did not recognize. "And everything worked like we planned. You got scared and we got to laugh!

"And you did all this just to laugh at me?"

"Of course!" everybody yelled.

Hidden Treasure

*What could be more enticing than a map with an X on it? Two brothers can't resist following a trail that leads to danger in **HIDDEN TREASURE**, by **Andrew Forbes**.*

On a warm summer day when the sun was shining brightly and the wind was easily swaying the trees back and forth, two young boys, Matt and Jeff, were sitting in their house with nothing to do. They were sitting on their old green sofa staring into space, wondering what they were going to do that day.

They decided to go up to the attic. They trudged up to the attic half asleep. When they got there, they saw mountains of boxes with books and papers pouring out of them like a volcano.

There was one particular box that stuck out. It was a medium-sized box that lay in the corner of the room. This was the only box that didn't have things pouring out of it.

They walked over and peered inside. The only thing in it was an old book with a crumbled piece of paper sticking out of the side. Jeff picked it up. It looked oddly familiar to him. He recognized the street names, scenery, and the names of places. Then he realized it was the town that he grew up in. He spotted a tiny X at the top right corner of the map. It was a treasure map!

They sped down the stairs into the garage and jumped on their bikes. They rode up the long winding road to the top of the hill to where the X led them.

At the top there was an old run-down house with broken shutters, foggy windows, and cracks in the wooden frame. Matt and Jeff walked up to the window and spotted two men wearing

black coats, and in their hands were giant moneybags. Matt and Jeff started running toward their bikes, but Matt stumbled and yelled as he hit the ground. The robbers dropped the moneybags and dashed out of the house toward them.

The boys ran around to the back of the house trying to escape. There was a big blue fence blocking their way. They ran into the house through the back door, frantically trying to find a way out. Then they saw the moneybags just lying in the middle of the floor. They picked them up and ran back outside because there was no other way out.

When they got outside they slowly walked toward the front of the house. They peered around the corner. They dashed quickly but quietly toward a nearby shed that wasn't too far from their bikes.

When the robbers had finally given up their search for the kids, Matt and Jeff ran for their bikes. They thought that they would be safe with the money and return it to the police without the robbers ever seeing them leave, but then Jeff cracked a fallen branch while running. The robbers instantly turned around and saw the boys racing toward their bikes.

The robbers chased after them. Down the winding hill they went. The boys rode toward a police car at the bottom of the hill and explained everything as the robbers turned the last corner of the hill flying at them like a bullet.

The robbers spotted the policeman but couldn't turn around fast enough because their momentum was carrying them too fast. When the robbers were close enough, the kids stuck their legs out and tripped the robbers. They hit the ground tumbling with bruises and deep gashes from the torn up gravel. The officer arrested them.

Matt and Jeff turned in the money to the police station. They didn't get to keep the money, but they got a reward of one hundred dollars each. They still love to tell the story of that exciting day.

The Ice Cream Surprise

*An ice cream making contest sounds fun and tasty to two best friends. But the girls find that it is hard work, too, in **THE ICE CREAM SURPRISE**, by **Lauren Girson**.*

Every Friday after school, Amanda Smith and Brooke Green would go to Freddie's Old Time Ice Cream Parlor (everyone just called it Freddie's). It was everyone's favorite place to go after school because it had the best ice cream in town, and it was such a fun place to go.

Freddie's had red and white striped awnings on the outside, and the inside was decorated with old-fashioned tables covered with red striped tablecloths. The booths were big, so there was enough room for all of your friends to sit. If you wanted to sit on the stools near the ice-cream fountain, you could watch Freddie make the sundaes, floats, and milkshakes.

There was also a great big jukebox in the corner. Freddie let his customers pick out any songs they wanted and listen to them for free. He enjoyed having the music on and seeing kids having fun. He was like a friend, and was always doing nice things. He always wore an old-fashioned shirt with black and white stripes and a great big red apron.

Freddie came over to take the girls' order. "Do you girls want the usual?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," said Amanda and Brooke at the same time. The girls would get the same thing every single time they went. Brooke would get a vanilla twist with gummy bears, and

Amanda would get a chocolate sundae with extra fudge on top.

The girls were eating their ice cream and talking about their school day. Brooke was playing with her ice cream, mixing it all together, when she said to Amanda, “We should try something new instead of always ordering the same thing every time. It would be fun to make our own flavor.”

“That’s a great idea,” said Brooke. “We should tell Freddie.”

“That’s an interesting idea, girls. Let me think it over,” said Freddie.

Two weeks later the girls went to Freddie’s, and the line was *very* long. “I wonder what’s going on?” said Amanda. Brooke and Amanda noticed a sign on the wall that said, “Ice Cream Contest - Best New Flavor - \$ 1,000 prize.”

“Freddie must have liked your idea, Amanda.”

“We should enter the contest!” said Brooke.

“Yeah! That would be great, and so would the money!” said Amanda.

Later that night, Amanda went over to Brooke’s house, and Brooke’s mom took the girls grocery shopping to buy ingredients for ice cream flavors.

“Girls, I have a great idea,” said Brooke’s mom once they returned home.

“What’s your idea?” asked Brooke.

“Well, when I was your age, I had my very own ice cream maker. I saved it all these years. It’s in the basement. Why don’t you girls come downstairs with me to find it? Let’s see if it still works, and then you girls can start making some yummy flavors,” said Mrs. Green.

“Awesome!” said Brooke and Amanda.

“Here’s my ice cream maker!” said Mrs. Green. “I can’t believe I found it. I had a lot of fun with this thing! Here girls—enjoy!”

“Thanks, Mom,” said Brooke.

“Yeah, thanks, Ms. Green,” said Amanda.

“Mom, it’s like 20 years old, and it doesn’t look like it works,” said Brooke.

“All it needs is a little TLC,” said Mrs. Green.

“What’s that mean?” said Brooke.

“Tender Loving Care,” said Mrs. Green. “I bet if you girls cleaned it up, it would be fine.”

“Come on, let’s get started,” said Amanda.

After some scrubbing and polishing, the old ice cream machine was as good as new. The girls put on their aprons and got to work.

“So, what kind of ice cream should we make first, Amanda?”

“I don’t know. What do you think?” said Brooke.

“Well, let’s come up with a list of flavors. How about carrot juice ice cream, or Greek salad flavor with feta cheese and beets?” answered Amanda.

“Are you crazy? Who would eat that? Health freaks?”

“I know. What about hamburger or mac and cheese flavored ice cream? That way, you have your lunch and desert all in one. Parents would love that!”

“Come on, Amanda, let’s get real. We need to get started; it’s getting late!”

“O.K., O.K., Brooke, I was just joking. Nothing wrong with having a little fun.”

The girls each came up with ten flavors, and that was *way* too many. They narrowed down the list to their top five flavors: Chocolate Fudge Reese’s Pieces; Strawberry Caramel Chocolate Chip; Caramel Apple with Peanuts; Chocolate Covered Strawberries with Almonds; and last but not least, Hot Chocolate S’mores.

They put the old-fashioned hand-cranked ice cream maker on the table and started creating their new flavors. The

girls decided to make all five flavors, so they could try them all and see which one was their favorite. They decided to make the caramel flavors first, and then they would do the chocolate flavors. This would be easy, they thought.

“We’ll be done in no time,” said Brooke.

Boy, were they in for a surprise! This ice cream making project was a lot of work!

“I’ll crank first, since it’s my Mom’s machine,” said Brooke. “You pour in the ingredients.” Amanda started adding cream, sugar, caramel, strawberries and ice. Brooke started cranking. Amanda had already spilled some of the sugar and caramel as she was pouring it into the machine. The mixture went flying all over the table and onto the floor. What a mess!

“Don’t worry about it now. We’ll clean up everything after we’re all done. We have four more flavors to make, and my arm is getting tired. Do you want to crank the machine now while I add the ingredients?”

“Sure, let’s do the caramel apple peanut one next. This is harder than we thought it would be.”

The girls took turns cranking out three more flavors. They were up until midnight trying out new flavors of ice cream. Finally, they were on their last flavor, Hot Chocolate S’mores.

“This is going to be the best one yet. I love s’mores.”

“Let’s put the graham crackers in first” said Brooke.

“We can add the marshmallows next,” said Amanda.

“This is sounding good already, but it needs chocolate chips,” said Brooke. “What else could it possibly need?” asked Amanda.

“I think it needs hot chocolate mix,” said Brooke.

“Now it’s time to put the ingredients in the ice cream maker,” said Amanda.

“I’ll crank this one first,” said Brooke.

“All right, but I get to taste it first,” said Amanda.

“All righty. Hope it tastes good—a thousand dollars good!” said Brooke.

“Time to taste it. Mmmmmmmm, it tastes terrific!” said Amanda.

“Let me try it. This tastes so good!” said Brooke. “I think we’ve got it! I think we’re going to win!”

“Oh my gosh! Look at the mess! There are chocolate chips, graham cracker crumbs, nuts, caramel, and hot chocolate mix all over the floor,” said Amanda.

“Yeah! There’s almost as much on the floor as in the ice cream!” said Brooke. “I told you to be more careful!”

“Come on, help me clean it up.”

“But it’s after midnight, and I’m tired. Can’t we do it early in the morning?”

“No, we have to do it before my mom sees it. She’ll go ballistic if she sees this! Let’s clean this up fast. Then we can go to bed. We have to wake up early so we can get over to the ice cream parlor before the deadline tomorrow.”

The next morning, Amanda and Brooke got to Freddie’s just in time to enter their flavor in for the contest.

“I wonder if we will win?” said Brooke. “There are a lot of entries here already. Some of them look pretty good, too.”

Freddie announced that he would pick the winner on March 9, after he had a chance to taste each and every flavor that was entered. “That’s over a month away!” said Amanda. “I wish Freddie would pick the winner today!”

They didn’t know how they would make it that long. It was a very long month for Brooke and Amanda. They saw other kids in school who entered the contest, too. Sally and Mary said their flavor was pumpkin pie, and they were going to win. Bob and John bragged that their flavor was better than every single entry, but they wouldn’t tell what their flavor was.

They said it was a secret. Every kid who entered thought he or she was going to win.

“We’re not going to let those comments get us down,” said Amanda and Brooke. “Our flavor is really good. We just have to wait for Freddie to taste the other ones. After he does, I’m sure he will like ours the best. After all, it was our idea to come up with a new flavor.”

The big day finally came. On March 9, Amanda and Brooke got a phone call. It was Freddie, and he said, “We like your flavor idea—you’re in our top ten.”

“Put it on the speaker phone now!” said Amanda.

“Oh my gosh! I can’t believe we’re in the top ten!” said Brooke.

Freddie said, “Please come to the ice cream parlor on April 1 when I will announce the winner.”

“We’ll be there. We wouldn’t miss it for the world!” shouted Amanda and Brooke.

“All right, girls, see you then!” They hung up the phone and screamed with excitement.

The days passed slowly. They couldn’t wait until April 1. They daydreamed about how they would spend the money if they won.

Finally, it was April 1, the day they had been waiting for. Both girls bought shirts with an ice cream cone on it to get into the spirit. Their parents dropped them off at the ice cream parlor, and the girls ran straight inside to their assigned seats. Freddie walked up to the podium and said, “I know this has been a very anxious month for all of you top-ten finalists. But, I wanted to be fair and give myself enough time to try all the flavors several times.

“As you know, the first place winner will get one thousand dollars. But even if you don’t win first place, you won’t go away empty-handed. All the other finalists will get a

fifty dollar gift card to Freddie's Old Time Ice Cream Parlor, and we might even use your flavor on our menu later on."

Amanda and Brooke were very excited to see if they had won.

"Here's the moment you've all been waiting for. The winners are Amanda and Brooke with Hot Chocolate S'mores Ice Cream. Congratulations, girls!"

The moment they heard their names, they screamed and smiled *very* big smiles—braces and all! Freddie had another surprise. He said another reason it took so long to announce the winner was because he made the new flavor and he was giving samples for everyone to taste. "Here, girls, I almost forgot: Here's *one thousand* dollars for you guys to share. Spend it on whatever you want."

The girls each bought an ice cream machine so they could make the ice cream flavor they created. They also bought tons of other things, too. The girls also got a special card to Freddie's so they could get their ice cream flavor whenever they wanted.

Their flavor became the most popular at Freddie's. One year after, their flavor was so popular that it was in grocery stores in all 50 states. Also, the girls came up with other new flavors. Now the girls' favorite food is Hot Chocolate S'mores Ice Cream.

When the girls turn sixteen, their job will be to come up with new flavors of ice cream. Now you have been inspired to come up with new possibilities. What will it be? It's up to your imagination. But, always remember where you got the idea.

Lessons in the Limelight

In LESSONS IN THE LIMELIGHT by Madison Lee Braun, Emma makes a commitment that tests her nerves. Does she have what it takes to triumph over her own misgivings?

“Why am I up here?” I asked myself as I stared at the hundreds of people looking right back at me. The microphone felt slippery in my hands; all I wanted was to be off that stage. I thought back to how this all started.

* * *

I’m Emma. I go to Wilton E. Middle School. I’m a sixth-grader with bright red hair, green eyes, braces (usually pink), and pigtails—ALWAYS pigtails. My two best friends, Taylor and Alexis, sing with me in the school choir, baby-sit, dance, and pretty much do anything that three friends can do together. The one thing that we have never done together is the school musical. . .until now.

It was all Taylor’s idea. She loves the limelight. And anything one of us does the other two join in. Because of this “rule,” Alexis and I were dragged into it. Neither Alexis nor I wanted to be in the musical because everyone at Wilton E. knows where there’s drama, there’s the drama queen, Alyssa.

All that Alyssa ever did was dramatic. In the first grade, Alexis accidentally hit her with one of those soft foam soccer balls that we used in gym class. She cried for exactly 32 minutes and 43 seconds. . .straight! We timed it! Anyway, when they put the words “drama” and “queen” together, they had Alyssa in mind.

But Taylor pushed us and we cracked. The auditions for *The Wizard of Oz* were on a Friday. Taylor went first and got so nervous that Alexis had to hold her hand as she walked into the room. Taylor came out looking much better but didn't say anything. I leaned over and whispered, "How did it go?"

She looked at me and said, "Well..."

I cut her off. "You did fantastic, didn't you?"

She smiled and nodded. I knew she would. I had always thought she was the sweetest soprano in the choir.

Then the director opened the door to the audition room and studied his clipboard. "Emma Ramona, it's your turn." I wasn't nervous. After all, even if I didn't get in, that was fine by me.

The director led me into a big square room, and then he sat down in a chair that had a bunch of writing on it. I looked closer at the writing. It said, "No sour notes allowed." I looked beyond the chair and suddenly butterflies erupted in my stomach. I thought I was only singing for the director, but no! I stood facing a table behind which *three* people sat: the director, the choreographer, and the music teacher. This meant I had more people judging my performance!

I thought back to what my choir teacher had said about auditions. *Slow down. Take a deep breath. Relax.* I slowed down, took a deep breath, and relaxed. Then I began to sing.

I did all of my dance moves right and didn't miss a note. When I was done, the director clapped. I was bursting with pride.

I walked out of the room three minutes later, still smiling. This time it was Taylor that leaned over and asked me how I did. I said quietly, "Okay."

Alexis was next and strode confidently into the room and came out on a stretcher.

Taylor and I ran after the people carrying her to see what was wrong. They told us that during the dancing, she had fallen and hurt her leg. I called her that night to see how she was, but her mom said that she was still at the hospital getting a cast. She said she would be at school on Monday, so I could see her then.

On Monday the cast list was posted outside of the school. It said “Dorothy - Taylor Lenard; Glinda - Alyssa Stratton; The Wicked Witch of the West - Emma Ramona; Munchkin #12 (and a bunch of other munchkins I didn’t know) - Alexis Randel.” I was so ecstatic and so was Taylor, but not Alexis. Munchkin #12 didn’t work for her. She was MAD. Her face turned a light shade of pink, which I was about to tell her when I heard a little sob. Alexis was crying! She never cries! Clearly the musical *had* meant something to her!

So Taylor and I spent the whole day hearing (between sniffs and sobs) about how the directors should give her another chance. Apparently her dance audition was first, so they never heard Alexis sing. I thought about telling her that they wouldn’t have let her audition again because she had a broken leg and you are required to dance. But for once I kept my mouth shut.

I had never been in a show before, but the thought that it was going to be with my friends made me feel eager to start practicing. Our first rehearsal was scheduled for next Monday, so on Sunday, Taylor, Alexis and I watched *The Wizard of Oz* movie. Taylor and I kept pointing out where our character talked or showed up, until Alexis mentioned (with a sour face) that we would never know which one of the munchkins is Munchkin #12.

On Monday the whole cast was there. Our rehearsal was held on the stage in the gym. The director said a bunch of stuff that I didn’t hear and then handed out scripts. After that the bell rang. That was all that happened on my first play rehearsal of my life. I was stunned! In movies and things plays seemed so glamorous!

Rehearsals continued on every Monday and Friday. The cast was learning quickly, and the musical seemed good. Alyssa was constantly making comments about how babyish I was and how bad of an actress! I was hurt until I heard that it wasn’t just me being made fun of. Alyssa is mean!

On the last week before the show we got our costumes. Mine was a beautiful black dress and a hat. I got to fly on my broom until

Alyssa took over the ropes holding me up, and I immediately crashed to the ground and fell right through the set. I turned bright red and wished I were invisible. Taylor and Alexis ran over to me and helped me up. They were about to tell me how it was going to be okay when Alyssa started laughing. I ran offstage with my face burning.

The week of the show there was a dress rehearsal that the elementary kids were coming to. I was a little nervous but so excited. I walked out on stage for my entry and realized that the lights were off. I could see everyone in the audience! “Why am I up here?” I asked myself.

* * *

I was just about to run off the stage when I heard a voice whisper, “The people just want to see you act, so don’t worry!” I turned around to see Alexis and Taylor, but it wasn’t them talking. It was Alyssa! I was still in shock, but I turned around remembering what I had thought of at auditions and sang my song feeling much better.

After the show Alexis, Taylor and I were in the line for food when Alexis said, “You know I’m not mad about that whole Munchkin #12 stuff anymore.” When I asked her why she began to tell me all of the fun things she got to do as Munchkin #12.

Taylor asked me why Alyssa was so nice to me. I told her I didn’t really know. I was just beginning to think Alyssa had changed when I heard, “I know, Emma is such a baby!” Then I saw Alyssa walking right toward me. She said, “I only said that so you wouldn’t ruin MY play! Duh!” Well, I guess she doesn’t change that easily.

I suppose the lesson of this is to believe in yourself because it’s you who will need to face your fear in the end!

Millionaire

*For the family in **MILLIONAIRE** by **Joey Kagoz**, finding the perfect house to live in is the easy part. It's coming up with enough money to pay for it that has the family working hard.*

One afternoon, I was walking home from school when I saw this huge mansion for sale. My family was looking to move into another house. I ran like a man was chasing me with a gun just to tell my parents about this mansion. When I told them, they said they would take a look.

The next day my parents went to look at the house. They said, "We have to raise half of the cost of the mansion."

We were all sitting in the living room thinking of ideas. We were as quiet as church mice.

My brother said, "We can sell our bodies to science."

My mom said, "You have to be dead to do that."

"We can sell tee shirts at dad's store," I said. They all looked at me as if I were crazy. "I don't see you guys using your brains," I said.

Then my computer freak brother said, "I will find a website that designs tees." We had to provide the tees.

I asked, "How much do tees cost?"

My dad said, "My friend can get me some tees cheap."

Two days later, my dad called his friend and ordered 400 white tees, 300 black tees, and 500 gray tees for 100 dollars. We downloaded the program. The designs were only five dollars. My brother made fliers to hang up.

After a week, we were getting shirts in. The store was packed with customers. My dad called to make another order and his friend said, "Just got in hats." My dad ordered the hats in white, black, and gray. My dad's friend made a deal: We buy 100 of each, and he will throw in 200 of each free. My dad got all of them for 300 dollars. My brother found a new website. This one was two dollars a hat.

We made fliers about the hats. When people saw them, they rushed into the store. It was very hectic. People were shoving their way into the store. The cops came and arrested 30 percent of the people for hitting them.

The police told us to shut down the store for the day. My mom and dad closed and cleaned the store up while my brother and I counted the money. We came out with 40 million dollars!

We ran out and bought the house with the basketball court, tennis court, pool, sauna/spa, and football field.

Mr. Fisher's First Day of School

Welcome to the beginning of the school year! That adult at the front of the room may be just as anxious as the students about the whole thing. Jenny Richter imagines a teacher's concerns in MR. FISHER'S FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL.

There was silence in Looneyville, but it wouldn't last long. Mr. Fisher was getting ready to practice his pigeon call. After Mr. Fisher had yelled himself hoarse, and still couldn't get the confused pigeons anywhere near him, he thought, "I had better stop so I can still use my voice to teach the children."

Mr. Fisher glanced at his clock. His clock was the kind that showed the date as well as the time. It read 9/4/06, 6:30. "Perfect," Mr. Fisher thought, "plenty of time to prepare for class." Mr. Fisher grabbed a large box labeled "Classroom Decorations."

He drove his cramped car to Berkshire Middle School. He pulled the immense box out of the car, and staggered beneath the weight of his box to his classroom.

Once inside his room he dumped out his box. He sifted through his goodies until he found his stepladder and a giant clump of refrigerator magnets. He pulled the magnets apart until he had found enough to spell "GULLIBLE." Mr. Fisher climbed the ladder and put "gullible" on the ceiling. Then he arranged the remaining magnets on the white board to spell out "Tuesday, Sleepتمبر 5, 2006."

Next, Mr. Fisher sat in his small chair at his small desk. He typed a funny story to read to the children the next day. Then, Mr. Fisher dug around in his pile of classroom things until he found his dead cicadas in cups, and placed them on his desk.

Mr. Fisher was easily able to spot his new chalkboard cup in his rapidly shrinking pile. This was his favorite cup. It was a mug with an outside made of chalkboard material, so he could write on it in chalk. He quickly scrawled "What a mug!" and drew a face with chalk on his cup. He carefully folded up his "Happy Language Arts Week" banner, and placed everything he didn't use back in the box. He then squeezed the box into one of his cupboards. Mr. Fisher climbed into his cramped car and drove home.

Mr. Fisher lay on his bed, thinking about this year's class of children. Would they like him? Would they think he was funny? Would they laugh? The children had been so full of laughter last year. But would they be the same this year?

Mr. Fisher suddenly shuddered as he thought of the way he was treated when he was a student. His fingers still twitched when he thought of Mr. Fishhook and his little ruler that he had so liked to slam on misbehaving kids' knuckles. Mr. Fisher didn't want the kids to hate him the way he had hated Mr. Fishhook. And the best way he knew to make kids like him was to not give them homework the first week, but more importantly, to be funny and make them laugh. Oh, how he hoped they would like him!

