



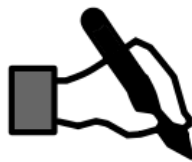


# Like

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Ninety-seven Stories by  
Sixth-grade Students of  
Berkshire Middle School

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EDITED BY

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Deana Straub  
Barb Babich

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## To the Authors

Writers write!

Your editors congratulate you and  
encourage you to keep up the good work.





**Friends  
and  
Family**



# The Blind Eye

---

*In THE BLIND EYE by Sha Carter, a girl goes blind and has someone to take care of her, but she doesn't want to return the favor. Love who you have because you never know when you're going to lose them.*

“Okay, so do I step down here, or no?” said Jessie. Jessie had been blind for 22 years, and even now she still constantly thinks of that hot summer day when it all happened as she was playing baseball with her teenage friends...

“I’m about to get you out, JC!” yelled Quentin.

“All right, let’s see you do it,” JC yelled back.

Quentin threw the ball, and JC hit it out of the park! Pearce went to get the ball, and when he came back, he had something in his hand.

“Hey guys, I found this M-80 firecracker by Old Man Joe’s broken firecracker stand. We should light it. Does anybody have a lighter?”

Offie went into his pocket, and pulled out a lighter. “Who’s going to light it?” Offie asked.

“I will,” Sara said. “All of you are just a bunch of chickens.”

“You sure you want to do that, Sara?” Paul and Drew asked at the same time.

“You might get hurt,” Kevin said.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be fine,” Sara said persuasively.

“Okay, if you’re really sure...,” Makena said.

“I’m positive,” Sara said back.

Jessie snatched the lighter out of Offie’s hands. “I’m not going to let you do this,” Jessie said to Sara.

Sara snatched the lighter out of Jessie’s hands. “I am doing this no matter what you say,” Sara said back to Jessie. Sara lit the firecracker bravely at first, but then started to panic while holding it because the fuse burned faster than she expected. Once the fuse was almost at the bottom, Sara threw the firecracker at Jessie.

Jessie didn’t catch it, and the firecracker hit her in the face. “AAAAAAHHHHHHH!” cried Jessie.

Drew said, “AAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!”

“OH MY GOSH! OH MY GOSH! OH MY GOSH!” said Makena. “She’s going to die, oh man, she’s going to die.”

“Guys...Guys...GUYS!” Jessie yelled. Everyone turned around and stared in amazement. “I’m okay! The only thing that seems to be wrong is my eyes. They hurt like crazy!” Makena ran straight over to Jessie.

“Oh my gosh, are you okay? Don’t die on me, Jessie, I need you!” she said.

“Aaaawww! Thanks, Makena!”

“So is she okay?” Paul asked. “I wonder if she thinks she’s going to die.”

“PAUL!” everybody yelled.

“Well, I was just wondering.”

“This is all my fault! If I had never had that stupid lighter, none of this would’ve happened,” Offie said.

“No, Offie, this is my fault! If I never had even found that M-80, none of this would’ve happened,” Pearce said to Offie.

“Just chill and relax, everyone. She’s going to be fine,” JC said calmly.

“JUST RELAX! SHE’S GOING TO BE FINE! WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU? My best friend has just been hit in the face with a firecracker, and you say to relax!” Makena yelled at JC. Then she slapped him across the face.

“Hey guys! It looks like Sara hit her right in the eyes, look!” Kevin pointed out.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right, Stoops,” Paul said.

“Guys, what if she dies?” Quentin asked. Everyone turned around and glared at him. “Well, sorry.”

Ten minutes later, Jessie’s parents had arrived. Then, about five minutes later, the ambulance was there.

“We’ll all meet you at the hospital,” Paul said.

“I’ll call Jessie’s boyfriend, and tell him what happened,” Makena said. “Hopefully he can hear what I say through my cries.”

In about an hour, Jessie, Jessie’s parents, all of Jessie’s friends, and Jessie’s boyfriend were at the hospital.

“Everyone, it’s okay. Jessie is going to be okay. The only thing is, well, she has to stay in the hospital for a day or two with her bandages on her face.”

“Why?” Makena asked.

“Well, um....can I just talk to you all in the hallway?” Everyone got up and went into the hallway.

“Just sit tight, Sweetheart. We’re in the hallway, don’t worry,” Jessie’s mom said before leaving.

“Okay, well, the doctors and I believe that Jessie...may be blind,” said the nurse. Makena started crying again, and everyone else started welling up too.

“Don’t worry, though. We aren’t exactly sure yet, but we can almost guarantee it,” the nurse said.



After two days, everyone was back in the room with Jessie. “In here you guys,” the nurse said. “Jessie, your family, friends, and boyfriend are here to see you.”

“Hey, Sweetie!” Jessie’s mom said. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine, Mom...or is that Dad?” Jessie responded.

“It’s me, your mom,” said Jessie’s mom.

“Well, it’s time to reveal Jessie’s face. Wow, that sounded a lot better in my head. Okay, let’s see your beautiful face, Jessie!” the nurse said. The nurse undid the bandages, and everyone let out a shocking sound.

“What? What’s the matter?” Jessie asked, confused. “Guys, you don’t have to worry, the nurse hasn’t removed the bandages yet. Go ahead, Nurse, remove the bandages!”

After a while, Jessie started scratching and pulling on her face as if to remove the bandages herself. She discovered that the bandages weren’t there.

“What’s going on? Where are the bandages?” Jessie asked, worried. “Am I...blind?”

There was a long pause, and then finally Jessie’s dad came up. “Jessie, honey.... Yes, you are blind,” Jessie’s dad replied.

“Babe, it’s okay though. I’ll take care of you,” said Jessie’s boyfriend, Junior.

“Oh, okay, Babe,” Jessie said. “I just wish I could see the world again, and then I would marry you.”

Twenty years passed, and Junior had been taking care of Jessie. “Okay, so do I step down here, or no?” Jessie asked. “Oh, I really wish I could see the world. If I could, then I would marry you.”

“Baby, it’s okay. I’m here and I want to try and make all your dreams come true. Do you have any in mind?” Junior asked.

“Well, there is one, but I don’t think you can make this come true,” Jessie replied.

“Come on, tell me.”

“Well, my dream is to have my eyes back. My eyesight; that’s my number one dream. I know that you probably can’t make that come true, but that’s okay.”

They lived together for years. Junior took care of Jessie, and loved her with all his heart. He devoted his life to her, and wished to make her dreams come true. He helped her all day, and all night. He talked to his boss, and asked if he could have a break from work to protect his girlfriend. After his boss let him go, Junior loved and cared for Jessie. All the while, medical scientists were working toward a way to transplant eyes.

The next day, Jessie and Junior got robbed! The robber broke in, and was still there when they got home. The robber pointed a gun at the both of them, but Jessie didn't know.

"Okay, look," Junior said to the robber. "I don't want any trouble. Here's my only money, just don't hurt her." The robber took his money and ran.

"What happened, Babe?" Jessie asked.

"Nothing. Just relax. We were, uh, just robbed, but don't panic. It's okay because they did minor damage."

"Okay, okay. I'll relax and cool down. I just wish I could have seen his face so I could help identify him."

"It's okay. It's okay."

The next day, Jessie received a phone call from her doctor. He said, "Hello, Ms. Jessie. Medical scientists have found a way to transplant eyes. They believe that you would be a good candidate for the transplant. They'd like you to come down to the hospital and have your eyes transplanted."

Jessie got so excited that she couldn't speak.

"Hello? Ms. Jessie?"

"Yes, I'm here," she said.

"Okay, come down to the hospital in a week or so and we'll get started with the preparations and risks."

"Ok, a week, right?"

"Yes. We are going to make sure you qualify."

"Ok, see you soon! Bye."

"Bye."

"AAAAAAHHHHH! I can't believe this! Oh my gosh, thank you so much LORD. This cannot be happening to me! I'm getting my eyes transplanted in a week! I'm so happy that I'm crying tears of joy! I'm going to be able to see again! AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!"

A week passed of Jessie's excitement. Junior drove Jessie to the hospital, and tried to calm her down for the surgery. He said, "Babe, you don't have to worry about me. Now I won't be right there when you first wake up. Okay?"

"Wait, why?"

"It's better that you don't know. But you don't have to worry because I have arranged everything for you. Okay?"

"Okay," she replied. A couple of minutes later, a nurse came and took Jessie with her. They walked into Room 128, and Jessie lay down on the bed.

"I'm so nervous," Jessie said.

“Don’t worry,” the nurse said. “The doctor’s going to give you some painkillers so you won’t feel a thing.”

“Okay, I feel a little better. Thank you.” Ten minutes later, the doctor came in.

“Hello, Jessie! How are you?”

“I’m fine, thank you.”

“Okay, this should take about an hour. Is that okay?”

“That’s perfectly fine, Doc.” Right after that, he got to work. Little did Jessie know Junior was in that same room with her. He could see and feel everything that was happening. Watching the doctor make every cut made him sadly happy. Junior was happy to see his love get what she wanted, but hated to lose something of his.

About an hour later, the surgery was over and Jessie had her eyes back. But she was still in her bed asleep. About a few minutes later, she awoke.

“Huh? Where am I?” she asked, confused.

“You’re here at the hospital,” a voice said from above.

“Hey, I know that voice. Well, at least I think I do. Junior, is that you?”

“No, it’s me! Dr. M.! Before the surgery Junior left to go get you a taxicab to drive you back home. He left this picture for you, though. He said he wanted you to come home and see him in person. He wrote directions to get home on the back. Also, he gave you a little money for the cab.”

Jessie got up, thanked Dr. M, and then got in the cab and started singing. “AAAAHHH! I HAVE MY EYES BACK! THIS IS THE BEST DAY EVER! NOW I CAN MARRY JUNIOR!” She sang this all the way home, over and over again. The only thing on her mind was the fact that she could now marry Junior.

Jessie pulled up in front of her house, and smiled to herself.

“This is my beautiful home with my beautiful boyfriend in it,” Jessie said. “Ooh, I can’t wait to go in and see my baby.” She paid the cab driver, and he was off.

Jessie went up to her door, put the key in, and walked into her house. The first thing she heard was Junior asking, “Now that you can see, will you marry me?” Jessie was shocked because she found out that Junior was blind! How could this be? Was this even possible?

“No! No, I will not marry you!” Jessie replied sternly. “This isn’t even possible! Is it? No, it’s not. I’m getting my things, and I’ll be leaving. This is still crazy!”

“But, why?”

“Look, I appreciate you helping me and all, but it doesn’t make sense how you took care of me when you were blind yourself!”

“But I love you. Plus, you said if you could only see the world, you would marry me. What happened to that?”

“Once again, thanks for what you’ve done for me, but now that I have what I want...I can ditch you. I don’t want to take care of you. That’s too much work. I don’t think I can do everything you did for me. I just can’t, and I don’t want that kind of responsibility.”

“But I took care of you, and loved you with all my heart. Why do you want to break my heart?” But before he was done asking his question, Jessie was closing the door behind herself. Those were the last words Junior heard from Jessie. Junior cried for weeks and weeks. A few years later, Junior wrote to her saying: “Hello, my dear. How are you? How are the eyes? I just hope you take care of them because before they were yours, they were mine. Take care of my eyes for me dear. Your loving ex-boyfriend, Junior.”

This is how some human brains change when the status changed. Only few remember what life was before, and who’s always been there even in the most painful situations.

### Life Is a Gift

Today before you think of saying an unkind word—  
think of someone who can’t speak.

Before you complain about the taste of your food—  
think of someone who has nothing to eat.

Before you complain about your husband or wife—  
think of someone who is crying out to God for a companion.

Today before you complain about life—  
think of someone who went too early to heaven.

Before you complain about your children—  
think of someone who desires children but they’re barren.

Before you argue about your dirty house, someone didn’t clean or sweep—

think of the people who are living in the streets.

Before whining about the distance you drive—  
think of someone who walks the same distance with their feet.

And when you are tired and complain about your job—  
think of the unemployed, the disabled, and those who wished they  
had your job.

But before you think of pointing the finger or condemning another—  
remember that not one of us are without sin and we all answer to  
one maker.

And when depressing thoughts seem to get you down—  
put a smile on your face and thank God you're alive and still  
around.

We need to stop taking life for granted, and love it while we have it,  
because God didn't have to make us.

Life is a gift — Live it, Enjoy it, Celebrate it, and Fulfill it.

# Happiness

---

In **HAPPINESS** by **Katie Westerlund**, a girl has to adjust to living with a new baby sister. Although she doesn't like this baby sister, she has to keep her. For Harmony, life will never be the same.

My mom, Patty, had her second baby three months ago. Her name was Elizabeth Mary Jane. What a precious baby girl she is. Her little blonde curls, the way she looks, her soft, soft cheeks and oh my, her pudgy little body. Elizabeth looked so innocently perfect but I don't want her at my house. She was born at 10:40 P.M. on March 1st, 2000. Everyone except me, Harmony, her older sister, was happy. I'm not happy because I think she will steal all the attention from me.

Hi, I'm Harmony and I am two years old. I got a younger sister three months ago. I'm wondering when she goes back, I mean she is going back right? Well I hope she does....

"Hi Harmony come say hello to baby Elizabeth," said Mom joyfully.

"Okay, hi, Elizabeth. Oh, and Mommy, when does she go back?" I say.

"Oh Harmony," said Dad, "Where do you think Baby Elizabeth is going back to?"

"I don't know. Where ever you got her from," I said.

"Well Harmony, Elizabeth will never go back, she will always be with us," Dad said.

"But I thought she would go back soon," I explained to Mommy and Daddy.

"No sweetie," they said in unison. Well now I know all my wishes to be an only child are gone. I really thought that she was going back from where ever she came from.

"So now she will be with us forever?" I asked.

"That's right," Dad said. *Oh wow she's going to be here for a long time I bet. I'll probably never get used to this,* I thought.

That night Mommy put Elizabeth down to sleep at 6:30 and I go to bed at 7:30 so I got a whole hour with Mommy and Daddy by myself.

"I love spending time with just you two," I said excitedly. We were playing a game called *Balloon Lagoon*.

"We love spending time with you too," said Mommy.

"We'll all love spending time with Elizabeth too, as a family," said Dad gleefully. Great, now we will all spend time together with Elizabeth. I really hope she goes back to where she came from.

“Mommy and Daddy, can one of you read me a story?” I asked hearing the pleading in my voice. “Please, please pretty please.”

“All right, Harmony,” they said.

“Yeah!” I shouted.

“Hush,” says Mom. “Now let’s go on up.” I love getting books read to me, it helps me fall asleep.

“Mommy, could we read *Wild about Books*?” I asked.

“Sure,” she said.

Before I knew it, it was morning and baby Elizabeth was already up! I was really surprised; I thought babies slept all the time. “Why is Elizabeth up?” I asked.

“Harmony some babies are up very early. They are high maintenance you know,” said Mom.

“No, Mommy, I didn’t know that, but thanks for telling me,” I told her. *I hope Mommy and Daddy don’t make me take care of her. I mean changing stinky, poopy diapers and oh the smell would be horrible, oh I could never do that! Good thing I’m not,* I thought.

“Hey, Harmony, come eat with us,” said Dad.

“Okay!” I said excitedly. I mean he wanted me to eat with them, I guess if you think about it Elizabeth might keep me company.

After lunch Mommy, Daddy, Elizabeth, and I went to the park to play. She is still kind of little so Elizabeth didn’t do everything I did. We went down the slide, on the swings, and I went across the monkey bars. Also we all played hide and seek and even tag.

We went to the park many times during the summer and by the end of the summer I started saying, “Elizabeth, I love you”

Then Mommy would say, “Oh, that’s great; I knew you loved her.”

“We thought you wanted her to go back from where she came from,” Daddy would explain.

On my birthday, August 16, we went on a picnic and we were all together as a family. Elizabeth and I were getting along so well together and I was finally three years old. We opened all my presents. I got some Littlest Pet Shops, Barbies, a Build-a-Bear, some clothing, and some *Olivia* books. I was so happy. “Thank you, I love you, Mommy, Daddy, and Elizabeth.” Elizabeth sat there and giggled in a silly baby way when she heard her name.

“We are so glad that you like the gifts,” said Mom.

“Well the gifts are really fun,” I exclaimed, “When is Elizabeth’s birthday?”

“Oh, not until next June,” said Dad.

“Oh,” I said sounding sad.

“Why?” said Dad.

“I just want to see her face when she gets presents,” I said.

“Well, that’s very thoughtful. Now do you still want Elizabeth to go back to wherever she came from?” asked Mom.

“NO! Never, I love her so much!” I screamed.

“That’s wonderful!” they said in agreement. My life was perfect. Elizabeth made me feel whole. Now I am so glad I’m not an only child.



# Her Story

---

*Cecelia-Grace has a hard time with how she always is moving. She struggles with family problems and taking on the challenge of middle school by herself. Read **HER STORY** by **Cecilia-Grace**.*

Last year I moved here in Brooklyn, New York from Berkeley, California. I moved here in the summer, because of my mom. We are always moving. This time we moved because her boss is always sending her to different factories.

Ever since I moved to New York I have realized that some people here can be very rude, but considering I have moved about five times since I was little, I will probably move away again next year, so I don't mind at all!

"Grace, wake up; school starts in an hour and you have to look good for your first day!"

My name is really Cecelia-Grace, but my mom sometimes calls me Grace or Cecelia. I get ready pretty fast today. I guess I'm just excited, but I feel like I'm missing something... *Oh well*, I think. I go through a checklist in my head, pretty sure I've got everything.

When we got into the car almost halfway there I realize there's a big problem: I don't have my schedule! There my mom goes, driving as fast as fast can go, in a neighborhood down the block, and back to our house. I hurry up and unlock the door and race to my bedroom to get my schedule. When we drive to school this time with no interruptions all I hear from my sister is how stupid I am for forgetting my schedule, and how we are going to be late on our first day.

Once we get to school, we walk in right as the bell rings. We don't see a slight bit of any life. As we walk our separate ways to get to our lockers, I try to find my locker, but struggle finding it. After about five minutes I find it. I put my backpack in my locker and get my books, don't forget my schedule, and then walk off to my first hour class.

Ok, so my first hour class is... math in room 212. When I walk into room 212 it looks more like a science room filled with eighth-graders, not sixth. As the older teacher looks at me she asks if I'm here for science in room 213. My legs start to tremble. I shake my head and quietly say, "Sorry, wrong class." I quickly walk out as fast as possible, but still hear kids from 213 giggle.

*Ok*, I say to myself, *I need to find 212*. I look all around 213. There's 215, 211, 214 next—then 204? This is weird. I keep looking, and finally I find it!

A tall woman comes up to me asking if I have math first hour in room 212. I say yes in relief. “Ok, well, you're in the right place then, but you know you're seventeen minutes late, right?”

“Oh, uh, yes, I do; see, I forgot my schedule and I had to find my locker then this class and—”

She cuts me off. “Calm down,” says the teacher. “Now take a seat somewhere. Now, you're Cecelia-Grace Larner, right?”

“Yes,” I say as I take a seat near the front.

“I am Ms. T. Nice to meet you. Now class, like I was saying, take out your textbooks, and then—”

“Is this thing on? Testing, testing, one two three—” The people in the office were making an announcement. “Teachers, please let out your students for locker organization until thirty minutes pass.”

“What is locker organization?” a girl with seventeen bracelets, four rings, and bright yellow shorts says.

“Exactly what it sounds like,” Ms. T says back.

When we get sent out into the hall, there are people running everywhere, teachers yelling to get them to walk, lockers filled up with books, and barely anyone actually getting their lockers set up for the school year! I want to clean up mine, but there's not much to set up. I decide to try to organize it anyway.

As I walk over to my locker I hear someone behind me yell and say, “Can you walk any slower?” After a minute I realize he was talking to me. I am walking slow, so I speed up a little. I keep an eye on my locker because I'm so close. Just then—BOOM—books fly everywhere and I hear someone say “Ow!” in an annoyed voice. I had bumped into someone. She is medium height with red curly hair. There are many people watching and giggling.

“I'm so sorry!” I stumbled to say.

“Yeah, you are,” she said back, and then walked away.

“She is so rude,” I hear a girl from my right say.

I look at her and say, “Yeah,” curious what to do next.

“Hey, I'm Emma,” she says in an overly cheery voice.

“Cecelia- Grace, but you can call me Cecelia, or Grace, I don't know, whatever you want.”

“How 'bout Celia?” she says with a slight almost-evil but friendly smile.

“Sure,” I say, still trying to get to my locker. “You know, now that I think of that name, I have never heard it, but I like it.” When I finally get

to my locker I half expect her to be walking away now, but when I look back I see her still talking to me, but then she quickly sees the time and says bye.

After I get my stuff from my locker I practically run down the hallway, but safely and alert this time.

When I spot my mom's car I hop in it, and then suddenly feel a lump in my throat because everyone is in tears! I look around and ask with a cough in my voice, "What's going on?"

"Umm, Cecelia, your dad has cancer," my mom slowly says.

I responded questioningly, "Really?"

"Yes," said my sister, annoyed.

The rest of the night I was thinking about what my mom had said.

For the next three weeks I have been worrying about my Dad. I will worry and worry, but on the bright side I have made a new friend: Emma. Thanks to her I haven't ripped my head off and fed it to my dog out of worries! Emma and I have become pretty close friends. She told me how she lives with her step-dad because she's not allowed to see her dad for some reason and her mom died years ago. I have been keeping her updated about my dad and stuff. After a little while she tells me everything about herself, as do I.

I remember this like I remember my name: After about a year since Emma and I became friends, I found out my dad didn't have cancer! The machines at the hospital were all messed up, the doctors were doing the wrong thing, and my dad only caught a really bad virus going around. It was great, all of it but one thing: when I heard my sister say, "Oh, and one other thing: We are moving back to California!" My mom knew how much we hated it here at the beginning of the year, so she quit her job, because she was going to at some point anyway, and we moved back.

Ever since we moved back I have been a lot happier and school has been great! I'm with all my friends, except for Emma. I always am texting and emailing her, though. Plus my mom said we could go down to New York this summer and hang out with her family! I have had a great time back!

# Lost and Found

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*When disaster strikes, two children must learn to cope with their new life in **LOST AND FOUND** by **Allison Miller**. Will their lives ever be the same?*

In order to start this story, there is something you must know. It is about the mother. This lady from the Deep South had two lovely children and a respectable husband. She was a very kind-hearted woman, and she often helped out with some of the chores her family's slaves were supposed to do. The family's slaves lived very well compared to the plight of others, and if they ever had a complaint or became sick, the mother took it as her personal mission to fix the problem or cure the person. Thus, every other morning the mother got up early, so that she could collect the eggs from her hens.

Now that you know that, the story will continue as planned. One particular morning all started out as usual. However, no one could have guessed what would come next. Little did anyone know that a slave by the name of Caroline had earlier that morning accidentally spilled water on the back stairs. Caroline had known that her mistress and the mistress's family would be coming down for breakfast shortly. She decided that there wasn't enough time to clean the water up. Caroline didn't want to make the family wait to eat because of her own clumsiness, so she resolved to clean it up later.

At about that same time the mother decided to go out to the chicken coop to gather the eggs. Because it was early and she did not want to disturb the others, she headed down the back stairs. The mother slipped on the wet stairs, fell, and broke her neck. Later that day the mother passed away.

The father was so depressed that he became trapped in his own grief, causing him to change his opinion about slaves. The enraged father then treated the slaves harshly, and worse than animals.

Four years later, the little girl of that family was making her way home from her friend's house. The girl (whose name was Abigail) was determined that she could make it back home without help. However, when a storm stirred up she wasn't so sure. Abigail became lost in the torrent of rain pelting mercilessly from the sky. A sharp bolt of lightning shot down a tree, dangerously close by. Abigail was frightened out of her wits!

Abigail lost her footing on the muddy slope and fell down into the raging river! Wave after wave crashed down upon the girl, and Abigail began to feel weak from the lack of air. A moment from losing

consciousness, Abigail felt a strong hand grasp her and pull her toward the surface.

Abigail gasped gulps of air until her lungs could hold no more, and then she breathed out slowly. When Abigail was breathing normally again, she thought, *Wait, how did I get out of that terrifying river? Someone must have helped me!* She looked around, and only one other person was in sight: their family's slave Caroline!

"Oh!" gasped Abigail. She had imagined that she was the only person for miles around. Stumbling to Caroline, clutching her tightly, Abigail choked out, "Thank you for saving me!" Abigail turned, glancing at the ferocious river. "But I can't help wondering why you are out here. I thought that I was all alone."

Caroline answered simply, "Well, I thought if you were going for a swim in this weather, then I better come too." Caroline then picked up the nine-year-old girl in her strong arms, and turned toward the house.

During that whole episode, the brother, Joseph, had been crouching beneath a thorn bush. When he saw his sister go over the edge of the slope, Joseph was petrified by fear. It was lucky for everyone that Caroline was there when the girl slipped into the river. Caroline's presence changed everything. Now, from the darkness, Joseph cried out to his sister, "Abigail, wait, wait for me!"

Abigail shrieked, "Joseph! What are you doing out here?"

"Father told me to follow you to make sure you got home safely!" Joseph explained hurriedly. "Please don't get mad at me! I know you can get home yourself but Father..." Abigail had slipped from Caroline's arms while Joseph had been stammering, and now she was hugging her brother.