That night Mr. Fisher had many dreams full of stony-faced children and Mr. Fishhook heads looming out of the darkness.

The next day Mr. Fisher woke up and got ready for school. His nervous hands could barely tie his tie. Mr. Fisher clambered into his tiny car and drove to school. He sat down at his tiny desk and shook like a leaf.

When the first bell rang, a couple of children filed into the classroom. They sat down at desks toward the back of the room. Just before the second bell rang, the rest of the students walked through the door. Mr. Fisher opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out, so he gestured at the desks. The new children sat towards the back with the others.

Only one child sat in a front seat. Mr. Fisher gave her a small smile. He took roll call as each child raised a hand when his or her name was called. Then, Mr. Fisher said, "Before we start, class, would you like to hear a story?"

"Yes," said most of the class, but a few people called out loudly, "No!"

"Would you like to sit up front so I can keep an eye on you?" Mr. Fisher politely asked the three boys who had shouted out.

"Not really," they said.

"All right, then," said Mr. Fisher. Mr. Fisher sat down in his chair and began to read. Not one of the children laughed. Some of them were even yawning! A few children in the very back were talking to each other. When he finished the story the only person who did anything was the girl in the front row. She smiled. Mr. Fisher waited awhile.

Eventually one of the boys called out, "That was the most boring story I ever heard!" At the same time someone said, "What a lame story!" Mr. Fisher squirmed. It was so hard not to yell out or get angry.

"I wrote it myself," Mr. Fisher said sadly.

"Ha! I'm surprised you even became a language arts teacher!" another boy yelled.

"What's your name?" asked Mr. Fisher, who was trying his best not to look hurt.

"Danny," said the boy in a know-it-all voice. "What's yours?"

"Mr. Fisher," said Mr. Fisher.

A girl interrupted, "Is it because you like to go fishing?"

"What's your name?" asked Mr. Fisher.

"Gosh, he can't even remember our own names," said Danny in a loud whisper.

"Young man, would you like to have a talk with me out in the hall?" said Mr. Fisher in a threatening voice. Everyone was listening now.

"Sure," said Danny, his eyes twinkling with mischief, "what would you like to talk about?"

The next instant, Mr. Fisher was leading Danny out to the hall. No one knows what Mr. Fisher said to Danny, even though they all listened to see if Mr. Fisher was the kind of teacher who likes to give punishments. Just when everyone was bored and had started to talk, Mr. Fisher came back with Danny.

"Um... Gullible's on the ceiling!" said Mr. Fisher, trying to change the subject. A few children looked at the ceiling, but the rest were staring at the clock, as though willing it to change to 2:46. "Er, do you like my cup?" said Mr. Fisher, trying to attract their attention.

One kid looked at the scribbled face on the mug and said, "Hey, that looks like you, Mr. Fisher!"

"You...you really think so?" asked Mr. Fisher, fighting tears back. Mr. Fisher bit his lip. He was thinking of the stony faces from his dream. These rude children were much worse. "Well, at least I can make an impression," Mr. Fisher thought. He pulled out his cups of cicadas and said, "The end of summer always makes me think about cicadas. I have some here." Mr. Fisher gave the cicadas to the girl in the front row and said, "Here, you can take a look at them, then pass them around."

The girl said, "My name is Jenny." Mr. Fisher sat back down at his desk and waited. But even though Jenny tried to pass the cicadas back, no one seemed to want to go anywhere

near the dead bugs. Mr. Fisher sighed and put the cups back on his desk.

Mr. Fisher said to the class, “Would you excuse me for a moment?” and rushed out the door. Mr. Fisher burst out the nearest door and hid in the bushes. He started to cry. He had prepared so hard; he had hoped so long! His magnets, story, cicadas, and cup preparations had all been wasted. He couldn’t teach a class that didn’t like him! The only child who hadn’t made fun of him was Jenny.

He had always strived to be funny and make people laugh. Unless...hadn’t he shouted himself hoarse yesterday perfecting his pigeon call? If this didn’t work, nothing would.

Mr. Fisher walked back into the classroom with new hope. “Hey class,” said Mr. Fisher, “would you like to hear my pigeon call?” No one did anything, but Mr. Fisher didn’t care. Mr. Fisher opened the window and sucked in a cool breath of air. “Now or never,” Mr. Fisher thought. He called with all his might, “PIGEON!”

Mr. Fisher’s heart pounded for what seemed like forever as he waited for laughter. Mr. Fisher drooped. All had failed. But then, oh joy! Mr. Fisher’s ears strained. Could it be? Laughter rang like bells from each child! Mr. Fisher beamed.

At the end of class, Danny came up to Mr. Fisher and said, “Mr. Fisher, I’m really sorry about what I said. I didn’t mean it. I’ll see if I can make my friends stop, too. I didn’t realize how mean we were being.”

Mr. Fisher ruffled Danny’s hair and said, “I accept your apology. Now hurry or you’ll be late for your next class.”

Mr. Fisher thought to himself, “Perhaps this won’t be such a bad year after all....”

My Super Sweet 16 (Maybe)

Spoiled Nadia can hardly wait for her fabulous 16th birthday party. What will she do—and how will her friends react—when her family's wealth evaporates before the big day? Autumn Palmer tells the tale of MY SUPER SWEET 16 (MAYBE).

I will never forget the day of May 18, 2006. I woke up on my OWN birthday, not realizing that today was MY day. I couldn't believe that I forgot! Well, let me fill you in with the two weeks before, when I was planning my super sweet 16.

I went up to my room. It was covered with red velvet walls and matching carpet. My bed was covered with a golden comforter. I had a closet for each season. Of course, I had a separate closet for my shoes. I could never leave this room, I thought. This was my home.

My parents were filthy rich. I could have anything I wanted. I started to make a list of what I wanted at my birthday party:

1. A Princess entrance
2. A balloon arc
3. An ice sculpture
4. A real live DJ
5. A dance floor
6. Centerpieces for ALL the tables

In addition to that, my guest list was 12 pages long. My list for presents is too long for this story. I'll tell you my number one thing: a car. I wanted a black on black Jaguar or a black on black convertible. As you can see, I like black on black. I was really excited. What girl isn't excited on her 16th birthday?

Then, my parents told me. They had charged almost everything and could never afford the house. My seven other siblings and I were moving into a three-room apartment in a week. I yelled at them, "Why are you telling me this now! It's all your fault. If you could never afford this house, why did you buy it in the first place?" I could not have my sweet 16 as I planned.

I ran to my room so fast, neither my mother nor father could respond. I cried in there for what felt like an hour. Then I started to pack my stuff. I could only take some things since I was going to be sharing a room with three other siblings. At my soon-to-be-old house, each of us had our own room. I only took my most precious things, like my diary. We sold most of our things or gave them away.

Once we were able to catch a look at our new apartment, it turned out that I had to sell more things than I thought. After I sold, like, almost my whole room, I ended up only keeping my diary and my laptop (for schoolwork).

The next day we moved everything we had into the apartment. Since I was the oldest, I got the top bunk on a three-bunk bed. I cried again for an hour. As I was crying, I thought that maybe I could not even have a few friends over for an overnighter (they're not called sleepovers in high school).

When I finished crying, I decided to go ask my mom if I could have an overnighter. She said I could have a couple of friends over for a sleepover. I had to explain to her that they

were not called sleepovers anymore. They were called overnigheters.

I looked at my guest list and crossed out people that I really was never friends with. I was left with five people: Alice, Brianna, Joysln, Anna, and Jasmine. I've known them since first grade. I called Alice first.

"Hi, Alice."

"Hi, Nadia."

"I just wanted to tell you that..." I told her everything: the yelling, the crying, and the moving into the apartment. "I'm having an overnigheter at my apartment for my birthday. Will you come?"

"Sure. You're my best friend; I would never let you down."

"Thank you, Alice. See you there."

"Bye."

Then I called Brianna and Joysln (they're twins).

"Hey, Bri."

"Hey, Nadia."

I told her everything, too.

"Make sure you tell Joysln, too."

"OK."

"I'm having an overnigheter at my apartment. Are you two going to be there?"

"You know we will!"

"See you then."

"Bye."

"Only two more people to go," I said to myself. Anna was next.

"Hey, Anna."

"Hello, Nadia."

"I'm getting tired of telling my story over and over. To make long story short, my parents couldn't afford the house,

and now we live in a small apartment. I'm having an overnighiter on Saturday. Will you come?"

"Ummmmm," she hesitated "I'm going to the mall with the most popular girls in school on Saturday."

"So you'd rather go the mall with some snobby brats than come to your own friend's birthday?" My voice started to break.

"Yeah."

"You're not much of a friend!" I was crying now. Anna was not my friend any more.

I had to go to my room to cry before I called Jasmine. When I finished I called Jasmine, still snuffling a little.

"Hi, Jasmine."

"Hey, Nadia, what do you want? I'm busy."

"To make long a story short, my parents couldn't afford the house, and now we live in a small apartment." There was a silence. Then I said, "I'm having an overnighiter on Saturday for my birthday. Can you come?"

"Why would I come to your little apartment for your birthday?"

"Because you're my friend." I could hear my voice breaking again.

"I am not your friend anymore. Don't you get it? I only liked you for your money."

I was really mad at her now. I ran up the stairs and made my sisters get out while I cried.

"What's wrong?" one of my sisters asked.

"Just get out!" I yelled at her. When I finished I felt bad for taking out my anger on my sister and apologized to her.

That night as I was getting ready for bed, I thought about how much fun I was going to have tomorrow on my birthday.

I woke up the next morning not realizing that it was my birthday! I couldn't wait until my friends got here. In

celebration, I had breakfast in the living room (it would be breakfast in bed, but the living room is where the TV is).

When my friends got here, we went outside to get some air. Once we got back in, we did all kinds of things. We played games, ate junk food, and listened to music.

We stayed up all night. The first person to go to sleep was Joysl. We were going to put whipped cream on her face, but my mom caught us as we snuck into the kitchen.

I learned that day that you don't have to have a big fancy party to celebrate your birthday. Just being surrounded by people that care about you is the real meaning of your birthday. My 16th birthday was a success.

On Thin Ice

It's just a family trip—to Antarctica! What could go wrong? ON THIN ICE by Nathan Willey makes a good case for family unity in the face of adversity.

They were almost there. The three brothers, Eric (15), Jonny (12), Nick (6), and their father Rick, a famous arctic explorer and pilot, were flying in their father's plane to the North Pole where they would study arctic animals for three weeks.

"Daddy!" cried Nick. "When are we going to be there?" Nick was spazzing out and jumping up and down in his chair.

"Nick!" yelled his father. "I told you one hundred times: It's going to be a long...We're here!" cried Rick as they looked at the beautiful ice-covered ocean. The ice almost looked like the clouds because it was so white. Just then the engine made a weird noise.

"Wait...Wait. What's happening?" The plane began to fall towards the ice. "Brace yourselves!" screamed Rick. "The engine just lost power!"

Rick was able to hold the plane steady as they rapidly fell to the ground. It felt as if the boys couldn't breathe as they plummeted. They had not been at a very high altitude as they were making their approach to land, so Rick was able to keep the plane's nose up and scrape the plane down safely on the ice, but the engine was dead. "Boys...boys, are you all right?" asked Rick.

“We’re all right,” said Eric. “Let’s get out of here.” As the boys and their father climbed out of the plane, they saw something moving in a hole in the ice about ten yards away.

“Look, Daddy, unicorn fishes!” yelled Nick, running towards the ice hole.

“He-he-he,” chuckled Rick, “those are actually called narwhals, son!” called Rick, chasing Nick to the ice hole. It was an amazing sight to see.

Eric and Jonny stood by the plane, completely mystified at how their brother and father could forget that they were just in a plane crash! Feeling left out of the action, they ran to join their father and brother.

“Have you completely forgotten that we were just in a plane crash?” yelled Eric.

“Right,” added Jonny.

“You guys chill,” said Rick. “I have a spare engine in the cargo hold. I’ll just hook it up and we’re in the clear. It’ll only take a couple of hours.”

“Daddy, look at the narwhals,” said Nick. They all looked in the hole and out jumped a huge fish with a big twisting tooth coming from its forehead. “Daddy, they’re so cool!” exclaimed Nick, hopping closer to the pool full of the uncanny creatures.

“Nick, nooo!” screamed Rick. “You’re on thin ice!” But it was too late; the ice began to break.

“Nick, come on. Just keep running!” yelled Eric.

“No!” called Rick. “Take it nice and slow, so you don’t disturb the ice even more.” Nick walked slowly across the cracking ice. “You’re almost there!” said Rick. But then something happened that no one could have predicted. The ice that Nick had reached, that they all thought was safe, crumbled beneath him and he fell into the pool of narwhals. Rick and the other boys were terrified by Nick’s fearful screams.

A father's instinct sprang into action, and Rick jumped into the frigid water to pull Nick to safety. Nick's face was a deep crimson and his hands were blue. "Sorry, boys, this trip is over," exclaimed Rick.

"D...d...d...daddy, l...l...look!" said Nick, using the last bit of his energy. Jonny and Eric had discovered a baby polar bear and were moving in for a closer look. They wanted to scare it away from their struggling father and brother.

"NO!" yelled Rick. "The mother has to be close by, and she will tear you up!"

All of a sudden, a huge polar bear emerged from a water hole with a seal in her mouth. "There she is!" shouted Rick. "Back away from the cub and start heading for the plane," he instructed. But when the mother saw the two boys by her cub, she dropped the seal and came running for them. Fortunately, the boys were quick on their feet and were able escape back to the plane unharmed.

Now Rick and Nick were next. The mother polar bear returned to her cub and seemed to ignore their presence. She scooped her baby up and went back for the seal.

Rick and Nick slowly shuffled on the ice, careful to miss the thin spots, and joined Jonny and Eric in the plane. Rick radioed the closest arctic base. As it turned out, it was located only ten miles away, and they assured him that help would arrive within the hour.

Rick and Nick immediately disposed of the wet clothes and wrapped themselves in blankets from the cargo hold. Rick and the boys were amazed at what they had already seen, but were looking forward to getting to the base for some warmth, and of course, a bite to eat!

“Parents Know Best”

*Hey, kids! Maybe those adult voices you are drowning out with your iPods carry words of wisdom after all. But you don't have to take this faceless narrator's word for it. Take it from **Jane Thomas** and her message of “PARENTS KNOW BEST.”*

“Parents know best.” We have all heard our parents say this a million times. This time, it's true.

All I could think about was Christmas vacation. I knew I was going to Crystal Mountain with my mom, my dad, my younger sister Lindsay, my cousin Keelen, and my Grandpa. I couldn't wait to go skiing and have some fun!

I was the first one to wake up in our condo that morning. I was trying to be as quiet as a mouse so I would not wake anybody up. I was overwhelmed with excitement and couldn't wait to “hit the slopes.” Little by little, I made enough noise to wake up the condo. Since I didn't want any grouchy skiers on the slopes with me that day, I decided to brew a nice hot pot of coffee to wake them.

After breakfast it was time to finally do what we came here for...“hit the slopes.” Our first stop was at our private lessons.

That is when it hit me: I don't need private lessons. I am older, wiser, more mature, more responsible, and an experienced skier. My younger sister Lindsay is just a kid; she needs lessons, but not me.

I told my parents that I was going to skip the private lessons and go off on my own. They didn't like my idea.

They were afraid that something would happen to me or that I would get lost. It took a lot of persuasion, but they finally let me go off on my own and prove how responsible I really was. We decided that we would meet at the bottom of the slopes closest to the condo in exactly one hour. We correlated our watches and promised to see each other in exactly sixty minutes. A lot changed from that moment on.

I was having so much fun that I lost track of the time. It was great to go down all those steep and challenging hills without having to wait for my family. I really enjoyed being out on the slopes on my own because I felt like I was able to have more time to enjoy myself. Whenever I ski with my family, I always have to wait for them at the bottom of the hill before we can go on to another hill.

After a while, I realized that the sun was beginning to set. I looked at my watch and it had been three hours from the time I saw my parents. I knew I was in big trouble! I got very nervous and started heading toward what I thought was our condo. The problem was, all the condo buildings looked the same. I went to three different buildings thinking that I would find my family, but I didn't have any luck. I was so nervous my heart began to pump so hard I could hear it in my ears.

After skiing around in more circles I began thinking maybe I should go ask somebody for help, but that just made me more nervous and scared. So I decided to sit down and think about my next step.

I found a safe spot by a tree and leaned against it to rest and think. I instantly began to cry. "How could I lose track of time?" I thought. "My parents must be so frightened and worried." I was afraid that I would never see my family again. It started to get very dark, very fast. I was even more terrified now than I had ever been before.

A few moments later I heard, “Jane! Jane! Jane!” I instantly perked up and looked around to see where the voice was coming from.

A few minutes later, I heard it again. I yelled back, “I am here! I can hear you! Help me! Help me!” The voice told me stay where I was and not to move. He said that they would find me and to keep talking so they knew which direction to walk towards.

Moments later, I saw yellow ski jackets coming my way. It was the ski patrol. I felt a wave of emotions; I was happy, scared, glad, and thankful. I had tears running down my cheeks as soon as I realized that I was going to be reunited with my family.

A few feet behind them I saw my parents. They had tears running down their faces as well because they were so happy I was safe.

We went back to our condo to rest from the big day on the slopes. I told my parents all about my adventures that day, and I apologized to them for losing track of time and scaring them. We agreed that the next time, I would stay with them and go to the lesson instead of going off on my own.

I guess it is true: “Parents know best!”

The Rescuer

*In **THE RESCUER** by **Kelly Greer**, American doctor Julia Farely becomes a pen pal and sponsor to teenaged Robert McCoy in Ghana. Their story begins with coincidence, but perseverance in the face of tragedy takes it so much further.*

The city streets were crowded as Julia shopped along them, looking for the perfect holiday gift for her brother. She went in every store, but couldn't find anything. As a doctor, she rarely had time to shop, so she felt lost in the maze of stores.

The window display in a jewelry store attracted her attention. It was a large poster of James Bond in a tuxedo. The cufflinks on his shirt were skeleton heads; she thought they might be a good gift for a savvy businessman like her brother.

As she paid for the cufflinks, she noticed the cutest bracelet she had ever seen. She asked the clerk to add it to her bill.

When Julia arrived at her penthouse, she opened her bracelet to put it on. Inside the case she found a note. It read:

*Thank you for your donation!
All of your money will be donated to
Foster Children in Ghana, Africa
to help pay for a child's education.
To send extra donations,
call 555-1111 for information.*

This made Julia feel much better about her purchase. After reading she dialed the number on the note. The agent on the phone took her credit card information and said that her donation would be processed and the name of the child that she would be sponsoring would be sent to her within the next thirty days.

Exactly twenty-eight days later Julia received a letter from Africa. As she opened it, she expected it to be a typed copy from the charity saying “Thank you, your donation is really appreciated” in two pages with more phone numbers at the bottom. She experienced a pleasant surprise, though, when she saw it was a hand-written note. It read:

To Miss Julia Farely,

My name is Robert McCoy, I am seventeen years old, and I would like to thank you very much for your generous donation to Foster Children in Ghana. Because of you and many others, I am going to college next fall. I will be attending medical school to fulfill my childhood dream of becoming a doctor.

*Thanks again,
Robert McCoy*

After reading the letter, Julia smiled. She couldn't believe he wanted to become a doctor. Immediately she felt like the two of them had everything in common. She wrote a letter back:

Dear Robert,

Thank you for the letter. I really enjoyed hearing from you. I think it is great that you want to be a doctor. I myself am a surgeon at a hospital in New York City. What school will you be attending? What kind of doctor would you like to be? I always find myself curious about these things, and I can give you some good advice. Please write me back.

Sincerely,

Julia Farelly

Soon enough, they became pen pals and loved hearing what each other had to say. A few months later, though, Julia heard the worst news. On every news station they were talking about one of the biggest floods in history that took place in Ghana.

All she could think about was Robert. Was he okay? Was he even alive? As much as she was worried for him, though, she felt confident for him. He was so smart; he must have figured something out. But Julia also knew better than to expect the best.

Ideas of how to help him were already forming in her mind, but the next day, when she went into work, she came up with the best idea yet when she saw a Red Cross booth in the lobby. She immediately went in to see her boss.

“Did you hear the news about that terrible flood in Ghana?” she asked him.

“Yes; tragic,” he answered.

“I was wondering if we could send a few doctors over.”

“Why the sudden interest, Dr. Farelly?” His eyes narrowed.

Julia didn't want to tell him that she had selfish reasons. "I just think it would be the right thing to do."

"Airfare is expensive," he said. "I'm not sure we've got enough funds right now."

"I'll talk to the Red Cross," Julia said. "Maybe we can go over on one of their planes."

"We?"

"Yes. I want to go."

Six days later Julia boarded a Red Cross plane for Togo, the country that borders Ghana to the east. When she arrived, she was taken to a village of tents in the middle of nowhere. She put her suitcase on top of one of the empty cots, and immediately went to work on finding Robert.

She went to the tent where the refugees were and asked the volunteer if there was a list of names. Robert was not on the list, which disappointed her, but before she had time to think about it, someone tapped her on the shoulder.

"Excuse me, Miss, may I help you?" an employee asked.

"Yes, please. I'm a surgeon; I was directed here from the tent next door," Julia replied. "I'm looking for someone. A boy."

"I see," replied the employee. "What is his name?"

"Robert McCoy."

"I'm sorry. He's not on this list. But we will have the lists from all the other camps by the end of this week."

Julia was disheartened, but she could see around her that there was plenty of work for her to do. She headed over to the tent that had "Operating Room" painted on it in big red letters. As she entered, her heart began to pound as she joined the other doctors and dressed for surgery.

Patients were brought in one by one. Most of them she and the other doctors were able to save. It gave her more confidence that Robert would be okay, as well.

When she got back to the tent where she was staying, she brushed her teeth and went straight to bed. Thirty hours had passed since she last slept.

As Julia started to get used to her new temporary life, she remembered it was the end of the week. She immediately got dressed to go see the lists. She ran over next door and approached the bulletin board with the lists posted. There were thirty lists on the board, all with dozens of names on them.

Julia began reading. There were so many names, and so far there was no Robert McCoy. When Julia finished reading the lists each three times over, she hung her head and cried. Robert was not on any list. She sat and wept for who knows how long, then slowly got up and went to work. It was a lot harder for her to work with this misery, but she got through the long day.