"It's okay. You didn't need to hide, though!" Abigail assured her brother. "Now come on, Caroline is taking me home!"

"All right, let's go."

Caroline scanned the kids from top to bottom to make sure they were not hurt. Caroline observed that the girl was drenched, and the boy had gained multiple scratches from the thorn bush under which he had been hiding. "Kids," Caroline declared, "I'm going to bring you to my grandma's home to get you two cleaned up a bit before your father sees you and thinks that you ran off and caused all this trouble." Joseph felt his cheeks burn as he thought about his father. "Well," Caroline said, "I don't know about you, but I'd rather be warm and dry than be out here in this storm. Let's get going."

Caroline's grandmother's home was the coziest place that the children had ever been. The walls were painted a deep red, and the glow of the fire reached out to the children, drawing them close to warm their feet. Joseph lay nestled by the fire after the women cleansed his scraped limbs, and

Abigail rested against the grandmother's legs as she brushed Abigail's hair out slowly and gently. As the children became cozy and warm by the heat of the fire, sleep overtook them.

After all this time the father had become worried about his children, so he went out to look for them. He heard voices coming from one of the slave's huts, and he thought that the slaves would help him find his children. The slaves, he often noticed, interacted with his kids; they would be sure to help now.

As he was seconds away from his fist coming down upon the door the man heard a young girl say, "Thank you so much." The father paused. A few seconds later he heard a young boy's voice chime in with another thank-you.

The father's eye was attracted to a beam of light shining from the warm glow within the cottage into the dark, rainy night. The father peered through the window. The sight inside stirred up many feelings inside of this man. There, in the lap of one of his slaves, was his very own daughter! She was laughing gaily, and her ocean-like eyes gleamed in the firelight. *How dare she!* the father thought angrily. *I was so worried for her safety, and this is how she thanks me! She goes and relaxes with the slaves while I pace back and forth across the room until her return! If I had not thought to come out here to this hut, then I would be back at home, worrying for my dear children's safety! How could they!*

Then the father glared at his boy. Joseph was lying on his side, facing the fire. His back was to the father. Joseph was sprawled upon the floor, in a manner that seemed as though this was the boy's home. He lay there as though this fireplace had warmed Joseph every night, and as though there were no other place in the world where he would be as comfortable. The father was fuming now. *I gave Joseph very specific instructions to find Abigail and bring her home. Now look at him, completely forgetting my instructions and sound asleep in front of the fire.* How could these children, his very own kids, be so comfortable with these people who had led to the death of his wife? *One of these slaves had spilled water, then didn't wipe it up because, because....* The father faltered.

*Why didn't the slave dry up the water?* A fuzzy image came to his mind. It was of a time that the father had done all he could to forget, but this image had never really been forgotten. *Breakfast, something about breakfast....* Then abruptly it struck him. All of a sudden the father comprehended how wrong he had been. He had always just thought of what happened, not why it happened.

The image that he recalled was on that terrible day when his wife was on her deathbed, and she tried to explain that the slave, Caroline, had not wished to make them wait for breakfast. She did not want to cause the family to wait out of her own clumsiness, so she decided to dry up the

water later. The proof that she did go back to the stairs to clean it up is she found his wife at the bottom, unmoving. That was the truth to how this whole disaster began.

The father felt a hot tear tumble down his cheek. It was a tear of remorse for what could have been. Then another and another joined it. One was a tear of mourning for his lost loved one, and the other a tear of pity for his children who had grown up without a mother, or a father to be there for them. He brushed them away, deciding once and for all that from then on he would be the father his children deserved. That finally worked out, the father opened the door with a great *smoosh* and bellowed excitedly, “My children! My children! Oh my dears! I am so sorry! How could I have ever not paid attention to you! Do forgive me!”

Joseph popped up the moment he heard his father’s voice, “Father, is that really you?”

“Yes, my boy, it is me.”

“Oh, my goodness,” Abigail breathed. Abby felt overwhelmed by what was happening. This man must be an imposter. Her real father would never act this way, but would he?

The father then saw Caroline and her grandmother. “Kind ladies, I am very sorry to say that I have been wrapped up in myself. I have not paid attention to those around me, nor their feelings.” Then the father spoke to Caroline directly. “I have completely ignored you for the past four years, and I have acted unforgivingly towards you, who out of anyone has done nothing to hurt my family. Actually, you have always cared for my family, even when I didn’t give any consideration whatsoever to you at all. So please, please take my sorrow...”

“Don’t fret,” Caroline interrupted with tears in her eyes, “it is okay. This just shows how much you loved your wife. It is only human to feel grief and wish to blame someone. The thing that makes us all unique is what you do with your grief. You started to blame someone and then you realized...you realized that...,” Caroline was beginning to sob.

The father finished for Caroline, “That you have to be happy with how things are, and appreciate everything while you have it. And then, if something important leaves you, you must not linger upon what is gone, but you must appreciate what you still have. You may always leave a spot in your heart for what is gone, but you must also leave an even larger area for what is here, now.” After that speech tears started to trickle down his face, and then the father bawled full out, in front of everyone.

A few minutes later when the father had collected himself, he strode over to his children and picked them up together, at the same time, and hugged them very tightly. “Oh my dears, my precious, oh my little dear precious sweets...”

Abigail huffed, “Father, if you want to get our forgiveness you will have to stop calling us pet names. We just want to be your children, Abby and Joe.”

“My children, I love you so, and never forget it.” Now the father’s voice turned serious and his face became solemn. He turned to Caroline and her grandmother. “In the state of Kentucky, half the state goes with the north and the other half with the south. I have never quite made up my mind but I am certain now. Everyone in this house must live as a free person. You are free to leave and to go wherever you may wish. If you desire to remain here, I would pay fair wages in exchange for helping my family out.”

Caroline took a step back. Her thoughts were all jumbled together, so she took a moment to relax and to untangle herself. Her first thought was, *I’m free. Really and truly free. I could travel to places I have never been before! I could... I could find my own job! I could have my own house all to myself! It would just be me and... and... no one. I would be all by myself. No sweet little Abby to walk home with, and to chatter quietly with. No adventurous Joseph, dashing off to some new discovery. It would just be me. Me. All alone in this world.* Caroline realized that the mornings would just be too quiet for her liking without the children there. She knew that even though she might meet new people and kids, she would never meet Abby and Joseph again. She just couldn’t let that happen.

I must interrupt this story to explain something to you. At that moment a warm, tender feeling swept through Caroline. And that feeling was love. It was so deep and so true that Caroline knew in her heart she wanted to remain with the children as long as she could. Now, back to the story.

So, to show her newfound resolve, Caroline feigned shock to the kids and their father. “Do you really think I would leave you, could leave you, after all these years?” Abby and Joe released a breath of air they had been holding when their father asked the question. They ran forward, and hugged Caroline tightly. The father hesitated but one moment, then rushed forward and joined in the circle of love.

From that day on they lived happily together, two kids, the father, Caroline, Caroline’s grandmother, and many of her friends and relatives who came to work there as well. Abigail and Joseph’s father found a job for anyone who was willing to work, and soon Abigail and Joseph and their father became a loving, devoted family once again.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is where this chapter of this southern family stops. Many more episodes happened and events occurred, but nothing could ever break the bond this family and workers have now created.



# Party Rock

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*The parents of four sisters finally give in and allow their daughters to go to a party. What could go wrong? Read about it in **PARTY ROCK**, by **Chelsea Motley**.*

One day Taylor, Chelsea, Gabby, and Angel all wanted to have a party. But their mom always said no. Their friend said they could go to her awesome party, but before they got invited to the party this really happened.

**Taylor:** I am so bored.

**Chelsea:** Me, too.

**Gabby:** We should have a party.

**Chelsea:** Mom's going to say no.

**Taylor:** All you have to do is ask her.

**Chelsea:** I'll ask her, but you have to get the pizza.

**Gabby and Taylor:** Fine.

## In the kitchen

(Mom walks in the kitchen. Chelsea, standing there, was having the guts to ask her.)

**Chelsea:** Hey, Mom, can I ask you something.

**Mom:** Yeah, what is it?

**Chelsea:** Can Taylor, Gabby, Angel and I when Angel comes back from the store have a party?

**Mom:** No, I'm sorry.

**Chelsea:** But why? How come?

**Angel:** I'm back from the store.

## Chelsea's room

(Chelsea and Angel go to Chelsea's room to talk about what their mom said.)

**Taylor and Gabby:** What did she say?

**Chelsea:** She said no. I don't know why she did.

**Angel:** What's going on?

**Chelsea:** We asked Mom for a party and she said no.

**Chelsea:** Everyone in the living room. I've got a plan.

**Angel, Taylor, and Gabby:** Ok, what is it?

**Chelsea:** Instead of us making a party, we should find someone else who has a party.

At Berkshire Middle School

**Angel:** Do you guys remember the plan?

**Taylor, Gabby, and Chelsea:** Yes.

(Chelsea's friend Nailah walks up to her.)

**Nailah:** Hey, Chelsea.

**Chelsea:** What's up?

**Nailah:** London is having a party.

**Chelsea:** Did she invite you?

**Nailah:** Yeah, she did. You should go ask her if you can come.

**Chelsea:** Okay.

(Chelsea is walking to London.)

**Chelsea:** Hi, London.

**London:** Hi, Chelsea, what's up?

**Chelsea:** Nailah told me you invited her to a party; I was thinking... can my sisters and I come to the party?

**London:** Sure, you and your sisters can come.

(School ends for the day, and Chelsea cannot wait to tell her sisters they were going to a party.)

At home in Angel's room

**Angel:** So what's the big news you have to tell us?

**Chelsea:** I got us invited to a party

**Gabby:** Cool.

**Taylor:** Whose party is it?

**Chelsea:** London's party.

**Everyone:** Great.

**Chelsea:** The party is on Saturday.

**Gabby:** What about Mom?

**Chelsea:** I'll tell her.

**Taylor:** No, you messed this up last time.

**Angel:** I'll go tell her.

**Everyone:** Okay.

In Mom's Bedroom

**Angel:** Hi, Mom

**Mom:** Hi, Angel. What do you want?

**Angel:** Can we go to a friend's birthday party?

**Mom:** Whose birthday party is it?

**Angel:** Chelsea's friend London.

**Mom:** Fine, if it means that much to you.

**Angel:** Thank you so much.

Angel's room

**Chelsea:** What did she say?

**Angel:** She said yes, but I told her it was a birthday party.

**Everyone:** You did what?

**Angel:** Sorry, I got nervous.

**Taylor:** Everyone calm down. It's going to be OK.

**Chelsea:** But the party is in two days.

**Gabby:** What am I going to wear to the party?

**Chelsea:** We all need to pick out our clothes.

**Taylor:** I'll ask Dad for money this time.

In the kitchen

**Taylor:** Hi, Dad, can I have some money?

**Dad:** You work?

**Taylor:** No.

**Dad:** If you don't work, you don't get any money.

**Taylor:** But it's for London's birthday party.

**Dad:** Just for the birthday party and not for anything else.

**Taylor:** Thank you.

(Taylor walks back in Angel's room with 100 dollars.)

Angel's room

**Taylor:** We can go shopping

**Everyone:** Great

(The girls go shopping so that they go to the awesome party they got invited to. At home again were they can get dressed for the party.)

Driving the car

**Taylor:** I cannot believe Mom and Dad are letting us go the party.

**Angel:** Well, they think we're going to a birthday party

**Gabby and Chelsea:** Ha! Ha! Ha!

At the party

**Gabby:** We are finally here.

**Taylor:** This doesn't seem like the party we would go to.

**Chelsea:** I held the map upside down. We are at the club!

**Angel:** We've got to get out of here. Mom and Dad would kill us if they knew we were at the club.

**Everyone:** Let's get out of here

(Click)

**Taylor:** What was that?

*Woooooooooooooooooooo!*

**Chelsea:** I see those people are shooting!

**Gabby:** Everyone get down!

**Shooter #1:** Everybody get down on the ground!

(The girls were in trouble. Someone had to help out.)

**Taylor:** Is that Nailah? Yeah, it is her. What is she doing?

**Chelsea:** Nailah, get down!

(Nailah got up and hit the shooters right in the face, but that did not stop them. They shoot Nailah, and she dies.)

**Chelsea:** Someone has to do something! I'll go get the phone and call the police!

**Gabby:** The shooters are right there. Don't move!

**Chelsea:** I have to. I have to save all these people. Taylor, Gabby, and Angel, help me.

(They all got the phone and called the police.)

The police came to arrest the shooter. We still don't know who the shooters are. All we know is that day changed all of us forever.

The lesson in this story is things are being thrown at you when you don't know it. You should never lie to anyone because you don't know what might happen.

# Runaway

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*Have you ever thought of what would happen if you and your sister sneaked away for just a little while? In **RUNAWAY** by **Isabella Levitt**, that is exactly what two sisters do.*

**JESSICA:** My name is Jessica, and in a little while you will meet my sister Sarah. I'm about to tell you a plan I came up with to have the most fun I could ever have.

**SARAH:** Jessica is here to get the story out there. I am here to make sure she gets the details right. I don't think that any of you know my sister. She tends to exaggerate a lot.

**JESSICA:** Sarah and I are both 13 years old, and we have very loving parents. Sometimes I felt like my life was really boring. I decided to start saving up money to do something exciting. It may sound like a crazy plan, but I decided to sneak out for one night to go to Disney World.

I found out one day when the Cinderella Castle suite was open. I found that out because my best friend Meagan's mom works in the Magic Kingdom. Meagan took a huge risk in sneaking into her parents' room to help. She found a paper that had times when no one was in the suite.

**SARAH:** I really didn't have a good feeling about what Jessica was proposing to me. I know that I may be a worrywart, but any person with common sense would be on my side. Jessica was saying that if I could use enough makeup to make myself look older, then I could pretend to be Jessica's mom and we could get up to the suite.

**JESSICA:** After over two weeks of asking and asking Sarah finally said yes! I found out that I would have a week to plan everything.

**SARAH:** I really shouldn't have given in that quick. I shouldn't have given in at all! I guess that she would have gone with me or without me and it was that sisterly instinct kicking in.

**JESSICA:** My plan to get us in was to use makeup to make Sarah look older. Now getting out of the house was a bit different. We waited until about midnight just to be sure that our mom and dad were asleep. I kept my window open a little bit so I could crawl out. I figured that Sarah was doing the same.

**SARAH:** I wish that I would've known what I was getting into. To get to the park we walked. We only lived a quarter of a mile away from the bus station that could take us there.

**JESSICA:** When we got to the bus stop we went into the bathroom and Sarah started her makeup magic. By the time she was done you would

have thought she looked like she was at least 20! We came out of the bathroom and went to the bus.

**SARAH:** At this point I told myself there was no backing out now. We got on the bus and walked inconspicuously to the back. We were just about the only ones on the bus. It took about ten minutes to get to The Magic Kingdom. When we got there, I got out the money that Jessica gave me to pay with.

**JESSICA:** My heart was beating so fast I felt like it was going to pop out of my chest. I could feel the adrenalin pumping. Luckily, the Magic Kingdom was open until 2 A.M. that night, so we wouldn't seem too suspicious. We bought our tickets and walked through the gate.

**SARAH:** When we got into the park we went back into the bathroom and I took my makeup off. It doesn't matter right now because no one will notice two girls walking around the park. When we came out of the bathroom, I finally got a chance to take in the busy atmosphere of everything. There were families with little kids in their arms asleep and couples with Mickey and Minnie Mouse bride and groom hats.

**JESSICA:** I looked up how to get in the castle online. You can find anything with help from the Internet! I had found out that there are a series of trapdoors and tricks leading up to the actual room. I made Sarah memorize the entire route, and I did too. If you stepped in the wrong spot you were shot down a slide. That meant ending up somewhere that we could get caught! We slowly and carefully made our way up the path.

**SARAH:** I didn't know what waited through the door, but I couldn't wait to find out. Jessica asked for my hairpin so she could pick the lock. I gave it to her and urged her to hurry up.

**JESSICA:** I put my ear to the door to make sure no one was in the room. There wasn't, although the door was locked. I planned for that, though.

**SARAH:** When we walked in, the first thing we saw was a Jacuzzi bathtub. I thought, *I could get used to this!* When we went deeper into the suite, there were luxurious beds and everything that I could ever ask for in a house.

**JESSICA:** I had a list of everything that I wanted to do. As much as I wanted to get started now, it was way too late.

We got into bed and I set an alarm for 8:30 A.M. The park opens at 8:00 A.M., and it would have seemed too suspicious if we were there right at park opening coming out of the castle.

**SARAH:** When we woke up in the morning we went to do everything that we wanted to. We did just about everything! I guess I was feeling adventurous, but I suggested that we go to EPCOT.

**JESSICA:** Yes! I've finally started to rub off on Sarah! She wanted to go to EPCOT. We took the monorail there, and when we walked in I could feel all the excitement in the air!

The first thing I saw was the big "golf ball." It is really a ride called Spaceship Earth. "Golf ball" is what Sarah and I called it when we were little. I remember being little and coming here with my parents. I always sat on my dad's shoulder. Sarah was always in the stroller or holding hands with our mom. We never came here and didn't go on Soarin'. I can tell that you might be a little confused on what Soarin' is. Sarah should explain it.

**SARAH:** Soarin' is a ride where you sit down and the seats rise up into the air. You feel like you are flying! When we got on I felt the same excitement I had felt before. When we flew over the orange grove I could smell the oranges. This is my family's favorite ride of all. It was way worth the two-hour wait time!

**JESSICA:** When we came out of Soarin' we decided to go ride another family favorite. We walked to Test Track. Test Track is a ride where you get in a car-like vehicle and go through a simulation of testing a car. This ride is a bit more exciting. How exciting? You bank 45 degree turns while going 65 miles per hour!

**SARAH:** When we come out from Test Track there were two EPCOT cast members and also, our parents! Our parents came rushing up to us with huge smiles. I wasn't quite sure why they were smiling, but I had a strange feeling.

**JESSICA:** Yeah, I know. We should have been more careful, blah, blah, blah. I already know all this. Let's go on with the story!

So, as we were surrounded by EPCOT cast members I knew we were busted. My mom told us, "When we found you gone from your room this morning we weren't sure where to look for you. Then, we found all the brochures under your beds. We knew to come here."

**SARAH:** I asked how they knew to come to EPCOT and this particular ride. They said, "Well, we knew that this was your favorite park and that this was your favorite ride. We put two and two together, and here we are!"

**JESSICA:** Then, my dad tells us that the people at Disney had chosen us to win lodging in Disney's Caribbean Beach for two weeks free and they also have given us free passes for our entire family! I was in shock because it seemed so crazy, but of course I was absolutely the happiest I had been for a long time.

**SARAH:** I was a little apprehensive because I didn't quite know why they weren't mad at us. They told us that they were mad. They said they

couldn't let that get in the way of the amazing things happening. I knew that we had to tell them the whole story.

**JESSICA:** I was relieved that Mom and Dad weren't too mad at us. I told them everything: raising all the money, sneaking out of the house, and sneaking into Cinderella Castle.

**SARAH:** We spent the best two weeks of our lives in Disney's Caribbean Resort laughing, smiling, and not fighting at all.

**JESSICA:** We also go to Disney World at least once a week using the free passes from Disney. Sarah and I also get along better than ever!



# Still Six

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*In STILL SIX by Piper Meloche, Isabel lives a normal life until a friend finds out her secrets about the dolls she has had for a long time. Will she make it through the day?*

“Why do you want to see my room anyway?” I asked as I led my best friend Chelsea down the hall to my room.

“I haven’t seen your room for four years!”

“It’s been five years.”

“All the more reason; five years is a long time!”

“Fine, it wouldn’t hurt, I guess.” I slowly opened the door to my room. I knew my social life was over. What kind of sixth-grader still has and loves her baby dolls?

Chelsea was truly stunned. She excused herself to the living room. I heard the beeping of texting buttons, probably about my stupid pink bedroom. My favorite dolls, Rosie, Katie and Grace, glared at her.

The next day was torture! All day I heard, “Hey doll face!” and “Look at that girl Katrina; she’s all dolled up today!” and “Isabel, I never knew you were still six.” The day came with a large helping of laughter and whispers. In about every class I saw at least ten people whispering. I was laughed at at least five times and got hit with, like, ten spitballs. For hours I was counting the minutes and counting the laughs. Finally I focused my eyes on the clock and whispered to myself, “One Mississippi, two Mississippi,” until the clock seemed to scream, “GO! Go home, Isabel!”

I ran to the bus and stayed in my own seat. I was picked on there, but the bus driver is so strict nobody even wanted to try to do anything more than whisper to their friends and point at me.

Even when I got home, my mind started playing tricks on me. Rosie kept repeating, “I never knew you were still six!” Grace started giggling and whispering to the other dolls.

After dinner I sat down to watch a little TV in my room. Even the TV mocked me! It kept playing commercials for baby dolls and friendship bracelet kits. One of the girls on the friendship bracelet commercial had Chelsea’s long, wavy, red hair. The girl on her right had my blue eyes.

I woke up the next morning with a strange feeling of courage. For the first time in a while I really felt good! Why do they tease me? I’ve kept their secrets for a really long time. Just then I got an idea.

I survived the teasing through the morning. Let them laugh. They will feel different by the time school ends today.

At lunch when Billy Thompson came up to tease me I stepped in. “Billy, give it a rest. I know you still watch *Go, Diego, Go!*” Giggles began around the cafeteria. “Amanda, you still play with Barbie dolls!” The giggles increased. Pierre Baker began to whisper. “Pierre, you still read picture books.” The laughter was at an all-time high. Finally I yelled, “It’s not funny! It’s who we are and if you can’t accept that then you’re not being very good friends to Pierre, Amanda, Billy or me.”

The room fell silent. The sixth grade seemed to be in a strange moment of deep and true thought. For once they really considered that these “nerds” were real people with real feelings.

I’m not saying nobody ever got bullied again. I’m not saying we all became BFFs and started skipping down the hallway together. I don’t think any of those things will ever happen. I do know that one thing dramatically changed that day. I see more caring and kindness between students now. And nobody reads Chelsea’s texts now, for they don’t care. She has also become much less popular. As for me, well, I never heard a peep out of her again. I also realize something about Chelsea now: She was never really a good friend to me or anyone else. I honestly won’t miss her being there. Now that I think about it, I never will.

# Threats.Friends

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*What happens when someone who thinks you have abandoned her comes back? What happens when an enemy becomes a friend? Find out in **THREATS.FRIENDS** by **Alison Brandt**.*

“Well, well, well, who do we have here? The brat who left me by the side of the road, huh?” exclaimed Katherine.

“Yeah, I’m back,” said Alice. They had been enemies almost forever. The only time that they hadn’t been enemies was from kindergarten through fourth grade. It was in fifth grade that Katherine insulted Alice behind her back. Katherine said that Alice was a good-for-nothing, back-stabbing little brat with a good-for-nothing, know-it-all mother. She had said this because Alice had started out the school year okay, but then became really interested in her classes and was therefore deemed “uncool.”

“Why are you here?” Alice asked.

“I came on a dispatch from headquarters. They wanted you dead and I was happy to oblige,” sneered Katherine. Then she added, “So, is the scaredy-cat girl going to fight me, or is she going to run home to her mommy?”

“Neither, I don’t fight people just for the sake of it and I don’t go looking for fights, unlike you,” Alice pointed out. “You think that you are so powerful, now that you have learned how to use a sword.”

“I would think that you learned from what you experienced in fifth grade: I am better than you. I’m so much better than you that I actually brag about it. Do you ever brag? No, because you’re still that good-for-nothing, back-stabbing little brat!” Katherine finished with hatred and anger in her eyes. “Ugh, you still have that little mutt of yours?” Darby had started growling once she caught sight of Katherine.

“Of course I still have Darby!” Alice exclaimed. Darby was Alice’s Border collie, and she was trained the same way that Alice was. Darby was three years old.

“Why don’t you trade her in for something like Biter? Battle dogs are better than those everyday dogs. They’re much more aggressive. Then again you don’t like aggression, do you?” asked Katherine.

“No, I don’t like aggression,” said Alice. “If you stop talking, then maybe I’ll be able to take you to jail peacefully.”

“Why would I go peacefully, as you put it?” asked Katherine. “And also, is that the reason that you came looking for me?”

“You would go peacefully because then, I won’t hurt you. And yes, this is the reason that I came look—”

Alice launched herself at Katherine. Katherine was not expecting it as she put up her hands to block a blow that never came. Instead, Alice grabbed Katherine’s wrists and twisted them outward just enough to seriously pain Katherine, but not enough to break her wrists.

“—ing for you. I was assigned to arrest you because of your last robbery.”

They were conveniently in one of the corners of Alice’s four-acre yard, so she had every right to do this.

“Owwwwwww, that really hurts, Alice,” whined Katherine.

“It’s supposed to, you lying little git,” Alice said with a grin on her face.

“I thought you said that you weren’t going to hurt me,” complained Katherine.

“I said that if you came peacefully, I wouldn’t hurt you. I wouldn’t call resisting coming peacefully. So, you’re going to jail. Sorry, no wait, I’m not,” finished Alice. “Oh, and related to your first comment, I did not leave you on the side of the road. I left you in fourth hour after the bell rang for lunch. I was also surprised that when I came at you, you didn’t pull out your sword and just cut me down. That shows me that you never really paid attention in class and that fighting with your sword did not become instinctive.”

“How dare you say that to someone who was privileged enough to actually train with a sword. Then again, you’re just a sneak who goes around and puts people in jail,” exclaimed Katherine.

“A sneak who goes around and puts people in jail that is also privileged to be thoroughly thanked for her service to the country by the King,” said Alice. She was one of the few people who helped to gather up all of the troublemakers in the country. She had a serious authority, especially in the areas where there were no lords.

“Yeah, you won’t be thanked by all of those good people you put behind bars, though,” remarked Katherine.

“I’m not planning on getting any thanks, and you’re just trying to get me to jabber on while you cut through the cuffs you’re wearing that seem impossible to open, right?” asked Alice.

“What? Oh of course not. I was just trying to figure out if you had a heart.” Katherine blushed as she said it. The truth was that she was wondering why her blade on her sleeve couldn’t cut through the cuffs.

“I’ll tell you why you can’t cut through the cuffs,” said Alice intriguingly.

“Please tell me!” begged Katherine.

“You can’t cut through because the cuffs are steel,” Alice said happily.

“Whatever, take me to jail, then. Biter will most likely kill you then, and my job will be finished,” concluded Katherine.

“What Biter? You mean that Biter?” Alice asked. Unfortunately for Katherine, Biter was frolicking with Darby a few yards away, all sense of aggression and dominance now gone. This was apparently due to Darby running in the grass with her. Alice continued, “You misnamed her. Her name should not be Biter, but it should be something more feminine.”

“But... but I always assumed that Biter was a boy,” stuttered Katherine.

“Then you assumed wrong,” concluded Alice. “You’re still going to jail, though, there’s no doubt about it.”

A few hours later, Katherine was cursing to herself about how it all went wrong and how Alice should be in this cell, not her.

After a few years, however, she finally found the error in her ways, and she decided to work toward the solution. Alice, however, kept on doing what she used to do and started earning gratitude from the new King. She kept on working with her new horse, Jewel, and training her the same way she had trained Darby.

Katherine was eventually let out of jail and became Alice’s partner. She did this because in jail, the marshals had always talked about doing the right thing and she felt that this was the right thing to do. She was trying to remember why she even started training with a sword and had a flashback of after her mother died.

“Get up!” roared her father, Jim.

“Coming, Dad!” Katherine nearly screamed because she was almost down the stairs, not where her dad thought she was in her room.

“Breakfast, then see me in the living room,” said Jim.

“Got it,” said Katherine. She thought about what her 11th birthday was supposed to be like. Was her father supposed to yell at her to get out of bed? She didn’t know. All she knew was her father had made her breakfast and told her to meet him in the living room.

She ate her breakfast and was surprised to find that when she entered the living room it was almost bare. There was only the couch and the rug left.

“What are we doing?” she asked as her father launched himself at her.

“I thought that since you were 11, I should treat you like I would treat you if you were 11, by teaching you how to protect yourself,” Jim struggled to tell her through clenched teeth. “I’m doing you a favor, Sweetie. There are people out there who are just waiting to hurt you.”

“Why are you so mad at me?” Katherine asked.

“I am mad because your mother went too soft on you,” said Jim.

“Enough!” Katherine yelled at the top of her voice. “You’re not doing me a favor, Dad, and you told me a thousand times already that there are people out there who are waiting to hurt me. Just do me a real favor, Dad, and let me out the front door, okay?”

“Fine, but we’ll finish this later. Don’t you think for a moment that I’m not going to fight you,” Jim finished as he let go of her.

“Bye, Dad, I’ll see you when I’m ready to fight you after school,” Katherine said as she left the house. She was not going to school as it was a holiday, but her father didn’t know that. She was really going to her friend’s house. Her friend’s father forged tailor-made swords, and she was planning on buying one. Her friend, Mala, also gave lessons on swordsmanship, and she had been taking them for some time now.

When she got to Mala’s house, she didn’t hear the familiar clanking as Mala’s father worked in his shop. She rang the doorbell and was greeted by a “Happy Birthday” that came from Mala and her father, Michael, and the sight of a sword on the table. Katherine screamed with delight at the “Happy Birthday” shout that rang through the house.

“Oh my gosh, you guys are amazing!” Katherine exclaimed. “Is the sword for me?” Katherine asked with a delighted smile on her face. Mala nodded and gave it to her.

“My dad has been working on it for a while. We took your drill sword, which you said you liked the feel of, and my dad made a model, forged it, and here you go. Your new sword,” Mala said.

“It’s just what I need. My dad attacked me this morning and said we’d carry on after ‘school,’ which I told him I had today,” Katherine concluded.

“Wow,” was all that Mala could muster. “Anyway, I hope you like your sword.”

“Bye,” said Katherine as she left the house.

She opened her front door as quietly as possible and found her dad in the living room, reading the newspaper, not expecting an attack. She drew her sword and it alerted him that there was someone else in the room.

“What are you doing here?” he asked as she started toward him. “I thought you were in school.”

“You thought wrong. Oh, and next time it’s a holiday, you might consider stopping me from claiming I was going to school,” said Katherine. “Well, you said something about finishing the fight after school, and it’s after school, so let’s get cracking.”

“But I’m unarmed,” her father said with a warning tone in his voice.

“Yeah, the fight will not be a long one, then,” said Katherine. As she spoke she glided forward and hit the hilt of the sword onto the side of his skull, knocking him out cold.

That's where Katherine's flashback ended. She told Alice about reliving that specific part of her life. Alice was reading dispatch papers about their next assignment at the time.

"It's only a simple reaction to being with another girl who is treating you nicely. You remember your mother and then you get little reminders of what life was like with and without her," Alice said, barely looking up from her papers.

"Oh," said Katherine. "I thought it would be that my dad was sad from my mom dying and had decided to take out his grief on me."

"I don't think so," Alice said. "But don't take it from me. I might be wrong. Interpret it any way you want to."

Katherine had three more flashbacks following the first one. The last two included reliving times when she wanted not a battle dog, like Biter, but a Border collie, like Darby. She decided to take a meaning from this and chose a Border collie for herself, who lives with her, Alice, Biter, Darby, and Jewel. Carnation, as Katherine decided to name her, was conveniently Darby's cousin, and they played with each other whenever possible.

#### *One Year Later, in Alice's Yard*

"How are you? Are you okay?" Katherine asked Alice. Alice had a surprised expression on her face.

"Yes, I'm okay. Darby has had puppies!" screamed Alice. She picked up what she was obviously hiding and handed it to Katherine. "I think you'll like this one."

It was almost pure black but had white markings on its paws and head.

"Awww, she's so cute," Katherine said with a wide grin spread over her face. Then, as a thought struck her, she asked Alice "How many puppies did she have?"

"Three," said Alice.

#### *Three Years Later, on One of Their Assignments*

"Why are you working with her? I thought you worked for me!" screamed Rebecca, one of the commanders of the Criminal Society of Now. She was addressing Katherine as she was being dragged into jail by Alice. Katherine had indeed worked for Rebecca and still did occasionally. Undercover for Alice, that is.

# The Volcano

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*The threat of an erupting volcano can't possibly be brushed aside, can it? In **THE VOLCANO** by **Marshall Harvill**, a group of campers is unclear on the meaning of "danger."*

It was a quiet day in the town of Detroit, and four boys, Eric, Steve, Dan, and Kyle, were out hunting with Dan's Uncle Bimbo. They had shot six birds and two bucks, and were aiming down at a rabbit when an earthquake occurred. Dan missed the rabbit and hit a bird. The hunters retrieved the bird. Because of the lucky shot no one paid attention to the earthquake, even though they all heard it.

The campers decided to set up camp in the mountains. The kids were telling scary stories, drinking soda, and watching stars. The quiet birds made no sound, and the wind was silent.

Very soon, a shout came from the town of Detroit. The voice came from the nature observatory and said the volcano, Mt. Killkill, might erupt! Many people panicked in the streets. They held up signs reading "The End Is Near!" and "The End Is Here," but the five campers couldn't have cared less.

Kyle said, "This could get dangerous up here!"

"Nobody cares, Kyle!" said Eric.

"Watch out!" Kyle screamed as he pushed Eric out of the way of a boulder rolling down a mountain.

"Maybe we should get out of here?" Dan screamed over the rumbling.

"Nah," said Bimbo, "we'll be fine."

Meanwhile, people started digging a trench away from Detroit, in hopes of stopping the lava from hitting.

The campers finally noticed a glow at the top of the mountain. Dan started to think, unlike his uncle, and said, "Let's get out of here!" Bimbo thought the lights were pretty, so he was dazed until he was grabbed by Dan, who was heading down the mountain.

"It could be dangerous," he said, so they ran down the mountain.

When the campers reached the trench the town had built, they stopped and panicked. Dan saw a tree and used his gun to mow it down. The gun wasn't powerful enough to cut the tree in time, so all the kids started shooting as well. The fallen tree reached across the trench, and they crossed the bridge. The lava burned the tree as it went into the trench; the town of Detroit was safe for now.

The lava hardened in the trench and created Lava Road, where people now tour every day. The day of Killkill's eruption is now history.



# A Whale's Fate

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*In A WHALE'S FATE, by Claire Brady, Natalie is desperately trying to rescue a group of baby whales. But she soon finds out, it might be harder than it looks!*

**W**hoosh! Bang! Crash! Bam! Those were the only sounds I heard during the day, but I liked it. They were the sounds of the whales' tails crashing against the waves, making them ginormous. Oh, and by the way, my name is Natalie. I live along an ocean-side beach in Clearwater, Florida in 1968. Recently a herd of baby whales had been making a huge commotion over the city with the noises and huge waves. Most fishermen hadn't been able to go fishing because of the dangerous waves. But my family and I liked it.

"Honey, the whale debate is happening today," said my mom in the kitchen.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Oh, come on, haven't you heard all the noise out there!" answered Mom.

"Geez, well, I didn't know they were such a problem. I think they're beautiful and harmless, and if something happens to them, I'm going to give the mayor a piece of my mind!" I yelled as I rushed through the door. I just can't stand the mayor, so I went to where I can relax: Sal's.

Sal's Smoothies is where I hang out half the time. They have delicious smoothies, TVs, arcade games, and more. So I planned to watch the debate there. But when I entered Sal's I got this bad feeling in my stomach as if this wasn't going to end well. And sooner than later I was going to find out that my stomach was definitely right.

"Hey, everyone! Mayor Mcjack is about to decide what to do with the baby whales!" Tubby yelled out. He is the manager at Sal's and my first friend, since I moved to Clearwater.

"Tubby, do you think the whales will be all right?" I asked.

"Of course they will, you can bet on it," Tubby said. But there was a little nervousness in his eyes, as if he knew something that the rest of us didn't. Tubby then walked away and turned on the TV.

"People of Clearwater, the city council and I have decided that a ship will sail to the whales in the sea. When they get there they have been ordered to kill the whales so the noises and waves will be peaceful. We have decided that this decision is best for the community and shall be done on Friday of this week..." spoke the mayor.

Right then and there my heart melted, my stomach knotted, and my knees weakened. I don't know how I managed it, but I ran all the way home and to my room. I cried and cried, and finally my mom came to my room.

"Sweetie, it's going to be okay, there are more whales in the world." My mom tried to calm me down, but it wasn't going to work. My eyes became waterfalls of sadness and despair. But another emotion came over me too, the feeling of courage and bravery. I knew that I had to do something about these whales. But right then, I would just continue weeping.

Two days had gone by since the announcement, and I'd been thinking about the whales. If I sneaked out on my dad's boat to the whales and lured them away before Friday, everything would be fixed. My first try would be that night, when my parents went out to dinner.

My plan was in action. I stole the boat keys, squeaky toys to get the whale's attention, and snacks for me. The docks were like 30 feet away, and then 20 feet, and then 10 feet, and I was there. Okay, I turned the key and the engine started; so far it was good. Wow, before I could even start driving I could see that the waves were crazy, but I could handle it.

Oh my gosh! There they were, the whales: three of them, all a baby blue color with a silky texture to their skin, right off of Billigan's Harbor. I looked back to shore and my neighbor John was yelling, "Who's making all that noise out there!" I finally realized he meant the boat's engine. I quickly turned it off, and John went back in his house. Now it was time to move the whales away.

So first, I had tried squeaking a toy fish to get them away: fail. For my second try, I just called out, "Come on, little whales," somewhere different. Once again I had failed. Oh, and did I forget to mention that the whales pretty much hated me? Each time I came near their flippers or blowhole, they either sprayed me with water or crashed their tails against the water. So I had figured they were going to have to like me if they were going to move anywhere.

Other people probably wanted to help too, but I was the only one with the guts to save the whales because, honestly, most people were afraid of the mayor. He had the most money and power in our town. So he could pretty much do anything to you, if you got on his bad side.

After that I went home, and I was soaking wet from the huge waves. Then, 15 minutes later my parents got home. "Natalie, why are you so wet!" screamed my mom. And my dad gave me a painful glare. I have to admit they were really suspicious, but I told them there was a shower malfunction.

After my first try I went back every day and tried and tried. I even swam with them a little and treated them like pets. After all my time with them I had never seen any of the moms come for them. That's when I figured they must be babies. Because of that I was even more determined to help. (If I got separated from my parents, I would be devastated.) But on the upside, I also named them all. The happiest whale I decided to name Sunny, the shyest is named Gully, and the hyper one is named Austin. Each of them has a personality of its own, and I used that to my advantage. I fed Austin candy. Sunny got fed sushi, and Gully got his favorite food, pasta.

It was Wednesday evening and I felt pretty good, but the whales and I were cutting it close.

I woke up Thursday morning feeling pretty queasy. That was my last chance to save the whales; it was my one chance to fail or succeed. But I could get caught. Whenever I come back to shore there are always people staring at me like I am crazy. But I hadn't minded too much, as long as they didn't tell my parents or the mayor.

I went out on a wooden paddleboat because my parents were at the house. When I got to the whales I hopped out of the boat and swam over to them.

*Each one of them will lose its life, I thought, unless I do something to help them.*

I went over to Gully and whispered, "I want you to live and I know you do too. If you can trust me, follow me, to a safer place where you can live happily." Then I did the same with Austin and Sunny.

I swam to the paddleboat and rowed. I never looked back to see if the whales were following me; I just hoped they were. I probably paddled over a mile away from Clearwater. I finally stopped and looked over my shoulder. They were there! They actually followed me! Then, I yelled out, "You are safe here now, just stay! You can live happily and be free!"

I was crying tears of joy as I rowed back to Clearwater, trying my hardest to keep my secret inside of me.

That next day the front page of the Clearwater Daily read "Whales Mysteriously Leave to a Happier Home," but inside I knew it was no mystery. It was all on purpose. Then soon after the mayor proclaimed, "The whales are not to be killed for they have moved on to a different part of the big, giant sea." And then, everything was right back to the way it was, but it was definitely better.







# Bad Things May Lead to Better Ones

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*In BAD THINGS MAY LEAD TO BETTER ONES by David J. Kent, Billy Gaz is in the race of his life. Will a world champion stop him from completing his life's goal? Anything can happen when you're in a Mini Rocket race!*

## Prologue

Billy Gaz checked everything, the pedals, thrusters, and controls. He knew that in order to win his first Mini Rocket race, everything had to be in tip-top shape. Once Billy got through his checklist, he rolled his mini rocket over to the starting line. Billy then opened the cockpit window and crawled inside. There, he pulled the window closed and tuned the power knobs.

“Here we go,” Billy thought. “Here we go.”

The race was to start at one o'clock. Billy was ready at nine o'clock in the morning! He, being the only racer there, and one of the only people there, couldn't wait much longer. But as time slowly passed by, more and more Mini Rocket racers showed up. Billy recognized all of them: Red Blazer, Loin Claw, Racer 6. All of these names were familiar to him. He had a name too, The Flying Soul. Billy knew that this name was perfect for him. But, without the name, his rocket was nothing more than dark blue on the sides. Billy didn't mind though. He wasn't into the art section of life.

Billy then said to himself, “I may have a dull rocket, but my soul is the exact opposite.”

And that was true.

\* \* \*

The big race was just one hour away and Billy felt like he could explode. Nothing was on his mind but racing. He couldn't rest, think, or even eat! That didn't matter. The only thing the raceway food stand was selling was hot dogs and fries. Yuck! Billy hated hot dogs and fries. The only meat he liked was bacon, something he never got to have. And fries were too salty for his tastes. So, Billy thought about the thing at hand, Mini Rocket racing.

“Yes,” said Billy when the announcer told the racers to prepare their mini rockets for the race. “Imagine,” thought Billy, “the prizes at the finish line; the wealth, the power that would follow him after this one race.” Billy was ready to race, to win. The light at the starting line counted down. 3, 2, 1, go!

Billy blazed down the track with outstanding speed. He passed everyone in sight.

Nobody could catch up with The Flying Soul.

“This is too easy,” laughed Billy as his mini rocket blasted up the first hill. He then saw the first gate.

The raceway had three of them. If you wanted to leave or just couldn’t take it anymore, the gates are where you would go. Billy thought about how easy it would be to just turn around and go through the gate, the gate to freedom. After all, when the race was over, victor or not, he would go back to life in a cage. Billy didn’t have a family, only two witch-like adults. They took Billy from his mom at birth. Day and night, he worked. Billy had no fun or toys, except a small stuffed bear he found in the streets. That was Billy’s only comfort in his life.

This was it! Billy had raced down the track so fast that he couldn’t see anyone behind him. He plunged down the final hill and passed the few racers in front of him, all but him, the best Mini Rocket racer in the world. His real name was Shane. But everybody else called him “The Blue Wind.”

“Just two more miles,” Billy said to himself. “Just two.”

Shane on the other hand thought, “Come on Shane. You can beat this guy.” The track here was the hardest part to get through. The uneven landscape made the track come up at several spots. If your thrusters hit one of those bumps, you’d be on your way to heaven. Billy got over the bumps with ease. Shane was having a lot of trouble.

“If I don’t get through, and if I lose the race, my public rankings will collapse.” With that, Shane switched his double thrusters to triple thrusters. “That should do it,” thought Shane.

Meanwhile, Billy was over and done with the bumps. “I can do this,” he said with determination.

Billy knew he was close to the final mile mark. He flipped on the double thrusters—big mistake. His mini rocket bolted into the sky. Even though he was still going forward, soon the elevation would be so high that when he landed the rocket would blow.

“There is now only one thing I can do,” said Billy. With that, Billy jumped over the side and reached for his thrusters. The smoke filled his lungs. He could smell the burning fuel. The thrusters were so hot to the touch that Billy had to crawl back and get fireproof gloves. Now, back on



the scene, Billy took the double thruster in hand and pushed it until it was in line with the original thruster. Then he got back in the cockpit and slowly descended from the sky. The mini rocket finally touched ground and Billy took off to the final mile marker.

On the final mile of the race, Shane hit Billy's left thruster with the front right side of his mini rocket. One push of a triple thruster and Billy went flying. The rocket crashed in a haystack near the finish line.

The race was over. Shane had won, but without pride. Billy wasn't hurt, but was furious. He went straight to Shane and yelled, "You idiot, don't you know how much those mini rocket cost?"

"Do I care?" replied Shane.

Billy screamed, "Shane, are you at least going to pay me back?"

"I am the Blue Wind," said Shane firmly.

Reading the newspaper the next morning, Billy saw something incredible. An article said, "Shane Gaz, or 'The Blue Wind,' won yet another Mini Rocket race yesterday." Billy stabbed his spoon through the cereal he was eating. He read on.

"In the picture, there is Shane's proud mother, Mary E. Gaz, shown to the right of the trophy Shane won." Billy thought about this for a moment.

"So, the person I hate the most is my brother," thought Billy. "No wonder we argued so well. And the mother: I found my mother!" Just then the doorbell rang. As Billy rushed to the door, he thought, "I will find her. I will find my mother, even if I have to do everything imaginable. I will." Billy opened the door and saw what he had only seen in a dream—his mom.

At the Gaz household, everything was normal. Shane was winning Mini Rocket races around the world. Mary was expecting a new baby boy. As for Billy, he continued to make up for all the school he'd missed. Everything was good. Everything was perfect!

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#### Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Mrs. Babich for giving me this project. If she didn't, I would not have written the best story I ever made. I would like to also thank Microsoft Word. Without it, I couldn't have made such a story as "Bad Things May Lead to Better Ones."

# The Baseball Tournament

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**THE BASEBALL TOURNAMENT**, by *Keith Schmidt*, is a story of a baseball player that is playing in the National Youth Baseball Tournament with his team, the Birmingham Eagles. The main character, Darrel Patting, finds himself in a series of bad feelings for himself, and struggles to find his way out and help his team.

I checked the runner at second base with beads of sweat streaming down my face. It was the semifinals of the National Youth Baseball Tournament and the game was on the line and I was pitching. If we lost, we would be done and gone. But if we won, we would go on to the finals.

It was the top of the ninth and the score was us, the Birmingham Eagles, 5, and the Los Angeles Broncos, 5. There were two outs and the count was 2 and 1 with a runner on second base. I had to be careful because, if I gave up one base hit, they were likely to take the lead.

Now, all I had to do was throw low and get this guy to ground out. That would finish the inning and our big hitter, Larry Gary, was up next. I threw a perfect pitch down low right in the corner of the strike zone. But apparently the ump didn't like it because he called ball three and the batter was in control now. I had to throw a strike. I gave him a fastball on the inside and he smacked a line drive to left field. Our left fielder, Trent Gilbert was coming at it as fast as he could, but he couldn't catch in the air.

"HOME, HOME!" I yelled as I ran to back up the catcher. The guy that was at second was now rounding third and on his way home. The thing the other team didn't know was that Trent had an arm. He gunned it home without a cut off and the ball was in our catcher's mitt three steps before the runner and our catcher laid down a perfect tag.

"HE'S OUT!" the ump yelled. That was a relief.

Now, Larry Gary was up, and the pitcher made the mistake of losing his cool and throwing a high fastball on a 3 and 0 count. CRACK! Larry crushed the ball and we all knew as soon as he made contact it was going over the fence for a walk off home run. We all stood at home plate and waited to celebrate, all pounding on each other.

We were all talking and enjoying the moment on the bus ride back to our hotel in Los Angeles, except for me. I was sitting in my own seat and just not feeling right. I felt like the pitchers never get credit for winning the game unless they make the final out. I had to get that thought out of my head since we were going to Cooperstown, New York tomorrow and I was supposed to pitch that game.

When we arrived at Cooperstown, the game was the following day, so we had the day to do anything we wanted pretty much. So, I spent the day with the team driving all the way to New York City and looked around there for a little bit. I got a good night's sleep and was pumped for tomorrow's game.

Now, we got to the game and we were warming up, but I just didn't feel right. I couldn't get that feeling out my head.

Right before the game, I looked around and saw everyone around me watching...the pressure was on. I was shaking! I just slipped on an under armor pretending I was cold because my coach was staring at me.

Dean Martin started off pitching for us and the Pensacola Gators were all over him. They rallied for a 4 to 0 lead early. But we held them and got some runs in to make the game 2 to 4. Now it was the ninth inning and still the same score, but not for long. We had one out with the bases loaded, and Dean had a three and one count. He walked the guy and gave them a 5 to 2 lead. The coach waved me over and pulled Dean. Just like that, I was in a really tough situation.

I pitched myself into trouble right away; it was a 3 and 1 count. I threw a fastball on the inside; the batter swung...and hit the ball. Not hard though, our shortstop snagged it and whipped it home to get the lead runner. It was just in time. Now we had two down, and I wasn't letting anymore runs in. I was annoyed though, frustrated for some reason. I threw a curveball that sank perfectly into the bottom outside corner. The ump signaled a ball though. I ignored it and walked back to the mound. This time I gave the batter a fastball on the inside, right over the plate. The ump signaled another ball. *Come on, where's it supposed to be*, I thought. This time I threw another fastball, and my frustration got the best of me. The pitch was way low and in the dirt, our catcher, Tim, missed the scoop. I ran to cover home, late though, I had almost forgotten my job, and when I checked the third base runner, I knew he was going. His teeth were gritted, he was going all out and so was I. Tim turned around with his eyes so wide I thought they might pop out. When he tossed me the ball and it was in midair between us...my glove fell off. Without thinking, I reached with my bare hand and grabbed it with two fingers. Now came the tagging, I had to tag the runner with my bare hand without it getting knocked away!

Although the runner was really only two steps away, everything froze in front of me, and I did the most natural thing. I tucked the ball in my long sleeve, somehow doing it in the half second I had. I lunged in front of the batter, and I was there in time, I knew he was out. Then everything fell silent. The ump was trying to make the decision, while the players and fans were eager to hear the call.

“HE’S OUT!” the ump screamed.

*Finally, a call that goes my way*, I thought.

One thing I had forgotten about was that I was up fourth this inning and the best thing that could happen to me happened; the first guy had a base hit to right, then the pitcher walked the next two batters. So here I was with no outs, losing by three runs, and all I needed was a base hit which would probably knock in two runs. The pitcher threw a fastball just where I wanted it on the first pitch. Low and a little inside, and I swung for a base hit. It was right on the sweet spot and I drove it deep. I started sprinting to first because I knew that’s what my coaches wanted to see, but I already knew that it was long gone.