The next morning Julia was hit with a fresh idea. She hopped in a Jeep, bought a map, and drove to the university Robert told her he was attending. When she arrived, most of the offices were empty. The sight made Julia quiver with a small sense of sadness, but she continued walking until she found the administrator's office. She was sitting at her desk, filling out paperwork, like all administrators do.

"May I help you?" asked the lady at the desk.

"Yes, my name is Julia Farely. I am a friend of Robert McCoy, a student here. Do you know if any students evacuated the country before the flood?" Julia asked.

"Of course, everyone at the university left. We knew the rains were coming, so everyone evacuated a week before the rains came. They are now in Lome, the capital of Togo."

"Thank you!" Julia exclaimed. She got in her Jeep and drove to Lome. Her heart was pounding as she drove as fast

as she possibly could. When she got to Lome she went to the hotel the administrator suggested she try first.

“Excuse me, is Robert McCoy staying here?”

The receptionist typed a few words on her keyboard, and said, “Yes, room 231.”

Julia’s heart raced as she ran up the stairs to find him, ecstatic that he was all right. When she got to his floor she raced down the hall to Robert’s room. When she saw the door finally right in front of her, she felt something she never thought she would encounter. As she went to knock, she stopped, her hand in mid-air. She took in the feeling of curiosity of what Robert would be like face to face, in person, knowing that it would soon be gone. She wondered if he would remember her, or if he would shoo her away and think she was a complete idiot. She pondered over the million thoughts running through her head. She wondered if she should knock, or if she should turn around, knowing he was okay. While she stood in this confusing state of thought, all her problems were solved. Someone on the other side of the door swung the door open.

“Hello, may I help you?” He barely had time to finish his sentence as Julia threw her arms around him, giving him an overwhelmingly big hug for such a little figure.

“Robert, I’m sorry, you probably don’t remember me. I’m Julia, Julia Farely. We wrote letters to each other. I was just coming to make sure you were okay,” she said.

“Yes, I’m very well, thank you. You came all the way from the United States just to make sure I was okay?” he was very surprised.

“It’s a long story,” she replied.

Runaway Love

*Serious situations call for serious actions. An unstable and dangerous home life leads to a desperate decision in **RUNAWAY LOVE**, by **Rita M. Benissan**.*

In the year 2006, there were two R and B artists name Mary J. Blige and Ludacris. They both made a song called “Runaway Love.” The next day the song became a book.

One day they had an interview on station 95.5. The co-hosts, Big Boy and Mojo, asked Mary J. and Ludacris, “Where did the song come from?”

“It came from a real girl named Nicole who did run away from home from her step-dad. She had a friend, Stacey, who did die, but not from getting shot. She died from lung cancer in real life,” said Ludacris.

“Do you think that this book could be read by children?” said Mojo.

“Um, yes, it could be read by children. It’s for everyone and every age,” said Mary J.

“Could you read your story for us?” asked Big Boy.

Mary J. said, “Sure, I’ll read it!”

“Nicole is only ten years old. She has an alcoholic step-dad who always wants to strike her. Nicole wants to know why the world is so cold, why she is not pretty, and why nobody seems to like her. Some days she feels sad, and some days she leaves home with some bruises. Teachers ask questions, and she is making up excuses so her alcoholic step-dad won’t find out.

“She is bleeding in the inside while crying on the outside. There is only one person who knows what Nicole is all about. Her name is Little Stacey. They both promise to be friends until the end. Then one day little Stacey got shot.

“Now Nicole is stuck in the world all alone and thinks that hell is the place called home. The next day Nicole was in her bedroom. Just then her alcoholic step-dad started to bang on the door, yelling, ‘Open the door!’ Still Nicole didn’t open the door. She knew that something was going to happen and happen fast. The first thing she thought to do was to start packing and run away from her alcoholic step-dad.

“When she was done packing her stuff, she opened her window quietly and fast. Her alcoholic step-dad started to bang harder on her door. When the window was open she jumped out. She started to run before her step-dad saw her.

“When she was halfway down the street from her house, she knew that she was safe. After that, nobody found her.”

Sleepover

*What happens when an ordinary overnighter turns into a war between neighbors? In **SLEEPOVER** by **Alicia Lerner**, find out how Margaret and Victoria deal with two boys who underestimate their adversaries.*

“What is the homework for science?” Margaret’s friend Victoria asked at the other end of the phone.

“It’s to read pages 137 through 139,” Margaret replied.

“Thanks,” Victoria said. “Listen, do you think we could have a sleepover today? I mean, after we get our homework done, of course.”

“Yeah, that would be fun! Hold on, let me ask.” Margaret set the phone down on the table and ran to go ask her mom. After the few seconds of silence Victoria sat through, Margaret picked up the phone again. “My mom said okay!” Margaret said happily. “I’ll be over at five.”

“See you then!” Victoria said.

Meanwhile....

Two boys just got off their bus.

“I’m gonna be bored later,” said one of the identical twins, James, as the boys got off their bus, crossed the street and headed toward their house. They walked under their favorite big apple tree, through the bright green grass under a cloudless blue summer-like sky. At least they wished it were summer. It was spring, almost the end of the school year.

“Why?” asked Marc, the other twin.

“Cause I barely have any homework today and our Playstation is broken. You better think of something for us to do,” complained James.

James always had thought of Marc as the smarter twin. Whenever he didn’t understand any homework or something, he had someone to help him. Marc was also good at thinking of stuff to do when they were bored. Marc was thinking for a few seconds when a car pulled up in their neighbors’ driveway and out came a girl about their age. Then their neighbor, Victoria, answered the door along with her mom.

“I might have an idea,” said Marc.

“Knock, knock,” Margaret said at Victoria’s front door.

“Come on in!” said Victoria’s mom, Mrs. Turner.

“Thank you,” replied Margaret.

“Come on, Margaret! Let’s go to my room,” Victoria said.

“Set your stuff down anywhere,” said Victoria in her junkyard that she calls a room. “If you can find anywhere.”

Victoria’s room looked like a normal girl’s room if it had been in an earthquake, turned upside down at least ten times, and been in a heavy-duty washing machine. It was far from being the “cleanest room ever,” and not even her parents would go in it.

“What do you want to do?” Victoria asked, trying to be polite.

“Let’s go on the trampoline,” Margaret answered.

Both James and Marc didn’t like Victoria. When they were little, she was always mean to them. James and Marc didn’t think they should put up with it, so they started to be mean, too. Eventually, they just ignored each other. But not today.

After Marc had told James all about their plan, they started to get to work.

“They don’t even know what is about to hit them,” Marc said to James while they were in their backyard right behind the fence leading to Victoria’s yard. They had a giant catapult and a huge bucket, and were putting their plan into action. “Literally.”

“Whoa!” Margaret said as she jumped up in the air and back down, landing with a thud. “I guess I haven’t been on a trampoline in a while.

“Wanna play Add-On?” Victoria asked.

“Sure,” said Margaret.

“Okay, I’ll go first.” Margaret watched in astonishment as Victoria did a backward flip and landed perfectly.

“Wow! I can’t do that!” Margaret said.

“Okay then,” Victoria said. “Can you...what is that?” Victoria asked looking up into the sky at a tiny red dot that was falling in the air. “It’s a...WATER BALLOON! LOOK OUT!” Victoria yelled and leaped out of the way.

Margaret stood there perplexed at what was going on as the balloon came crashing down on her.

“AHH! IT’S COLD!” Margaret screamed. “Where did this come from?” Margaret stared back into the sky and saw another blue dot. Still soaked from the last one, she jumped off the trampoline, making sure not to get hit.

This one was aimed at Victoria and she kept trying to crawl out of the way, but she didn’t even know where it was going to hit, so she stepped right in its path. Margaret started to laugh and so did Victoria. More water balloons were coming down, so Victoria got off the trampoline. Victoria started to hear laughter from the other side of the fence.

“I think I know where they are coming from,” she said, walking toward the fence that led to the neighbors’ house.

Sure enough, as she opened the door of the fence she saw Marc and James TeeVee laughing their heads off.

“YOU THINK THIS IS FUNNY?” she said.

“Hey,” Marc said, in between laughs, “we heard you laughing, too! You know it’s funny!”

“Whatever,” Victoria said in annoyed tone of voice. “Just stop bugging us.”

Victoria then walked over to where Margaret was.

“Who are those guys?” Margaret asked.

“Complete idiots. Let’s go.” Victoria started walking toward the door, and Margaret was still standing there, trying to take in what just happened. Then, she ran to catch up.

When they were in the house, Margaret asked, “Were they those idiot neighbors you always tell me about?”

“Yeah,” said Victoria. “That was them. They are always so annoying to me.” Victoria paused and then had a wicked smile on her face. “We have to get back at them. And I think I have an idea.”

Victoria and Margaret had dinner, but all they could think about was the plan. They were looking forward to it, but they had to do it late at night.

After dinner, they went upstairs to Victoria’s room and found what they needed. Of course, it took a while searching through all the stuff in her room. It was like a tornado had just hit the “Museum of the Most Random Things.” You could find anything in that room, just name it. A gumball machine? Yep. A magic kit? Yep. A photo book of corn? Yep. A peacock portrait? Yep. Even a giant gumball.

They put everything they needed in a backpack, including shaving cream, honey, a bucket, feathers, string, fake bugs, and toilet paper.

“We sure got ‘em good!” said James to Marc, in their beds, at nine-thirty at night.

“Yeah! They had no clue!” Marc replied. “Well, I’m tired. Goodnight, James.”

“Night, Marc.”

Victoria and Margaret were watching Marc and James’s room through a telescope in Victoria’s room.

“Okay, the light is off,” Victoria said. “Engage ‘Plan Revenge.’ I’ve always wanted to say that.”

Victoria and Margaret snuck downstairs very quietly and out the door with the backpack. They went into the backyard and through the fence. It was really dark out, so it looked like a haunted forest outside. From watching it, they knew where the window was leading to the boys’ room. Luckily, it wasn’t that high up—about seven feet. Margaret put her foot on Victoria’s hands and Victoria gave her a boost up. Then, when Margaret was in the room, she stuck her hands down to help lift up Victoria.

“Okay, they’re asleep,” said Margaret. “Let’s start.”

First, they put the feathers in the bucket and put it on the fan in their room. Then, they put fake bugs in their clothes, shoes, and beds. They put shaving cream all over their faces and blankets and also squirted honey on their hands and on their doorknob. They attached the string to the fan and tied it on Marc’s foot.

“Let’s get out of here,” Victoria said, “before we get caught.”

“Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!” said the Irish dude on Victoria’s alarm clock. (Another random thing. Victoria isn’t Irish.)

“Margaret, WAKE UP!” Victoria yelled, not knowing what time the boys would get up.

“I’m awake!” Margaret yelled, still half-asleep.

Victoria was looking through the telescope and Margaret scrambled over to see.

After about two minutes, they got up.

First, Marc woke up and screamed, which made James wake up. When they felt the shaving cream on their faces they tried to wipe it off, but just spread honey all over. Then, James saw a bug on his pajamas and screamed again. Marc was so frightened he jumped up, and the string on his foot caused the fan to turn on and the bucket to tip, spilling feathers that were blown all over until they became stuck to the honey. James got up and tried to open the door but just practically glued his hand there.

While the girls were watching this from the telescope, they were cracking up. They literally fell on the floor laughing. It went on for about ten minutes.

The girls got some breakfast and then Margaret had to go.

“Bye, Victoria! That was so much fun!” Margaret cried as her car pulled out of the driveway.

Victoria was sad to see her go. It had been the best sleepover ever. She walked back inside wondering if the boys would ever be non-sticky again.

And finally, the sleepover was over.

Stage Fright

It's Dixie's turn in the spotlight—but the light seems too bright for comfort. Demi Shamoun considers what is at stake in **STAGE FRIGHT**.

Hello, I am Dixie, and I am a soft toe dancer. I am 13 years old, and I want to be a famous dancer when I am older. Right now, I am a hip-hop dancer, and I am getting ready for a recital. Today is our recital that we are getting ready for, so...

“Where is my costume, Christina?”

“Coming!” Christina said.

“Christina, your costume is on its way. Be patient.” As I was getting my costume on, I felt something. “Oh, no! My stomach.”

“What is it?” Christina said.

“It is my stomach. It is hurting. I can’t perform. Go and take my place.”

“I can’t,” said Christina. “I don’t know your moves.”

“Make them up.”

“Ok,” said Christina.

As Christina went out on stage, I thought to myself, *Wait a minute. I can do this.* So I yelled out to Christina, “Wait, I can do this!”

I walked out on stage. I kept saying to myself, *I can do this*, over and over. The reason why my stomach was hurting was because I had butterflies in my stomach.

After, everything worked out, and we went to celebrate. As I went home with my big first-place trophy, I felt great! I did it.

Tornado

*It is one family's misfortune to get caught up in the fury of a massive storm system. It's man against nature in **TORNADO**, by **Dustin Schwartz**.*

This is a story about a family: a mom, dad, sister, and brother. The mother's name is Rachel; the father's name is Steve; the brother, who is eight years old, is named Jacob; and the 12-year-old sister is named Jessica. They are a nice family who don't fight a lot, and they live in Oklahoma City.

One day they are on their way to a water park. All of a sudden, the sky just turns into a humongous black cloud. It looks like some tornado funnel clouds were forming in the sky. Jacob says to Jessica that the sky looks like a black hole ready to suck you in, and all of the other family members agree with him. They keep going to the water park because they are still six hours away.

Two hours into the trip, the sky is still a cloud of humongous black. In the sky they now start to see four tornados forming. The whole family is very scared. Then they see a sign saying "MOTEL – FOUR MILES AHEAD." Now the family isn't as scared. The motel seems like good shelter to be out of the bad weather.

The family checks into the hotel and gets into two rooms. The father and son stay in one room, and the mother and daughter stay in another room. They settle in for a good night's sleep.

The family starts its journey the next morning only to encounter more humongous black skies. Now the family needs to find a way to get out of this tornado trap. They stop the car to call for help, but there is no cell phone service. The tornados are getting really close, so they get back in their car and drive away.

All of a sudden the winds catch up to the car and shatter the back window! Rachel and Jacob don't have their seat belts on, so the wind is pushing them around in the car.

The wind becomes stronger. Now it is pulling the back seat into the trunk and scaring Rachel and Jacob. Both the kids are holding on for their lives. They are stuck in the trunk holding on while the winds are pulling at them.

Steve climbs into the back while Rachel is driving, and he is trying to save their kids. Steve asks Jessica to try her hardest to grab onto his hand, but she's slipping. "Try harder!" the dad screams. "Yes, we got her!"

They are so happy that they forget about Jacob. Jacob screams and grabs onto his dad's hand to get pulled up. Jacob says, "Thanks, Dad."

But the family is still sad because they didn't get to go to the water park.

"Wait! Look at the sky," Rachel says. "The sky is clearing up. Maybe we can still go to the water park!"

"Wait," Steve says, "aren't you guys happy that is over?"

"YES!" the children reply.

So that is what happens on a Saturday afternoon on the way to a water park.

A Tragic Tail...

In A TRAGIC TAIL... by Maddie Monchnik, Suzy is a wonderful owner to her dog Brownie. But as every dog lover knows, love alone doesn't ensure a happy ending.

On the top of a hill, there lived a young lady and her dog that lived in a mid-sized house in a town outside of Detroit. The lady's name was Suzy. She was in her 30's, and her dog, Brownie, was a bichon frise. Brownie was a beautiful dog. He was a white puffball with a black nose. He was an award-winning dog in the agility competitions. The next thing you know Brownie had won over ten first place prize medals.

Every morning, afternoon, and evening, Suzy let Brownie outside in the backyard. He would run around, play, and dig holes, like other dogs. All she had to do was yell his name and he would come racing inside.

Not too long ago, Suzy thought she heard howling coming from the back yard, but she knew it wasn't Brownie because he barks, not howls. Suzy decided not to worry about it.

One night Suzy let Brownie into the backyard as usual. But when she called him to come in, he didn't come. She kept calling his name in case he hadn't heard her, but he still didn't come.

Suzy ran outside looking for him, but he was nowhere to be found. She called the neighbors to see if they saw him at any time, but she had no luck.

She called the police and told them that her dog was missing. The police asked how she knew the dog was missing. She told them that she let him out earlier that evening, and when she called him to come inside he didn't come. The police said that earlier that day they got a call saying someone saw a coyote with a dead bichon frise in its mouth, and that maybe that dog was Brownie. The person said they could make out the letters on the dog tag and it said Brownie on it. "Since your dog's name is Brownie, I'm guessing that was your dog," said the officer.

Suzy didn't want to believe that Brownie was taken by a coyote, so she went around town and put up missing dog posters. It had been three weeks, and no one had called back about Brownie. Suzy was in such misery that she decided to believe that a coyote took Brownie.

What a Day

*It is a normal day at school for Megan, until her boring routine is interrupted by events that fill her with fear and confusion. You may appreciate boredom a little more after reading **WHAT A DAY**, by **Andrea Kelly**.*

Megan dragged out of her first hour, Social Studies, and was walking back to her locker when she saw a guy with his back to her who looked a bit older than the students. She turned to her friend Kerrie and said, "Does that guy look familiar to you?"

"No," Kerrie replied. "I can't really tell anyway with that big trench coat on," she said, obviously annoyed.

"Oh my gosh, is that a gun?" Megan exclaimed.

"You really need to just calm down," Kerrie said, getting frustrated now.

"I'm going to the principal," Megan said.

"Oh," Kerrie groaned.

"But Principal Fishman, I saw it. I saw him hide it in his coat!" Megan cried.

"Now, Megan, calm down. Everyone must check in with the office first, and all of the other doors are locked. Now go back to class and forget all about this," Principal Fishman explained.

"Whatever," Megan thought, and went back to class.

During third hour, Ms.Rehsif got a call from the office. "Children," she said with a strange look on her face, "we're going

into red alert lockdown and the police will be surrounding our building.” The room went silent. Then it was just a lot of noise, people crying, people talking, and everyone scared to death.

Megan turned to her friend Kerrie and said, “OH MY GOSH, it’s that weird guy I saw in the hallway! I just know it’s him!”

“Do you know who that guy looked like? Your step-dad, Jerry,” Kerrie said, frowning.

“I knew he looked familiar!” Megan said, slightly scared. She knew her mom and step-dad had just gotten in a fight, but she didn’t think it was this bad. It seemed like something they would get over, like everything else.

Her teacher told all of the kids to read or work on homework. She secretly whipped out her cell phone and called her mom at home. “Mom?” she said, her voice shaking.

“Yes, honey?” her mom said. “Is everything okay? You sound scared.”

“Mom, I think Jerry is in my school,” Megan said, still shaking. “With a gun, because we’re on lockdown.” All she heard was silence on the other end. “Mom?” she asked the quietness.

“I hear you, honey. I’ll call his work, but I don’t think he’s at school. He went into work this morning. I saw him drive away, and Kirkshire is the other way. I don’t think Jerry would have any reason to be there, anyway,” she tried to convince her.

“But Moooooommm, fine,” she whined.

“Bye, sweetie. Love you,” her mom said.

“Bye, Mom,” Megan said.

“I’m calling my step-dad’s work myself,” she told Kerrie.

“Uh-oh,” Kerrie groaned.

Megan called her step-dad’s office. “Hello?” a deep voice answered.

“Hi, this is Megan Clooney, and I’m calling for my step-dad Jerry,” she said.

“I’m sorry, sweetheart. Your step-daddy called in sick today,” he said. His voice was dripping with fake sweetness; she hated when adults talked to her like that.

“Thank you anyway,” she said politely.

So it *was* him! He probably didn’t stick out at her school. He is only in his early 30’s or late 20’s. Megan never really got what her mom saw in him.

“I’m calling my mom again,” Megan told Kerrie.

“I don’t think this is a good idea,” Kerrie said with a worried look on her face.

“Mom?” Megan said as soon as she heard the phone get picked up.

“Yes, sweetie?” her mom asked patiently,

“Jerry called in sick today,” Megan broke the news to her mom. Silence was all Megan heard on the other end.

“I’ll notify the police,” she finally heard her mom say. “And honey-buns? I love you.”

“I love you, too, Mom,” Megan replied.

The rest was all a blur. The police finally decided on storming the school. They got Jerry down on the floor in handcuffs and drove him away in a police car. It turned out Jerry didn’t have any real intentions that day, but the school was searched for weapons or bombs anyway and was determined safe. Megan thought it was just to give her mom a scare, kind of like payback for her mom not doing whatever it was he wanted her to do.

The parents came in and there was a lot of crying, hugging, and I-love-you’s. The kids got the rest of the day off, and Megan never saw her step-dad again, unless you count all the newscasts that week. Megan never found out what finally made her principal put the school on lockdown. She just assumed he finally believed her.

Shock Wave

The Haunted House of Franklin Village

*A group of kids with nothing better to do investigate an abandoned house that has a spooky reputation in **THE HAUNTED HOUSE OF FRANKLIN VILLAGE**, by **Anthony Lossia**. Unfortunately, there is something in the house that does not like visitors.*

“Hey, Dominic,” said Anthony. “What’s up?”

“Nothing. You?” said Dominic.

“I’m going to go get Max, Chris, and Collin. Wanna come?” said Anthony.

“Ok,” said Dominic.

They got Max, Chris, and Collin. “Let’s go get Jannel and Jenna,” Max said.

“Ok,” everyone said.

They got Jannel and Jenna. “Hey,” they said.

“Let’s go check out the big old abandoned house in Franklin,” Anthony said.

“Ok,” every body said.

“Hey Anthony, you think you can do a back flip?” Collin said.

“Never tried.” So Anthony tried and landed it.

They came to the house. It looked like it had burned. It was a two-story. Parts were falling of one side of the house, there was a big hole in the roof, windows were broken, and the door was dented in.

They went inside the house. Anthony went first, then Dominic, then Max, then Collin, then Chris, and then Jenna and Jannel. The door shut closed. They were looking around.

Then 15 minutes later, they saw a figure on top of the stairs “H-h-hello?” said Anthony.

“Leave this house,” said the figure that looked like a little kid.

“W-w-what?” said Anthony.

“Leave now, or you will be cursed forever,” said the figure. Then in a flash of light the figure disappeared.

Everybody ran up the stairs, and they saw a little boy sitting on a chair.

“Hey,” Jannel said. The boy didn’t answer. Then Anthony turned the chair around, and the boy was dead without his eyes.

“AHHHHHHH!” Jannel and Jenna screamed. Anthony, Dominic, Max, Chris, and Collin couldn’t say anything

They looked at the bottom of the stairs, and then the little boy figure showed up again.” LEAVE! NOW YOU ARE CURSED!” the figure said.

“NO!” everyone screamed

“LOOK!” Chris and Collin screamed. There was an opening. Everyone jumped out. They were hurt.