A walk off grand slam, not exactly what I was trying to do, but it works. Two walk off wins in a row, but this time I was getting plenty of credit.

# The Big Game

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*The main character, Shawn, sleeps in and gets to his first baseball game late. Because of that, his coach puts him in right field. The next thing he knows, he's in the hospital. Find out what happens to Shawn in **THE BIG GAME** by **Carson Sowle**.*

It was about twelve thirty at night when Devin woke up. “What time is it,” yawned Devin.

“I don’t know. Why you don’t look at the clock!” nagged Shawn.

“Shawn, why are you still awake?”

“I don’t know. I guess I can’t sleep.”

“Well, you have your last championship game tomorrow, so you better get some sleep.”

“Yes, you are probably right.” The next moment, Shawn was snoring.

The next morning Shawn woke up and Devin was gone. He went out to the kitchen to let his eyes adjust and get some breakfast. “It’s already ten forty-five!” screamed Shawn. As he pulled his sliding shorts on, he turned on the radio. His big game has already started.

“It looks like Shawn Daniels isn’t here yet. Let’s hope that he comes,” the announcer commented.

“Yup, he’ll be there,” Shawn mumbled. About five minutes later, Shawn was in the car, driving to his game.

When Shawn arrived, his coach screamed at him. “Where have you been? We’ve been looking all over for you!”

“I’m so sorry. I overslept.”

“Ok, now go out to right field. Tell David to come in and take a break.” In the outfield, there were Jimmy and Tom. Jimmy and Tom were two of Shawn’s best friends. Once the game started Shawn got into his ready position and right as he got settled, the batter clobbered a drive directly into Shawn. He didn’t have enough time to react to the ball and it hit him square in the forehead, knocking him out. His mom called the paramedics and he was taken to the hospital. Later that day, he woke up and a doctor said that he had suffered a concussion. After he heard that, he fell back asleep.

About ten minutes later the doctor comes in and woke him up. “Will I be able to play the next game? And will I be able to join track?” asked Shawn.

“Yes, if you promise not to get hit in the head anymore,” the doctor said jokingly.

“But what about track?” Shawn asked again.

“I wouldn’t recommend it because we just discovered that you have broken your ankle.”

“Well, then how can I play baseball?”

“You could have someone else run for you.”

“OK!” He had forgotten that he could have a sub runner. “Cool.” Then he fell back and took a rest.

When Shawn woke up from his rest, he had a walking cast on. He walked around a little to make sure the cast was comfortable. He had a little bit of a limp, but he could play baseball and he was flabbergasted.

# Danger Zone

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*When Victoria is chosen out of a lottery to build an obstacle course, her world becomes filled with twists and turns. In **DANGER ZONE** by **Victoria Auten**, she has to use her creativity to make the course come to life.*

**I**t all started on the first day of Winter Break, December 16. I have this tendency to put my name into every drawing in hope of winning something. On this day, there was a chance to design the Danger Zone obstacle course and to pick the contestants. The only other thing was that they were picking two people, so it was kind of like a battle to see who does it better. And, just my luck, I was picked along with mean, bratty Kayla.

I was at home reading my favorite book, *The Hunger Games*. The phone started to ring. In my house, you never answer the phone without an adult unless you know the caller ID. I couldn't believe that the Danger Zone people called me. When they told me that I won, I was screaming and yelling. I was so excited, but then I found out that Kayla had won as well. My expression changed completely. I guess it wouldn't be that bad since we were competing, not working together.

I was invited to come down to the studio and check out where I would work. The first thing I did when I arrived was cover the studio in basset hound magnets and stickers. I have a basset hound so that's why I did it. I decided to try my best to ignore Kayla. I just hoped she would do the same to me. It has already been a very long day, so I decided I would go home and come back tomorrow.

My day had been so exciting that I forgot to tell my mom and dad. After I told them, they were so excited and helped me with a ton of stuff, like brainstorming some ideas. That night, I mostly watched episodes of Danger Zone to get some ideas. Nothing really worked. I had to think of something before tomorrow or I would just be sitting in my studio all day long. I went to sleep and woke up the next morning with a great idea.

My brainstorm came from my dog, Dudley. He is still a puppy, so I spend a lot of time with him. Dudley's ears are so long that they are just plain in his way. When he walks on the floor, he's like a broom and he picks up everything in his path. He isn't my only inspiration though. I got some from my sisters, too.

I have two sisters, Lily and Alexis. Lily and Alexis inspired me because they like to put on shows. Today's show was like a circus act. They were going over the monkey bars and doing flips on swings which I decided I would like to have in my show. They also added water to their act which

really made it cool. I think everyone in my family has helped me so far. One thing that struck me at the last minute was that I didn't have anyone to be in my show yet.

The next day, I went in my studio and started to call people to see who could be on my show. The people I choose have to be crazy. Luckily, I found the perfect people to be in my show. Deryl, he used to be a fire tamer until he actually swallowed the fire. Katie, she used to be a bungee jumper until the string broke. Calvin used to be a firefighter, but he was afraid of fire. Anna used to be a ballerina until she broke her toes. And, Billy, used to be a librarian until he ate the books.

Finally, I know all of the details and it is time to start building up my obstacle course. I decided to invite my family to come and help me. I thought it would make it more fun. The first thing I built was the Fire Ring, Twister of Terror, Book Drop, Ice Skating Rink, Bungee Cord Drop, and the Big, Red, Bouncy Balls. I was so excited when I finished! I invited the directors to come and see my work. They thought it was awesome. They told me that Kayla hadn't finished, so I went over to see if I could help her. I helped her finish her course and she was grateful. It wasn't going to be as good as mine, though.

I went home for some sleep, but I was too nervous. The next morning, I had a big cup of hot chocolate and got in the car to go to the studio. I met all of my contestants again and tried to reassure them that they were going to do great. I don't think it helped though. Before the competition started, we interviewed them. Most said that they were nervous, except for Deryl. He said that he was going to win and there was no way he could lose. I forgot to tell you about one part in the obstacle course, The Room of Doom. In this room, they have to face their fears. I picked a name out of a hat to see who was going to go first. Deryl was picked to go first.

There was the sound of gunfire and Deryl was off to the Ring of Fire. Deryl froze in his tracks since he was so scared. I had figured he would be afraid of this part. He put the fire out and then went through the ring, I was very impressed! Next, he was on his way to the Twist of Terror. This was like a tornado, so they had to grab onto a rope and spin to the other side without falling into the mud. Deryl did this with such ease. He was soon onto the next part, the Book Drop. He had to jump onto a moving book and ride it down the slide. He was doing amazing! I didn't think anything would stop him. Next thing I know, he went through the Ice Skating Rink and the Bungee Cord Drop. Finally, he had to face his fear. He had to swallow fire again. This part took about half an hour, but he actually did it. I was so proud of him.



Katie and Anna didn't do very well. They both failed when they got stuck in the Room of Doom. Billy was my favorite contestant. He actually ate the books on his way down the Book Drop. Then, he went right back up to the top and rode it again! Next thing I know, he ate all of the books! Calvin didn't go anywhere. He got stuck on the Ring of Fire.

I lost the competition, but it didn't bother me since I had so much fun creating it. Deryl decided to go back to his old job and become a fire tamer. I went to a lot of his shows. It was really funny watching everyone try the obstacle course.

I still enter my name in many other contests, but it is different now. I feel like the experience will never be as good as this one.

I hear the phone ringing. I have to go; I think I won another contest.

# It's Not Over Till It's Over

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*One person, or quarterback, can save a game. Can he do it? If you want to find out, read **IT'S NOT OVER TILL IT'S OVER** by **Colton Tinsley**.*

“**H**ut, hut!” He snapped the ball. By him, I mean me, Matt Carnage. I was the starting quarterback for the Detroit Falcons. That’s my football team. We were playing the Indiana Panthers for the Midwestern Championship.

It was a grueling 98 degrees out, and it was the middle of July. We were up 37-29 and had the ball at our own 32-yard line.

Anyway, back to the game. I snapped the ball from our center, and faked the handoff to our running back Cody Hill. He got pounded by a linebacker right at the line of scrimmage.

I took the next snap. Cody jumped right in front of a blitzing safety that would have made me lose yardage. That gave me an extra three seconds in the pocket. I avoided an oncoming defensive tackle. I rolled out of the pocket, and I slipped a pass to the tight end, Ryan Johnson. At five feet eight inches and 134 pounds, he bowled over the scrawny cornerback and ran for 27 yards!

We had the clock running, and a new fresh set of downs in our hands. Destiny was ours, until the next play.

I snapped the ball, and a blitzing linebacker bowled me over. The last thing I saw was every player on the field in a big pile, fighting for the ball.

I got up and jogged off the field. Coach Hill, our offensive coordinator, said it wasn’t my fault. “It’s OK, nobody blocked on the line except Ryan. You’ll get it next time.”

“Coach, you got to tell the offensive line they got to block! I don’t know how we’ll win the game with no blocking on the line!”

“Well, if they don’t block next time, they’ll get benched for sure. I’m tired of them not blocking. But they have been out in almost 100-degree weather for a couple of hours. I’ll talk to them.”

“Please.”

He said he saw there was absolutely no blocking, except for Ryan, on the line. It made me feel better. But that wasn’t the worst case.

Our opponents had the ball at their own 49-yard line! I watched in horror as the best defense in the Midwest slipped up and let our opponents score.

Our opponents were now back in the game. The new score was 37-35.

I looked up at the clock, and saw that there was only 4:38 left in the game. I told myself, “If I fumble the ball again, an easy field goal and the game is over.”

I had to use the ball and the time wisely. I got up off the bench and jogged onto the field. Cody Hill had returned the kickoff to the 41-yard line. Great field position and the ball. Perfect.

With 3:48 to go in the game, I snapped the ball. I handed it off to Cody, who pitched it back to me. I threw a bullet to Ryan, who again bowled over the scrawny cornerback. He ran for seventeen yards. He got the ball into our opponent’s territory. I looked up at the clock and saw that there was 1:32 left in the game. “YES!” I thought to myself. Finally we had enough time to get some points on the board.

I snapped the ball and quickly handed it off to Cody, who ran for seven yards. I wasted ten seconds from the clock, and then snapped the ball. I dumped it to Cody again for a three-yard screen. First down, and one minute to go. I called a timeout and gave my offense a break. We got some water and ran back out onto the field.

I threw a bullet across the line to Ryan, who instead of running it for ten yards ran backwards and pitched it to our other wide receiver, Collin Hurt. He ran the other way, fooled the defense, and ran into the end zone. TOUCHDOWN FALCONS! The crowd roared so loud, I couldn’t hear myself think.

Time expired, and the game was over. We had won the Midwestern Championship! The whole team ran out onto the field to celebrate. The linemen hoisted me up onto their shoulders and ran around the field.

I took the honors with Cody to pour the Gatorade jug onto our coach. The coach was my dad, who was so surprised. The team and I had said if we won, Cody and I would pour the jug onto my dad. The whole team was so excited. Later that night the whole team came over for a party to celebrate our win.

We made a toast, and then my house turned to a big crowd of food, music, and people celebrating our championship. After the party we had a big ceremony, and my dad told the team we would be having our big banquet the next week.

# John Smith

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*In* **JOHN SMITH**, by *Joe Behrmann*, a poor man living on the street changes his life forever with just one trip to the gym.

It was a cold winter morning in Detroit when John Smith, a poor man, was walking to a local gym to stay warm. It was there when a man dressed in Detroit Pistons clothes was playing basketball. He asked John if he wanted to play.

“Sure,” said John.

“Oh! I almost forgot to introduce myself. My name is Dwayne Clark.”

“My name is John Smith,” said John.

As the two men started to play, Dwayne noticed John was the best basketball player he had ever seen. He knew John had to try out for the Pistons. He would be great and he would make a lot of money.

“John, you have to try out for the Pistons. You would be the star player on the team. You might even be the MVP of the league,” exclaimed Dwayne.

“Really?” asked John.

“Definitely,” said Dwayne.

When John left the gym he was very excited that he was going to be trying out for the Pistons. At the try-out, all of the coaches were amazed with John’s skills. He made the team easily. When John found out he made the team he felt amazing. He knew he was going to get a lot of money for playing with the team.

When John arrived at the first game he saw all of the fans screaming, neon lights all over the place, white towels waving, a big TV screen with words flashing on it, a mascot running around the floor, all of the players shooting around, and lastly, a group of fans in the first row with a huge sign that said GO JOHN! All of that pumped him up for the game. That game, John scored a game-high of 31 points. All of the fans at the end of the game were yelling for John. He was very happy with himself.

His success continued through the rest of the games until the middle of the season. Then came the All-Star game. He was voted in by fans to be a starter. In the All-Star game he scored a mind-boggling 46 points.

“Great game,” said Dwayne.

“Thanks,” said John.

The Pistons easily got into the playoffs. They won every game until the championship. In the championship, they played the Miami Heat. This team was fully-loaded. They had LeBron James, Dwayne Wade, and Chris Bosh. They were a very good team. In the first game of the championship

the Heat won. John had an okay game scoring 20 points. In the second game, the Heat won again. LeBron James scores a staggering 67 points.

In the third game, the Pistons finally won because John scored a game-winning shot as time expired. The fourth game was a battle to the end. It went into overtime. The Pistons just came away with the win from ten-point overtime from Rodney Stuckey. The fifth game was a blow-out win for the Heat. All of the starters scored at least 20 points. The end score was 142 to 100. The Pistons had to win the sixth game if they wanted to win the championship. The Pistons just won from a great game from John.

The seventh game was very close. Everyone played well. The game came down to double-overtime. The Pistons had a game-winning shot from John! John was the hero of the NBA championship. This was his rookie season. In the off-season he was voted the MVP of the league. The next five seasons went well for the Pistons too. They made the playoffs every season and won the championship three times.

The sixth season was when the problems started. In the season-opener, John got a severe-concussion. He was out for the season. The concussion was so severe the doctors didn't know if he would play the same. The next season John played, but he wasn't nearly as good. It took him the whole season to finally recover. After that, he was back to normal, winning championships. This was an extraordinary comeback. John would go on to win six more championships. This was a new record for a single-player. No other player had won as many championships as John Smith. He would retire after 21 seasons.

# The Surfer

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*A boy becomes the best surfer in the world through hard work and determination in*  
**THE SURFER** by *Will Bradley.*

There was a boy named Mike who was 14 years old. He lived in Empire, Michigan. He surfed at Empire Beach with his friends on Lake Michigan. He loved to surf, and his dream was to be the best surfer in the world.

Mike was the best surfer in his town. He entered and won the local surf competitions. There was a man there from Rip Curl (a surf company), and he told him he should go to California where there were bigger waves where he could do bigger tricks.

Mike watched videos of surfers in California and Hawaii and couldn't believe how big the waves were. He wanted to go to California. He begged his parents to take a trip out there, and they did. He entered a big surf competition in Huntington Beach and won 2nd place and \$5,000. Then he went to another competition in Santa Cruz and won 1st place and \$10,000.

People were starting to notice him because he was so good and he came out of nowhere. The same guy he had met in Michigan from Rip Curl came up to him after he had won and told him Rip Curl wanted to sponsor him. He had some weird way of surfing that made him different from all the others. He could balance better than every other surfer.

He was so excited, but he would have to move to California. His parents realized how good of a surfer their son was. They loved being in California and knew this was Mike's dream. Rip Curl said they would pay for the move. So they moved to Laguna Beach, California where Rip Curl put them in a condo on the beach.

Once Mike was in California, Rip Curl paid for a coach to train him. He wanted to train so he could win the number one spot in Hawaii. He trained for a year and learned a bunch of new tricks. He was very competitive and wanted to be the number one surfer in the world. He would train in the morning and be home-schooled at night.

He finally went to Hawaii and only won 4th place. He was disappointed and knew he had to train more.

Mike trained for another year and went back to Hawaii. He won the competition. Then he went to Australia and won. He was the number one surfer in the world competition and was on the cover of Surfer Magazine. He was now the best surfer in the world.

Because he was the number one surfer in the world, he came out with his own line on Rip Curl surfboards and clothes. He made so much money that he supported his family for the rest of their lives and he traveled all over the world telling people to support others. He donated 200,000 dollars to hospitals all over the world.

# The Time I Became Quarterback

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**THE TIME I BECAME QUARTERBACK** by *Joseph Esshaki* is about Tom's big chance. All he has to do is play one good game.

**H**i, my name is Tom, and I play football for the Birmingham Patriots. My team and I were going to football practice to watch film. Our last game had not been great. We lost. We were not doing a great job at our positions. So coach decided he was going to move us around. I was a wide receiver at that time, but I was hoping he would put me as quarterback because I had a good arm.

Coach was calling names. "Cole, you are at wide receiver. Logan, you are at running back." My heart was beating so fast. I was just waiting to hear my name get called. And finally Coach said, "Tom, you are going to be quarterback." I was so excited.

On Tuesday we had a scrimmage against JV Blue. It took some time getting used to taking snaps and remembering plays. That day it was raining, and it was tough taking snaps because the ball was slippery. I completed two passes, and I had one fumble. At the end of practice my coach gave me a pat on the back and said, "Good job for your first time at quarterback."

On Wednesday we had some serious conditioning to do: laps, suicides, and other painful drills. On Friday we practiced our plays. I wasn't that great because it was my first week, but I did pretty well.

It was Saturday, my first game at quarterback. I was really nervous. The crowd was screaming, and all I had to do was just mess up one thing for the blame to be on me. But luckily I had no fumbles, and I completed my first pass.

That game everyone was saying, "Good job at first-time quarterback," and my coach said I did a great job. My coach gave me a pat on my back. I was really proud that day, and so was my team.





**New  
Timeline**



# The Adventures of a Rubber Ducky

---

*A rubber duck finds himself in an unexpected adventure where the future is unknown. Read his adventure in Arnold Rothstein's story THE ADVENTURES OF A RUBBER DUCKY.*

“DIE, LITTLE STUPID DUCKY! HA, HA, HAAAA!” Teddy screeched as he was playing in the bath. All of a sudden, he decides to put me, a rubber duck, down the drain. He takes a big steak knife and starts chipping at the drain.

While he was cutting, I try to run away, without success. I think he is doing this because I am ugly. Well, it is true; I am not a really handsome rubber duck. First, I'm blue on my beak, yellow-brown a little everywhere, orange on my butt, and a little red on top of my head. On top of that, I am completely chewed from the four generations of the Johnstons.

I don't think I have ever been so scared in my life. During the long trip down, I want to cry, which I have never done. “These are going to be my last moments in life,” I say as tears come out of my eyes. The pipes are just the darkest, smelliest, scariest things of my life. There just seems to be no end. But, if I do die, no more Teddy!

Minutes later, I see a glimpse of light. In seconds, I arrive in this pool of deep, dark, smelly brown stuff. By the terrible, unbearable smell, I can tell it is poop. But I am ALIVE! Once again, tears start coming out of my eyes because I'm so happy.

After puking rubber a few dozen times, I start going into a cleaning process. I am put in plenty of pools, where stuff is taken away from vacuums in the side of the pools. As time goes by, I go from pool to pool.

I am about to enter the fifth pool when a big chunk of poop clogs the pipe that connects the fourth and fifth pool. Water rises and overflows the pool. This is my only chance to freedom. I hop out of the pool and jump into a nearby river. I fall asleep as the current takes me away.

Hours later, I have the taste of salt in my mouth. I look around, and I am in the middle of an ocean. All I can think of is *What a nice smell* and *Where am I?*

I start swimming around and say in astonishment, “Goodness, this water could fill up at least 50 bathtubs!” All of a sudden, I am really hungry. A fish goes by, so I try to catch it, but it is way too fast. I swim around looking for food when I see a floating piece of wood. I hop on

and find plenty of little shells. They are quite disgusting compared to Teddy's strawberry shampoo, but at least it is food.

I continue exploring when a cruise liner goes by. For fun, they use a net and pick me up. The sailors are actually nice people, dressed the old-fashioned way with funny hats and striped navy blue and white shirts.

They bring me to the captain, and I just can't help but laugh. HA, HA, HA! He is so fat! He is on an electric wheelchair that has a 150-horsepower motor, just to carry him around. He says he is on a diet, but he still eats a few boxes of king size Milky Ways a day!

All of a sudden, there is silence in the room. Everybody in the room is staring at me. An ugly sailor screeches, "The duck just said something!" and I find myself in a cage.

"Okay, little ducky, speak to me. Say something," the captain muttered. We were in a room with a few barrels that had "beer" written on them, and a nice painting of an island in the middle of an ocean. There was a table on which my cage sat and two simple cloth and wood chairs. And then, there was the captain.

He had the same dirty clothes, and he was smoking a cigarette. He seemed to be pouring sweat out of his greasy black hair. His eyes were looking at me in such a really mean way that they seemed to be popping out. "SAY SOMETHING A BEFORE I CUT YOUR NECK!" he spat on me.

*No, no, no*, I think. He seemed to have read to read my mind because he chuckles and takes out a huge knife--bigger than Teddy's steak knife. I quickly say, "OK, OK, I will talk!" He looks at me in astonishment, and I look at him back and can swear that I can see a dollar sign in his eyes. That is when he mutters, "I think I can make some money, he he he."

It has been around two weeks since I have been on this stupid ship. The crew does not care about me anymore. The captain made me go in a cardboard box without windows. We are headed to San Francisco, where I used to live, except that we will be on the north side instead of the south side. I have heard the first mate say that we will be there in about an hour.

Thirty minutes later, some sort of bird is flying over me. Every few minutes it comes closer to me until I can see it is a bald eagle. The captain sees it too and come closer to me, acting like he thinks it is going to do something to me, his money-maker. He stays there a while when a sailor comes up and says, "We are almost there, sir."

All of a sudden, the eagle swerves down and takes the box, with me in it. The captain takes out a pistol and fires twice. He misses with the first shot but puts the second shot in the eagle's left wing. The eagle screeches but does not stop.

My shoulders hurt because of the eagle's sharp claws. The sun is going to go down, and I have no idea where we are going. All of a sudden, the eagle drops me and he goes down because he has lost too much blood.

I am falling, and before I land, I can see that I am over a daycare for little kids. I land on my butt as parents bring their kids. One kid comes up to me and yells "DUCKY!"

And this is how my new life began.

# The Amazing John Johnson

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*When a hero is near, he might be the one and only John Johnson. Even though he did something bad doesn't mean he's bad. Read all about it in **THE AMAZING JOHN JOHNSON** by **Brett Dudeck**.*

The amazing John Johnson was a super hero. He loved fighting bad guys and saving people.

His family came from a planet named Hero. The reason he is here is because he knows that there are a lot of bad people on Earth.

One time he saved a girl named Lisa Star from falling off a building, and he caught the bad guy, too.

People loved John until he became a villain. He hurt a super model and gave her a broken leg and a concussion. He had been captured by a villain and was paralyzed by a bad captain to make him do that.

He escaped from jail by using his superpowers and using a laser gun to get out of there. He changed his name to Joel Holloway, left Earth, and went home for 20 years. He thought if someone saw him he'd go back to jail and get the death penalty.

Everybody forgot about him and went on about their own lives. But then he came back because he thought there was more to complete on planet Earth.

# The Anime Incident

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*When two siblings get sucked into an anime world, they try to find a way out. But if they don't solve the bigger problem in that world, they might never see home again! Find out if they escape in **THE ANIME INCIDENT**, by **Shane Donovan**.*

“Hey, Hannah,” I said, walking into my sister’s room. “Want to watch TV with me?”

“Sorry, Nick, but I have to finish my homework,” Hannah explained.

“Come on, Hannah,” I sang. “Our show’s on.” I could tell she was having a hard time resisting me. I tried again. “I’ll let Noodle watch it with us!” Noodle is Hannah’s cat. He’s usually not allowed on the sofa, but our parents were out to dinner, so they wouldn’t know.

“Oh, okay!” she said. “But only for a little bit.”

Hannah is in love with that show. It’s an anime show we watch once in a while. It ended a long time ago, but they show reruns of it every Saturday night. We’ve seen every episode, but Hannah is so obsessed with it that she insists on watching them again. Tonight her favorite episode was on. We plopped down on the couch with Noodle in front of the TV, and started to watch.

About halfway through the episode, a tall man just appeared out of nowhere on the screen. He was dressed in a black cloak, so we couldn’t see his face.

“Hey, he wasn’t there before!” Hannah exclaimed. Leave it to Hannah to memorize a whole episode, line by line. The strange man looked straight at us and started walking toward the screen.

“Whoa, this is getting kinda creepy,” I said. “Are you sure that this year isn’t, like, the 25th anniversary of the show or something and they made a special spooky Halloween episode for tonight?”

Hannah looked at me with her signature I-can’t-believe-you-can-be-that-dumb face.

“Nick, for one thing, it’s the middle of June. And, I would have known if there was going to be a special episode.” I rolled my eyes, but thankfully, Hannah didn’t see it.

“Let’s just enjoy the show.” When the man’s blacked-out face was right in front of the camera, he reached out a pale, slender hand toward us.

“Nick? What’s going on?” said Hannah, her voice quivering. Noodle leaped off the sofa with a frightened meow. We felt ourselves being pulled toward the man’s outstretched hand.

“Are you feeling this?” I shouted. Hannah was too busy hanging onto

the sofa for dear life to speak. But the man's pull was too strong. Hannah and I were wrenched off the couch and into the television, and then everything went black.

I awoke on a sidewalk. I looked around and saw Hannah waking up beside me. That's strange. We woke up at the same time. We both looked around and saw that we were in a big city.

"Whoa, it looks all cartoony," said Hannah.

"Yeah, but don't you think it looks familiar?" I said.

"You're right!" said Hannah. "It looks exactly like the city in the show! I forgot the name of it, though." She looked around at her surroundings and spotted a shop labeled Furuba Books.

"Oh yeah!" she shouted. "That's what it was called! Furuba City! Wait...does that mean we're in Furuba City?"

"Could it be that—" I started. "No, that's impossible."

"What?" Hannah asked.

"No. It's probably just a coincidence. It's not important," I replied. "What is important is finding someone to help us get back home."

As if on cue, a teenager walked up to us. He was thin and handsome, with silvery hair that fell to his shoulders. He had big round eyes, a small mouth and a pointed nose. "I apologize if I am being rude, but you look like you just stepped out of thin air. Where are you from?" he asked. Hannah and I looked at each other, wide-eyed. He looked exactly like one of the main characters from our anime show!

"My name's Yuki," he said. "What are your names?" Our eyes bulged wider. Yuki was the name of the character from our show.

We tried to ignore the fact that our TV sucked us into our favorite show, and tried to concentrate on the task at hand. We also were shocked that Yuki didn't freak out because we looked so different than him. I took a peek at what we looked like, and almost had a heart attack. We looked like anime characters, too! We had big eyes and small noses and mouths, but that wasn't all. We looked 3D and everything, but sort of animated, too. The small details, like the hair on our arms, were gone. It was so weird.

"Uh, my name's Nick," I stammered. "And this is my sister, Hannah."

"Hi," said Hannah weakly.

"We're not from around here," I explained. I tried not to tell Yuki that we were sucked into this anime world by a tall man in a black cloak.

"Could I show you around the city?" Yuki asked. We happily obliged. We needed all the help we could get to go back home.

A couple of hours later, we were on the way to Akito's mansion. Wait, let me back up. There wasn't much to see in the city. It was almost



deserted, except for a few residents. Yuki explained that the city was cursed. Yes, cursed. He said that whenever one of its residents comes into contact with an animal, the person turns into that animal. Then Yuki said that they didn't know how their city got cursed, but that a suspicious person in a dark cloak had arrived in Furuba City a few months before and moved into the abandoned mansion at the edge of town.

That's when the curse started up. People everywhere were turning into dogs, cats, and other pets. The only reason there were still people in the city was that they didn't want their city to die out, so they were keeping it together. He then said the stranger's name was Akito. I knew that this Akito was the man who pulled us into this world.

Akito's mansion was on the far side of town. We were already close to it, so we only had to walk about two miles to reach it. Once we were only a mile away, we could already see the mansion looming in the distance. Jeez, that thing was huge! It would take an hour to find Akito in his house!

When we reached the house, we found that it had a huge gate with a lock on it to keep intruders out.

"Dang it!" I said. "I was sure that we would be able to break the curse on this town!" Then, the gate opened...all by itself.

"Whoa," I said. "Did I do that?"

"I don't think so," replied Yuki. "I think he knows we're here. You see, Akito is—how should I say it?—a wizard. He can do many things, including put curses on people."

"So, he's like Voldemort?" I asked. Hannah snickered. Yuki looked at me funny.

"Never mind," I said, remembering that this was an anime show and the people knew nothing of the real world. "What matters is breaking this curse and freeing your people." I know I sound noble and all, but in truth, I was terrified of meeting this Akito person. But these are innocent people we're dealing with here, and I want them to live in happiness. So Yuki waited outside for us while we walked through the front gate and into Akito's domain.

The inside was what you expected an evil cloaked villain's house to look like. It was very fancy, with big chandeliers and archways and stuff, but it had a creepy air to it. It was cold and dark, and everything was black. Well, maybe everything except for the lights was black, but that makes sense. It was almost a castle. It was so big. It even had those big pointy towers that castles have.

We explored some of the mansion for a few minutes. There wasn't much there. There was mostly just creepy, magical stuff, like staffs with animal heads on them and big black cloaks (does he really wear anything

else?).

Finally, we came across a room with a giant staircase spiraling around it, which probably led to the tallest tower. We hoped we would find Akito at the top. So, whole bodies shaking, we started climbing the staircase.

The staircase led to a large room at the top of the tallest tower. At first I thought it was empty, and I was going to get Hannah and go search somewhere else, when I saw him. A hooded figure who blended in with the black decor was standing on the edge of a balcony overlooking the whole city.

“Akito,” I said. He turned toward me, his face still hidden under his hood.

“Ah, Nick,” Akito said. “I thought I’d meet you here.” His voice was smooth, like glass, but higher than I thought, not anything like what you’d expect a villain to sound like.

“How do you know my name?” I said.

“Oh, I’ve been watching you, Nick,” said Akito. Okay, that was just creepy. “I thought you might have been able to get here yourself eventually and cause some problems. So I brought you here myself, and led you to my mansion to destroy you once and for all.”

I was trying not to show it, but I was scared to death.

“You know you can’t defeat me,” Akito said. And then he took off his cloak.

His hair was long and black, and it reached down to his waist. His skin was unnaturally white, as if he hadn’t ever been in the sun. He wasn’t all muscular, either. He was thin and slender, with a black shirt and black pants. But creepiest of all were his eyes. They were an icy blue color, and it made me uncomfortable to even look into them. He was also carrying a staff (I bet you can guess what color it was) that looked like his source of power. I had an idea forming in my head.

He then pointed his staff at me, and it shot a bolt of blue light out of its tip. Okay. Now it’s time to get back to reality. I dodged the light at the last second, and then silently motioned to Hannah behind me. She ran up to me, and I whispered something into her ear.

“Got it,” she said. Akito was too busy shooting bolts of light at me to notice Hannah creeping up behind him. She then grabbed his staff right out of his hand. She turned to face Akito, and, pointing his own staff at him, shot a blue bolt of light right at his chest. Akito went flying over the balcony and fell down a couple of hundred feet to the ground. There was no way he could have survived that fall. Right then, a blue hole appeared at our feet. I had a feeling it was the portal home.

We walked outside to say goodbye to Yuki. He was so surprised that we had defeated Akito, and even more surprised that the curse had been

lifted. He then asked why we were saying goodbye. He thought we lived around here. I grimaced to Hannah, and then started telling Yuki how we got here. We told him everything, from the anime show we were so fond of, up until the point where we ended up here. He seemed very surprised, but he knew what Akito could do, so he believed us. But we were getting very homesick, and we wanted to get home as quickly as possible. We said goodbye to him, and then went back into the mansion, up the stairs, and into the large room where the portal was. We stepped into the portal. All of a sudden, we were back home, sitting on the couch with Noodle by our side.

“Meow,” said Noodle.

We couldn’t help it. We looked at each other for a few seconds, and then burst out laughing. Noodle seemed just so boring after all that just happened. After a couple of more seconds of laughing, though, Hannah grew serious.

“Is Akito really gone for? That seemed way too easy. Maybe he wanted us to believe he was dead, so that we wouldn’t be suspicious.”

“Yeah, but who knows? Maybe we’ll see Yuki again,” I smiled.

# The Battle with Myself

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*In this epic war you can't even trust yourself. If you were in war you wouldn't expect what happens in **THE BATTLE WITH MYSELF** by **Meriç Cokelekoglu**.*

“Hello, ma'am. Is this the Shop Till You Drop store?”  
“Yes, it is, boy,” said the lady with a twitchy voice. “What is it you want?”

“I would like a comb, some hair gel, some Axe hair spray, and a rag tux.”

“Coming right up, sir,” said the witch-sounding lady. As she went to the back, I saw a mirror that was diamond-encrusted with a space at the top to write your name.

“Here you go, boy,” said the lady.

“Um, excuse me. I would also like that mirror.”

A frown came to her face. “Boy, if you want that mirror, listen to me: Don't write your name on the mirror!” She started to act crazy, so I gave her one hundred dollars for my stuff, took them, and then went home.

I was ready for my date. First, though, I wanted to write my name on this mirror. *R-e-x*. Perfect. (I wrote my name on the mirror because I'm low on money. If I lose it, someone will bring to the town lost and found.)

“Hello. Anybody here?”

That's Susie. She is my date. This is our first date. “I'm coming,” I said. “Where do you want to go?” I said.

“I don't know. Let's just drive around, okay?”

“Sure, let us ride in my red Corvette to The Hub. I hear that the first round of drinks is on them today!”

“The easiest things spark your mind, don't they?”

“That is very true. What about you? You're a tomboy who hates girl stuff.”

“Whatever.”

Then I felt that someone was in my house, so I said, “Hey, Susie, I need to get my keys.”

“Ok, sure,” she said.

I went into the house, and I saw a sight that almost gave me a heart attack: It was a clone of me!

“Who are you?” I said in a scared, shaky voice.

“What do you mean; are you blind? I'm you, stupid.”

“You can’t be me. I’m me, not you. Me!” I yelled.

“I can’t have you stop me, so I’m going to have to lock you up before you stop me.”

I thought of what to do. It was bold, daring, and totally awesome. I ran to the hills. “Awwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww!” I screamed, coming out of my house.

“Rex, what’s wrong?” said Susie.

“What’s wrong?” My mirror made a clone of me and he wants to enslave me!”

“You are crazy, you know that?” she said.

“Crazy? Ha! You go look and see then, huh HUH!”

“That’s it, this date is off. I can’t date a crazy person.” Then she left me.

I went into the house and found my clones were making more of me come out of the mirror! Then I remembered what the lady I bought the mirror from said: “Don’t write your name on that mirror.”

I knew what I had to do. I took a broomstick from near my door and ran toward the mirror. A clone jumped at me, and I ducked and hit him right in the gut, making his face green. I kept running. Five more came for me with some of my kitchen knives, so I threw the broom toward them. As I thought they would, they grabbed it. They held it there, so I jumped on it and flew over their heads.

As I hit the ground, I rolled and got up to run for the mirror. I took the knife I used to butter my toast and smashed the mirror! I did it! It was over. My clones shouted and cried, but they still disappeared.

To this day I feel safe, or so I think, but every night their shadows return. I’m always ready with my broom. Once I thought I heard something from the dump. It sounded like, “Come on, guys, in the trash heap—the pieces of the mirror.”

*Meanwhile...*

“Now, boys, let’s go get Rex. If we get him, we can make clones come out of every mirror in the world.”

As Rex pouts, completely not thinking about what he heard at the dump, he feels pain, and then a flash comes in his mind. He sees the clones putting the mirror back together. He knew what this meant: The mirror was alive still, and it was making clones by the minute. So he took his broom and his secret gun, and then went to the trash heap.

# Bear

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*Have you ever had a large responsibility? Find out Linda's big responsibility in BEAR by Reid Stevens.*

“Linda, will you go out with me?” asked George.

“Well...,” said Linda.

*Please say yes,* thought George.

“Yes. Pick me up on Christmas Eve at 6:00.”

“Okay. See you next week!”

*One week later*

“Hi!” exclaimed George.

“Hey,” said Linda boringly.

“Merry Christmas.”

“Thanks. Same to you.”

“I got you a present. It’s right here!” George exclaimed as he pulled a green and red wrapped box out from behind his back.

“Thanks! Should I open it now, or later?” said Linda as hearts filled her eyes, just like in cartoons.

“Sure. Why not? It’s almost Christmas.”

She ripped it open like she was a pro in the Olympics at it. Inside was the cutest little teddy bear that Linda had ever seen. It had cute little earrings, black and red emo-flipped hair, and a little black rose in its hand.

“If you say the magic words on his tag, he’ll come to life! But be careful, he needs lots of attention.”

“Interesting. Do you know how it works?”

“No, but that doesn’t matter.”

Linda looked at the tag. It said, “Name the bear and tell it a name and gender, and then give it a kiss on the nose.”

Linda took a deep breath, and said, “Bear, you are a boy, you are sweet and kind, but can get very jealous at times.” Then she gave him a kiss on the nose and watched as the limp, stuffed bear turned into a living bear.

*Four months later*

“Mommy, can I go over to Merc’s house?” Bear asked.

“Who is Merc, Bear?” Linda asked cautiously.

“He’s my friend from school, Mommy.”

“Well, we’ll drive over to his house and I’ll talk to his parents. Okay?”

“Okay, Mommy. Mommy? Can you help me put on my shoes?” Bear said curiously.

“Sure.” Linda helped Bear put on his shoes. Then they left for the car.

“What is Merc like?” Linda asked.

“He is a big black and white bear!” Bear said loudly.

“Oh. Baby, he is a panda bear,” Linda chuckled.

“I knew that!” Bear said sarcastically. As they got into the car Bear asked, “What’s a panda bear?”

Linda chuckled and then said, “It’s Merc.”

Once they got to Merc’s house, Bear went off to play toy cars with Merc as their parents talked.

“So, have you heard about Bear before now?” asked Linda.

“No, we haven’t. Have you heard about Merc before today?” Merc’s mother asked.

“No I haven’t.”

“Well, that’s sorta weird, isn’t it? Well, I’m Linda.”

“I’m Jess, how are you?”

“I’m doing well. And you?”

“I’m doing fine.”

### Six months later

“Bear, sweetie?” Linda asked Bear while he ate his frosted mini Q’s.

“Yes, Mommy?” Bear asked curiously.

“You remember my good friend George, right?”

“Yes. Why?”

“He wants to marry me. Is that okay?”

“I don’t know? Is it?”

“Well, baby,” she sat down next to him, “it’s up to you. Do you think it would be a good idea? I love him very much.”

“As much as me?”

“Almost, baby.” She brushed his hair back.

“Okay. But if he hurts you, I’ll eat him!” Bear said jokingly.

Linda and Bear laughed so hard that they almost fell over.

### One year later

“You may kiss the bride,” the priest said.

Linda and George kissed for what seemed like an eternity. Everyone cheered and clapped except for the kids, who looked away and groaned.

When they got home Linda asked, “Do you think we should have a baby?”

“Whoa! Linda, we just got married. Don’t you think we should be thinking about that later?” George scoffed.

“I guess,” she said sadly.

Linda kept on asking about it every week for three months. Finally George said, “Fine, I guess. But we should ask Bear first.”

“Okay, I guess,” Linda said. They walked together into Bear’s room. He is 11 now in living teddy bear years.

“Bear?” they said simultaneously.

“What do you guys want? I’m in the middle of a competition.” Grunts and noises came from the T.V. “Great! Now I’m dead!” Bear said madly, and with aggression.

“Well,” Linda and George mouthed to each other. “Bear, we were thinking about hav—”

“You guys are going to have a baby!” Bear cut them off with a groan.

“Now, Bear,” they continued, “we were wondering if that would be okay with you.”

“You guys do know that if you wanted to learn to be more responsible, you could’ve just gotten me a puppy? But I guess if you want me to take care of a baby, I’ll just find a way to make it soft and fuzzy,” Bear said sarcastically.

“No!” Linda and George yelled right after he finished. “We wanted to add another addition to the family. You could teach it stuff, like those games you play.”

“Oh, well, I guess that would be okay,” he said with a bit of an evil grin.

### Ten months later

“It’s a boy!” the doctor exclaimed.

“Let me see him!” Linda said with a smile. She thought he was the cutest thing ever, just barely above Bear on the cuteness scale when he was “born.”

Two days later, Linda, George, and Harry were coming home in the car. Harry is what they decided to name him, because of how fuzzy and hairy his head was when he was born.

As soon as they walked in the door, Bear yelled, “Good thing you’re home, I need more energy drinks.”

“Bear, come here, honey,” Linda said.



Bear came running into the room. “So what did you name the little gender?”

“We named HIM Harry,” George said.

“Why, ‘cause of how hairy his butt was?” Bear laughed rudely.

“No. We named him after the small pea-sized fuzz ball in yer head that you call your brain!” George said fiercely.

“George!” exclaimed Linda.

“Ha, ha, Dad, you just got busted!” said Bear rudely.

“To your room! Now!” George yelled.

### Four months later

Bear is starting to miss all of the attention he was used to getting. He made a trap so that every time Harry would crawl, he would fall flat on his face. One day George was walking to the kitchen when he tripped on the trap and hit his elbow on the counter.

### One week later

George could tell Bear was trying to make Harry suffer. So, he gave Bear a choice: Move out, or help raise Harry into the man he should become.

“I’d rather live with Merc than live with that!” Bear said fiercely.

“Okay, then pack your bags and get out,” George said sadly.

It took Bear 45 minutes to pack all the stuff he couldn’t live without. Then he called Merc. “Hey, Merc, the bananas are kicking me out. Can I stay with you?”

“Sure, you can stay as long as you want, bro. Hey, can you bring your piercings and piercing kit with you? I kinda wanna get a few. You’re the only guy I know who’ll do it for thirty bucks.”

“I’ll tell you what. I’ll give you all the piercings you want for free, but only if you let me stay for no rent.”

“Deal,” Merc said happily.

“Deal, but can you give me a lift?” Bear asked shyly.

“You know I lost my driver’s license. I mean lost, too, not taken. I can’t find it anywhere!

“You do know you can get a new one, right?”

“Yeah, but I would have to drive there.”

“Or walk there.”

“Well, I’ll walk over, and we’ll just make a few trips back and forth.”  
Merc lived seven blocks away.

“Okay, thanks. See ya soon.”

After about three hours of walking back and forth from Bear’s to Merc’s house, they had finally gotten all his stuff into Merc’s house. Now the hard part was getting it into the guest bedroom. Bear decided to practically bring his whole room!

They spent the next day “neatly” putting stuff away.

“So, where do you want the piercing?” Bear asked.

“My eyebrow,” Merc said.

“Didn’t I already do one there?” Bear questioned.

“Nope.”

“Which side do you want it on?”

“Left side.”

“Where should we do this? It should be in a room that we can easily clean up blood.”

“Bathroom.”

“Let’s go.”

When they got to the bathroom, Bear asked, “Wait, before we do this. What color do you want the ring?”

“Do you have a black and red ring?”

“Let me check.” He started looking for one that matched Merc’s description. “Yeah, I do, but the red is a light red, and looks sorta pink. Is that all right?”

“Let’s see it first,”

Bear showed him the ring. It glistened in the light, like a star in a dark night with no moon.

“Perfect!” Merc said happily.

“Take a deep breath as you start to feel the needle go through.” Bear started pushing the needle. It went through like melted butter. Bear put the ring in so fast that if you had been watching, it would’ve looked like it was from the Matrix.

“Flubber! That hurt!” Merc screamed.

“Dude, we’re not seven!” Bear laughed.

“Yeah, but the neighbor’s kids are outside playing.”

“So. They’re not seven either.”

“Actually, one’s seven, the other’s four.”

“Oh, well.” He stuck his tongue out at Merc.

“I thought we weren’t seven!” Merc laughed.

“I put that ring in, I can take it out,” Bear said seriously. “Dude! You should have seen the look on yer face when I said that.”

Later that night, while Merc and Bear were eating pop rocks and energy drinks for dinner, Merc asked, “Why’d yer parents kick you out?”

“They said I wanted to ‘make Harry suffer,’” Bear said sadly.

“Who the purple elephant is Harry?” Merc said with an English accent.

“My little brother.”

“How old is he?”

“Four months.”

“Now why the blue grape would you wanna make your four-month-old-baby bro suffer?”

“He irks me.”

“He irks you,” Merc repeated disappointingly. “We’re gonna go over there with all your stuff in the morning, and yer gonna teach him stuff, and help him grow to be great. They say young minds are the easiest minds to mold.”

“Fine.”

The next day, Merc and Bear showed up at Bear’s house. They rang the doorbell. Bear’s dad came to the door. “Hey, guys. Merc, like the new one! And I thought you, Bear, were never coming back here.”

“Dad, Merc helped me realize that it’ll be better for Harry if I’m around to help. Like Merc says, young minds are the easiest to mold,” Bear said as he smiled.

“I do say that. Wait. I only said that once,” Merc said, very confused.

George laughed so hard he almost fell over. “Mold... his mind?”

“Yeah, Dad, like you molded me into this awesome being!” Bear smiled and held his arms out to the side.

“‘Awesome?’” George chuckled.

“Thanks for the help, Merc,” Bear said thankfully.

“No problem, Bear.”

Before Bear closed the door, George poked his head out and said, “Thank you so much, Merc.”

Merc waved his hand in the air, and smiled. He felt as if that had been the first good thing he had done in a long while.

# The Bowers Harbor Inn

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*When Kim, Ashley, and Jennifer find a deserted hotel where creepy things happen to them, what will they do? Find out in **THE BOWERS HARBOR INN** by **Annalese Lohr**.*

“Where are we?” cried Jennifer. She and her friends Kim and Ashley were lost. They were on vacation in California trying to find a five-star restaurant with low prices that a Spanish taxi driver, who didn’t speak English very well, told them about. That didn’t seem like such a good idea now. They couldn’t see anything when suddenly they spotted a hotel.

“What’s that?” asked Ashley. “It looks like the sign says the Bowers Harbor Inn.” They walked up to investigate. There were no lights. It looked completely deserted.

“Hello? Is anyone in here?” yelled Kim. The lights flickered on as they stepped in. The ceiling was very high. It had a very old diamond chandelier covered in cobwebs. The carpets looked ancient. They were light red from being worn out.

She walked up to the front desk and slammed on the bell. Suddenly, someone appeared there.

“Can I help you?” asked the man. He was old with white hair and pale skin.

“Um... I guess we want a room,” announced Kim. The man threw keys at them and vanished.

“Well, that was something!” squeaked Jennifer.

“He didn’t just disappear... right?” demanded Ashley.

“I don’t want to stay here. This place gives me the creeps,” Kim complained.

Ashley said, “It’s late. There aren’t any other hotels with vacancies and we’re lost. Let’s just stay here for one night.”

“Which room are we in?” Jennifer inquired.

“The key says 213,” Ashley explained.

“213? That’s bad luck,” Kim exclaimed.

“Don’t worry, 13 is a lucky number in our family,” Jennifer reassured her.

The trio took the elevator up to the second floor to get to their room. Cobwebs hung from every chandelier that they passed. The lights were dim. Lightning flashed.

They unlocked the door and went into their room. It was huge and also filled with cobwebs. There was a giant door to the bathroom that stood about seven feet tall. The room had two huge old looking beds. They decided to go to bed.

In the middle of the night, Ashley got up to use the bathroom. While she washed her hands, she saw a different face in the mirror.

“AHHHHHHHHHHH!” she screamed. She tore down the shower curtain, snatched the pole and smashed the mirror into a million pieces. There was a massive hole in the wall. It was big enough to climb through. She looked in and then tried to get out of the room, but the door wouldn’t open. She tried to call for help, but the room was soundproof. So, she climbed through the hole.

It was a long tunnel that led her to the lobby. She popped out right behind the front desk. She screamed as she saw a figure in the dark.

“I see you have found my tunnels,” bellowed the man. “They are strictly off limits, and you were not supposed to use them. You weren’t even supposed to see them!” Then he vanished.

“He still didn’t vanish, right? That’s impossible,” she thought.

Ashley took the elevator back upstairs. It suddenly stopped.

“Help! Can anyone hear me?” she screamed.

Back at the room, Kim and Jennifer had just woken up.

“Hey, where’s Ashley?” asked Kim.

“Yeah, she’s not here!” agreed Jennifer. “I’ll check the bathroom.” The door was locked, and no one answered when she yelled in. She kicked it down. Ashley wasn’t in there. Jennifer spotted the tunnel.

“Oh, no... she must’ve gone through here,” Jennifer told Kim.

“We’re not going to go in there, right?” whimpered Kim.

“We have to if we want to find Ashley.” They both climbed through the tunnel. When they got out the other side, the man was standing there again.

“So everyone found my secret tunnel! No one is allowed in it! Get out now!” he yelled.

Before he could vanish, Kim asked, “Where’s Ashley?”

“Oh, nowhere, just trapped in my elevator! Mwahahahahahahaha hahahahahahahahaha!”

“Oh, no! How’s she gonna get out?” cried Jennifer.

“Now that you know that, I can’t let you leave,” snickered the man.

Back in the elevator, Ashley was frantically pressing the buttons, trying to get it to work. She pressed floor 10 and the elevator shot up. The doors opened and she sprinted out. “Yes! I’m free!” she exclaimed. She darted over to the stairs and walked down to the lobby. She saw Kim and Jennifer, trapped in a huge net hanging from the ceiling.

“How did you guys get up there!” panted Ashley.

“I put them up there! It’s not that hard to figure out,” sassed the man.

“Now you can join them.”

“Oh, no! Someone help me!” she exclaimed as she ran away.

“Don’t run! I’m 210 years old!” complained the man.

“What! How?”

“I’m a ghost! I’m surprised you didn’t figure that out yet, with all the vanishing.”

Ashley ran over to the tunnel. She tore apart the front desk, looking for scissors. She went over to the staircase and jumped onto the net. Ashley cut them free, and they fell 30 feet.

“Ouch!” whimpered the man. The girls had landed on top of him. He surprisingly felt like a pillow.

“Let’s get out of here!” suggested Kim. They all ran out of the hotel, leaving the man behind, still confused.