Later that night when Anthony was asleep, his door was opened. He saw the figure again in the light. “ WHAT DO YOU WANT?” Anthony screamed

“You are cursed until you break the curse and free my soul and the soul of everyone else that died in that house, ” the figure said.

Anthony snuck out of his house. He got Dominic, Max, Collin, Jenna, Janelle, and Chris. He told them what the figure said.

“Oh my god!” Jenna, and Jannel said. “Do we need to go back in the house?”

“Yep,” Anthony said with a big sigh. “We need to burn the house down.”

They took trashcans, matches, and lighters. Soon after that, they went to the house. Anthony, Dominic, Collin, and Chris ran upstairs and lit the trash, while Jannel and Jenna did the other side. They all ran downstairs, but what they didn’t know was that there was a hole in the floor. Before they could make it out, the fire hit the door. “AHH!” they screamed.

They stood there in amazement. They ran around to look for a place to get out. Anthony found a table, and threw it through the wall. They escaped.

“YEA!” they yelled in victory.

Later that day Anthony went home to his parents who had been wondering where he was. Than Anthony told them the story....

“And that’s the story.”

The Haunted Mansion Disease

*Two boys embark upon a dangerous course of action from which they dare not turn back. And you, Dear Reader, may find that **THE HAUNTED MANSION DISEASE** by **Elliott Wolf** takes you places you fear to go.*

“Home run!” Jimmy yelled out as his friend Adam smacked a home run out of the field.

“Good one, Adam,” Jimmy exclaimed.

“Yeah, but I don’t really know where that ball went. Did you see it land anywhere?” Adam asked.

“Nope, it sounded like something broke, though, right after it went out of the field,” said Jimmy.

“Aw, man, that was our last ball. Now we don’t have another ball!” complained Adam.

“Hey, dude, it’s ok. We’ll just climb over the fence and go look for it,” said Jimmy.

“Ok,” said Adam. Adam and Jimmy climbed over the fence to go look for the ball.

“No!” Jimmy said.

“What’s the problem?” questioned Adam.

“Well, the ball went into that stupid haunted mansion that everybody says spread a disease in 1944,” replied Jimmy.

“Yeah, I think I heard that spooky story. Well, any story about mansions that are haunted is usually scary. I say we just

head home and tell our parents the game was cut short,” said Adam.

“Fine, let’s go,” agreed Jimmy.

“Everybody pack your things and go home. The game is over,” Adam said. Then, with a groan, everybody picked up their bags and left the field.

“Come on, let’s get going,” Jimmy said to Adam. Jimmy and Adam then packed their things, left the field, and raced home.

“I think my parents are at your house, Jimmy,” Adam said.

“Ok, then to my house!” exclaimed Jimmy.

As Jimmy and Adam walked into Jimmy’s house, they realized it was way too quiet. Something was wrong. Jimmy and Adam darted upstairs to find both their moms and dads lying on the floor, their faces pale white and their bodies covered with black markings. “What the heck is going on?” Jimmy screamed.

“The curse is back,” Jimmy whispered to himself, then said to Adam, “The haunted mansion disease is back!”

“How did it spread again?” asked Adam.

“Maybe when the ball broke the window, the disease that was locked inside of the house spread all around the whole town,” feared Adam. “I remember hearing that it only affects adults. Is it a killing disease?”

“No, it somehow paralyzes the body. Let’s go back to the mansion and seal the window. Then maybe the disease will go away,” suggested Jimmy.

“I guess we could try that. Let’s hurry!” said Adam. They hurried out the door in the direction of the mansion.

A few minutes later, Jimmy and Adam were standing right in front of the house. They walked up the porch steps to the front door. All of a sudden the door opened on its own like magic! “Huh, maybe it’s just the wind,” stammered Adam. They

walked into the house. It was silent. Then the lights flickered on by themselves.

“Ok, we can’t blame the wind for that,” Jimmy said nervously. They walked upstairs into the hallway.

“Oh my gosh, look at all of those doors!” yelled Adam. Right in front of Jimmy and Adam were many doors on both sides, all down the hallway. “Where should we start?” asked Adam.

“I guess we’ll start at the one a couple down from the last door so we don’t have to go through all of these rooms,” said Jimmy.

“That’s a good idea,” Adam said. They walked to a door that was four doors away from the last door. This door had Chinese writing on it. When they walked in the door both of their jaws dropped open. “Wow, this place is huge! I think we are actually in China!” exclaimed Adam.

“Yeah, I think you are right. I mean, there is a sky,” agreed Jimmy.

“Well, let’s just get through this place fast,” said Adam as they started walking through the room. While walking, they were looking around at all of the sites.

“Wow, who knew China was this cool-looking?” said Jimmy.

“I sure didn’t,” said Adam.

Adam and Jimmy looked up and saw someone on a roof of a building. He was dressed all in black. Whoever it was, he was watching Adam and Jimmy. They looked at each other, then when they looked back the man in black was gone.

“Hey, Adam, was there a man dressed all in black on that roof over there? Or is my imagination playing tricks on me?” asked Jimmy.

“No, you’re not imagining things. I saw him, too,” replied Adam.

“If someone is watching us, I say we leave ASAP,” suggested Jimmy.

“Ok, I guess if we came in from one door there has to be another one. Let’s look for it,” said Adam.

As they started walking, a throwing knife landed with a thud in the ground right next to them. Five more knives came flying at them, also landing in the ground, then came ten knives, and then twenty knives! “Dude, look, it’s a ninja!” shrieked Adam.

The ninja bellowed, “BY ORDER OF THE U.N.C. YOU ARE TRESPASSING! SUCH BEHAVIOR MUST BE TAKEN CARE OF.”

“Uh, oh,” said Jimmy and Adam at the same time. “RUN!” screamed Jimmy. Both boys were running and screaming for their lives.

“Look,” Adam said in relief, “it’s the door!” They sprinted as fast as they could to the door, and once on the other side of it they shut it tight.

“You don’t see that every day,” Jimmy said.

“Yeah, I’ll say. Let’s go try another door,” suggested Adam.

When they approached the next door it had pictures of a lot of men shooting at each other. They walked in. Before their very eyes they saw the Revolutionary War taking place. It was 1775! In the distance they could see men shooting and assaulting each other. All of a sudden a man with a musket walked right up to them and stopped.

“What in the blazes are you two boys doing here? Oh, excuse my manners; I am General Wilson IV. It’s a pleasure to meet you boys. But you shouldn’t be out here. It’s much too dangerous for children.” He then took their arms and dragged them into a building. “Now why are you kids here?” asked the General.

“Um, well, we, um,” the boys rambled.

“How are we going to tell him where we came from?” Adam whispered to Jimmy.

“I don’t know,” Jimmy replied. “Well, we, um, Mr. General, sir, I know this will sound strange, but we are from the future,” Jimmy blurted. General Wilson looked at some of his comrades and laughed a big hearty laugh. Then they started laughing, too.

“Hey, it’s true!” Adam defended his friend.

“Forget this. Let’s find the door to get out of this place,” Jimmy said while nudging Adam out the door. They spotted the exit door and hightailed it as fast as they could to safety on the other side.

“Ok, next door,” Adam said.

“Hey, dude, let’s skip this one. It doesn’t feel right,” said Jimmy as he stared at a picture of a scary, fire-breathing dragon on the door.

“Fine with me,” replied Adam.

The last door at the end of the hall had a picture of a computer on it. They decided to take a look inside. “What do you think this room does?” asked Adam.

“I don’t know,” said Jimmy. “But look, there is a lever that says SHUT DOWN on it. Should we try it? It might be the answer to this problem.” They pulled the lever down. Everything turned white, and they were back outside in a flash of light.

“Dude, the house is still here! What if this happens all over again?” Adam sighed.

“I can only think of one solution: Burn the house down,” Jimmy said sadly.

“What! Are you crazy?” shouted Adam.

“I know it sounds crazy, but I think it’s our only option,” reasoned Jimmy.

“We don’t have anything to use to burn it down. No matches or lighter or anything,” worried Adam.

“Don’t underestimate me, Adam,” Jimmy said, and he pulled a small pouch of gunpowder out of his pocket.

“Where in the world did you get that?” asked Adam.

“I snagged it off the General when he wasn’t looking. Guess it will come in handy about now, huh?” smiled Jimmy.

As Jimmy walked around the house spreading small amounts of gunpowder, Adam went searching for two sticks to start the fire. It took a few minutes, but Adam was able to light the gunpowder from a spark made by rubbing the sticks together. In an instant the house was starting to burn down. Within ten minutes the house was burnt into little pieces of charred wood and ash.

Jimmy and Adam ran back to Jimmy’s house and were surprised to see their parents sitting at the kitchen table talking and laughing. “Where were you two? What’s wrong? You both look like you just saw a ghost!” Adam’s mom exclaimed.

“Hey,” Jimmy whispered to Adam, “how come they don’t know what’s going on?”

“Don’t know. I guess we got rid of the haunted mansion disease for good. And they don’t have any memory of what happened. Like amnesia,” Adam answered.

As the boys exchanged a look and a high-five to each other they replied at the same time to their parents, “It’s a long story!”

Liar

Kyle always thought lying was just fun and games. It is only a matter of time until his falsehoods catch up with him in LIAR, by Brad Sloan.

I, Kyle Saintobin, am a 12-year-old sixth-grader. The start of middle school is tough, so you need friends to watch your back. Yeah, well, I don't have many friends. I think it's because I tell a few little white lies. I don't like to think of them as lies, but just as jokes. Yeah, that's it, just harmless joking around. There was the time I told my ex-friend it was my birthday, so he got me lots of presents. He found out it wasn't my birthday, and that's why he's my EX-friend.

Things got out of whack the day I got my math test back. I hadn't studied for it much, but I was confident. As my teacher came around passing the tests back, I crossed my fingers. My teacher approached me and set my test down on the desk.

I was in despair. The top of my test had a big, fat, red D+ on it. "No, Mom's gonna kill me. Unless she doesn't find out," I said with a smirk.

On the way home from school, I chucked my test in the nearest Dumpster. Then, I continued my walk home.

At home, my mom asked what I got on my test. I said, "I didn't get it back yet." She fell for it.

Three days later, the wackiness from the day I got my test back continued. Something very weird happened. I went to bed like I do every night. However, when I woke, I was in a dark, hot room.

I looked up and saw a man. I had no idea how he or I could have gotten into this mysterious room. I sat up in the bed to see who it was. It was a man in a black suit. I had never seen this man before. I asked him who he was, but he remained silent. "Who are you?" I asked again. Now, he was just testing my patience. He pulled from his pocket a weird-shaped Taser gun, like the ones the police have.

At this point, I should have run, but I couldn't seem to get myself out of bed. The next thing I knew, I was on the ground. Then, everything went dark.

Hours later, I woke up in what seemed to be a spooky, dark mansion. Standing in front of me was the same man in all black. I asked him, "Where am I?" Once again, he had no response. He signaled me to follow him. I had no choice.

I was so terrified that it seemed like we walked down a never-ending hallway. Finally, we reached a door. The man held out his hand, signaling me to enter. I entered the room.

The room was dark and empty. Not a soul was there. In the room sat a throne. Suddenly, smoke filled the room. A figure appeared on the throne. It was my ex-friend!

He said, "You have done wrong by telling lies. But, I shall give you a second chance if you tell the truth to everyone, including those that you have lied to, from this day forward." I asked my ex-friend who the man was. He said it was his butler. His rich parents had hired him to do my ex-friend's bidding.

He gave me a chance to redeem our friendship. I took it, thinking I needed some friends. Besides, my ex-friend was really a good guy. He gave me a ride back to my home from the mansion (which was actually his house).

I went inside and told my mom about my grade. I told her that I was sorry for not telling the truth.

I now realize that even though I thought my lies were jokes, telling the truth is a smart thing to do.

Lost in the Woods

*A moody teen has no choice but to endure the family vacation that he has no interest in. If only he had paid more attention to the ranger's warnings in **LOST IN THE WOODS**, by **Benjamin Cooper**.*

As the bear let out a savage roar, it charged. I couldn't move. That is how it ended, but this is how the nightmare began.

It all started out when my parents thought it would be a great way to bond to go camping at Yellowstone. I was raised in the city. As far as I'm concerned there's nothing more to camping than bug bites and disease. After much protesting and complaining, we were off. (But not without my hiding my iPod in my suitcase first.)

When we finally got there, we were treated to a long and boring speech about wilderness safety by a middle-aged park ranger. I turned up my concealed iPod to tune him out. When he was finally done talking (which felt like hours), we set off to our campsite. It wasn't that bad really, but once my Dad started to sing, I managed to pass out instantly.

I was jolted awake by a sudden impact. I stumbled clumsily out of the car. When I came to my senses, I noticed three things: a flaming car engine, a splintered tree, and my parents' cold, dead bodies. I felt like I was going to puke. After much sobbing, I remembered we had a first aid kit in the car. I started off to the car when, **BOOM!** I was thrown back like a doll. I was covered in burns, and had a piece of shrapnel embedded in my arm. I passed out.

I was rudely awakened by a less-than-gentle-nudging. I rolled over and mumbled, "Five more minutes, Mom." Then I felt a claw scrape me. I yelped. I looked up and saw a bear.

I ran as fast as I could! But I tripped on a root and broke my leg. As the bear let out a savage roar it charged. I couldn't move.

Then I heard a gunshot. I saw a park ranger brandishing a shotgun. The bear roared. The park ranger ran away screaming.

As the bear let out a savage roar, it charged. I couldn't move.

More Than a Dream

*Taylor is a sensible girl who has never believed in spirits—until now. Find out what changes Taylor's mind in **MORE THAN A DREAM**, by **Renee Hines**.*

Hi, my name is Taylor. I have a mom, a dad, and Christian, my older sister. I am one of those people who hardly ever gets scared, worried, or disturbed, but that was only until we had to move.

You see, it all started last year when my dad got a new job. Now at the time that didn't sound bad at all, because we were moving back to our old neighborhood...but that ended when I found out what house we were moving into. It was the most terrifying house ever.

Now, you might be wondering how I know about it, and to tell you the truth, I didn't until my friends told me about it.

One day as my friends were taking their weekly walk, they walked past a house. As they walked past it, they heard a screaming noise that moaned "Walter Fine." Then they saw a knife thrown in the air.

As soon as my friends got home they looked up "Walter Fine" on the Internet. Obviously we weren't the only ones who knew about it. There was this huge article about him with a picture of his house. The article basically said he committed suicide by first cutting his hand off, stabbing a knife into his thigh, and then finishing himself off by forcing the knife into his stomach. His last words were, "The next family that lives in this house will live in complete nightmare." On the 15th of July, it said, he would live there as a spirit.

The questions I'm left with are who knew all of this and how they found out about it.

Moving day came, and look at my luck: It was the 14th of July. Well...I considered maybe it wouldn't be true. After all, most of the stuff on the Internet isn't true.

As I was unpacking, I found a note on my dresser in my new room that said:

Leave now while you can, because when tomorrow comes, I'm not leaving.

*Sincerely,
Your new roommate*

I ran downstairs and thrashed through the living room with the note in my hand. "Mom, Mom! Look what I found! Look what it says! "Where did you find this?" my mom asked, concerned.

Ring! Ring! I ran to pick up the phone.

"This is your last chance. Be smart and leave," the voice whispered.

I hung up the phone and burst into tears. My mom asked, "What the matter?"

"He's going to live with us until we die," I cried.

"Who is going to live with us?" my mom responded as if I were crazy.

"The man that used to live here and killed himself. He doesn't want us is living in his house."

"Ca...calm down. Who was that on the phone?"

"The man, Mom. The crazy man that killed himself," I said, extremely agitated.

"Well, maybe you need some rest."

"But I'm not kidding!"

"Yes, and I believe you, but we've had a long day, and you need your rest." I listened and went to bed.

Later that night, I woke up for a glass of water. When I opened my eyes, I found a man-shaped figure looking over me.

"Mom...Dad...Christian," I said. No one answered.

“I warned you,” the figure whispered.

“Mom!” I screamed as loud as I could. My mom ran into my room. The figure disappeared.

“What’s wrong?” my mom said in shock.

“He’s here!” I said, extremely frightened.

“Who’s here?”

“Mom, I told you this morning... twice! Please don’t make me say it again!”

“Oh, yeah. THE MAN. Well, I’ll stay in here until you go to sleep.”

Then suddenly, the figure came back, and this time it was bigger and his voice was deeper. “Get out!” the figure yelled.

My mom and I screamed, “Christian, Dad!” They rushed up the stairs, and saw the huge man figure. Then a big “BOOM” came. That very boom knocked out me, Mom, Dad and Christian.

“Wake up,” my sister said sweetly, and then rudely and loudly yelled, “Wake up!”

I looked around. I was in my in my old house and room.

“Aren’t we supposed to be in our new house where that crazy dead man is supposed to be living with us?” I said, confused.

“What are you talking about?” my parents said.

“Well, all of you were there. Remember when I found the note? And the phone?” I said as if I knew what I was talking about.

“Well, we aren’t moving. They moved the office closer.”

As I got out of bed I felt joy rushing through my veins. Then it happened. I saw a note on my dresser that said:

You are lucky I’m only in your dreams.

*Sincerely,
Your worst nightmare*

The Mystery of the Missing Man

*The title may seem to be a straightforward description of what's to come. However, there are eerie, supernatural occurrences behind **THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING MAN** by **Raven Goodwin**.*

In Beverly Hills, California, there were three mystery-finder girls. Their names are Billy, Abby, and Dana. Billy and Abby are identical twins. Dana is an only child. The three mystery-finder girls are BFF—best friends forever. They have been mystery-finder girls since the age of 12. Now they're 16, and still doing well. Now my turn is up. Let Billy tell the rest. Okay, Billy, you're up now.

It was a week before Halloween, and it was freezing outside. It looked like it was going to rain, so we thought we weren't going outside.

I said, "I can't afford to get my hair wet. It cost a lot of money, and it's from my allowance." But we knew we had to start the mystery hunt. The news people called us the best mystery finders in Beverly Hills, California.

Abby said, "What is the mystery about?"

"It's about a man name Danny Pothole. He's been missing for one month," said Dana.

"Wow, we have to find out what happened to him," Abby said sarcastically.

"Well, the news said that Danny went on vacation to Oregon, and when he came back from vacation he talked to his

neighbors about how fun it was in Oregon. But the neighbors haven't seen him since then, so they called the police. The police put us on the case."

"So where the heck does he live?" asked Abby.

"He lives two blocks away from here," said Dana.

I asked, "When are we going to look for him?"

"Right now," said Dana.

"Why? I have to watch *One Tree Hill*," I said.

"Sorry, girl. Watch it next week," said Dana.

"I can't," I said.

Abby said, "Twin, if you don't put a sock in it, I'll do it myself."

"Fine," I said.

We discussed whether we would drive or walk.

"I think we should drive, because if something starts chasing us, we will have the car to get away faster," said Dana.

We followed what Dana said. We got in the car. I drove there. We stopped in front of the house. The house was creepy.

Abby said, "Let's just go in and get out of that creepy, ugly-looking house."

I said, "No, we can't do that, twin. We have to make a plan. Duh!"

"Yeah, you're right. What if we get in trouble? We'll have a plan to follow," said Dana.

"Okay, what should our plan be?" We were thinking.

I thought we should stick together, walk around to the back on to the back porch, and look through the windows to see if we could see something. We followed my plan, and walked on to the back porch.

Abby said, "What are they doing?"

Dana said, "Look! That one looked like a zombie!"

Abby was getting ready to scream, but Dana covered Abby's mouth because she saw the zombie dragging a bloody

body. Dana said, "Abby, you have to be quiet before the zombies hear us."

Then I said, "I wonder if that's Danny Pothole."

Abby said, "I'm scared. I don't want to go in."

I said, "We have to. We have to find out what happened to Danny Pothole."

We opened the door. It was more creepy on the inside than the outside. We saw zombies everywhere! Before any zombie could see us we found a big table that we could hide near.

"So now what should our plan be?" said Abby.

"I don't know. I thought of something last time. You figure it out, Abby," I said.

Then out of nowhere, Dana said, "I've got a plan." It was such a first. She never had a plan.

"What is it?" asked Abby.

"Okay. We should blend in with the zombies and look for Danny Pothole."

We followed what Dana said, and it worked. We became detectives. We peeked through every door, but we couldn't find Danny Pothole. We had one last door to open, but we were scared to open the door.

Then someone creaked the door opened before we touched the door, so we went into another room and locked the door. Then we heard the door open wide, and someone left that room. We peeked through the door to see if anyone was there. No one was there.

The next thing we saw was a man with a necklace with a name on it. It read Danny Pothole! We got Danny Pothole and blended him in with us to match the zombies.

When we got of the house, we didn't stop moving. We kept moving till we were in the car and far away from that house. We were surprised that the zombies didn't come after us. I didn't even care. At least I was safe.

When we were done driving, we stopped at a Taco Bell to talk. I guess Danny was traumatized from being with the zombies. But after he got a little bit adjusted to the situation, he was ready to talk. He said, "I don't know what happened after Oregon. I guess I was in a coma."

"Well, I think you should get some sleep after that coma," I said.

He said, "Okay. I'll go across the street to the Hamptons Hotel."

"Okay. Goodbye," we all said together.

Well, we finished that mystery successfully, as always. Now it's our time to get some sleep. It is late now. Good night!

Night of the Living Computer

*Computers are complicated enough without their coming to life on us! In advance of such a development, **Karl Woods** offers a blueprint for action in **NIGHT OF THE LIVING COMPUTER**.*

This is a story I'm pretty sure you'll have to read again to understand.

It was May 25, my special day, and it didn't turn out the way I wanted it to. Jack, my twin brother who's really annoying, had put a horn to my face and blown it so loud it sounded like listening to a *T. rex* screaming. Then on my way downstairs he started to throw water balloons at me with the water ball slingshot he got last year for Christmas. The next thing I knew, I had to avoid his sharp-tipped darts he had been tossing at the game Stab the Pin on the Yoda. He was tossing blindfolded, which made it more dangerous because he was aiming in the wrong direction.

He was aiming straight for the new Spyder X-25 laptop I had just received that day. It was black and green, it was very thin and it was equipped with a video camera, radio, built-in television, and a special computer chip port. The port could accept any type of computer chip, such as a dark matter chip that can cause any type of computer or laptop to go crazy on a rampage of havoc and destruction. "Wait, Jack, stop!" I shouted, but it was already too late. He had tossed all five darts straight for the laptop. The first three missed, but the last two hit the new computer chip I needed for the laptop.

“Jack, what did I tell you about free throwing?” I said.

“What? It was an accident, Jake.”

“Yeah, but what are we supposed to tell Dad when he gets home?” I asked nervously. I put the laptop away and went outside to think this over.

“Well, what do you want to do now?” I asked.

“Well, we could always go to that fix-it guy’s computer store.”

“What? Are you talking about that big guy who we always find in the alleys in the back of school looking for parts?” I said, freaked out. His store isn’t what you could call exciting. It’s so badly trashed it got the award for—well, most badly-trashed store in the whole city.

By now, though, Jack had already pushed me to the store. It was so quick because it’s just a five-minute walk to get there. We walked inside and it was the same as usual: small, bad, and trashed.

One of the employees was at the counter when we got there. “Fix It Computer Store. What can I do you today, boys?” John said. We know his name because no one asks what his name is.

“Yeah, we need a new computer chip for the laptop.”

“Well, let’s see what we have today,” John said as he looked through the trash around. “It seems that we have a d-25 chip left; you want it?”

“That depends: new or used?”

“It’s new.”

“Okay, we’ll take it.”

“Fifty dollars.”

“We’ve only got twenty-five; take it or leave it.”

“Fine, but on one condition.”

“Man, I can’t believe he made you wear that thing.”

“Oh, shut up,” Jack said as we stood outside the store. He was mad because he was wearing an old, beat-up computer costume. John said he had to do this for at least one hour, or he was going to blackmail us about the time we snuck into his high school four

years ago and used our experimental automatic fire extinguisher and highly dangerous serum that makes anything it touches grow ten times its size. It wouldn't have happened if Jack hadn't added the serum to the extinguisher. Then that tarantula wouldn't have grown to the size of a chalkboard. But it was a good thing our parents never understood John. They asked him how two eight-year-old boys could come up with that technology. Actually, that's the whole reason he has the job he has now.

A couple of hours later we were at home. We had been in our room for dinner. For some reason John tricked Jack into staying in the suit longer for cash. But a huge rainstorm came, and he was in the thick of it. He caught a serious cold later. I ended up doing all of Jack's work and schoolwork for him since he couldn't get out of bed. I was his slave for whatever he wanted, even if it was stupid.

The next thing I knew Jack had me blindfolded to see which computer chip we were going to use for the laptop (yes, I told you we got a new one, but that's only because one of them was old and used). "Okay, pick," Jack said. I picked the dark matter chip, but I didn't know that. Jack had already installed it in the laptop by the time I removed my blindfold.

The next day we went to school, even though Jack was still sick. We just had to keep him away from the nurse's office, or the nurse would pull him in and send him home for no reason. I had to be his personal helper for the day. I had to do things like carry his books and help him down the staircase because he'd just stumble and fall down and hurt himself. But the worst part of the day was the fact that Jack fell asleep from first period to lunch. In order to keep him awake, I had to get the teachers to let me bring in cold water so he didn't miss anything important.

At lunch he was feeling much better. I was able to keep him awake with five gallons of water as cold as the Arctic Ocean and the same horn he used on me.

We were eating our lunches and our friend Andy Jones wasn't looking so good, either.

“What’s wrong with you?” I asked.

“You’re not going to believe what happened.”

“What?” Jack said.

“There was this black and green laptop that broke into my house without even setting off the alarm.”

“Well, did it say anything?” I asked suspiciously.

“It said it was out to cause mass destruction, and it had a video camera with a radio and a built-in television to savor every moment of the torment and destruction it was going to cause.”

“What!” I said, shocked. “And our laptop has the same qualities as that one. But did it say what it runs on?”

“It said it ran on a d-25 chip of some sort.”

“That’s the same one we put in our laptop. But then if it left the house, that means.... Jack, we’ve got to go.”

“Go where?”

“Oh, come on, already,” I said, impatiently pulling him along.

“So you’re saying that’s our computer he was talking about that broke into his house?”

“Yes, that is exactly what I’m trying to say. I think it’s trying to get our attention,” I said.

“So now what are going to do?”

“We’re going to sneak out.”

“Yeah, but how?”

“Okay, you know we’re having our mile run in an hour. That gives us about one hour to get that laptop before something else happens, and get back to school.”

“Okay, but where are we going now?”

“To recess, duh,” I said. “The other door to the mile run is that way.”

We were outside, and now Jack was having fun sneaking out, but we still had to open the gate that nobody has ever opened and ever broken out of.

“How do we open it, boy genius?” Jack said impatiently.

“We blast it open.”

“With what?” Jack asked.

“With my miniature silent time bomb.”

“So what do we do now?” Jack asked, sounding bored with this.

“Just stand back and watch,” I said, installing it to the gate.

“Hey, how did the gate open by itself?” Jack asked, shocked.

“Remember, I said it was silent.”

“Freedom, here I come!” Jack shouted.

“Oh, come on, there are lives at stake here. Our computer is on an unspeakable rampage. Let’s go, already!”

We reached our house and found no way in except for the very unstable vines on the side of the house that go up to our room. We were climbing up, and as we got to our room, there were explosions as the laptop shot thunderbolts all over the place.

“There is no escape, owners,” the laptop said in a deep voice.

“We have to shut that thing down,” I said in a hurry.

“There’s only one thing to do.”

“What?” I asked Jack.

“We have to short-circuit it.”

“Yeah, but with what?” I asked impatiently.

“Duh, water balloons,” Jack said, quickly reaching through the window to grab two balloons.

“Quick, aim at the chip port,” I said, getting ready to throw.

“Ready, aim, fire!”

We both threw the balloons at the same time. The laptop started shutting down.

Yep, we did it. But our room’s still on fire.

Nightmares

*Walter is a normal boy until he has a nightmare. You'll be relieved that he doesn't dream about you after reading **NIGHTMARES**, by **Elizabeth Benedetti**.*

Walter rode his bike through the cold stinging rain. His hair was drenched with the freezing water coming from the sky. His bike was covered in gross, slimy mud. *Squash!* That's the sound the bike made when he hit the cold, mushy ground. His book bag ripped in half, and all his books were lying on the ground.

"OH, JUST GREAT!" yelled Walter at the top of his lungs.

He collected his stuff, leaving his bike on his neighbor's lawn. Walter's pain immediately left him as the warmth of his house greeted him on his cool skin. He knew his parents wouldn't be home for about another hour, so he decided to just watch TV.

Walter climbed up the stairs to his bedroom. He looked around at his pink room. "Why did my parents give me Jane's room?" he asked. He lay on his bed and shut his tired eyes, quickly flinging them back open. The frustrating feeling came back to him, for he was angry with himself for hurting people.

You see, Walter wasn't a regular boy. He wasn't regular because when he had nightmares they came true. For example, Walter had a nightmare about his friend Boris being pushed into the street by an evil creature. In the nightmare Boris was run over by five cars. He broke both his arms and was paralyzed in both his legs. He was lucky he wasn't killed. The same thing happened in real life, but every time you asked Boris what happened to him or why he was in

the street, he would turn whiter than snow, and just say he was too close to the road, or he was just not paying attention.

Another nightmare was one with Walter's girlfriend, Faith. He dreamt she was at the Grand Canyon when a wind monster blew her over the cliff. Sadly, the same thing happened like the first nightmare, except the turnout wasn't so good. The funeral was right after the police found the body.

The skies were getting darker as night came nearer. Walter knew that soon he would be in bed asleep. That would mean nightmares. It wasn't common to get his nightmares. Actually he has only had three, but he always was scared to go to sleep. He knew that it was his fault that his friends and sister had gotten hurt. He never talked about his sister, Emily, whose life was cut very short. His other sister, Jane, was at college.

"Time for bed!" yelled Walter's mom.

Walter groaned. He had that gut feeling you have when you forget something. This, he knew, was a sign that he was going to have a nightmare tonight.

Walter tried to get ready for bed as slowly as possible. His heart was pounding as he got into his bed. Before Walter could try to think his regular happy thoughts (that's how he stopped his nightmares), he was thrust into a deep sleep.

The cold attic wall snuck up behind the boy. His heart was pounding as the ugly beast came toward him. Its fiery hair lit up the whole room, and its 100 arms grabbed for him. The boy looked down. The creature had no legs. The creature grabbed for him and...

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!" Walter woke up screaming. "Oh, no," he thought aloud. He quickly started to run downstairs to make sure everything was okay. But as Walter was running down the hallway, he slowed down, realizing something that made him freeze. The realization was that *he* was the person about to be killed by a creature so gruesome, so evil, so cruel. Walter was the boy who was up against the attic wall. He was the boy about to be killed by this creature.

Walter stood in the hallway for what seemed like an eternity. The voice of his mother snapped him back to Earth. “Walter, come on. You’re going to be late for school!” Walter quickly got dressed, running out the door with his new non-ripped backpack. He forgot that his bike was on his neighbor’s front lawn until he passed it. He knew his bike was useless, though, because he had totaled the chain yesterday.

That day was like any regular day for any regular student in high school except for Walter. He screamed every time the teacher called his name, and when he saw the flame on the stove in Skills for Living, he ran out the door screaming like a little girl. That got him eight detentions.

As Walter was walking home he figured that to save time he would pick up his muddy, broken bike. He carried it the rest of the way home, hoping that the thing he saw in his dreams last night wasn’t at his house. Walter dropped his bike off near the garage and forced his hand to jab the key into the keyhole. The door opened way too quickly.

Walter stepped into the house slowly, debating if he should run away from this house or if he should go upstairs to see if anything was there. All of a sudden, Walter was knocked out. The last thing he remembered seeing was a flame right above him.

Walter woke up in the cold, drafty attic of his house. He looked around, not knowing what was going on. All of a sudden, Walter remembered his nightmare.

“I know you’re in here! What do you want?” screamed Walter in a squeaky tone.

“I want you, Walter,” said a voice that sounded like a bunch of leaves crackling in a fire. “I know what happened to your sister so many years ago.”

“You do? What happened, then?” said Walter, overcome with curiosity about his sister’s death.

“All her good dreams and bad dreams came true. She hated this power as much as you do. So when she realized you had the same

power as her, she tried to protect you. She did not want you to live the same life she lived in, full of fear. So, Walter, by now I think you have an idea about who killed your sister,” said the creature.

“You,” said Walter with a mixture of fear and anger in his voice.

“That is correct. I was the horrible creature that killed her. You created me, Walter. You had been thinking evil thoughts. So that night I came to life, thanks to you. Now, Walter, I need the rest of your power to stay alive, so if you would be ever so kind as to give it to me.”

“I would prefer not to,” Walter strongly said. Then the creature from Walter’s nightmares stepped out from behind the boxes.

“Prepare to meet your doom,” said the creature in an evil chuckle.

Walter started backing up until he hit the cool attic wall.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” Walter screamed.

All of a sudden the small attic window burst opened, pouring rain into the small area.

“NO! Water! My weakness!” screamed the creature as he dissolved into thin air.

Walter wasn’t sure, but he had a feeling that Emily had something to do with this. Walter’s parents burst into the attic, panting hard.

“Walter, are you okay?” said his dad between gasps for air.

“I’m fine, Dad. I thought I saw something,” said Walter in a half laugh, half cry.

As Walter and his parents walked downstairs, Walter whispered, “Thanks Emily.” After that little incident, Walter never had another nightmare.

Emily was able to save Walter this time, but could she save him the next? For in the shadows, the creature was getting stronger and stronger.

Many years have passed and everything is going well for Walter. He just has a feeling, though, that soon something is going to happen again to someone.

REVENGE

*A psychotic teenaged girl has just what her enemy doesn't need: a bad temper, and a secret power. Watch out for Ashley in **REVENGE**, by **Alesha Lewis**.*

“Hi, Marc. Are you going to Billy’s glass house party?” Rose said.

“I’m not supposed to talk to you. I’m your best friend’s boyfriend, and you keep on flirting with me,” Marc answered.

“Who’s my best friend again?” Rose thought to herself. “Oh, I remember. Ashley is. That girl.” Rose rolled her eyes. The thought of being Ashley’s best friend made her want to scream. Ashley was a really nice girl, and she was popular, but Rose did not know that. If she did know that, she did not care. She was only after one thing, and that was Ashley’s boyfriend, Marc. The more she pretended to be Ashley’s best friend, the more she could flirt with Marc.

Ashley is 15. Ashley is a normal teenaged girl. Almost. Ashley has a backstabbing friend, she has a boyfriend, and she loves to talk on the phone for hours. But like every teenaged girl, she is not perfect. Some are too skinny, and some have too many pimples. But for Ashley, she has telekinesis.

Telekinesis is the psychic power to move or deform inanimate objects without the use of physical force. Basically she can move things with her mind. Ashley has that ability, and the power to move time.

Ashley has two big problems. The first is that when she gets the slightest bit mad, she can’t control her anger and uses her power to do something evil. The second is she never told anyone about it

except for her dad. She was afraid they would think of her as a freak.

Ashley saw Rose and Marc talking before they left school. She just stood there and smiled evilly. The party was right after school. So Rose was very excited to walk home, drop her books, and go to the party with Ashley.

Ashley's dad was taking them in his black Hummer. On the way home Rose kept on walking faster and faster, not just because she wanted to go to the party, but because there was a black Hummer driving behind her. The mysterious Hummer kept on honking very obnoxiously. Rose did not dare look to see who it was, but finally the truck came up to Rose, and someone in the Hummer grabbed her. Luckily it was just Ashley and her dad.

"I am so glad it is you, Ashley! I thought you were a stranger," Rose said, almost crying.

"Oh, sorry. I forgot to tell you my dad bought this truck a few weeks ago. Do you need a ride home, too?" Ashley asked.

"Yeah, thanks," Rose said, unsure.

At her house, Rose went inside to drop off her things. Ashley started mumbling to herself and punching the back of the passenger seat. "It's so cute how Rose thinks I'm not going to do anything about her flirting with my boyfriend. Marc is my soul mate, and she better back off. I've been saying that forever. It doesn't matter because now I'm MAKING her back off."

Her father overheard her and thought he should say something that could help. But Ashley took it the wrong way. He began to speak. "Ashley, sorry, but I can hear you talking to yourself. I heard you talking about making Rose back off and all of that. My advice is to avoid the conflict and try to forget about it." He was about to speak, but he heard Ashley say under her breath, "What are you, my therapist?" She mumbled, but since she had stopped punching the seat, her dad heard it loud enough.

“Excuse me?” he said. Ashley exhaled really loud and rolled her eyes. “No, really. What did you say? No, better yet, why don’t speak your mind?”

Finally, after a few more seconds of quiet, Ashley spoke her mind, with appropriate words.

“I’m sorry, Dad, but I’m going to make a plan to make Rose suffer whether you like it or not. Besides, you heard me say it. This is not the first time I told her to stay away from Marc. I told her with words; now I guess I have to tell her with action,” Ashley said with confidence.

“Listen here, I don’t care how mad you get.” Her dad was not one who would put up with an attitude. “I told you to behave. No backtalk. No whining. No crying. Just do what I say, and there won’t be a problem,” Her father said with impatience.

“I’m sorry, Daddy, but there will be a problem.” A rock from the ground lifted up in the air and started to write in capital letters “REVENGE” over and over until the windows broke and shattered all over her father. There were a lot of cuts on his face.

“Now do we have an understanding...Daddy?” Ashley said evilly. “Now here, put some of my makeup on. You look a mess. No backtalk. No whining. No crying. Just do what I say, and there won’t be a problem. I sound like someone familiar. Don’t I?” Ashley said with an attitude.

Her dad had two tears rolling slowly down his cheeks. He was terrified of Ashley and said, “Here comes Rose.”

“I hope she likes her smile because she won’t see it for a long, long, time,” Ashley said. Rose almost got too close to see the broken glass and makeup.

“Rose!” Ashley yelled with excitement. “A kid rode by with his friends and threw a rock at our window. No one was out to witness it. So will it be okay if we ride in your mom’s car?” Ashley lied.

Ashley would have fixed the glass with her mind, but she forgot because she was too busy tormenting her dad.

“Sorry, Ash. But my mom and dad are not home right now,” Rose lied.

“I’ll still drive you girls,” Ashley’s father said. “I will drop you off at the back where no one will see. And get the window fixed after I drop you off,” Ashley’s dad suggested, trying not sound worried.

Rose got out of the truck when they got dropped off at the party. It was winter, so everything got dark early. At the party Rose asked Ashley to get a drink for her, and Ashley said okay, but she wanted to show Rose the top of the glass roof. They took the outside stairs to get up to the top of the building to see the magical roof made from glass.

Even though they were not supposed to be up there, they were being distracted with their thoughts. Rose was too busy thinking about stealing Marc away from Ashley. And Ashley was enjoying the thought of when she would kill Rose. Finally Ashley was thinking that she was just overreacting, and maybe Rose was not trying to steal Marc away from her. But then again, she knows that Rose is untrustworthy and sneaky. So she had to make sure that she and Rose were on the same page.

“Rose, I recall telling you to stay away from Marc,” Ashley said as nicely as possible.

“Please, girl. Marc doesn’t want you. Don’t you see that he is always talking to me? Why don’t you just break up so I can take your place? I mean, really. What kind of girlfriend lets her boyfriend flirt with her best friend?” Rose asked, trying to make Ashley mad.

Rose did not know that Ashley had telekinesis or could move time. “You know what, Rose? I am going back down to the party to get your drink. Then later on at this party I will break up with Marc just for you. Stay right here,” Ashley tried to say with a straight face.

Ashley walked to get a drink and waved at Rose, but Rose turned the other the way and waved at Marc. Marc was shocked at first to see someone up there. Then he looked a little closer and saw Rose, so he just shook his head in shame and walked away. Then a

lot of snowflakes fell on the glass roof, and Rose saw the word “REVENGE” start to be spelled out. The word “REVENGE” was right where Rose could see it spelled out perfectly on the glass roof.

As Rose looked at it, she was about to scream, but she saw past the small snowflakes and saw Marc. Rose waved at Marc, but he looked the other way again. When she put her hand down, a nail was sticking up. The nail was not there until Ashley looked at it. Rose screamed and then tried to wiggle herself close enough to the ladder, but she was putting too much pressure on the glass. The glass shattered, but no one saw, and it did not hurt anyone else.

No one could see or hear her, but Marc saw Rose falling. He pushed everybody out of the way and caught Rose.

Rose was driven to the hospital right after the fall. While Rose was in the hospital bed alone in the dark with a little light from the bathroom, she saw a shadow mysteriously lurking in the room. She put the covers over her head. Someone turned on the lights.

“Rose, are you okay?” Rose calmed down. She recognized the voice, and took the cover off of her head. It was Marc.

“Yeah, thanks.” Once again she did not sound sure. “Yes, Marc. Don’t tell Ashley, but I could have sworn that what happened was not bad luck,” Rose told Marc. “Think about it. First I asked her to get me a drink, but instead she wanted to go on the roof and look through the glass. Then she started to tell me again to stay away from you. Then when I told her that you don’t like her anymore because you like me, she got mad and got down. Then when I waved at you, a nail was sticking out, and I put my hand right on it. And before I fell through the roof, I noticed that people just moved on the dance floor right where I could see, and made the word “revenge.” And the people who just moved on the floor could not move until I fell through the window. And I swear I heard Ashley say, “Move! Move!” Rose explained to Marc. “You can go back to the party. I’ll be okay. Just watch out for Ashley,” Rose suggested.

“Okay,” Marc answered, then stood there for a minute. “WHAT! Why would you tell Ashley that? It’s already bad enough that she thinks this relationship is going to fail! Then you are going to encourage her. And then you’re going to try to lie to me to make me think my girlfriend—the nicest person on Earth—tried to kill you. You’re her best friend! The stuff that happened to you happened because you go too far!” Marc took a deep breath and began another sentence. “What goes around comes around. Actually for you, it’s ‘what goes up must come down.’ I’m not going to tell Ashley what a bad friend you are. She already knows. But still she tries to forget about it. But, I promise you, one of these days you will go too far and she is going to go crazy! So what are you going to do?” He sat to catch his breath.

Rose did not want him to go on, so she tried to get him out of the room. She began to speak “May...be... maybe I just need to sleep,” she tried.

When Marc stormed out, he left nothing but the bathroom light on. About five minutes later, Rose saw another shadow mysteriously lurking in the room. Rose thought it was Marc.

“Marc, I said you should go back to the party. Can you hear me? Why aren’t you answering me? Who are you? You’ve got two seconds to answer, or I’m going to scream. One...” Before she got to “two,” the lights went on, and she saw Ashley. “Didn’t you hear me talking to you? How come you did not tell me it was you?” Rose asked.

“I just walked in here while you were counting. I heard you talking to yourself, so I came in here to make sure no one else was in here. Sorry,” Ashley politely told Rose. “Actually, you should be saying sorry to me. I’m not the one falling through roofs and still being rude even when the person’s best friend tries to make sure she’s okay! I deserve respect! And I want it now,” Ashley commanded.

“And you want it from me? I don’t owe you anything. So you can just leave now.”

Ashley stormed out of the room.

A few minutes later the lights started to flicker on and off. Slowly someone rose from the ground. It was Ashley. Her eyes burned in flames, her teeth were sharp as knives, and her hair was frizzy and tangled. She slowly grabbed Rose's neck and started to choke her. Rose screamed. Ashley heard footsteps coming to Rose's room and looked at the clock. She turned it two hours back to where they had first walked into the party.

Rose looked around. The music was loud and the glass wasn't even broken, and every time Rose asked, "Don't you remember what just happened to me? I fell through the roof," they would just answer, "Well, you look fine to me" and keep on dancing.

Ashley and Rose sat down next to each other at a table. Rose said to Ashley, "Why don't you go talk to Marc? Every time a girl walks up to him and asks him does he want to dance, he says no and points at you," Rose suggested.

"Are you sure, Rose? I was going to break up with him later on at this party for some reason," Ashley said. "No, don't do that! Go over and talk...PLEASE!"

Ashley said okay, but before she got up and left, she asked Rose why she was being so nice. Rose said, "I just owe you more respect, that's all." Then Ashley smiled evilly and walked away.

"Ashley, I'm glad you came over here. I thought you were Rose for a minute. She won't stay away from me," Marc confessed.

"I don't think she will be bothering you for a while. I think that she's starting to get that even though I'm her best friend one day, I'm going to get revenge. And even though I'm nice, I can be evil," Ashley said with a nice smile at Marc and an evil smile at Rose that not even a mother could bear to watch for more than two seconds.

The Secret of Long Lake

*An eleven-year-old girl has heard the scary stories of the lake creature. They are just stories, right? She finds out in **THE SECRET OF LONG LAKE**, by Kellie Garvey.*

Ever since I was a little girl I always loved my cottage. It's not very far away, and we go there almost every weekend in the summer. I usually like to go tubing, but mostly swimming. I had a lot of good memories at my cottage, but this memory is not one of them. My cousin Thomas always loses his shoe; will we be able to find it?