# The Cake Is a Lie!

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*If you like explosions, cops, and cakes, then **THE CAKE IS A LIE!** by **Conner Lenington**, is the story for you! In this story, you will read a tale of a mischievous, shape-shifting, and talking cake.*

It was a cloudy day at West Finister Bank. The look of the clouds made it feel like rain. It was a boring, slow day at the bank. The tellers had heavy eyes, but then something happened. Two vans pulled up to the curb, and six men jumped out. Then, the vans pulled away and the men came in. They lined up; six men for six tellers.

“I would like to take money out of my account please,” they said in unison.

So, the tellers asked, “What is your account number?”

The men said in unison, “All of them!” The men crashed through the glass in front of the tellers and knocked them out!

“Ok, call the boss,” said the tallest man.

In about a half hour, ‘the boss’ showed up. He was a pleasant looking man in his mid-forties, but he had an eye patch over one eye.

“We good?” asked the boss.

“Yes, and we’re about to be done, too.”

“Good, now get out of here,” demanded the boss.

“WHAT?” asked all of the men.

“You said that we would get some of the profit!” said one of the men.

But, just then, the boss did something peculiar: he turned into a gun and shot the man! Once the boss turned back into a man he said, “Now take him and get out!” So, all the men, the dead and the living, ran as fast as five men carrying a dead man can run.

“Finally some alone time,” said the boss. He turned to the money already on the ground. “Hmm, I have an idea.”

At that moment, the cops came bursting through the doors!

“FREEZE!” screamed the cops.

“What? Where are they?” questioned one of the cops.

“All the money is still here, too,” commented another.

“Well, let’s get the medics in here and have them check out these knocked out tellers.” So, the medics came in and checked out the tellers and the police put the money back into the vault.

The following Tuesday, the tellers needed more money, so they went to the vault.

“I got it Jena!” said Suzie. She walked up to the vault, typed in the code, and opened the door. But, inside there was not only the money, but a big cake!

“What the...?” said Suzie, but just then, the cake did something weird. The cake grew a fist and knocked Suzie out! Eventually, Jena came to investigate and saw Suzie on the floor.

“OMG!” Jena yelled. “Suzie are you o...Is that a cake? What is a cake doing in a...” *BLAM!* The Cake knocked her out, too.

“I love it when a plan comes together!” said the Cake. “Changing into a hundred dollar bill to be put in the vault was genius! I, Cake C. Carrington, am the greatest mastermind whoever was tasty! Now I will...” While the Cake was in the middle of his monologue, a third teller came to see what was happening.

“Omg!” Sarah said quietly to herself. Then she left to call the cops.

When they arrived, Officer Donufle and Detective Jones entered the vault. “Ooooooo cake!” said Officer Donufle. “I’m hungry.”

“Wait!” said Detective Jones. But, he was too late! Officer Donufle already had his travel fork out and was ready to eat. The Cake punched Officer Donufle into oblivion.

“THE CAKE IS A LIE!” yelled Detective Jones. He ran out of the room for back up.

“I have another idea,” the Cake schemed.

When Detective Jones was about to step back into the vault with five men for back up, Officer Donufle came out a little bigger in the mid-section.

“All clear! I ate him, or it, or whatever that was,” said Officer Donufle.

“Oh, okay, take a breather and I will go and check out the scene again,” said Detective Jones. When Detective Jones went back to the vault, he saw something unexpected. Officer Donufle! He is still knocked out. Most of the money was missing as well.

“I don’t understa... do you guys hear something?” Detective Jones asked the other officers. “It’s like a ticking noise. It might be a... EVERYONE OUT!” Everyone dove out of the room right before it burst into yellow and red flames!

“DANG! We lost our only trace!” said Detective Jones.

“Sir!” yelled a medic from behind. “Officer Donufle is alive!”

“How could this be possible?” asked Detective Jones.

“He was sprayed with some gooey fire retardant gel before the vault exploded!” explained the medic.

“So, the Cake is a robber, but not a killer,” said Detective Jones. “Or, at least not this time.”



“What is our next move, Detective?” asked one of the officers.

“Well, anyone know where Officer Donufle went?” Detective Jones asked.

“He said he needed to make a deposit at the East Finister Bank,” said a police woman.

“Get over there now! Hurry!” demanded Detective Jones.

Once they all got there, it seemed calm, but they saw a big bird carrying a money sack.

“See that bird up there?” pointed the Detective. “Get your best marksmen and shoot the money sack!” So, their best marksmen shot the money sack and it fell.

“My money!” screeched the bird.

“It’s the Cake!” said Detective Jones. The Bird/Cake flew down to the money sack, which had splattered and flung money everywhere.

“Get him!” yelled Detective Jones. Three policemen, in full riot gear, grabbed the Bird/Cake and fastened his legs and wings. The policemen threw it into an armored truck.

“Good work, men,” said Detective Jones. But, at that moment, the Bird/Cake turned into a bug and crawled out of the barred windows of the armored truck. The bug flew up to a tree and made himself into a sign that said ‘YOU’LL NEVER CATCH ME IDIOTS!’ Then, it turned back into a bird and flew away.

“Did I just see a bug turn into a sign, then into a bird?” asked Detective Jones. Just then, *BOOOOOOOOOOM*, the armored truck exploded!

“What’s with this Cake and explosives?” questioned Detective Jones. “Okay, we need dogs, more snipers, more police officers, and more armored trucks!”

The next day, at the meeting point, ten armored trucks rolled up. There were also 25 riot officers in full riot gear, 300 snipers who slid down ropes out of helicopters, and 400 normal police men and women from around the country.

“We are finally ready!” Officer Jones told the team via megaphone. “Search the streets!”

Three days later, after searching the streets non-stop, the police arrested the Cake and locked him into an air tight cell since cakes really don’t need air. There was no way that he could escape. So, the world was finally rid of the mischievous, shape-shifting, talking cake.

Or is it? *BOOOOOOOOMMMMMM!*

# The Curse

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*In **THE CURSE** by **Kathryn Hurt**, a New England boy named Carter is just moving into New York and not at all used to the modern world. He thought moving would stop his visions...but he thought wrong.*

My name is Carter. I just moved from New England to New York because of my dad's work. No one knows what's wrong with my dad these days. He enjoys singing songs while rubbing his tummy in the shower. Put it this way: I have walked in on him before and it is not a pretty sight. He calls his house "haunted" or "filled with magical creatures." When it comes to Christmas in July he's all for it. He would listen to Christmas songs 24/7 if he could. I have no idea why my mom married such a strange person. My mom died when I was four years old, so I can barely remember her. My dad tells me that she died in a car crash.

One day I decided to go exploring in my new house. I was walking downstairs and saw a doorknob turn to a coatroom closet. I had never really seen this coatroom before. Well, I have only seen the first floor and second floor, never the third. I opened the door and I saw nothing but pitch black. I reached for the light but something reached it before I did. There was a girl that appeared in the light. She had dark brown eyes and red curly hair. She was wearing a hoodie and jeans. She smelled like sweet, fruity perfume. She was smiling at me in an anxious sort of way. She introduced herself and said,

"Hey, I'm Izzy. We have to talk. When you were little, a wizard cast a curse on you. You were specially picked when you were little. I'm different just like you. The curse was whenever you started getting nervous or flushed; you would start getting bad visions. Have you ever realized that?"

"Well, yeah, kind of," Carter said.

"Now this isn't just any curse; this is a curse that nobody can change but you. That's why I'm here. You're going to need my help, trust me. Here's what you need to do: you have to defeat the wizard who started this curse by taking away his powers. But, like always, there's a twist. You have to take the wizard's powers and either keep them for yourself or give them away to somebody who wants them. But, if you don't want them or nobody else wants them, then you can let them flow into a river. Then in one hundred years the wizard will rise again, sadly," Izzy said.

I heard a voice, it sounded like my Dad's. I didn't want him here because I needed to get rid of this curse. Then, Izzy disappeared and I hid.

I saw my Dad reach for his favorite coat. I stared, waiting to see what was going to happen. All I heard now was a sound of someone balling. In the corner of my eye I saw Izzy. But now she looked different. She looked like a cat. She told me she was different but not ‘turns into a cat’ different.

Izzy told me that the reaction on my face looked funny and I told her that she looked funnier. I told her she looked like an unpleasant cat.

“I’m sorry when I’m scared I change into a cat. That’s how I was born. Now, let’s get to work,” Izzy said.

She shows me a passageway through the closet. I walk with Izzy up the mountain and she showed me where Max, the Wizard, lives.

“Wow! For a wizard that is an odd place to live,” I said. His house was dark, black and on the edge of a steep, pointy mountain. It got colder and colder every inch higher we walked. It was a cold winter day. The trees shook and the icy snow was touching my aching feet. I wasn’t expecting to be here so I only had socks on. If there were a smell out here I wouldn’t know because my nose was frozen like a Popsicle. I told Izzy that I probably wouldn’t be able to help her a lot with her mission. I had no special powers.

We made it up the mountain. All we saw was a huge, dark, spooky mansion. Izzy and I walked into the mansion. She told me where the wizard’s room was down the hall and to the left. I was too scared to face him by myself so Izzy came with me. We walked into his room. I saw her speaking to Max and then he turned purple and changed into the form of a goblin!

Izzy shouted, “Now!”

I jumped on top of him and Izzy took control and got his powers and handed them to me. I went and put them in the nearest river and we raced up the mountain to see what happened to him. He dissolved! I was running home when I saw my Dad walking up the mountain. I was just about to say something but he interrupted me and said, “You might have defeated, Max but you will never get me! I’m your dad. I know everything about you literally.”

Izzy transformed into a cat when I went and tried to find a stick. Izzy attacked! She grew her claws and scratched and it did a lot of damage. Now, all she needed was for me to jump on him so he would be normal again. I came back at the right time and jumped on top of him. Suddenly he turned back to his normal self.

“Dad! You’re back! Is this why you have been acting so strange lately?”

“Yes, Carter, I’m so sorry! Max cast a spell on me too, but I’m okay. “

“Is this why you were calling the house haunted to kind of give us warnings?”

“Yes, son. Now, let us go back to our house and relax.”

“Wait, can Izzy come too? It would just be for the weekend.”  
“Okay, it’s fine by me.”

# The Day of Trees

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*When a random kid falls in a hole, you know there is going to be a problem. Read more in **THE DAY OF TREES**, by **PJ Sarotte**.*

Back in 2006, Jimmy walks down the street in his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. He tumbles down a hole that's ten feet deep. He screams and screams for help. He sits there for over an hour, just screaming the whole time. He hears rumbling when he sees a brown snake-like thing slithering at him. It drags him out and sits Jimmy right next to this maple tree.

When the trunk finally lets go, Jimmy runs all the way back home to where his mom locks the door and helps heal the cut that Jimmy had gotten. The next day, Jimmy walks to school. Suddenly, Jimmy is caught on a root.

"Oh my goodness, Mother Nature must hate me," Jimmy yells. "Come on, stop touching me, roots."

So, Jimmy grabbed my hatchet and chopped off the limb of the tree. He runs to the United States Pentagon building. Jimmy brings up to the general that there is a large problem. The general says there are two problems.

"We are currently at war with them," he says as a person comes flying through the window and sounds the alarms. All the people are running around, so Jimmy starts to walk home while the havoc is going on.

He is at home when a bird comes to deliver a message. Jimmy picks up the message and reads, "The trees hereby just wanted to say we want the stop making of paper and for us to be respected."

So, Jimmy started to sprint to the airport to get on a plane to Washington to tell the President of the disaster. While he was on the plane, one of the engines blew up and he crashed on an island where he built a boat to travel all the way to Washington, D.C.

Once he got there, he marched right in to the building and screamed at the President to stop cutting down the trees! The President said that he couldn't do much from here. The only thing he could do was sit there and watch. Well, Jimmy had a solution without hurting any trees. He runs to his boat and surfs all the way to area 51 where he starts to build. All you could hear was the sounds of power machines.

The next morning, Jimmy gets his friends, Dameen and Louie, to lure the trees his way. The trees are all there, about to destroy the ten kids,

when Jimmy pulls the rope. The rope releases a huge encaged area the size of Cuba.

Once all of the trees are inside the F.B.I area, they are to lock the gate and train the trees back to their original state. As the trees are replanted, one of the crazy trees seeds comes off and flies to who knows where.

Twelve years later, Jimmy is eighteen when he is leading a resistance army against the trees. After Jimmy had been knocked out, he woke up in a hospital bed where he asked the nurse about what had happened. The nurse responded in a video, all he saw were feet running all over the place. He also saw fire. The nurse said that the trees began to grow again and they tried to chop them down. But, they were like metal. All of the sudden, an exposure alarm goes off. The nurse yells everybody for themselves, a seed flies right through the nurse and the nurse began to moan and groan, then the leaves came flying out of her mouth.

Jimmy ran as fast as he could down the stairs. Rocks and leaves were everywhere. He finds out from the doctor that there was a seed that got inside of a person. The ending was undocumented.

# The Deadly Jungle

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*Can three kids stranded in the wild make it out alive while following an airplane they see flying overhead? Or will their journey bring them to a gruesome end? Find out in **THE DEADLY JUNGLE**, by **Chaz Ringey**.*

As soon as Mark and Kate got to the airport, they realized they would probably never see home again. “Mark, do we have to leave?” asked Kate.

“Yes,” Mark replied. Although he was as annoyed about having to move as she was, their mother had recently died of cancer, and they had to go to Brazil to live with their father.

Then Mark heard an announcement saying, “Five minutes until Flight 7 to Brazil leaves.”

“We have to hurry Kate!” said Mark. They ran as fast as they could to their flight and got there right as they were closing the door. “Sorry we’re late!” shouted Mark to the flight attendant as they ran past her, nearly crashing into her.

Mark and Kate quickly found two seats and sat down in them. The flight was smooth and relaxing until Mark saw a man light a match a few rows in front of them. “What are you doing?” Mark shouted to the man with the match. The man just smiled and laughed like a maniac before he lit a Molotov cocktail bomb and threw it at the front of the plane. Now people were starting to realize what was happening. Somebody had alerted the captain right before the man had thrown the Molotov.

The plane was engulfed in flames and was falling quickly. Desperate people tried to put out the fire with a fire extinguisher that was on the plane, but it was too late. There was an explosion as one of the engines caught on fire and exploded. The man who had thrown the Molotov was nowhere to be seen, but there was a broken window right where he was sitting. Kate was crying now, and others were panicking. Then it was quiet.

Mark woke up in a small hut. Next to him was a boy; he looked about 12 years old. When Mark tried to sit up, the boy quickly stopped him. “I wouldn’t recommend that,” he said.

“Where am I?” asked Mark, “and where is Kate?”

“The girl?” replied the boy. “She’s fine, and my name’s Nick, by the way.”

“Thanks, Nick. My name is Mark. But you still haven’t told me where we are.”

“Well, about that,” mumbled Nick, “I have absolutely no idea; I ended up here when the plane I was riding crashed.”

“Come on, there has to be a...” Mark stopped speaking when he looked outside. To the left were the remains of their still-burning plane, and surrounding them was a dense forest.

“I get it,” said Mark.

“Well, Kate and I are going to look for some kind of nearby city or town,” said Mark. Then Mark stood up and left the hut. He found Kate outside doodling in the dirt with a stick.

When she saw Mark she ran toward him and hugged him crying out, “I thought you were going to die, Mark!”

“Well, I didn’t,” replied Mark. “Now let’s go.”

“Suddenly a wolf came out of the bushes and Mark jumped back, but Kate simply walked up to the wolf and started petting it and said, “This is Nick’s tame wolf; his name is Tim.”

“Well, that’s nice to know after I thought it was going to attack us,” said Mark. “Now let’s go.”

“Where?” asked Kate.

“To find a town or city or something, of course,” replied Mark. “So we can get home.”

“Mark,” said Kate. “I see a plane.”

“Follow it!” shouted Mark.

Nick ran out of the hut. “A plane!” shouted Nick. “If you’re going, I’m going too. It’s been months since I had a decent meal!” They started going in the direction that they saw the airplane going with Tim following close behind them.

Then after hours of traveling they found a small village and were greeted by a short man named Golia.

“So you’re saying you can get us to Brazil quickly?” asked Mark as they walked through the village.

“I’m sure the village’s mayor will find a way; he knows this forest better than anyone in our village.”

“And what’s his name?” asked Nick.

“He doesn’t like people to speak his name,” answered Golia. When they saw the mayor’s house, they saw skulls hanging over the doorway and blood dripping off windowsills.

Mark and Nick stopped walking. “Come on, guys,” said Kate excitedly.

“Kate,” Mark said, “something about this mayor makes me unsure about this.”

“Yeah,” agreed Nick.



“Kate, I think we should just continue in the direction we came,” said Mark.

Then Golia turned around. “Just follow me,” he said viciously.

“Kate!” yelled Mark. “Run!” Tim growled at Golia and bit his ankle while Kate, Mark, and Nick ran as fast as they could. When they were almost out of the village, arrows started flying past their heads, and then when they were out of the village, the arrows stopped being shot at them.

“Why’d they stop shooting?” asked Nick.

“I don’t know, but why did it suddenly get darker?” replied Mark. Kate looked up and screamed. Mark and Nick looked up. A large pitch-black dragon with glowing green eyes and purple fire floating around it was flying right above their heads, and riding it was a man. In his hand was a Molotov. Then Mark realized who that crazy terrorist on the plane was. “It’s you again!” Mark yelled to the man. “You must be the mayor who Golia was talking about!”

“Yes,” was all that the man said. Then he threw the Molotov at Golia.

“What are you doing!” screamed Golia as he realized what was happening. The Molotov exploded just a foot away from Golia. This was enough to scare Tim away from Golia and run whimpering back to Nick. Then the monster shot a ball of purple fire from its mouth. They all ran, but the ball of fire hit Tim anyway.

Nick felt like his heart had skipped a beat. Without thinking he ran to Tim’s lifeless burnt body. “You monster!” he screamed at the man. In a flash he stole a bow from the still terrified Golia and shot an arrow at the man. The arrow never hit the man, but punctured the monster’s thin wing. Mark and Kate watched in horror as the monster fell out of the sky and landed on Nick along with five other huts on the outskirts of the village.

“Nick!” yelled Mark and Kate at the same time. Nobody answered.

“Nick!” screamed Kate, and again no response.

Just then Mark realized the people, including the mayor, were all gone. “Weird,” thought Mark. Mark ran to the monster to look for any evidence of Nick surviving, and he found none.

The two of them left the village wondering if there had been a way to save Nick and continued following the airplane’s path. They soon got to a small city where they took a plane to Brazil. And after an hour of explaining the believable parts of their adventure to a flight manager, they were given free tickets to ride to Brazil. On the plane Kate couldn’t help but ask Mark, “What do you think happened to that man?”

“Let’s just hope that he doesn’t come back,” was all Mark said. Then he said, “Why do you think he crashed our plane, and how do you think we survived that?”

Kate stayed silent, still sad about their new friend's horrifying death. It was probably her imagination, but Kate thought she heard the man's insane laughter once again right behind her.

# Dinosaur in the Clouds

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*Through the story* **DINOSAUR IN THE CLOUDS** *by* **Claire Bautista**, *enter the fantasy world of purple dinosaurs and blue elephants. Read about the purple dinosaur and blue elephant—two completely different best friends.*

Once upon a time, there lived a purple dinosaur. This dinosaur wasn't like any other dinosaur, though. He was taller than a giraffe, and his head was stuck in the clouds! He didn't have very many friends, and he only saw the birds who flew above him every day, so he was very lonely. He longed to be like all the other smaller animals.

Then one day came a blue elephant. This elephant was extremely small, unlike the purple dinosaur. He was very adventurous, and decided to go say hello to the dinosaur.

"Hello? Anyone up there?" called the blue elephant, stretching his short neck to get a better view into the sky.

It took the dinosaur a minute to realize that someone was talking to him. "What? Yes?"

"Well... hi, how's the weather up there?" said the elephant.

"Quite pleasant...until the birds start flying around," said the dinosaur, with a glum expression.

"That's good. I wish I was as tall as you," said the elephant, who was becoming quite bored. He was too adventurous to be talking to someone so boring. And with that, he walked away silently.

Only the dinosaur didn't realize, since his head was stuck in the clouds. After talking to himself for countless hours, the purple dinosaur realized that the blue elephant was no longer there, and he decided to go to bed. He found his favorite cloud, and laid his head down. He dreamed of being short, like when he was a little dinosaur. But even then, he towered above everyone else.

He didn't sleep very well that night, but he awoke to a beautiful spring day, with the sun bursting through the clouds. Then, the dinosaur suddenly heard someone calling his name. "Yes? What?"

"It's me!"

"Oh, hello."

"What are you doing?" shouted the blue elephant.

"What? I can't hear you from all the way down there,"

"Can you hear me now?" asked the blue elephant.

Surprisingly, the dinosaur did hear him. He looked to this left, then his right, and saw the blue elephant climbing up his back.

After thinking about it, the elephant had decided that just because the purple dinosaur was boring, that didn't matter. What did matter was that they were friends.

The blue elephant and the purple dinosaur became best friends. They talked every day, and even though they were completely different, that didn't bother them. The purple dinosaur began to not mind being so tall, and became happy again.

# The Doodle

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*Jacob discovers an unusual skill and learns to not take advantage of things. In **THE DOODLE**, by **Courtney D.**, you learn about that skill and then you can decide if it's unusual or not.*

This is a story of two friends named Jacob and Sam. They aren't the most popular kids in school. As it turns out, they're the least popular kids in school. They are bullied day in and day out. Every day, someone found some way to mess with their heads.

One day, while Jacob was in his math class, he was doodling. Math isn't Jacob's best subject. He was drawing aliens abducting Mrs. Dorman, Jacob's Math teacher. Suddenly, the teacher was yelling at him for drawing in class.

"Jacob!" yelled Mrs. Dorman. "What did I tell you about drawing in my class?" Jacob was sure Art was going to be the only subject in which he was going to earn an "A."

"To not do it," Jacob said.

"That's right. Now bring the notebook up to me."

As Jacob brought his sketchbook up to Mrs. Dorman, he heard the popular kids snickering as he walked passed them.

The rest of the day usually goes like that; Jacob drawing, getting in trouble, then it's time for next period.

Finally, it's the end of another day. As Jacob gets on the bus, someone that he doesn't know trips him in the aisle. He falls onto Sam and they both look like idiots as they lie there in the middle of the aisle. Sam and Jacob scramble to get up and to find the closest open seat.

"Ugh! Why do they do that to us?" Sam exclaimed.

"I don't know. But we can't let it get to our heads," Jacob said.

"Want to come to my house later?" Sam asked.

"Sure, I guess. Maybe we should do our homework there as well; I don't want to get in trouble for something other than drawing in class," Jacob told him.

Later, at Sam's house, they finished their homework. They still didn't know if it was right or not, but they played video games anyway.

"What are we going to do about people picking on us?" Sam asked.

"How am I supposed to know? Everyone at school hates us!" Jacob pressed the pause button so they could talk.

"I wonder why everyone hates us. Do we dress funny? Are we just weird to them?" Sam wondered.

“I don’t know, but we’ve got to do *something* about it! We can’t just sit here and get bullied,” Jacob said.

“Then what do you think we should do?” Sam asked.

“I don’t know,”

“That’s what I thought.”

The next day in Jacob’s first hour, Mrs. Roman received a call from Mrs. Dorman.

“Can I see Jacob Stanley, please?” Mrs. Dorman asked.

“Jacob! Mrs. Dorman would like to see you.”

He didn’t know what this was about. He’d only been in school for half an hour. He didn’t even have time to open his sketchbook yet.

When he got to Mrs. Dorman’s classroom, she pulled him in and slammed the door shut.

“What was that for?” Jacob was speechless. His doodles from the day before were alive in front of Mrs. Dorman’s desk.

“What is the meaning of this?” she yelled.

“I-I don’t know HOW this all happened. All...all I know is that these are my doodles from yesterday,” Jacob stammered.

“How do I get these ‘DOODLES’ out of my classroom?” she screeched. Jacob couldn’t think clearly; he was too fascinated by his doodles.

“I know,” Jacob came up with an easy solution. “Erase them!”

Jacob took a pencil off of her desk, stuck his arm out, and started to erase. It worked! The doodles were disappearing right before their eyes!

Jacob went over to his sketchbook and saw that his doodles were gone. “My doodles are gone!” he yelled.

Mrs. Dorman came over to look, “You’re right! That’s weird.”

At that exact moment, Jacob knew how to fix his problem.

Later that day, at Sam’s house, Jacob told him his plan.

“I’ll draw a ninja and he can be like our personal bodyguard!” Jacob began.

“It’s not a bad idea. It can be one of those samurai ninjas with a mask where you can only see its eyes!” Sam continued.

“Yeah, that would be so cool!”

“Then get drawing!”

In less than an hour, Jacob was done. It was the best samurai ninja EVER!

They left the sketchbook in Sam’s closet so they could check it again later.

The next day, after school, they opened the closet. There, standing right in front of them, was a samurai ninja. He was exactly how Jacob had drawn him. They told the ninja that he had to protect them from

everyone who wanted to hurt them. His life was dedicated to protecting them and his life depended on our safety. They thought that was clear enough for the ninja and that he could understand it; considering he's a drawing.