At a bonfire one night my parents told me to go on the boat to get a better look at the stars. So I plopped along the lawn onto the dock and on the Pontoon boat. I climbed up the old ladder and got on the top deck.

I was a little wobbly at first because, for some reason, the boat was moving from side to side, hitting both the docks, like the Earth was moving from side to side with no gravity. I felt like I was about ready to fly off. At first I thought it was just waves, but as I thought of it, there were no boats on the lake after eight o'clock.

After about a minute of being scared and unbalanced, I laid down for a minute, wondering what would happen next. Then the boat started to shake again, like something huge was under it, or like there was a hurricane under water. I thought it might be a giant snapping turtle. It definitely was not a fish!

After being scared out of my mind I crept down the ladder and grabbed a flashlight. Stupidly, I shined it in the

water. I saw a huge tail fly under a school of fish! About a half a second later I saw dead fish bones floating up to the top. It wasn't pretty!

I almost fainted when I thought it could be a monster or something. But, the thing is, my parents always told me not to believe in monsters. Maybe they were lying.

Just then I thought about the story my Uncle Tom always told the little kids to scare them at night. He told us that once when a boy was swimming at night, a huge mouth of sharp teeth sucked him up! It was the Long Lake Monster! This myth was true!

I was getting ready to barf after I saw all those fish bones. At the same time my parents were calling me obnoxiously to come in because of mosquitoes.

I told my dad about the tail, but he just wanted to go fishing. Then I told my mom. She just started laughing. They were a failure.

Later the next day our family went what is called pontooning. I tried to tell them and convince them, but I had no chance, knowing old people didn't listen. They told me to give it up. It was actually great that they left me behind because then I could research the Long Lake Monster!

I raced to my dad's laptop and looked up lake monsters and sea monsters and sightings of them. Some pictures showed a dead sort of animal that had the exact tail as the one I saw. The approximate measure for the tail was 20 feet and for the abdomen was 50 feet, and it was ten feet in diameter. I printed out all the information I could find about this supposedly Long Lake Monster.

An hour and a half later everyone was back. I had to hide the monster stuff fast! I didn't want to tell anybody because they would think I was crazy.

The next day we were packing up when a bunch of wildlife cars came speeding past the cottages. We were all curious, so we went to investigate.

After a couple of minutes we had already started all our boats and were halfway up the coast of the shore when we saw news reporters, ambulances, police cars, and five wildlife trucks. They were all surrounding a giant animal that had died the night before. It had beached itself on a huge beach that people could visit. We went a little closer and saw what it was: It was almost the exact same thing I saw on the Internet!

In the beginning of this story I told you about how Thomas loses his shoes. Thomas's shoe was hanging out of its mouth! It was the Long Lake Monster!

Time to Die

*It started as a dare, but ended as a cry for help. Keep all the lights on when you read **TIME TO DIE**, by **CMP**.*

“I triple dog dare you!” Melinda Sanchez’s best friend Kendra Williams said. The two friends were walking home from school on a cool October day.

“If I say it, it will be the last thing I ever say, so no!” Melinda hollered. Kendra was once again trying to get Melinda to say “Bloody Mary” three times in the mirror of a dark bathroom.

“Geez, for a 12-year-old, you sure are a scaredy cat!” Kendra teased.

The two girls stopped. “If you want me to say it so bad, why don’t you say it yourself?”

“Fine.”

“Fine. Come over my house at 8:30 Friday night, and I’ll even say it, too.

“O.K., I’ll be there.”

Friday came quick and around 7:30 p.m., Kendra packed her bags. She assumed she would be sleeping over, because Melinda would be too scared to sleep alone.

It was around 8:03 p.m. when Kendra arrived at Melinda’s house. *Ding, dong.* Kendra rang the doorbell, and Melinda answered right away.

“Hey,” Kendra said as she waved her mom goodbye.

“Hey.”

“Let’s go play a board game or something.”

“No, let’s just go do it now and get it over with. That way we’ll have the rest of the night to get our minds off it,” Melinda said back to Kendra.

“Um, o-ok,” Kendra said, kind of scared.

After Kendra set her things down in Melinda’s bedroom, the two girls went straight to the bathroom. When they got in Melinda shut the door.

“On the count of three, I’ll shut off the lights, and we *both* say ‘Bloody Mary’ three times,” Melinda said. She sounded really scared.

“Ok.”

“One, two, three!”

“Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary, Bloody Mary.” Both girls said it at the exact same time.

They opened their eyes to see an all black shadow in the mirror. “Aaaaaah!” Kendra and Melinda screamed.

“Girls, open the door. What’s wrong?” Melinda’s dad yelled.

“Dad?” Melinda cried.

“Mr. Sanchez, please help us!” Kendra pleaded.

“Who called my name?” a deep mysterious voice called.

Gulp! Both girls swallowed hard.

“Don’t hurt us,” Kendra yelled.

“Oh, but now I have to hurt you, because you disturbed me!” the voice called again.

“Melinda, help!” Kendra was being sucked into a black smoky hole that had appeared out of nowhere. Water and smoke were flying everywhere. The walls were shaking and pictures were throwing themselves off the wall. The bathroom looked like a gas pipe just exploded—that’s how cloudy it was.

“Girls, are you ok?” Melinda’s dad knocked again.

“Kendra, I got you!” Melinda grabbed Kendra’s hand, but before she knew it they were both sucked into the hole.

When Melinda's dad finally kicked the door down, the bathroom was a mess—and worst of all, the girls were gone. He opened his mouth to say something, but nothing came out. He just started crying.

When he finally got the strength, Melinda's dad called the police. He told them that all he knew was that Melinda and Kendra went into the bathroom, there were screams, and when he got the door down they were gone and the bathroom was a mess.

The police searched and searched for days, then weeks, then months, and then years. They finally gave up. Until this day, Melinda Sanchez and Kendra Williams are still nowhere to be found.

The Virus

In THE VIRUS by Kevin Warfield, a family becomes the unwitting victim of a professor's grave mistake. Don't let this happen to you.

They were running as fast as they could. Their hearts were pounding hard as if they were about to explode. He was gaining on them like a fox on a rabbit. They ran upstairs like all of the “smart” people in the movies they watched. Faster and faster they ran, trying to get away from his cold, evil grip of doom. How did this come to take place?

This day started just like any other day with the Best family. They were a family who was almost like any other family. They ate food prepared by the mother, but often ate out because of her strange meals like sardine casserole and jelly bean stew. They played games and did other family things. Father Boots loved his tools, building any and everything he could. Sister, whose given birth name was Sister (because Boots and Dora thought it would be cute), loved music, memorizing every song she heard. Brother Barney loved his computer and video games. Never was there a time that he didn't think of them.

One day at school Barney was talking to his friend Surf when Surf brought up the topic of a new website called www.noreturn.com. Barney couldn't wait to visit it when he got home.

Barney went home, got on the computer and went to the website. He quickly became addicted to it and could not get

off. The next day he went to school hoping to tell his friend Surf how much he liked the site, but Surf was not there. The next day he was also absent, as well as the day after. In fact, Surf did not come to school the whole week. Barney was as worried as a mother without her child. Although Barney e-mailed Surf multiple times, Surf did not reply. Barney later heard a rumor that Surf's parents had sent him to a mental institution for reasons they would not discuss.

Back at his lab, Professor Cyberspace (who was an ex-terrorist mastermind) was fearful, for he suddenly realized his anti-terrorist virus was malfunctioning and might be capable of violent acts. The objective of the virus he had placed on the terrorist coded website (www.noreturn.com) was to take over the minds and bodies of the assumed terrorist site users, then direct them to convince their comrades and themselves to stop acts of terrorism and use peaceful methods to obtain their goals. Somehow the virus was promoting violence to achieve its purpose. Whom it was attacking or where it would strike next, he did not know. He felt strongly that the virus could not yet kill, as he rapidly worked the keyboard of his computer. Regaining control of the virus was his main concern. What if it had taken a direction of its own, as viruses are capable of doing? How long before it became strong enough to become a terminator?

Barney continued to go on the site every day. Then one night when Barney was on the website, he discovered a new game called "Virus." As it was being downloaded, he felt as if he were being hypnotized, and at that very moment, he was transformed. He was different. He felt evil and stronger. He walked downstairs where the family was watching TV. He went to the kitchen, took a knife his father had made, and suddenly charged at his family with the knife! He appeared unknown to his family as Dora yelled, "What are you doing with that knife?" They became panic-stricken as he began

slashing at them with the knife, and the crazed look in his eyes made them realize they must escape. They instinctively realized they could not reason with him or attempt to wrestle Boots's knife from him.

They were running as fast as they could. Their hearts were pounding hard as if they were about to explode. He was gaining on them like a fox on a rabbit. They ran upstairs like all of the "smart" people in the movies they watched. Faster and faster they ran, trying to get away from his cold, evil grip of doom. They started panicking, not knowing what to do. Their hands were shaking. They had turned white as ghosts.

He was about to take out Sister when she pushed the panic button on the home's alarm system. The blaring of the alarm had an effect on Barney. Again he felt something, and at that moment, he changed back to reality. He felt different. He felt weaker and normal. He felt like himself. He realized what he was doing and stopped.

His shocked parents took the knife and Sister hugged him to calm him and herself.

As they headed downstairs Barney suddenly tripped. He fell and rolled down the stairs and injured his arm. He felt he was losing control again. "What is happening to me?" he screamed.

Faster than you can say "megabytes," the police were there. The police were viewing the weapon and about to interrogate the family to try and find out what had happened. How had Barney been injured and why? As the police officer looked at Sister she shockingly exclaimed, "Barney came from his computer with a crazed look in his eyes and aggressive body language, and he chased us upstairs with Boots's knife. I was frightened so I hit the panic button on our alarm system." The police then tried to question Barney, but he appeared dazed and confused as he babbled something incoherently about "the virus." The police felt that Barney should go to

the hospital to see what had become of his injury, and also for a visit with Dr. C.D. Rom, the child psychiatrist. Being unable to question Barney in his condition, the police decided to call in an expert to investigate any connection with the computer and Barney's behavior.

Detective Hardrive of the Computer Task Force Crime Unit arrived in minutes. After a briefing from the police on the scene, Detective Hardrive went to Barney's computer to check for possible clues and decided to confiscate the computer.

Upon returning to Police Headquarters, Detective Hardrive began checking the history on Barney's computer and found the website www.noreturn.com. He went to a particular site and discovered it could be a terrorist hot spot. He then discovered the game Virus and started downloading it. As he watched Virus being downloaded, he felt as if he were being hypnotized, and that he was about to transcend into the unknown. He knew he could not prevent it. He felt evil and stronger as he reached for the safety switch on his service revolver.

Voices

*Who is calling Max's name, and why is he so drawn to the sound?
Beware the unknown in VOICES, by Tony Barbat.*

Part 1

There was a boy named Max. He and his mom and dad were taking a trip to a hotel. Across the street from the hotel were small houses that looked very old.

The hotel he went to had a water park in it. While he was playing in the water he heard a voice calling, "MAX... MAX." He thought it was just him. After that he went to his hotel to sleep. They were staying there for five days and four nights.

The next day they woke up and ate at the hotel's restaurant for breakfast. After that they went to their room to change into their swimming clothes. They went back to the water park and played.

He was swimming when he heard the voice again. "Max... Max," it called. He started to follow it this time, but it stopped.

They had dinner at the hotel restaurant. That night they took showers and slept.

At the water park this day the voice came when Max was jumping in the pool. He followed it again and, this time it didn't stop, but then he noticed the time and he had to go back to the hotel. The voice almost took him out of the pool area.

On the next day he got dressed and went to the water park. He heard the voice: "MAX...MAX." He followed it out of the water park area, up the elevator, out the elevator, up the stairs,

into the lobby, out of the lobby, and outside across the street into one of those small houses. It stopped. Then it started again. Max followed it up the stairs and into a room.

A phone was in that room, and it started to ring. He answered it. It was a voice that said to go to the house next door, so he did. He opened the door and he followed the voice up the stairs... "WAKE UP, MAX. WAKE UP." It was all a dream—a really bad dream.

Part 2

"It was a dream, a really bad dream," said Max.

His parents called, "Max, it's time for our trip."

Max said, "Ok, I'll be right there." He went downstairs and into the car.

When they got to the resort, the hotel looked totally different from the one in his dream, but the houses looked the same except for one. This hotel had a water park in it like the one in his dream, and they were also staying there for five days and four nights.

That day at their hotel, they ate lunch at a local restaurant and unloaded their clothes. This was different from the first day in his dream. By the time they were done it was night, but the arcade was open, so they went to the arcade and then ate dinner.

"Wake up," Max's parents called. "Time for breakfast. We are going to try the hotel restaurant today." It was like Max's dream again. After that they swam for a couple of hours and then showered. After that they ate lunch and went to the arcade.

When they were done playing in the arcade, it was 9:00, so they went go-carting somewhere nearby. While they were go-carting, Max was thinking about the dream, and then he heard the voice he was fearing: "MAX...MAX," it called. Max

crashed into a rail while go-carting. Go-carting doesn't hurt when you crash, so he was ok. *Could it be?* he thought. *Is my dream coming to life?*

"MAX...MAX." *Wait a minute. That wasn't the voice. That was my parents calling,* he thought. They ate dinner and went to bed four hours later.

Max woke up thinking about his dream. It was early morning. He had had it again. But he went back to bed.

He got woken up by his parents. Again they had breakfast at a restaurant nearby. Max couldn't stop thinking about the dream. He felt like it was going to happen. He couldn't take it anymore. He was going crazy, but he let it go.

They swam after. It was just like day three in his dream, and while he was jumping in the pool, he heard the voice. It was true. He wasn't imagining it. It wasn't his parents or anybody else.

He did not follow it. He was afraid and wanted to see the face of this voice. It sounded like a girl, though.

He went to bed at 7:00 that day. He was very afraid to sleep, but he wanted to. He wanted the dream to go further and it did. He opened the door to the house and went up the stairs. He opened another door. There was a little girl standing there. She was about seven or something. She said, "Don't let it get you."

He said, "Who get me? What are you talking about?"

He woke up. He did not want to do anything that day, but his parents had to get something from the supermarket.

There was a door knock. He answered it. It was the little girl from his dream!

She told him, "I'm lost. Can you help find my mommy and daddy?"

He said, "Ok."

They were walking around and then she said, "There they are!" They would not show their faces.

He ran back into his room and locked all the doors. THEY WERE IN THERE! The little girl's parents were in there! He screamed at the top of his lungs. They were revealing their faces (they had long hoods on) when another knock came at the door! It was his parents.

The little girl's parents disappeared. That day he wanted to tell his parents, but instead he tried to go to sleep to have another dream.

The next day he woke up. The dream had gone further. When he opened the door and the little girl said, "Don't let them get you," he asked, "Who?"

She replied, "Them." Then the little girl's parents appeared. They tried to capture Max, but he fought back. Then he woke up. Max was feeling very bad—horrified, I should say.

Someone knocked on the door. He opened it. It was them. They tried to capture Max, but he got away. They were chasing him through the hotel. He wondered who they were. Then the elevator opened. It was a family. The little girl's parents disappeared. It seemed that they didn't want anyone to see them except for Max.

He went to his room and they showed up again. He ran out of the room. A family was coming out of the elevator again. This time they did not go away.

He stopped, and they stopped running. They said, "Why are you running away from us?"

He said, "Because I saw your daughter in my dream."

They said, "We know," and then they said, "We know, and we wanted to tell you something. Those dreams and voices and us are your imagination." Max blinked. They were gone.

He never had a dream, heard a voice, or saw the little girl and her family ever again. He also realizes that it was just his imagination. Everything did turn out well for Max. His life is great and he is happy.

The Woman Who Lost Her LOVE!

THE WOMAN WHO LOST HER LOVE! *by Dillan Andrihs is a bit mysterious and a bit scary. At least you know that you will survive.*

There was a 13-year-old girl named Jesse Renee Anderson. Now this girl loved to play house in the snow. The most fun thing she loved to do was act like she was getting married with two kids.

Years later at the age of 30, she was in college and studying how to be a teacher. She had two kids named Ashely and Brandon. Brandon was in the sixth grade and Ashely was in the second grade.

On night at 9:00 p.m., the children were sleeping when Jesse's boyfriend came over to talk. He went home at 10:00 p.m. The boyfriend, Jim, left Jesse's house, but when he walked outside, he didn't leave. He went to the basement window because he remembered that it was broken. He went in. Then he went into Brandon's room, took the sleeping boy, and seated him on the porch.

It was still winter. Brandon was starting to wake up because he was starting to get cold.

Meanwhile, Ashely went to her mom's room. She said to her mom, "I went to the bathroom and heard a noise. What do you think it was?"

Jesse said, "Well, daughter, it was probably just the wind."

Ashely said, "Okay, Mom," in a mad voice.

Ashely went to Brandon's room, knocked on the door, and waited for an answer. There wasn't an answer, so she opened the door. He wasn't there. She looked out the window, and there he was on the porch.

Ashely hurried downstairs and opened the front door. She pulled him in. He did not say anything, but just lay there sleeping.

She called for her mom. Jesse looked at Brandon and started crying.

The daughter said, "Mom, I just found him outside."

Jesse told Ashely to take him to his room. Ashely said, "Okay!"

Jesse went outside and stood on the sidewalk. Suddenly she got caught by a man with a mask. He said, "I'm Jim."

Jesse said, "WHAT!"

He said, "Yes, and I'm going for your children now. I've already got Brandon. Now I'm getting Ashely. Bye!" he said.

But Ashely remained safe in her bed. It was Jesse who was never heard of again.

To Be Continued!

The X Factor

The Case of the Missing Basketball

How does a LeBron James autographed basketball disappear overnight when no one but family members have been in the house? Carly Wolf poses that head-scratcher in **THE CASE OF THE MISSING BASKETBALL.**

Eddie was sitting in his room listening to the radio. He heard an announcement that the 26th caller would win four tickets to a Cleveland Cavaliers versus Chicago Bulls basketball game for that night. The winner would also get a chance to meet LeBron James after the game.

Eddie called in. He was the 26th caller! He was so excited!

He decided to bring his mom Susie, his dad Danny, and his five-year-old brother to the game.

After the game, Eddie and his family got escorted to the outside of the locker room. They had to wait a few minutes for LeBron. When LeBron came out he was holding the game ball. Eddie asked if he could have it. LeBron said, "Let me get you an autograph first." Then he gave Eddie the ball.

Eddie was so excited. He was talking about it the whole car ride home! He couldn't get over it that he got to meet LeBron James and got the game ball. Joey asked Eddie if he could hold the ball and look at it.

They got home from the game and Eddie went up to his room with the basketball and hid it in a secret place so no one could find it.

Eddie woke up in the morning and yelled, "MOM!"

"What is wrong?" Susie asked him.

"MY BASKETBALL IS MISSING," Eddie explained to his mother.

"Don't worry about it, Eddie. We will find your basketball," Susie told Eddie.

Later on into the day, the family sat down for lunch. Susie asked Danny and Joey if they had seen Eddie's ball.

"Ummm...I haven't seen the basketball anywhere," Joey said, starting to sweat. "Can I be excused?" Joey asked, still sweating.

Joey was gone now, so Eddie, Susie, and Danny had a talk about this whole thing. "Eddie, did you hear any noises in your room last night at all?" Danny asked Eddie.

"I think I did hear some little sounds," Eddie said.

"I think that Joey could have stolen it since he got sweaty when we started talking and he left," Susie said.

"Let's go search his room," Eddie told Susie.

They got into Joey's room, and they found a secret spot with a lot of secret things in it.

"I found it!" Eddie yelled when he found the ball in Joey's room

They went to Joey and said, "Ok, if we can't find the ball we are going to have to call the police."

"The police?" Joey asked.

"Yeah, the police," Eddie told Joey.

"Umm...OK, I will admit it," Joey said. "I wanted the ball, too, so I snuck into Eddie's room last night," Joey explained. "I am sorry," Joey told Eddie.

"You are going to be punished, young man!" Susie told Joey.

The next day there weren't any problems, nothing was stolen, and everyone was happy.

The Greatest Treasure of All

*A captivating mystery leads a family across the world. In **THE GREATEST TREASURE OF ALL** by **Sanjana**, a girl and her family search for the answer to an epic puzzle that has remained unsolved for generations.*

“Long ago there lived a group of kings from different countries who came together to face a common threat. One day they had a meeting....

“For a while back then there was an alliance of countries from the Bad Lands trying to take over the empire. The countries would invade city after city, destroying everything and taking all the money from the leaders. The kings decided to combine all of their treasure and valuable possessions and hide it.

“They revealed their plan to only one more person, a religious priest that was a leader to a group of people who believed in world peace. Eventually the leaders of the countries killed the kings, only to be killed by their own people for not treating them fairly. The priest only told his son, who in turn passed it to his son. It continued in this way to be passed from generation to generation. To this day no one knows about the treasure except the priest’s descendents.

“The end,” said Dad as he finished the story.

All of us were sitting on my bed listening to a story we had heard a billion times before. We stared into the black sky,

the twinkling stars and the full moon as bright as the sun looking down at us.

“I thought only the priest's descendents knew about the treasure. How come we know about it?” asked my older sister.

“Because we are his descendents,” answered Dad.

“AWESOME! I CAN'T WAIT TO TELL ALL MY FRIENDS!” said my excited little brother.

“You can't tell your friends. They will think you are crazy,” I snapped back.

“That is right. You have to keep it a secret,” said Dad in a strict voice.

“Have any of our ancestors tried to find the treasure?” I asked.

“Of course they tried, but they all failed,” answered Dad. “Now go to sleep.”

We live in Germany. The house has six bedrooms. My mom and dad have one room, my older brother has another, and my sister (the oldest) has the biggest bedroom. While I have the one with the biggest window, my brother has the smallest one because he is the youngest. Oh! And the last one is for guests. There are six people in my family: my parents, my sister, then comes my older brother Jake, then me, and last but not least is my annoying little brother Rex.

One night I overheard my parents talking.

“I wish we could find that treasure,” Dad said.

“We don't need to spend the rest of our lives looking for some fantasy treasure,” argued Mom. Then they started talking quietly (I think they were on to me).

Wouldn't it be cool to go hunting for treasure? The next day we decided it wouldn't be a bad idea to look for the treasure.

My dad had the first clue locked in the bank for years. It said, “The secret lies within the great pyramid of Giza.”

“That’s pretty easy. We will just go to the pyramid of Giza,” I said.

“Well, that is what I thought before my father told me that many of our ancestors never came back after they went in,” said my dad in a spooky way.

“Whatever!” I replied.

We set off to Egypt. The plane ride was pretty boring. All I did was IM and email my friends. When we got there, my parents rented us camels to ride through the desert! Why couldn't we just drive? At least the cars smelled better!

The pyramid was really tall! We had no idea how to get in. But then my lazy older brother leaned against the pyramid. For a second the pyramid shook, and then a door just opened out of nowhere. It was sooo weird!

When we went in, the door closed behind us and locked us in! There was only one room with nothing in it. My little brother started walking farther in to the room.

Something just did not feel right, so I pulled him back, and right on cue, the floor opened up, revealing what looked like an endless pit. My brother owed me big time for that.

After that we started walking on the side of the room, hoping we wouldn't fall. When we got to the other side all we saw was a bunch of hieroglyphics and two maps. We didn't bother to read the hieroglyphics; instead we looked at the maps. One had a picture of Asia and an “X” on the Himalayas. The map of the Himalayas next to it was more detailed and pinpointed a cave on one of the mountains (thankfully the mountain wasn't all that big). As soon as my dad touched the wall, a door opened, leading us out of the room, and we set off to the Himalayas.

We got to the Himalayas by helicopter and trekked our way up the mountain. The trek was long and the mountain was much bigger in person than it was on the map. But we

finally found the cave and set up camp. The cave was VERY dark. A lantern could hardly light up the path.

Then my stupid older brother tried to frighten me and made me jump. I accidentally let go of the lantern and it fell on the floor, causing a fire! Fortunately the whole place was damp, so the fire stayed in one place. But it made it easy to find the stone that was covering the secret passageway. Everyone helped to push it to the side and when we finally moved it we saw...THE TREASURE!

There were miles beyond miles of gold and silver, coins, crowns, jewels, and everything you could ever imagine. It was heaven.

We realized we did not need all the money, so we donated ninety percent of it to charities around the world. But even with just ten percent, we were still the richest people in the universe. Plus, we were happy, and that is all that matters.

The Hidden Chest

*You never know where adventure will begin. It is at school, of all places, where three friends discover a map that leads to some interesting items and a link to the past in **THE HIDDEN CHEST**, by **Evan Ketai**.*

In 1989, there was a school built by a group of workers. After the school was finally built and the kids could finally start to go to the school, there was a square piece of concrete with a sewer built into it that nobody really noticed. This concrete was behind the visitors' bench of the football field.

Now it is 2006, and the square concrete is still there with the sewer. There are three friends, and their names are Ron Weinerschnitzal, Randy Lockhart, and Steve Shank. Ron is a huge klutz. These three friends are all on their school football team.

One rainy day, the football team was having a football practice inside. Ron, Randy, and Steve all got there early and started throwing the ball around. Ron then decided to kick the ball, knowing he would probably fall or hit something. When he extended and kicked the ball as hard as he could, he ended up hitting a banner that they had never seen before.

At that moment, they heard the coaches coming. They quickly started to run because the banner said "A Big Thanks to the Coaches." When they were running away, they noticed a piece of paper on the ground. Randy picked it up and ran away.

He showed his friends and they all looked at it with an awkward face. Randy noticed it was a map of the whole school,

and it must have come from the banner. The three friends decided to meet at the school that night to check out the map.

When they got there, Randy pulled out the map and said, "Let's follow the map." The map first said to go to the gym.

With a lot of eagerness to follow the map, the friends ran to the gym. When they got to the gym, the map said to go and look behind the bleachers. So they did, and they saw shovels. They took the shovels and went on.

Next, the map said to go to the cafeteria. When they got there, the map said to get two forks with circles on the ends. It took a little bit because their hands were shaking with joy to find the map. After that, the map said to go out the doors to the football field.

The map next said to go to the visitor's side of the field. They quickly dashed over to the other side of the field with their hearts beating as fast as a cheetah can run. When they got there, the map said, "Go to the concrete square." The map said to take off the sewer lid. Randy and Steve said, "No way am I taking that off because it will smell like old cheese."

Ron said, "Ok, I will take it off."

When he took the lid off, there was only dirt. They all looked at the sewer in shock because usually in sewers there is water.

Next, the map said to dig. They did as the map told them. Steve went right on digging and soon all three friends were digging as fast as Paul Bunyan could cut wood. After a long 15 minutes, they felt a metal box. They dug a little more and pulled out the chest.

The friends noticed that there were three holes on one side of the box and three holes on the other side. The map said to stick the two forks in each side of the chest in the holes and twist. They did and they twisted the forks. The chest opened.

In the chest was a picture of three friends back in 1989 on the school football team. Under the picture was one of the

kid's favorite Barry Sanders cards. The second thing was a lucky rabbit's foot, and the last thing was a heart-shaped necklace. Under the interesting items was a note that said:

Dear friends that have found this chest,

All of these treasures are special to us. The Barry Sanders card is Jeff's. It is his favorite player in the NFL. The rabbit's foot belongs to me, Phillip. It helped me win a championship basketball game. Finally, the heart-shaped necklace was Mark's mom's. She died at an early age. Her picture was inside the heart. Please put something special inside this chest for other kids to find.

Sincerely,
Jeff, Phillip, and Mark

Randy, Steve, and Ron decided the next morning at school to put their favorite things with a similar note back in the chest. So, they took their picture and each put something in. Ron put in a 2006 key chain. Randy put in his lucky quarter. Steve put in his favorite Michael Jordan card and a note that said the same thing as the first note that they found. They each signed the card and closed the chest, then put it back in the hole and covered it up. After that, they put the forks back in the cafeteria, the shovels back behind the bleachers, and got a ladder to put the map back.

Now, they will wait for another group of friends to find the map.

I Want My Mummy!

*Never underestimate the element of surprise. Three girls who fight crime their own way keep the cops and the robbers guessing in **I WANT MY MUMMY!** by Anna Lynne Garcia.*

“Tag, you’re it!”

“No, you didn’t! You got my hair! Hair doesn’t count!”

“Yes it—”

Then Riley and I got interrupted by my dad. He was still in his UGLY uniform from work. You see, my dad is a police officer, and so is Riley’s dad. They work together at the town’s local police station, fighting crime.

Anyway, my dad said Riley had to go home for supper. Since Riley and I are neighbors, I walked her home. Luckily, my dad came along and he *always* talks to Riley’s dad.

When we got there, our dad’s began to chat about work. It sounded pretty interesting, so Riley got us both some water and some paper and pens to write on (eavesdropping is what Riley and I do best).

After twenty minutes or so, Riley’s and my notes read that a sarcophagus was going to be stolen the next night at the local museum, and the back-up team was going to stop them. The back-up team was going because our dads had a different case that day.

Now, our dads don’t like us messing with their work, but we know that the back-up team is full of lame-o’s (and new guys)! This is how bad they are: We overheard our dads talking about how the back-up team wasn’t able to stop some

elephants from being stolen—because they couldn't hear them (true story, I swear)! Riley and I decided to go to the museum and stop the thieves ourselves before the back-up team messed everything up.

The next morning, I ran over to Riley's house at 9:30 a.m. so we could make plans (for the museum). Riley and I talked and planned and talked and planned but in the end...we had nothing, nada, zip! Only if we had some giraffes, plan number 24 would work.

Riley and I had only one plan that would work. That plan was to call someone with a plan. That someone was Emma, Riley's and my friend. Emma is so smart; she invents all sorts of things, like the voice-activated can opener or a video camera that looks like a banana. Since Emma's dad is an inventor, Emma gets all of his unwanted things and works with them.

Riley and I walked over to her house because it was just around the block. When we got there, Emma was at the door waiting for us. Emma looked like she had something in mind.

Here is Emma's plan: First Riley, Emma and I go to the museum. Second, we sit on the museum steps waiting for the criminals to arrive. Third, we follow them into the museum. Fourth, we stop them, and fifth, we become heroes!

After all that planning we had to put the plan in action! Riley, Emma, and I all went to Emma's house to gear up. After that Riley and I told our parents we were going to sleep at Emma's house while Emma told her parents she was sleeping at mine (of course, we were lying).

As the three of us headed for the museum we talked about what we would do when we become heroes. Riley said she wanted to be on television all the time and get interviews. Emma and I definitely agreed.

Once we got to the museum, we unpacked our bags on the steps and zipped our coats. It was very, very cold outside, so Emma, Riley, and I had to sit close together for extra warmth.

Then after waiting and waiting, we saw a white van pull up, and it didn't look like the back-up team (where *were* they, anyway?). We decided to hide in the bushes right next to the steps so the criminals couldn't see us.

As the three of us looked through the bushes, we saw a group of people dressed in black sneak out of the van. We decided to leave our sleeping bags in the bushes and follow them while Emma started to videotape. We couldn't make any sounds when we followed them.

We saw the criminals standing by the back door of the museum. One of them had a key in his hand. He opened up the back door with the key, and the group went in. Unfortunately, they shut and locked the door. When it was safe to come out of hiding, all three of us stood in front of the door. Riley and I stared at Emma for quite a while, but she said she had nothing that could get us in!

Since the criminals were getting ahead of us, I asked if anyone had a bobby pin. Riley remembered that she had one in her hair. Emma said that bobby pins only work as keys in cheap action movies. We tried anyway. It turns out it worked! Riley kept rubbing it in Emma's face, but I don't think she minded it (too much, that is).

Once we got in, we saw the group of thieves undrilling the glass case that protected the sarcophagus. Emma got all this on tape, and then she took out some matches. She told Riley and me to go by a fire detector and light one of the matches by it.

When Riley and I *finally* found a fire detector, I took out the matches. Riley was too scared to light the match, so I had to do it. Time was running low and the criminals were almost done with half of the case.

I struck the first match. *Whiff!* Nothing happened. The criminals were halfway done undrilling the case. I struck the second match. *Spark!* Sure, a spark, but no fire. Then we were down to the last match in the box. The criminals were three-

fourths done with the case. I struck the match then...*Spark!*
But there was no fire.

“Wait, no, fire! I see fire!”

“Yes!”

I held the match up to the fire detector and soon enough, the alarm and ceiling sprinklers rained on everyone!

Boy, were those criminals freaked out. They all started to panic and they started to undrill the case freakishly fast! Before they could escape, the fire department and the back-up team (SO, NOW THEY COME!) locked all the doors and stopped them.

The news crew came and interviewed Riley, Emma, and me. After that we had to call all our parents (let me tell you, they sounded mad...yet proud!).

Our parents had to talk to us all (Riley and my dad’s case was over). We all got lectures and hugs (for stopping the thieves, that is). Riley, Emma, and I all got grounded (for about EVER) but we also got *two thousand dollars*—each! Well, it turned out that we stopped number four on the FBI’s most wanted list!

Every day now, we three get recognized on the streets and get a slap on the back and a “Good job!” or “You did well!” I think we did well.

Epilogue

The police station fired everyone on the back-up team (even the new guys) for not being at the crime scene. Riley, Emma, and I got to meet the President and we each got Medals of Honor from him! The police station has offered Riley, Emma, and me jobs on the police squad when we become adults. Once we’re ten years older we *probably* are going to take the job.

Lost Island

A family's mysterious disappearance affects everyone in the neighborhood in LOST ISLAND, by Grace Kelly.

There once lived a family of four: a mom, a dad, an eight-year-old sister, and a ten-year-old brother. They were known as the Andersons. They lived in a small brown wooden house that was nice and cozy.

The family was always happy! They cared about each other. They liked to do activities together and went on a lot of trips together. Their cheerfulness and happiness influenced all the neighbors to be happy. It was the happiest neighborhood all through town.

On one warm, sunny summer day, everyone was outside and having fun. The kids were playing hide-and-seek and tag, while the parents were socializing and planting beautiful flowers like roses and tulips.

After all that fun, it was nighttime and time for everyone to go to bed. Just as the Andersons got into their house, they heard a knock on the door. They went to go see who it was, and the next thing they knew, they were lost.

Back in the neighborhood, everything was so boring and nothing without the Andersons. With the Andersons gone, everyone was locked in their houses, scared that they would be next.

After a week of everyone locked in their houses, a family that went by the name of Kelly decided to take a risk and go out to the wilderness on a camping trip. They got packed up for the woods and left. Once they were outside for a few minutes they were fine and thought, "Hey, this is not so bad after all."

After a long walk in the woods, the Kellys finally found the right place to camp out. They set up their red tents, blue sleeping bags, and the little lantern they all got for when it gets dark. When they were finished they got hot, so they went out to the lake to go for a nice boat ride.

As they got out far enough from shore they could see an island full of trees. On the island they saw something, or maybe even someone, as they got closer and closer. Soon the Kellys got so close they could see exactly what was going on. There were people on the island yelling for help!

The Kellys rowed a little faster to see if they could help. Soon enough they were on the island with people who looked like they were going to die of starvation: the Andersons!

Everyone was jumping up and down: the Andersons, because they were finally going to be rescued, and the Kellys, because they would finally get everyone in their neighborhood outside and everyone would have fun again.

As they got on the boat to take the Andersons back to the neighborhood, the Kellys wanted to know a lot of things: “Who put you guys on here? What happened? Did they say sorry? Why would they do this? Why didn’t you guys swim after him, or jump in the boat?”

The responses were, “Grandpa stole us; he hates happiness and wants the family money; we can’t swim, and the boat was long gone.”

After a while of talking they were all back at the campsite. The Kellys did not want to keep the Andersons out too long, so they packed up their stuff and walked home. It took about five minutes to get there, but they made it.

The Andersons did not like what they saw. Nothing was the same. A lot had changed when they disappeared. So to get everything back to normal, the Kellys and the Andersons got out everything fun and made all the noise and had all the fun they could. After about two minutes, the two families got everyone outside and it was the happiest neighborhood again.

This was really the happiest place to be.

Money Massacre

*Who would kill a champion soccer player, and why? In **MONEY MASSACRE** by **Peter Shimshock**, the victim provides the answers—after he is dead!*

This is the story of a soccer player named Jimmy John who won the World Cup. It was another boring day, until he and his team managed to win. Jimmy is from the American team, and the American team never wins.

After winning the World Cup, he disappeared with the trophy. Did he run away or was he kidnapped? A search of his house turned up traces of suspicious activities. It appeared that he had been murdered.

The police searched the rest of the area and found nothing. But in Spain, the trophy showed up at his best friend William's door.

William tried to get ahold of Jimmy to ask why he got the trophy, but there was no answer. He found a secret compartment in the trophy, and there was a note attached to an audiotape. He listened to the tape, and he heard a bet from an old man. Also, near the end, he just faintly heard the old man mutter, "Man, I hope he doesn't win... then he's dead, and I'm going to run to the forest forever. Otherwise I'm dead."

He read the note, which said,

I would like to give this trophy to you, William, my best friend. I don't need it. By the way, if you see news of my murder, MAIL THIS TAPE I SENT YOU to the police in Pittsburgh.

William watched the news, and there, on the news, was Jimmy John's murder. William immediately sent the tape to Pittsburgh, but sadly, the mail people aren't very good, and it got lost.

Meanwhile, the police were investigating Jimmy's death. He was found in a freezer, and everything in him froze. His heart stopped pumping, his brain stopped thinking, and there was no pulse in his body. Where was the freezer? It was in a mansion in the suburbs, and the old man who owned the mansion happened to be betting with Jimmy every year. The old man's name was Plies P. Periwinkle. Like a lot of old people, there were a lot of wrinkles on his face.

When they came to the "betting spot," Jimmy asked, "Would you like a drink?"

Plies replied, "Yes, just some water, please."

Jimmy then put a tiny bubble-sized microphone on the inside of the glass, so it looked like it was a bubble. The microphone was wirelessly hooked up to an audio recorder in Jimmy's pocket.

Plies bet that Jimmy wouldn't win that year, and Jimmy bet they would win the World Cup. He was sure of it. Sure enough, Jimmy won.

Jimmy knew the old man was probably really mad, because they both bet 25 thousand dollars. That's a lot of money for an old man named Plies P. Periwinkle.

Quickly, within about 15 minutes, Jimmy sent the trophy to William, his best friend. Hoping that William would find the evidence in the trophy, he then went to confront Plies.

Jimmy asked, “Ahem. Do you have any money by any chance that you owe me?”

Plies reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, threw all the money in it at him, and cackled, “THERE, TAKE IT. IT’S ON THE GROUND,” and grinned.

There it was, a very nasty scene. Jimmy was stabbed in the back five times while picking up the money. He dropped dead on the ground, and his body was pulled into Plies’s freezer. Plies checked for anyone else. “Good... nobody saw this.”

Plies ran as fast as he could, which was one mile per hour. Anyway, he ran the way he always does, all the way to the river, ten miles away from the city. Nobody found him for a long time....

Ten Years Later

The police were still wondering what happened to Plies P. Periwinkle. There was a miracle, though. The police received a letter from a man named William, who was from Spain. The letter contained a tape. They listened, and immediately ran for the woods and found Plies P. Periwinkle, who was dead. It appears that Plies died of old age, because there were no animal bites or bullets in him.

Plies really did run away to the woods and do all the things he said. After ALL these years, Plies P. Periwinkle, the one who murdered Jimmy John, was found. He was buried, of course, on the complete opposite side of the graveyard from Jimmy John.

The Robbery in New York

*Unbeknownst to the mayor of New York, two burglars are posing as waiters at his high-society party. With a set-up like that, it would be criminal not to read **THE ROBBERY IN NEW YORK**, by **Ophelie Ovize**.*

On the 23rd of December, the mayor invited 200 people to come and celebrate a special event, the opening of a new Town Hall in the middle of New York City. He had prepared everything special in the old Town Hall to celebrate the retirement of the old building. Beautiful chandeliers hung from the ceilings, with golden ornaments added on to the spokes that carried thousands of light bulbs. A long straight banquet table was set in the middle of the room. White linens and classy silverware were waiting for invitees to enjoy the night.

Crystal glasses, mixed drinks, fancy music...everything was splendid. Still, nobody would ever have imagined that the mayor had hired two waiters who were in fact twin burglars.

At about 9:00 p.m., all the guests were in the Town Hall. For at least a half hour, the guests socialized, talked and made friends. They also could admire the beautiful dresses, suits and jewels that were worn by most attendees. At 9:30 p.m., the guests heard a ‘*BANG*’ but did not pay attention. The ‘*BANG*’ was a pistol shot. It was the burglars who were shooting towards the police so that they wouldn’t get caught. Two bodies collapsed. The burglars hid the bodies in the trunk of an Audi TT.

The bandits entered the Town Hall like nothing happened. They had already decided on their target, Mrs. Moneyhave, the richest lady in town. They would steal the famous diamond pin she wore. The pin had a big, round diamond in the center and many little diamonds around it. Altogether, the jewel weighed more than 10 carats.

The plan would be that the first thug would turn off the building's power, and the second one would sprint to the fat lady, pull on the pin to detach it, and run away with the jewel.

And that is exactly what they did. The power went off, and everyone went screaming. The bandit ran to the huge lady. He grabbed the pin. As he was pulling hard, he heard the fabric of the top of the lady's dress rip. They had made it! The very fat lady was screaming her lungs out.

The first burglar turned the lights back on. Nicely done!

Everyone in the room was freaking out. The party's staff was instructed to calm everyone down.

Both of the burglars, though, had forgotten that sister and brother Maria and Jack Flipper, the detectives, were attending the event. Jack was determined to crack the case.

Jack and Maria were both young and brave. Maria was wearing a very beautiful red dress. Her brown hair was pulled up in a bun, and she had made up her eyes in blue. Jack wore a black tuxedo and red tie. He had cut his hair short and used gel to straighten it up. They were both very elegant.

First, they went to talk to Mrs. Moneyhave, who was sobbing and practically choking. Her dress was all ripped up, and she had been using a tablecloth to cover her chest.

Jack asked, "How are you feeling?"

"I am miserable!"

"How did this happen?"

"Well, I was eating roast ham, very good in my opinion. Then the power went off. A few moments after that, I could

feel a hand touch me and then start to pull on my precious pin....” Then she started to cry again.

Before they left, Maria walked to the Mayor to ask him for help. He was devastated that his party was wrecked. “Can you please give that poor lady something to wear?” Maria asked. The mayor nodded, very happy to do something to help.

Jack and Maria hadn’t learned much from the victim. When they walked by the drink table, they saw the waiters whispering. That seemed odd! As they got even closer, they could listen....

“We have to leave now!” said the first bandit. Jack smiled, took his cell phone and called the police.

A few minutes later, nobody had shown up, and he was still getting no help. At a mayor’s party, there are supposed to be police officers nearby, he thought. Feeling scared, he called to his sister for help. Maria happened to be a master in martial arts and would have no problem dealing with the thugs.

While Maria was silently moving towards the room’s main doors to prevent anyone from exiting the building, Jack addressed the bandits loudly, telling them to raise their hands and wait for the police to come and arrest them.

They tried to rush to the doors to escape. Maria bravely swung into action and knocked both of them down with a single spectacular jump-and-kick karate move that hit each of the two men in the chin, right before they passed out and fell heavily on the ground.

Mrs. Moneyhave got her pin back, but the bodies of the policemen were found only the next morning, when a guest opened his trunk.

But that is another story.

The Rumor Kid

When an anonymous bully spreads unflattering rumors throughout the school, only one kid has the courage to try to stop the guilty party in
THE RUMOR KID, by **Tyler Scott**.

“Hey, Josh!” I yelled from across the hall.

“What,” he replied in a sad, upset voice.

“Well, I had other things to talk about, but we’ll start with this: Why are you so upset?” I said.

“I looked at the rumor board, and today,” he said with a sniffle, “it was about me.” He started crying. His tears made puddles at the bottom of his locker.

“Well, what did the note say?” I asked in a gentle voice.

“It said I liked Samantha Snorty,” he said.

“Samantha Snorty?” I said as she walked by in her giant, nerdy glasses. “Yeah, now that’s bad,” I said. “Well, I don’t want to be late for homeroom; you know how Mrs. Snicker can get,” I said. “Brr! Scary! Well, see you later, Josh!” I yelled as I walked down the hall towards my locker. “Man, the rumor kid is starting to get really mean,” I said to myself as I tried to open my locker.

My voice echoed through the halls as I talked to myself. I knew the bell would ring soon. I grabbed all my textbooks and stuffed them into my backpack that was loaded with loose papers and homework that I had forgotten to hand in. I zipped up my backpack and headed towards the door just to find out that something was about to put my life in danger.

The bell! *Ring-a-ling-ling, ding-a-ling-ling*. I turned the corner only to look into the eyes of Mrs. Snicker. “Um, hi, Mrs. Snicker,

I, I, just had to go to the bathroom,” I said in a very nervous tone.