When they were at school the next day, everyone was avoiding them. Although there was one super tough guy name Russell. He didn't care if he saw a huge ninja next to them or not. As Russell stalked up to the boys, the ninja bodyguard stepped between them and Russell. Russell took this as a challenge and threw a punch at the ninja bodyguard. The Ninja bodyguard pulled out his swords and as soon as Russell saw them, he stopped dead in his tracks. Russell was so scared, he literally ran away from the two friends and ninja bodyguard. After everyone saw that, no one even walked on the same side of the hallway as they did! Sam and Jacob both agreed that they could get used to this!

There was one day that Sam and Jacob haven't mentioned yet. Jacob thinks it should be part of the story, but Sam doesn't. Jacob is going to mention it anyway.

One day, while Sam, Ninja bodyguard, and Jacob were waltzing down the hallway on their way to fourth hour, Jacob thought of the most devious plan he'd thought of yet. When school is out, they would stay in the bathroom until the custodian was done with the classrooms. Then, they would hide in a stairwell until the custodian was gone. Sam and Jacob were going to have Ninja bodyguard smash all of the locks on the lockers of the popular kids. Then they would take all of their things out of their lockers and throw them in the hallway! Isn't Jacob a genius?

"Should we be doing this?" Sam worried. "What if we get caught?"

"We won't," Jacob assured him. "And don't you want to get back at all the popular kids who have been picking on us for so long?"

"I guess so. It still feels wrong though," Sam said.

"Stop being such a worrywart," Jacob told him.

After they gave Ninja bodyguard the locker numbers for all the popular kids in the sixth grade, he found them all and smashed all of their locks. It was so cool to watch. It was so loud you could hear it a mile away! When they finished throwing the popular kids' books into the hallway, they went home.

The next day, they saw all of the popular kids' and the expressions on their faces. They were not surprised or upset. They were angry; very, very angry! Jacob heard one of them say that they'd find out who did this and beat them senseless. Sam and Jacob were freaking out. What if the popular kids found out that they destroyed their homework and textbooks?

At home, they just sat there in Jacob's room. They just sat there

thinking about what had happened. They both just looked at each other and knew what to do. They had to destroy Ninja bodyguard. The only way to do that was to erase him.

“Ninja bodyguard, you have served us well. You are relieved of your duties,” Jacob said.

When he was fully erased, they both agreed that they wouldn’t take advantage of Jacob’s drawing skills ever again.

“Wait a second,” Sam said. “What do we do about all the angry popular kids?”

“We’ll just have to lay low until this is all over,” Jacob said.

“I guess we will,” Sam agreed.



# Elsewhere

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*Aaron, a single, elderly man living in New Jersey, discovers that his house is being haunted by unknown creatures that seem to be looking for something. No one believes him. Aaron must protect the family's most prized possession from the creatures in ELSEWHERE by Alexandria P.*

One week passed, and it happened again. Sixty-year-old Aaron watched with bloodshot eyes as it got closer and closer. Time seemed to stand still while the shapeless lump shot around under the carpet. Tables, couches, chairs, everything toppled down onto the carpet, causing the house to vibrate.

\* \* \*

I stood, terrified, at the top of the stairs in my old home in New Jersey, in which I lived alone. This was the second visit of this unknown creature. It seemed to come every week or so, and the worst part was I never knew when. I listened for the clanging of my antiques, but it was gone. Then I heard it again, in my bedroom. I slowly crept down the hall with trembling legs. I was afraid to look. With a sigh, I peered around the now-dented wall. And there, in the middle of the room, was a werewolf. It looked just as I had imagined it when I was younger...a furry, dog-sized creature with red eyes and fangs. It let out a loud cry. The werewolf took a step forward, I took a step back. It took two steps forward, I turned and ran. I ran all the way downstairs and out into the sunny afternoon. I turned around, but I could not hear the werewolf following. Then, it rounded the corner and stepped out into the sun. It stood there for a second, let out another loud cry, and vanished into thin air.

Three days later, I went to visit my daughter who lived downtown. I decided it would be right to share with her the mysterious things that had been happening at my house.

"Hi, Marissa! How are you doing, honey?" I said to her as I walked into her small, 2nd-story apartment on Chestnut Road.

"Oh, great, Dad! How have you been?" she replied.

"Umm...great..." I said back, trying to get rid of my negative tone of voice.

"Do you want some lunch? I have sandwiches; I can order a pizza..."

"Sandwiches would be great; thank you. I can help make them," I decided, relieved to drop the subject.

Once the sandwiches were made, we both sat down at the bar in her small kitchen.

“So Marissa, there is something I need to let out, and I know of no one better to say it to. There has been some unknown thing in my house lately, and every time I walk into a room, it’s in there in another creepy form.”

“Why are you still so caught up in this whole idea that you need to test me? Dad, I can handle living on my own. I am not moving back in to monitor your house for some mysterious ‘thing.’”

“No. I’m not joking!”

She gave me the look. “That’s what you said last time.”

“Fine. Don’t believe me. That’s okay. I could have just been hallucinating.”

“Of course,” she said sarcastically.

A few days later, on Saturday, it happened again. The creature was back. I was downstairs eating when I heard the clang of metal on metal. I rushed upstairs to see a lump racing around under the carpet in the now-destroyed spare bedroom. What did it want? I still didn’t know. I ran into the room and tried to stomp on the speeding bump, but it was no use. Then the lump disappeared, and out from behind the dresser stepped the devil. No, the devil himself; pointy tail and all. Why did it always have to be something scary? Why couldn’t a cute, little, harmless kitten crawl out from behind the dresser? No one understood. If my daughter didn’t believe me, no one else would, either. I drew my attention back to the devil, and frantically determined what to do. I decided my best and closest choice was the fire extinguisher. I pulled it out from under the bed just as the devil took a step toward me. Then, I took a step forward. It took two steps forward, and I pulled the valve. White foam came spraying out, making the devil look like an angel! Then, my fear took hold of me, and I ran out of the room and back downstairs. And this time, it didn’t come following after me.

The next day, after arriving home from work, I sat down at my desk and relaxed a bit. I took a look at my giant calendar that always hung on the wall, and realized that there was a family reunion tomorrow! And what were those little words? Bring appetizer? I needed to go find something for the party! How could I forget? I ran to the garage, got into my car, and headed to the grocery store.

As I strolled down the grains aisle, I noticed a cart round the corner, with no one pushing it! I took a step toward it to study it closer, and realized it was being pushed by a ghost. The ghost almost looked like... my mother. Could it be her ghost? And to make matters worse, the cart had in it exactly the things I had come to the store for; a French baguette and some cheddar cheese. Weird!

“Hello?” I said timidly. The ghost did not answer. Then, I heard another person coming toward the aisle I was in. *Shoot!* I thought to myself. Would they see the ghost, too? A lady came down the aisle, right next to the ghost, but paid no attention. I must be going insane! No one else sees it! I quickly ran away to go get the things I needed, receiving a puzzled look from the lady as I sprinted off....

Once I got back to my house, I threw my grocery bag onto the couch and ran up to my room to get some sleep. Maybe that would make me less insane. I walked toward my closet to get into something comfortable, and once again saw that ghost! This was truly getting to be too much. I cocked my head, and it did, too. I took a step closer to my closet, and so did it.

“Hello? Mom...” I asked.

“Yes?” it answered in a woman’s voice.

“Are you my mother? You look like her.” I took a step closer to her, but she did not mirror me this time.

She smiled. “I think so. I do faintly remember you. But, I have lost most of my memory.” Her tone changed. “But, don’t fall into their trap...that’s how I ended up this way....” Her voice faded off, and her glowing figure began to dim.

“Wait! Who? I want to know more,” I said, and she disappeared completely. I slowly changed and got into bed. The clock read 10:07. I lay, thinking about the fact that I had just talked to a ghost who had proved to be my mother. My mother had died many years ago, and we were all sure that she had gone to heaven...but why had she lost her memory and become a ghost? And, whose trap was she warning me of? Wait a minute...was she speaking of the demon things that had been in my house? I didn’t think so. How could they possibly harm me? They were just frightening, and it was hard to live not knowing what they were. In the midst of I all my thoughts, I drifted off into a troubled sleep....

I sat up and stared into the bright light coming from my window. I got out of bed and got dressed for the family reunion. I ran downstairs to grab the bread and cheese, but it was gone! I frantically searched every cupboard, with unsatisfying results. The food was nowhere to be found. *Oh well, I guess someone else will have brought another appetizer,* I thought. No one would even notice. So, I combed my hair, ate breakfast, got in the car, and headed downtown to my niece’s house for the family reunion at 11 o’clock.

“Hey, Mike! How’s it going?” I greeted my younger brother as I walked in the door. I was the first of three children: me, Mike, and Patty.

“Hi, Aaron. Do you want me to take your appetizer to put out in the kitchen?” he questioned.

"I didn't really bring one. I had a French baguette and cheese, but when I woke up this morning, it was gone."

"That's real curious, Aaron." He smiled. "Nice excuse." He walked away to go greet Patty, who had just arrived. I hung up my coat, and headed over to my niece, Sydney.

About an hour and a half later, lunch was ready, and everyone flocked to the kitchen, all 15 of us. As I walked into the dining room with my food, I saw the familiar ghost of my mother. The other people in the room didn't seem to notice. And, she was holding my appetizers!

"They're coming soon. They're coming soon." she chanted, and faded off. My heart pounded, and I walked over to the chair which she had been next to, finding under it my appetizers. Whatever. I sat down at the table, and began to socialize with my relatives as I ate.

"So, I've had some unpleasant visitors at my house that I don't know what to do about. They're actually kind of creepy," I started.

"You shouldn't talk about kids that way, Aaron," Patty said with a giggle.

"No. I'm not joking. They caused a werewolf and devil to be in my house once. They are like some kind of little demons," I protested.

"That's a good one," said my nephew.

"Dad, I've already told you, you must be hallucinating," said Marissa.

"You've never been one to make the most convincing lies," Mike joked. I was hallucinating, and I was sure of it now. They were right. There was no such thing.

The next morning I awoke to a familiar voice.

"Dad?" I called, sitting up in bed. This was getting to be too much. "Is that you?" I listened closely, and was now able to make out his words.

"They are coming now! Get out! Don't give them what they ask for!" His voice faded away just like my mother's ghost had. Was my dad a ghost, too? I scrambled out of bed and rushed downstairs. There in the kitchen was a tornado of fire. It swirled toward me, and from it came a voice.

"Give me the diamond!" it roared. The color drained from my face. Not the diamond! My great-grandfather had brought with him a special diamond from Italy when he moved to the U.S. years ago. It was always passed down to the oldest child in the family, and we vowed to protect it. I could not lose it now!

"NO!" I yelled, and ran in the other direction. I heard it twirling behind me. My heart was like a drum as I felt the burn of fire on my back. I was sucked backwards. I saw gray and orange spinning around me. I heard the crackle of fire. Nothing but a burnt smell entered my nose.

Then it all stopped. I was dropped out of the tornado, and was sure I would not make the fall through the darkness. I looked down at my body; and it was clear-white; like a ghost....I suddenly stopped falling, and realized

with shock that I was a ghost. I tried to remember the things I had done the day before, but couldn't! I was just the way my mom's ghost had been! I looked around, and spotted two other ghosts fairly close. I glided over and realized it was my mom and dad. They smiled.

"Glad you could join us," said my mom.

"You better not get bored of us, because you'll be here forever," said my dad. I laughed.

"I still don't get it though. Why did they want that diamond so badly?" I was eager to know.

"We don't know either. We tried to protect it, just like you," said my mom.

"But who will take it now that I am not there to protect it?" I questioned.

"It knows. It has moved on to Marissa's house by now, I suppose," said my dad.

"It knows?" I asked.

"Yes, it knows..." said my mom.

A very loud shriek came from a 2nd-floor apartment in downtown New Jersey. "A werewolf!" screamed Marissa.

# Fairy Girl

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*Celia only wants to go to school and have fun. One day, when Twinkle bites Celia, everything goes wrong. From there it is downhill. Find out what happens in **FAIRY GIRL**, by **Abbie John**.*

Celia was getting ready to go to school. It was only the second day of school and she was still nervous. Celia quickly went outside and stood at the bus stop. It was a very windy day and the leaves were flying everywhere.

Meanwhile, Twinkle, the Snow Fairy, was getting blown around uncontrollably. The wind was crazy and poor Twinkle was tired. Then, she saw a girl standing outside. Twinkle hurried over to the girl and rested on her arm. The girl swiped at her arm where Twinkle landed and, out of habit, Twinkle bit down on the girl to protect herself. This was what caused the trouble.

Celia felt it instantly. There was a piercing feeling in her arm and which was excruciating. She quickly looked at her arm and saw a small fly-like thing. Celia flicked it off and noticed very small, red spot. It was probably nothing so Celia went onto the bus and sat all by herself.

Twinkle started to panic! She had just bitten a human and that meant that soon something bad would happen; something very, very bad. The poor girl was going to turn into a fairy! The child was going to transform within the next two hours and something had to be done. If Twinkle didn't get to the girl before she turned into a fairy, the fairies' identities were going to be blown and that would be terrible.

It was almost lunch time and Celia felt woozy. She looked at her arm and noticed that her whole arm had turned a light pink color. Her ears also felt a little bit pointier. Celia went outside and went behind the school. All of a sudden, Celia felt like she was shrinking! Celia shrunk and shrunk until she was the size of a fly. Her hair turned a beautiful shade of red and her clothes were transformed into silky material that was the prettiest shade of red.

Twinkle was rushing over in the direction of the girl and saw that she had already turned into a fairy; a very rare fairy. She was the second Sun Fairy ever to exist! This was worse than she thought!

Twinkle flew over to the girl and said, "Hello, don't be afraid. I am a fairy and I am here to help you. I will show you the way to the fairy castle. They will help you change back into a human, but you only have two days, so we have to hurry."

Celia stared at Twinkle.

“Umm,” Celia began, “is your name Twinkle by any chance?” Celia knew this because of her magical sun powers. Twinkle explained everything and then they started on their journey.

Twinkle and Celia had been traveling for a long time and had become quite close. They talked and talked and before they knew it, it was night time. Celia and Twinkle rested under a beautiful apple tree and took a nap. Before they fell asleep, a frog hopped by.

“Ribbit! Ribbit!” said the frog. “Hello, my name is Natalia the Frog. How may I help you today?” Celia and Twinkle looked at each other and giggled.

“May you help us get to the Castle of Fairies?” Twinkle asked. “We need to get there before nightfall of tomorrow.” Natalia agreed to help them, so she put Celia and Twinkle on her back and hopped away to the Castle of the Fairies.

When Twinkle and Celia woke up, they found themselves more than twelve miles away from their destination. There was a leaf with writing on it. It said, *‘I am sorry that I couldn’t take you all the way to the castle. I had to run a few errands. Good luck on your trip! Sincerely, Natalia’*

Twinkle and Celia looked at each other and shrugged. They would have to do this the hard way. Right as they were getting ready to go, a beautiful unicorn with sparkly pink and blue hair and a light pink body flew over to them. The horn was sparkly and pure white.

“Hello, my name is Emma,” she said in a rich British accent. “I am a unicorn. I am here to help you find your way to paradise. Where would you like me to take you?”

Celia said that they needed to go to the castle because she needed to turn back into a human.

Emma, the unicorn, gasped and said, “I could never do such a thing. You are a very rare species of fairy and your kind is almost extinct. If I were to cause the last Sun Fairy to die, it would be simply atrocious. I will walk with you and protect you but other than that, I cannot do anything else for you.”

Emma walked with them until it was almost dusk.

“Your time is almost up,” explained Emma. “Come, and I will help you. Sit on my back and I will fly over to the castle for you because this means so much to you. There will be a guard and you will have to get past her which is very hard. She is very mean and scary and you must be careful.”

Emma galloped majestically and gracefully. When they got to the castle, there was barely any time left. They went to the guardian of the castle.

“Hello, we are Celia and Twinkle,” Celia began. “I was bitten and now I have turned into a fairy. Will you please let us go past, so that we may ask for the King and Queen’s help?”

“My name is Rachel, the Guardian of the Castle,” grumbled the guardian. “I don’t know. I trust no one and I don’t know if I should trust you. If you answer this question correctly, I will let you pass me. What is 2+2?”

Celia laughed and said that the answer was four. Rachel looked very surprised. Fairies were not very smart and the simplest questions were the hardest to fairies. Rachel kept her promise and let them pass.

The castle was very pretty and very big. There were fairies everywhere, too. Celia and Twinkle looked at the time. It was 11:58 P.M.! They only had two minutes! Celia and Twinkle pushed their way through the castle. They shoved and got pushed over, but nothing was going to get in their way.

It was 11:59 P.M.

They crashed through the doors of the Queen’s room. The Queen screamed and asked them what was wrong. Celia and Twinkle quickly explained their situation. Just as the queen was going to turn her back into a human - *Ding, Ding, Ding* - the clock chimed at midnight! They were too late!

Celia was devastated. The Queen, Victoria, was trying to comfort her. She stated by talking about her own troubles in life.

“I was married to a King named Connor once,” Queen Victoria began. “But, we got divorced because he was crazy. I got to keep the kingdom while Connor got kicked out and was sent to the fairy jail. You are still young and you have many things that you can do. You can bite your family and they will turn into fairies, too. Then, you can come and live with us here! It is a brilliant idea! Just brilliant!”

Celia and Twinkle decided that they should go and visit Connor. Maybe he would know what to do. After all, he was a mad genius. They climbed back onto Emma, who told them that this was a bad idea because Connor was crazy. Emma galloped them over to the fairy jail anyway.

Celia and Twinkle looked around as they quickly approached the dungeon. Everything was suddenly dark and scary. All the beauty of the land had left as if it had been sucked away by a vacuum. The dungeon was even worse. It smelled of trash and different chemicals. They approached the dungeon which held the former King, Connor.

Connor was scary and evil looking. He smelled like raw eggs and trash. It looked like he hadn’t taken a shower in forever.

“Um, hi?” Celia said nervously. “My name is Celia and this is my friend, Twinkle. We are here to ask for your advice. We have heard that



you are very wise and I need your help. I was turned into a fairy by Twinkle and I can't turn back into a human since I was too late. Do you know what I should do?"

Connor chuckled wickedly. "I knew you would be coming since I have tabs on everything. Celia, you are the second Sun Fairy to exist and I do not believe that it would be very wise of you to try to turn back into a human. Besides, you are too late! It has already been two days and you should have come to me sooner. I am closer than the palace, you know."

Celia looked at Twinkle. Twinkle had a guilty look on her face and she wasn't looking Celia in the eye.

"YOU KNEW THIS, DIDN'T YOU?" Celia screamed. "You knew that I should come here first, but, you didn't tell me!" Twinkle slowly nodded.

"I had to do this because you can't turn back into a human!" Twinkle explained cautiously. "You are very rare and without you, the Sun Fairies are endangered! We need you, Celia!" They quickly left the dungeon and went back to Emma, the unicorn.

It was almost dawn of the third day and Celia and Twinkle were still fighting. They were still with Emma because she was going to take Celia to her family. They were to wait for her to bite her family.

As they neared Celia's house, Twinkle and Celia started reconciling. By the time they arrived, they were friends again. Celia flew into her house and saw her little brother first. Celia bit him gently and watched as he turned into a fairy. He turned into a Fairy of the Waves. Celia quickly explained the whole situation to him and, together, bit the rest of their family. Their Mom turned into a Light Fairy, Dad turned into a Blacksmith Fairy, and their baby sister turned into a Water Fairy. They all climbed onto Emma and she continued to explain the whole thing to Celia's family.

"Your family is wonderful. I wish I had a family like yours," Emma sighed.

Celia looked at Emma in shock. "Emma," Celia said, "you already are part of our family!"

Emma smiled a very happy smile and galloped all the way to the Magical Castle of Fairies.

# The Famous Jester

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**THE FAMOUS JESTER**, by *Connor Bradbury*, is a story of how a jester learns the lesson of listening to his elder no matter the consequence because she knows what is right. It tells us that if we listen to our elders, we will be rewarded. But, if we don't, there will be punishments.

There once was a very famous jester named Fido, who entertained the royals throughout the land of Quent. He spent most of his time entertaining in the capitol, Azion, where the Great and Elegant Queen Victor sat on her throne. He entertained almost every day and sometimes even through the night.

One day, he was walking away from a party at a tavern when he was jumped by a drunk local. Fido didn't recognize him from any of the parties that he went to, so he didn't hesitate to try to fight back. At first, it seemed like Fido was going to get away unscathed, but a second man came out of the shadows from behind and knocked Fido over the head with an empty beer mug. Fido tried to fight the oncoming darkness, but it washed over him like an unrelenting wave.

He awoke in a mansion where he had never entertained before. He suddenly realized that it was his own house. He was tied up in a chair in his kitchen, but he had no idea how he got there! He was still trying to clear his head when a tall dark figure stepped into view. He tried to ask what he was doing in his house, but it just came out as a loud, low moan. The man laughed and yanked a figure into view. It took a minute for the face to swim into view, but as soon as he recognized it, he cried out in surprise. It was his mother! She didn't look afraid; she just looked grim and defeated. It seemed like she was almost prepared for what was happening because she wasn't wearing her usual nightgown, but jeans and a dark green t-shirt.

He gave her a confused look and she said, "This is my husband, Fido, your father."

"What?" he cried.

"This is your..." his mother continued.

"I know, I heard what you said," interrupted Fido. "But, what about the other one?"

"He is your brother," she explained.

Fido was too shocked to answer. He just looked at her with a look of betrayal. The man laughed and drew out a long, wicked-looking knife. His mother didn't try to shy away. It wouldn't have mattered because the grip

the man had on her didn't look like it was going to loosen at all. She just stared at it solemnly. The man held it up and, without another thought, stabbed her through the back.

Well, that's what would have happened if Fido's mother hadn't slid away at the last second. The man's momentum carried him across the room. He looked bewildered when he saw that his ex-wife had picked up a cutting knife and then stabbed him. She didn't give him a second thought as she whirled around with incredible speed and stabbed her eldest son. She slowly turned around and cut me out of my bonds. It looked to Fido as if she was reliving the few moments that she had killed her husband and her son.

She raised her gaze to Fido and whispered, "I am so sorry." Then she turned the knife in her hands and stabbed herself through the heart.

Fido was too surprised and sad to cry or do anything besides call a pair of guards to take the bodies away to get them cremated. He went straight to bed and slept for a full day before getting back to his job.

When he did get up to go to work, he remembered that he had to entertain the Queen and her closest friends. He got ready slowly, not even wanting to go to the party, but he had to. When he finally reached the castle, he began to entertain for everyone who was already there. The party slipped by like water between his fingers.

When it was finally over, and everyone had left, the Queen called him over.

"Why were you not being your usual, funny self today?" she asked.

"My mother died two days ago," Fido responded.

"That is not an excuse," she hissed.

"I'm sorr-," Fido began.

In mid-sentence, the Queen whispered a spell that made him turn into a dog. He whimpered and sprinted out of the City of Azion, never to return again.

# The Famous Monster That Loves Cookies and Thinks They Are His Life, Gets Eliminated by the Vegetarians and Veggie Monster

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**THE FAMOUS MONSTER THAT LOVES COOKIES AND THINKS THEY ARE HIS LIFE, GETS ELIMINATED BY THE VEGETARIANS AND VEGGIE MONSTER**, by *Jefferson Rodgers*, is the story about the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life getting eliminated by the vegetarians and Veggie Monster.

“I’m related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life, or you could say I’m his brother. You may have never heard of me before, but this topic makes me extremely mad. The reasons why the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life, aka my brother, got replaced by the Veggie Monster was because parents are too lazy to get up and turn off the TV, and they let their kids eat too many cookies. If children are eating too many cookies, then stop buying the cookies! I mean, you can get *some*, just not too many. But nooooo, the parents are too lazy to do something responsible. On top of it, they go and complain about how unhealthy it is. Well, kids don’t want every show to be healthy,” says the one who is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life.

“V is for veggies, that’s good enough for me, oh V is for veggies, that’s good enough for me, oohhh veggie, veggie, veggie starts with V.’ Now does that sound catchy? I don’t think so,” says the one that is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life. “So thanks to those lazy parents, the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life is in his basement watching TV, eating cookies, and thinking there is no purpose of going outside and showing his face in public. Now excuse me; I have somewhere else to go. Others want to hear my side of the story and ask me some questions,” says the one that is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life.

“Now, hello, the one that is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life. How did this affect the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life?” asked the talk show host.

“Well, this aggravated him in two ways. First, parents don’t like him, and they used to watch him when they were young. Second, they were too lazy to just stop buying too many cookies. But did they stop? Noooooooo, they kept on buying them and still complained that they were eating too many unhealthy things,” says the one who is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life.

“Well, don’t you think the parents bought the cookies but the children kept on sneaking them past their parents?”

“Well, to all those parents out there, HIDE the COOKIES better! That’s a good idea, don’t you think? Now can someone please get me a cookie?”

“That’s some good advice about the hiding the cookies,” says the talk show host.

One of the cameramen that works there came up and gave the one that is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life a cookie. “Thank you,” says the one who is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life.

“Now where were we? Oh, yes, now what would you do if you met the Veggie Monster?” asked the talk show host.