“It shouldn’t take you more than four minutes to go to the bathroom, now should it, Mr. BlaHa?”

“No, no, no it shouldn’t, and I’m sorry,” I said.

“Take a seat,” she said in an angry voice.

The seats are always so cold as soon as you sit on them. It’s like people put the room in a freezer. I’m surprised the room isn’t hot, because Mrs. Snicker is a devil.

“Okay, you evil goblins, there is a stupid hat day this Friday,” she said. “I hope that all of you don’t participate.” *Ding-a-ling-ling, ring-a-ding-ding.* “See you tomorrow, my little pretties,” she said in her ugly voice.

I dashed out the door like a deer dodging a car on a four-lane highway. I took a right, a left, another right, and then I ran out through the door, up the steps, up some more steps, and to the pickup circle. My mom’s car was a tan van with a beat-up door. When I saw her car I started sprinting until, *Bam!* I ran into a pole. “Ahh! My head!” I yelled as I got up and tried to walk to my mom’s car. “Mom, open the door!” I yelled.

She opened the door with a smile. “So, hun, how was—oh my gosh, what happened to your eye!” she yelled.

“Well, if you noticed, I just ran into a pole!”

“Other than that, how was your day?”

“Great, other than I was shoved in a locker, got my lunch stolen and almost got a detention. Other than that I had a great day. How about you?”

“Well I went to the grocery store and—”

BEEP!

“Chill out!” she yelled.

“Okay, let’s go,” she said. “Remember you have to go and get your hair cut today,” she said.

“Do I have to?” I responded as I looked at my hair in the mirror of the car.

“We’re almost there anyway,” she said, “and the barber likes you.”

“Here we are,” she said. “Jump on out.” I ran right in, hoping to get in and out as quick as possible. As soon as the barber saw me, he said, “You’re my best friend. OK. Take a seat.”

I climbed up onto the nasty, old chair. The chair was so old that there were holes starting to form all over it.

“Will it be kept longer or cut shorter?” he said.

“Short,” replied my mom, who had followed me in.

Minute by minute, I could see hair falling from my head until—*Wham!* It hit me, literally. All of a sudden I felt pain on the top of my head. A large chunk of hair fell from my head and onto my shirt. I screamed as loud as possible.

A few minutes had gone by and I had started to calm down. “Barber, umm, sir, can I look at myself in the mirror for a second?” I said in an upset and scared voice.

When he showed me myself, I knew exactly what happened. He had dropped the razor on my head, creating a giant bald spot. “Mom, we’re out of here,” I said in a mad voice.

She replied, saying, “Yes, yes we are!” We trudged through the door, slammed it shut, and sped home.

That night I thought to myself and asked myself these questions: Am I next? How am I going to stop the rumor kid?

The next morning as soon as my alarm clock went off, I embarked on a mission: Stop The Rumor Kid!

“See you later, Mom!” I yelled as my mom drove off into the crack of dawn. I had to watch myself. No one could be trusted except for one person: Josh.

I walked down the steps keeping my eyes peeled for my best friend. Then, I saw him over by the teachers’ bulletin board where normally the rumor notes are found. Avoiding any hidden teachers, I ran over to him as fast as I could. “Josh, I have this plan, and if . . .

“Look at the board,” he said in a soft voice.

I was stunned at how awful the rumors were getting. The note said,

*Spartanly Tigers picks his nose with brand
new toothpicks during noon rec.*

Always making rumors,

The Rumor Kid

“Man, that’s awful,” I said.

“Yeah, I know,” Josh replied.

“Well, anyway, I have a plan to stop the rumor kid,” I said in a desperate voice.

“Normally you like looking at the notes because of the pain and misery it brings to others,” Josh said.

We knew that we had to go and get our stuff for first hour soon, so I got to the point by telling him my plan. “Josh, yesterday the barber dropped the hair razor on my head, giving me a bald spot. That is why I’m wearing this very uncomfortable hooded sweatshirt,” I said. “If the rumor kid sees me and my bald spot, I’ll be on the bulletin board next.

“Tomorrow I need you to spy on the bulletin board between classes. Today I’m going to tell the principal about all the mean notes. Tomorrow if you see anyone try to take down any of the notes, get that person and take him or her to the principal’s office. I’ll make sure that the principal inspects the person’s locker. Are we clear?”

Josh had this really blank look on his face, and then he said, “Can you repeat yourself?” in a funny voice.

“You heard me,” I replied. We both laughed. “See ya at lunch!” I shouted.

“See ya later,” he said.

We both headed our separate ways. He went to Mrs. Figgen’s class while I headed to my locker to unload my binders

and textbooks from last night. At my locker I was greeted by a big, mean monster: Randal Thornberry!

Randal Thornberry is the meanest kid at school and is known as the sixth-grade bully. “How’s it going?” he asked in his mean, deep voice. I didn’t respond. He started to ask me the same question again until he froze solid right in his tracks. I had taken off the hood of my hoody sweatshirt because it was getting hot, when he paused. He was off before I could ask him what made him run off. Later I realized that he had seen my head and the bald spot.

I made it through my first three classes with no issues. I knew if I was going to see the principal then I was going to have to sacrifice my lunch for it. I really don’t think that was fair, though, because I hadn’t even been rumored about yet. I had been in the principal’s office before and knew that I could bring my lunch in there.

I ran down the steps, and then took a right, a left and another right until I was finally at my locker. I threw my third hour books and binder into a shelf, grabbed my lunch from my stuffed and crumpled-up backpack and quickly slammed my locker tight. I was about the only person left in the hallways because I’m the only person that packs a lunch, unlike the fat junk-food eaters.

I took a right, a left, another right and hobbled my way up the creaking steps that go down to the lower level floors. I ran through the lobby like a murderer was after me. I went flying through the doors and stood at the desk. “May I speak with the principal for a moment, Mrs. Sizzle?” I asked, out of breath and excitedly.

“Just walk straight down this hallway, take a left and three doors down on the right is the principal’s office,” she said.

“Thank you,” I replied. As I walked down the hallway I looked at all the nice pictures of the employees and kids of my school. There were a ton of pictures and statues of principals that I had never seen before. It was amazing! Then I got to the big knocker on a big brown door.

I knocked hard and loud. I heard a big booming voice say, “Come in!”

“Mr. Principal, sir, I would like to talk to you.”

“Yes?” he said in his deep voice.

“Well, in the sixth grade some mean kid is making up a bunch of rumors about a lot of kids in the sixth grade.” I told him everything: All the rumors I could think of, the lead suspects, and a way he could help. In other words, I told him everything. I walked into the principal’s office afraid, and I came out happy and excited. As I call it, mission 123456789101234567891012345678910 has been activated.

When I got home that night I knew that I was going to catch that person the next day. That night I had dreams about catching that person red-handed.

Ding, ding, ding. It was morning. I jumped out of bed like a bullet. I ran to the bathroom and took a shower really quick. Then I ate my breakfast, jumped on the smelly old bus and was on my way to school.

The bus ride was awful. I felt like throwing up as the kids were wide awake, singing, “The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round.”

When I finally got to school after that forty-five minute torture session, I was psyched up to run in and find Josh. I walked in, jumped off the steps and went searching for him. There he was again, looking at the bulletin board. This time he showed up wearing a blank face.

“Hey, Josh, how’s it going?”

“Today the rumor is about you.”

“Let me see,” I said.

Shane BlaHa got bit in the head with a golf ball and now he has a bald spot.

Always making rumors,

The Rumor Kid

“That’s not that bad,” Josh said.

“Wait a minute, Josh; the only time I took my hoody off all day was when I was at my locker yesterday morning,” I said. “Randal was the one who saw it. Randal did it. Randal’s the rumor kid!” I yelled. “Let’s go tell the principal,” I said to Josh.

“Let’s move,” he said.

We dashed up the stairs through the lobby and came barreling through the doors. “We need to speak to the principal, please,” Josh said while nearly passing out.

“Just this way....”

“We know.”

We ran down the hallway, took a left, and started knocking.

“Come in,” a deep voice said from behind the door.

“You probably remember me from yesterday. This is my buddy, Josh,” I said. “We think we caught the suspect,” I said.

We talked with the principal for a very long time. He promised us that Randal’s locker would be inspected by the end of the day. “Man, we busted him for sure,” I said.

“Oh, yeah!” Josh replied.

When Mr. Principal inspected the locker, sure enough, he found many mean notes and things in the locker. Randal was suspended for ten days. For sure, they were a relaxing ten days. Then the eleventh day came and Randal was back at school.

There we were, sitting in our little lawn chairs, drinking a soda. It was the life! Then Randal came in. The first things he said was, “I’m going to kill you two.”

“Josh, I suppose we should get out of here,” I said.

“I agree,” he said.

Randal was back, and our lives were back—back to normal.

She's Gone Forever

As if losing their mother isn't enough, two sisters must cope with their father's increasingly bizarre behavior. It's up to the girls to find the truth in SHE'S GONE FOREVER, by Alex Cooper.

"I can't believe she's gone forever," my nine-year-old-sister, Mandy, cried.

"It's all right," I said, giving her a shoulder to cry on.

So this is what happened. My—I mean our—mom, Jessie, died. She wasn't old, unless you think 36 is old. She wasn't sick, either. That was the weird part. Here she is, tucking me into bed and saying goodnight to Mandy and me, and then in the morning we find out that she supposedly died in her sleep. The even weirder part about all of this is that our dad seemed fine about it. He just said, "Oh well, let's get you girls ready for school." I guess I just have to keep an eye on him, because he has been acting pretty suspiciously lately.

"Mandy, Ashlee, get down here right now. I have something important to tell you two," my dad said throughout the house.

"We're coming," I called out to him.

"Girls, let me just come out and say this to you. I'm getting married," he exclaimed. Mandy's and my jaws dropped right away at the thought of Dad getting married. It was like when the twin towers fell.

"But Dad—" we both said in unison. Mandy started crying because she wasn't even over the fact that Mom was gone. If I were her age (which I'm not, I'm 12) I would cry, too. I just

wanted to be tough for Mandy and Mom, who is probably watching over us right this second.

“No buts,” he explained. “I know that last week was your mom’s funeral, but I’m not going to let that stop me.”

Dear Diary,

The wedding came and went. He was really serious about not letting Mom’s funeral stop him. He and ‘Clarise’ got married one week later. How did he find someone to marry him in one week and actually have her say yes? When our mom got married it took him like a year to get her to say yes about getting married. A lot has changed in 15 years.

Okay, now back to Clarise. She probably had a ton—and I mean a ton—of plastic surgery done on her face. She is 40 years old. She is supposed to look 35 years old. But she really looks 50 years old. Uh oh, here she comes right now. She’s looking at me. It feels like she’s burning a hole right through my skin. IT’S SCARING ME! Got to put you away, Diary, or else she might see what I wrote about her.

“Hello, Ashlen,” she said in a very snobby voice. The word “snobby” sounds like it is a person who has a snotty nose. But snobby is really supposed to mean that the person is stuck up. For Clarise’s voice, it means both.

“It’s Ashlee, not Ashlen,” I explained to her.

“Ashlee, Ashlen, what’s the difference?” she said. “Well, I was thinking, now that I’m your new ‘mom,’ there are going to be a couple of changes around here. Okay, first things first: You and your sister will do all of these things on this list. Here you are.”

- Set the table
- Prepare meals
- Clear dishes
- Wash dishes
- Clean laundry
- Fold clothes
- Make all of the beds
- Clean windows
- Mow lawn every week
- Massage my back and my feet

If you don't do these things, you two
will mysteriously disappear.

Your loving mother,
Clarise

* * *

“But Daddy, she’s threatening us,” Mandy and I whined to our dad.

“Clarise would never threaten you two little angels. You’re too good for someone to threaten you,” he explained.

“Should I?” Mandy asked me in a whisper.

“You should,” I answered back.

“Okay, Dad, here is the proof that Clarise is threatening us,” Mandy said as I handed him the note that our so-called “loving mother” gave us.

“Girls, I know that Clarise wouldn’t write something like this,” he said to us.

“Did I hear someone say my name?” Clarise came in the room and asked.

“Why, yes, I did, Darling,” our dad said to Clarise in a mushy gushy voice. I’ve never heard him talk like that before, not even to our real mom. “The girls gave me this note, and they said that you wrote it and gave it to them to do. Is that true, Sweetheart?”

“Of course not. I would never give a note like that to these children. They are so perfect. Besides, I don’t even have handwriting like this,” she said in the fakest sweet voice I’ve ever heard.

“See, girls, I told you that Clarise wouldn’t have written that note,” our dad added.

“Mandy, our room, now,” I ordered Mandy.

“Yes, sir,” Mandy said.

While Mandy and I were in our room, I told her about a plan I had. We were going to escape and go a little past the highway to our Uncle Tom’s house. Uncle Tom is 34 years old, and our dad trusts him very much. If our dad died, he would be the person that we would live with. It was the perfect way to get revenge on our dad. He would never suspect a thing.

“Let’s get packing!” I said.

* * *

“So, Uncle Tom, can we stay for a couple of days? We brought enough clothes for only three days, and then we would have to go back home,” we pleaded.

“Okay, fine, but remember that my house doesn’t have air conditioning. I hope you two brought short sleeve pj’s, because you will be hot if you don’t have those,” Tom explained.

“Okay, thanks, Uncle Tom,” we said.

In The Bedroom

“Do you really think that dad murdered Mom?” Mandy asked me.

“That’s what I think. Here are the clues: He didn’t show any sympathy after Mom died, he got married right after her funeral, and last, he didn’t believe us when we told him that Clarise wrote that note, when she really did. It’s just not fair,” I said.

A couple of days later, Uncle Tom said that we should probably go home now.

“Do you two think you can go back home and be strong?” Uncle Tom asked.

“I think we can,” I said, but not that confidently.

After we left, Mandy and I didn’t go home. Instead we went to the police station to report our dad for murder.

“Officer, we’d like to turn in our dad for murder. We think that he killed our mom,” I explained to the police officer.

“What’s his telephone number? I will call him in,” said a police officer who was tall and a little chubby. Maybe he ate too many donuts.

Mandy gave him the number. “That’s his cell phone, and he carries it with him all the time,” Mandy said to the officer.

* * *

“But, I didn’t kill my former wife. You don’t understand. Clarise, why don’t you tell them? Take off your wig and mask, too,” our dad said.

“Sure, I’d love to. Girls, it’s your mom. We all are on a reality TV show. It’s called *Lying to Your Angels*. I missed you girls so much. Can you forgive us for doing this to you?” our mom asked.

“Mommy! It’s really you. Of course we can forgive you. You were with us the whole time. We just didn’t realize that. We thought that Daddy murdered you,” Mandy and I said.

“We were so sad. We really thought that you died in your sleep, just like Daddy told us,” I exclaimed.

“Okay. Now why don’t you all just finish this jamboree at home? But, before you go, would you guys like some donuts? I have a ton. Trust me, I do,” the police officer said while patting his stomach with his hand.

Together everybody laughed. Then the camera guy said ‘Cut’ and came out from the back room. We were introduced to all of the crew. Then Uncle Tom came and told us that he was in on the plan, too. Apparently there was a camera in every room so our parents knew that we were going to Uncle Tom’s house. Then they called Tom and asked him to put cameras in all of his rooms also. They also had a camera outside so they knew that we were going to the police to report our dad. I guess you can say that we got “punked,” but I promise you that I will get them back. I don’t know how, but I will. It will certainly happen.

One Month Later

“Mom, guess what?” Mandy came in and said to all of us in the room.

“What?” our mom said.

“My friend Jessica and her sister are doing a reality TV show called *Lying to Your Parents*. Can we watch it tonight?” Mandy asked.

“Of course we can, Sweetie. Are you two still mad at Daddy and me for doing that other show to you?” our mom said.

“No, Mom, we aren’t, even though that was a very naughty thing for you two to do to us,” I said playfully.

Dreams don’t always come true, but this one, the dream to be one big happy family, came true (that is, until I get my parents back).

Sweet Steps

*Two dance teachers have selfish ambitions that go beyond the dance studio. In **SWEET STEPS** by **Jessica Randolph**, they teach their students not only about dance, but also that crime doesn't pay.*

“Five, six, seven, eight; keep your toes together and your feet flat!” For Morgan and Tony, this was their daily routine. Morgan and Tony had owned Tapping Toes Studio in California for over ten years. Dance is how they met. They were both in *The Nutcracker*, and from then on they have been in love.

Morgan and Tony loved dancing together, but didn't like teaching kids. They owned the dance studio just to make money, and hired other dancers to teach the kids.

One day Morgan and Tony had a brilliant idea to make more money when they were talking in their office. They had a plan to tell their dancers that there would be a brand new studio to dance in. In reality, though, they would never open the studio. They would tell the kids to pay in advance. When the kids paid, they would steal the money and run off to Hawaii, their dream home.

The next day Morgan announced to all the dancers in the studio that she and Tony were opening a new studio called M&T Productions. They told them to send their money for the year's classes to Tapping Toes, and gave them a fake address to the new studio.

In the next week, more and more envelopes came into the studio with the dancer's money. Morgan and Tony had been

planning for Hawaii during the entire week. Brochures were all over their office showing what houses they could buy in Kauai, Hawaii. Tony and Morgan loved a little white house on the beach. Tony circled their future house in a bright red circle.

As soon as all the money from the dancers was delivered, Morgan and Tony packed their suitcases, paid for the tickets with their dancer's money, hopped on the plane and arrived in Hawaii. They spent all of the dancer's money on the plane tickets, but used their own saved-up money to buy the perfect white beach house.

The dancers soon came to take their classes at M&T Productions. When they realized the studio wasn't real, they freaked out. The dancers were not getting the classes that their parents paid for, and only two people were to blame. Those two people were Morgan and Tony.

The parents of all the dancers were very angry because they thought their money had been stolen. They knew to call the FBI right away. And the FBI called the one person who would be able to solve this crime. His name was Detective Hobendoddlebob. He was the best detective ever!

He arrived at the scene of the crime, which was the fake address of M&T Productions. Right away he knew that to find clues he would have to go to the old studio, Tapping Toes. Since Morgan and Tony left town in such a rush, everything was still in the old studio.

Detective Hobendoddlebob burst through the front door of the old studio. He ran into each of the rooms, but when he saw the office he knew a lot of the clues would be in it. The detective saw that the door was wide open, so he knew that the suspects, Morgan and Tony, had disappeared. He looked around the room and saw all the brochures lying on the ground. He picked one up and noticed a house with a giant red circle around it.

In no time at all, he was on a plane to Hawaii. He had a feeling Morgan and Tony would be there.

When he arrived in Kauai, he asked the agents at the FBI agency in Hawaii about where the house was. They led him there. Detective Hobendoddlebob searched the house but couldn't find the suspects. The detective was in the kitchen eating a chocolate chip cookie when he suddenly heard a crack coming from the front door. Morgan and Tony walked through the door after spending the day on a boat. Their faces froze when they saw the detective! They knew they had been caught.

The detective questioned the suspects for two hours! Morgan and Tony felt so guilty that they started to cry, and they soon admitted to stealing the dancers' money. Detective Hobendoddlebob arrested them for robbing their own dance studio and brought them back to California.

The money was given back to all the dancers, and they returned to the old studio, which was now run by different dancers. The dancers went on to do great dances, while Morgan and Tony spent the rest of their dancing years in jail.

Tom the Clown

*Raise your hand if you're afraid of clowns. You are not alone. **Brandon Herman** understands this condition, and uses it to full advantage in **TOM THE CLOWN**.*

One cold, misty day in New York there was a circus. A man named Mark went to see the circus. There were hundreds of clowns everywhere, but Mark got murdered. A detective named John Hartman started to investigate the murder.

John went to the crime scene to investigate. John asked the manager of the circus, "Where did Mark get murdered?"

The manager replied, "Mark got murdered in a room next to the bathroom."

John also asked, "Who went to the circus with Mark?" The manager said that Mark's older brother named Jim said he was the one who went to the circus with Mark. So, John thought that he would go and get the full story from Jim.

When John got to Jim's house, he asked if there was anything strange that happened that night. Jim said that nothing strange happened except that Mark went to the restroom and did not come back. The detective thanked him and he went on his way.

The detective John had a hunch that Mark was killed on his way to the bathroom and then put into the room. John decided to go back to the circus to check out Mark's body. The detective was looking at the body when he heard two men whispering in the storage room. He heard a man say, "I am very thankful that you killed Mark for me." Then a clown

with a bad costume walked out of the room with a wad of cash and looked at John very suspiciously. With an angry voice he said, "What are you looking at?"

John wanted to see the guy that said thank you, but he was gone.

John thought for a moment, and then knew that it was the clown that murdered Mark. When John went outside he saw the clown hitting his car with a bat. The clown ran. John tried to run after him, but he disappeared.

That night John thought that he should get the whole story on the murder before he would tell the police, so John went to bed. However, things did not turn out the way he planned. John woke up in the middle of the night in his house, but he wasn't lying down. He was getting tied up by a guy in a robber's mask. Then, the next thing John knew, he was in a car being driven somewhere. John thought that he was going to get killed, but then he got knocked out.

When he woke up, he heard an eerie voice say, "No one will ever know that I killed Mark because I will kill you." Suddenly John untied himself using a knife that was hidden in his shoe. Then he jumped up and lunged at the clown with his knife, but the clown was already out of the room. John brought in a team of trackers to find the clown.

After awhile, a new circus named Circus Spectacular came to town, which is a continuation of the old circus. John decided to check it out. When John went to the circus there were over 100 clowns, and one of them in the back was talking about John. When John went to investigate it, a mob of thugs was looking for him.

All at once, a thug in the front yelled, "There's John." They all ran towards John yelling, "Get him!" John picked up his phone and pushed "Send." The thugs stopped and waited in confusion for a minute and then started charging him again.

Out of nowhere, F.B.I. agents rushed in and apprehended the thugs. John then ran to the office, saw the clown, ran towards him and kicked him right in the face with the force of a swinging wrecking ball. F.B.I. agents finally ran in and took Tom the clown away.

John still had to take care of one thing, and that was to find out who paid Tom to kill Mark. All at once, it hit John. He figured it out. It was Jim.

John ran to Jim's house and burst through the door and yelled, "You are the one who wanted Mark dead!"

Jim said, "Yes, I am the one who wanted Mark dead."

John asked, "But why would you want Mark dead?"

"I did it to get all of his fortune, and because he made me become a circus worker," said Jim.

John said, "Not too smart," and then he walked out and let an F.B.I. team walk in and take Jim away to jail.

This is the story of how Mark got murdered on a misty day at the circus. So, from this story you can tell that crime doesn't pay, and it is not something to *clown around* with.

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