“I would bring a knife made of the cookies and show him what pain my brother is feeling. Just kidding. Seriously, it’s okay to have sugar!” said the one who is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life calmly.

“And that was our special guest. Thank you.”

“No, thank you, because now I just let out all my anger. Also I’ve got to go and buy more cookies and check on my brother,” said the one who is related to the famous monster that loves cookies and thinks they are his life.

# Fire and Ice

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*When two young girls get exposed to radioactive lava and dry ice, their lives change forever. They have to find their parents, reveal the mysterious man in white, and try to stay alive. Find out how this all started in **FIRE AND ICE** by **Kaylin Montgomery**.*

**M**y name is Hailey. I am 12 years old. I have a sister named Heaven. Heaven and I aren't the usual pair. She's my step-sister.

My dad died when I was seven. It was a drunk driver accident. That man was arrested and was my mom's ex-husband. It's difficult.

My mom threatens to send my sister and me to Ashford Middle School if we are bad. It's the worst school ever. But forget my story. You're here to listen to Heaven's and my adventure, right?

It was a Tuesday— cold, exactly 34 degrees Fahrenheit. I would know. We weren't always keeping secrets from each other until the day we got exposed

"Heaven, no, we can do this. Just don't let go! Heaven, Heaven, no!"

## Two Months Earlier

"So, Heaven, what do we have for homework?"

"Here, look at my planner."

"Ok," I said.

My bright red hair hit the snow as I sat there reading it. I was just playing around until Heaven was gone. Heaven was out of sight. No matter where I looked I still couldn't find her, so I looked all around me. Then I just stood up and just simply walked home. Then I saw her long brown hair swing behind a tree. "There you are." Then she ran all the way down the hill. I couldn't see her anymore.

"She probably just went home," a voice said behind me. It was a man with a long, black trench coat with blue buttons on the side. His hair was white, but he wasn't old at all.

Then I said in confusion, "Who are you?"

He replied, "I am Raymond Grope Finch."

"Oh, you're the crazy guy who mom married, right?"

"Yes, but I'm not crazy anymore. Now, my dear Heaven, tell me where your mother is."

"I'm not Heaven."

"Well, you just have to be. She never ever remarried."

“Yeah, she did. I’m her step-daughter, Hailey.”

“Oh yes, the red hair. I thought she dyed it. Well, then, you’re coming with me. It was supposed to happen to Heaven, anyway.”

“No, I won’t. Get off me!”

*Hmmmm.... I wonder were Hailey is. I’m so stupid; I forgot she had the house keys. Oh well, I’ll just go to the park. Whoa, what’s that big hole over there? I looked deep down inside of it. It was nothing in. What the heck is this junk? I thought it was another clue to adventure. Aw man. Then someone pushed me in.*

The next thing I know I’m lying in a dirt hole. Some mysterious man put a big metal thing on top so I couldn’t get out if I tried. “Somebody help!”

I woke up in a cold, icy place with my hands tied to a table. As I sat on the floor I pushed the table up. I was free. It seemed to be like a castle. I just started to think of Heaven and how cold she is on my porch just waiting for me but me knowing that I’ll never be able to come home.

I heard a voice call my name. “Hailey!” I heard screaming down the hall. Not knowing if it was my crazy kidnapper, I fled.

I ran down the hall and up the glass stairs and into a room with a huge crystal. It was so pretty. I stepped a little closer to touch it. Then, *boom*, the alarms went off. I ran out the room, down the steps, and out of the castle. I climbed out of the hole and ended up in the park.

I saw another hole. Then I just kept running.

I fell. Then my kidnapper can back and screamed at me. He started to throw things and hit stuff, and he said, “I give you the curse of a rime.”

“What!” I screamed, and then in a flash I appeared home in my room, but it was very chilly. I got off my bed in confusion and walked slowly to Heaven’s bedroom.

“Help! Somebody help me!” I heard voices, but they were under me. I started digging, and then the dirt fell—all of it. I was falling, and I hit the ground—real ground, not dirt. It seemed that I landed right in a volcano hot spot.

“Where am I?” The man with the gray jacket and sunglasses was back. “Ugh. Can you just give me a break, dude? I’m tired, ok? Forget what I said about adventure. I got a booboo and I want my mommy and a Band-Aid would help.” He just stared at me. “Fine, just fine, I’ll just walk around and look for a door out of this place.”

I walked past the man, and then he grabbed me really hard and pulled me back. Then he walked away. He started to walk my way. I was walking backwards. Then I fell in something. It was goeey and gross. It was magma,

but it didn't burn. For some reason I was getting carried by cold magma. I screamed. The magma was so sticky I couldn't even lift my arm. I screamed really loudly, and he just stared at me.

The magma was like a river. It was moving me, and pretty fast I would be away from this dude if he didn't walk any faster. Then he stopped and pulled down his scarf and he smiled. His teeth were the yellowest teeth ever. Then he waved at me as I passed him into a cave full of cold magma. "Well, this isn't that bad," I said, and I started to sing these words: "I'm a kid just 13 years old sitting in magma yeah just lying magma yeah."

Suddenly I saw more magma, but it looked more... well, I guess it looked different. Then my toes started to burn. I noticed the cold magma was getting hot, and then a woman appeared out of nowhere and said, "I will save you. I give you the curse of a colloid!"

I appeared in my room lying on my bed. It was hotter than usual. The door opened, and it got cold again. It was Hailey. Before I could even open my cold lips the doorbell rang. I told her I would get it.

I opened the door and it was my mom. She said that she forgot her key. I gave her a big hug and cried on her for a really long time.

I wondered what Hailey was doing, and I walked downstairs to see her hugging my mom. Then I ran to give her a hug. Hailey went to go make her some lunch, so I opened my mom's bedroom door and locked it behind me. I sat on her bed and said, "Mom, I need to tell you something."

"What?"

"Well, today I went through this lava thing and I have magical lava powers and now I can do this." I flicked my finger and my FINGER CAUGHT ON FIRE! I didn't even know I could do that, but I just did. My mom screamed. She called the doctor really fast.

When I was at the doctor's office they said I was completely fine. I didn't want to flick my finger around my sister, so I didn't.

Okay, so this isn't the whole story. It's just the beginning, until my dad found a vacation brochure in the street. He picked it up and then he liked it. "Hawaii, huh," he said. That's when the trouble started.

When we got to the hotel it was so peaceful and pretty. I was so hot because it was 98 degrees and my veins are made of ice! It all started when Heaven and I decided to go to the beach. My mom told us to, so we agreed. On our way there Heaven got mad at me because I told her to chill, and she started to cry. I wonder why she did that. We were sitting in the sand kind of far away. SHE WAS FLICKING HER FINGER. WHAT WAS THAT FOR? Every time she flicked her finger it would get really hot, and it kept melting the ice castle I was making with my ice powers. I got really mad so I turned around and caught her finger. It was on fire, and she caught me, too. My hands were all icy and blistered.



“What’s going on?”

“I’ll tell you what’s going on.”

“What?”

“The man in the white coat—did you see him?”

“Yes,” she said. Then she said, “No, this can’t be.”

“It is. I’m fire and you’re ice.”

That whole week we didn’t say a word to each other. We didn’t eat together. We didn’t even share the same bedroom anymore. I thought it was going too far. I decided to tell her that I was sorry.

“Heaven, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, but I couldn’t.”

“Why?” she said.

“Well, because if I told anyone I thought they might send me away or even worse tell my friends!” We made up and talked about it all day.

The next day we woke up and decided to tell our parents we were going to the pool. We opened their bedroom door and everything was torn. There were ashes and bullets, and the window was wide open.

We were so scared. We ran all the way to the lobby. The lobby looked just like our parents’ bedroom. What was going on?

I heard a thud on the roof. I knew it was him, the man in the white coat. He was there.

Heaven and I still haven’t been talking because of the whole secret thing, but I’ve learned to cope with it. We walked up the dusty stair with broken light bulbs and thought, *What’s going on here?* We were on the roof watching our parents being dangled off the side of the Marriott Vista Resort. We screamed.

We ran to them, but the man in the white coat appeared. “Who are you!” I screamed. Heaven and I were speechless.

The man in the white coat cleared his throat and said, “I know that you’re scared, but your parents will die if you don’t sacrifice Heaven instead.”

Heaven stepped up and took their place. He made her struggle. She was holding on for a long time, and then I grabbed her hand. The man in the white coat was furious! He pushed me off with Heaven.

“Heaven, don’t let go!”

“You wouldn’t care if I did. All you care about is keeping that stupid secret. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because we’re not the same, and I swear one day we will be. Just hold on. Please! No!”

I couldn’t hold on anymore. I told Heaven I was going to let go. She nodded.

I let go. It felt like endless falling with no end.

I woke up in an all-white room. There was a woman there. She told us we succeeded.

“What? What do you mean?”

“This was never real. We tested normal people to see if they could face the strength of love and conquer death.”

That weekend we were as happy as can be, and the man in the white coat was sent to jail.

“Honey,” my mom said as they sat on the couch with me. “You guys are going to middle school—Ashford Middle School, just for keeping that secret,” joked Mom!

# A Greek God Lesson

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*Two Greek gods look down on a boy bully in New York. Can they stop him? Find out in **A GREEK GOD LESSON** by **Yuval Kohn**.*

**D**arkness and Lightness were twin Greek gods. Since the time they were little kids, they had done everything together: played together, learned together, and worked together. There was only one thing that was different about them: Lightness was the goddess of good dreams, and Darkness was the god of nightmares. Although they had different powers, their intentions were always good.

The twins' father was the Greek God of Dreams. He created them by making two large sparks that exploded in the sky one beautiful summer morning. The Greek god raised them and taught them everything he knew.

Lightness, the Goddess of good dreams, gives good dreams to every good boy and girl. She is nice, kind, and helpful, and she finds good in everyone. She wears white and light pink dresses.

Darkness, the god of Nightmares, gives nightmares to every bad boy and girl. He always wears blue and red clothes.

One day, Lightness was looking down at New York City from Olympus (which is on top of The Empire State Building). She was watching all the city's children. Suddenly, she saw a boy that she thought was good, bullying two new kids. The boy seemed to like it. Lightness heard the boy say, "I was here first. So, you have to listen to me!"

The kids answered, "Why? We didn't do anything to you."

"We didn't do anything to you.' I don't care!" the boy said.

The kids got scared and ran away.

After that Lightness called her twin brother Darkness. "This boy, Alex, was bullying two new kids, Amy and Adam," she said.

"Then, Alex will have nightmares until he will change his behavior!" promised Darkness.

That night Alex started to have nightmares. For once, Lightness enjoyed it.

The nightmares continued, but Alex kept on bullying the kids. Finally, one night, Darkness gave him a dream that he would never forget. The god himself appeared in the dream. Alex could not see him, but could hear him.

The god said, “Young boy, I know you are having nightmares, and I know why you have them. If you don’t want them anymore you will have to listen to me when I say... STOP BULLYING AMY and ADAM!”

Alex woke up all sweaty. He thought he just heard a Greek god or something. He got scared. He shook his head, breathed, and closed his eyes again.

The next morning the boy apologized to Amy and Adam. “I am so sorry that I bullied you. Now I know it is wrong, and I will never do it again!”

Adam and Amy thought about it for a minute. While they were thinking, Alex was playing with his hands nervously. He wondered if they would forgive him.

After some discussion the kids said, “We might.” Then they left.

After half an hour Amy and Adam came back to Alex. “We forgive you,” said Adam.

“Yeah, let’s be friends, we will have no fights, and...we’ll have fun,” said Amy. And they all ran off to play.

Alex stopped and whispered, “Whoever talked to me last night, thank you. I will be nice from now on. Thank you for teaching me the lesson I forgot.” Then he caught up with Amy and Adam.

Darkness and Lightness looked at each other, nodded, and accepted his apology.

Lightness and Darkness looked down at New York City one last time before leaving the city for another 3,000 years. This night they gave Alex a present and a good dream.

“Are you ready to move to Pennsylvania?” asked Lightness.

“Sure,” said Darkness. “Although I think I might miss this place, even though it’s much too noisy for me.”

“Yes, it is noisy, but you’re right, it’s a good place.”

“We have to go, Lightness. The other gods and goddesses are leaving. So, let’s go.”

And with that, they disappeared.

# Gummy War

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*People think gummy bears are harmless. They should think again. After you read **GUMMY WAR** by **Offie Rashed**, you will reconsider what you think about gummy bears.*

**C**HARGE! AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"  
BAM! BAM! BAM!

## 24 Hours Earlier

"Dan, it is time to go to school."

"Mom, why do I have to go to school?" Dan said.

"Do you want to grow up dumb like your Uncle Joe?"

"No," Dan replied.

He went on to the bus stop. He sits right in the front of the bus. He sits up there because he gets bullied in the back.

They pulled up at the school. He ran straight to the class. The bell rang ten minutes later.

Everyone was seated when I turned around and looked at the teacher. The teacher said, "It is time for some gummy bears." The class cheered. Then she ripped off her skin! The whole class screamed. They were terrified!

All the kids ran out the door. But all the teachers were standing looking like "GIMME BEARS."

All the kid jumped out the window and gathered up. They all asked Dan, "What do we do?"

Dan said, "Do not split up. There are too many of them."

No one listened to him. Only 12 people did. Then the rest of them died because they got shot by the teacher's laser gun. *ZAP!*

There were 13 left. The rest of them walked in the school.

They said, "CHARGE! AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

*BAM! BAM! BAM!* All of the 13 people died but Dan. The teachers pointed lasers at Dan and they said, "Any last words?"

He said, "Got milk?"

*BAM!* Dan shot them with a milk gun in his pocket. *BAM!* There goes one teacher. *BAM!* There goes his teacher. *SLAP!*

The principal, the king of gimme bears, stood up and said, "Dan, your time is now. You are going to be like all of your friends that went to war against us. HA, HA, HA!"

Dan got up, and he said, "Listen here, you punk. I am tired of you. It is now your time to die, sucker." *BAM! BAM! BAM!* He killed the principal.

All of the kids that were not dead ran to Dan and cheered. They were proud of Dan.

All of the teachers got fired, and the principal. That is why the owner of the district checks every teacher.

# The Invasion of the Oranges

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*It was Friday when the oranges took over the suburbs. It's up to only one boy to save his brother and the world. Will the boy succeed in killing King Orange, or will he be killed? Read **THE INVASION OF THE ORANGES** by **Matthew August** to find out who will win.*

It was an ordinary Friday; I threw my backpack down and sat on the couch to take a break after school. I grabbed two oranges to eat in my special way, with a straw, when my brother screamed out.

“I got it!” he screamed.

My brother was working on a life-animating potion for his science fair project.

“I want to see it,” I said as loud as I could talk, which is pretty loud for me. He said okay and came walking downstairs. He showed me this blue and red liquid.

“That’s the potion?” I asked.

“Yep,” he answered.

He sat down on the couch next to me, but I got up to get a drink when it happened.

My dog, Teddy, ran inside after trying to catch a mole. He jumped on the couch and landed on my brother.

“TEDDY, NO!” screamed my brother. Teddy knocked the life potion out of my brother’s hands and it landed on my two delicious-looking oranges.

“NOOOO!” I screamed. My oranges splattered in this disgusting liquid.

“Guess my potion didn’t work at all,” my brother said while staring at my oranges.

“Yeah,” I replied. I put my oranges back in the fridge; I would wait for the syndrome to leave the surface of the orange.

The next day, I woke up and poured a bowl of yummy, chocolate cereal and sat down in front of the television. I felt something on my foot. I looked behind me and under the couch. There were thirty-nine huge oranges with faces. I screamed like a little baby that was having a really bad nightmare! I ran upstairs and locked myself in my room.

I heard my brother open his door and scream. Then, I heard weird, muffled talking that I couldn’t understand; it was literally someone or something making that noise.

“Muffled, muffled!”

I knew it wasn't my brother talking. It had to be an orange; a mutated, living orange.

I took a hammer and broke into my emergency box. It contained a kitchen knife, a baseball bat, and a utility belt to hold the knife. I took a minute to think about this crazy situation. I finally came to the conclusion that oranges are the fastest breeding animal on earth.

I heard even more talking outside my door. It seemed like oranges were guarding my door. I grabbed my kitchen knife and was ready to throw open my door.

"1, 2, 3!" I screamed.

I threw open my door and saw an orange flying through the air. There was only one guard orange, not the two that I expected. The orange got back on his feet. Wait a minute! I just realized this new orange breed had feet and arms. This orange also had a long, sharp sword made out of a pineapple stem and a potato gun.

We had an awesome battle! In the end, well, let's just say I was drenched in orange juice and covered in huge amounts of mashed potatoes.

I realized that my brother wasn't anywhere to be found. I did find a note on our kitchen counter.

Dear Hero,

We think you are stupid, loud, and hyper and have a horrible sense of humor! But, if you want to have a chance to see your brother again, go to the Orange Woods. Here is a map. Your next clue to your brother's location is at the woods. So, go, you idiot!

Signed,  
King Orange

"Well, here's the map," I said to myself.

I followed the map into the Orange Woods, which was actually in my backyard. I gathered my weapons and walked through the forest. I walked for a long time until I saw my next clue. It was on an orange and in an envelope. I tried to pick it up, but heard a scream. The ground beneath me shook and the orange rose up to become a 15-foot orange.

"Wow," I said. The envelope was still in the orange's hair.

"Oh," I said. "Well, no time for thinking; it's time for running!"

I ran as fast as I could and grabbed my baseball bat. The huge orange was coming closer, so I closed my eyes and swung. I heard a yelp of pain



and opened my eyes. The huge orange lost his huge tooth. Just then, I had an idea. I grabbed the tooth, jumped up on the orange, and, when I was on his head, I raised the tooth and stabbed the orange's head. The orange got dizzy.

Then I had a better idea. If this is the orange's head, then the brain must be close. I whacked that tooth in deeper with my baseball bat. Soon the orange died from brain damage. The first thing I did was my victory dance, and then I grabbed the envelope.

Dear Hero,

At this point, I thought you would have died in the hands of my "little" pet. But, you have made it this far, so I will give you your next clue. Open up my pet and crawl inside. In his insides, there is a portal which will transport you to the outskirts of Orangopolis. Go inside the kingdom when you're ready for the Challenge of Champions. Goodbye, you dumb jerk!

Signed,  
King Orange

I was mad at the King Orange; not only had he stolen my brother, but he called me names.

"Well," I said to myself, "here I go."

Armed with my kitchen knife, I opened the huge orange's stomach. I jumped in and searched for awhile for the portal. Luckily, I found the portal near its butt. I jumped in the portal, and I was amazed at what I saw after getting out of that orange.

Everything, and I mean everything, was orange. Especially the 5,000-acre castle I saw on my right. I decided that was where my challenge must lie. I knocked about 500 times on the orange wood gate in front of the castle until I was finally let inside. As I walked in, two orange gangsters knocked me out. I woke me up with a bag over my head.

"Where...Am...I?" I asked quietly.

I heard some music in the distance. The orange gangsters removed the bag and the next thing I knew I was in the middle of a gladiator arena. I think it was that rude King Orange who I heard speaking in a grand voice.

"You idiot, hero! You will be challenged by ten orange gladiators. I will be your final opponent."

Okay, I was getting mad at this idiot for calling me stupid, so when the gladiators came, I took out my anger. Soon after, nine orange gladiators were down and I had 200 gallons of orange juice.

“You have made it this far, you dumb hero, now to face the real challenge...ME!” yelled King Orange. Out of nowhere appeared an orange that was my size, but then I saw he was not just an orange. He was red and blue—the same colors as the liquid my brother had made.

“The life potion,” I said, surprised.

“I am invincible to knives, you idiot,” he screamed.

“YOU STOLE MY BROTHER!” I screamed.

I was getting really mad at this orange, so I took my knife and made some orange sushi out of him. I was thinking about how much money I could have made by selling all my orange juice!

I thought I had won. But, when I turned my back, the most amazing thing happened. The King Orange grew back his damaged parts.

“Don’t even try baseball bats, either,” he said.

He charged at me and knocked me down. He beat up my face until I was bleeding and getting dizzy. He couldn’t be injured. There was absolutely no way he could get slammed or sliced, so I almost I gave up. I heard King Orange mention that he would win and how he needed a new belt to hold up his gold pants. Wait! A belt! I had an idea. I grabbed my own belt; you can’t come back to life if you can’t breathe.

“What are you doing!” hollered King Orange.

“Like I’m going to tell YOU!” I screamed. “I hope you have a will!”

I took the belt, wrapped it around the orange’s neck, and squeezed as hard as I could.

“DIE!” I screamed as loud as I could. As he was choking, I took my knife and stabbed him right in his heart. Everyone went silent. Lying on the ground was a dead orange with a golden crown. Everyone was booing me, throwing banana peels, and little orange kids were crying. But, I did my victory dance.

“Give me my brother,” I demanded. My brother was quickly returned to me.

When we got home, I got into the Orange Slayer Hall of Fame and my brother had to start a new science fair project. His new science fair project was called “The Daily Life of an Orange.”

Whenever my brother invents something new, I always go into a different room to eat my oranges. One day, I forgot and my brother ran downstairs with a Life Ray and tripped. The Life Ray shot at my orange.

“Not again!” I screamed. But, my brother and I had a good laugh and crushed the orange with a hammer.

# Isabel, Sorceress of Her Time

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*In ISABEL, SORCERESS OF HER TIME by Anna Liebelt, Isabel has a new power: to walk on water. But will she find her long-lost dad in a tribe full of people who want to kill her? If so, will she be able to control her power in time to save him?*

Isabel Firefly lives in a little house, away from all civilization, in a forest, by a mountain and a lake. One particularly sunny and bright day, Isabel asked her mom this: “Mom, when is Dad coming back? I miss him.”

“I know, I know, I do too. Something came up in Beijing. I said he was in Beijing, right?” Isabel’s mom told her.

“But Mom, it’s been eight years!”

“I know. I know,” was all her mother said.

Her daughter stormed upstairs to her room and threw herself on her bed, sobbing. Where was her father? Was he really in Beijing, or was her mother hiding something from her? Carefully, she retrieved the precious locket from her desk draw. If you didn’t have great eyes fit for finding things and you looked at it, all you would see would be a normal locket, but with no way to open it. Isabel had good eyes. When she got it from her father (her only memory of him) on her fourth birthday, she immediately found the catch under the heart that was sticking a little too far out. As she undid it now, she fingered it delicately.

Inside was a worn-out picture of her dad. He looked handsome, kind and funny. Just the memory of him brought tears into her eyes.

Suddenly, she felt strange. It was as if a ghost flew right through her. She snapped the locket shut and headed downstairs.

After she left the room, this trinket shone a bright gold color. Her computer turned on and a Word document popped up. It read:

**Magic:**

**Status:** Transferred successfully

**To:** Your daughter

**MISSION ACCOMPLISHED**

Isabel decided to go for a walk to clear her mind from her father. She had felt like she was being watched, in her room, and it wasn’t the only time she had had the feeling. The sky was a beautiful peacock blue, so Isabel looks up at it. Suddenly, her feet felt like they were walking on

something softer than grass. It felt sort of squishy, and, out of the corner of her eye, she saw it was blue. Cautiously, she looked down...and saw only moving water under her feet.

“This can’t be happening to me. Oh, no. This is a dream, just a dream, nothing else,” exclaimed Isabel, petrified. The poor girl pinched herself, hard. “It’s not a dream! I...I...I must be hallucinating. I must be! There isn’t any logical explanation for this. I’m going crazy! That must be it...”

She turned and fled into the (not so) comforting darkness of the woods.

An old lady appeared from what seems like out of nowhere and told our hero this: “Please, please come. I greatly need help,” pleaded this strange woman.

“What with?” asked Isabel. “I can’t do everything, and I need to be back home by—”

“You will like it, and don’t worry. We have a schedule, too,” muttered the wrinkled person impatiently.

*‘We have a schedule, too’? Does she have other helpers?* thought the young girl.

She followed the woman to the heart of the woods, and then off onto a secret concealed path that she hadn’t noticed before. But not all her thoughts were in the path she was being led on. *How can I walk on water? How is this happening to me? How did I suddenly get this power?* So many questions boiled in her mind. She thought about the strange sensation she had felt when she held the locket. *What if...* She pushed the thought aside. No, she would not be seen crying about a lost father in front of just anyone.

The two ladies headed for the mountain. Little did Isabel know that this creepy old woman was actually the boss of a tribe that threw people into volcanoes as offerings.

They arrived at the mountain. At its peak, the younger of the two spotted a sign reading “Welcome to your death. Welcome to Mount Wokadonka.” Suddenly, some strange people came up to Isabel and grabbed her roughly by the arm. She protested, kicked, and shoved, but they finally managed to put her into a straw mattress and hold a handkerchief up to her mouth. She fell into a deep sleep....

She was woken up shortly after, and the people of the Wonkadooka tribe weren’t so nice to her. They roughly led her to the place where she would make a great discovery: the mountain that she lived so close to was actually a volcano.

A wave of fear took hold of her. And then she got pushed into the volcano. She felt like she was floating in gooey Play-Doh. She thought she was in Heaven. Maybe she’ll meet her dad. Isabel opened her eyes...

...And saw red-hot lava under her. She could not only walk on water, she could walk on any liquid surface! The amazing thing was that she didn't feel the burn of the lava.

Isabel looked at the tribe. They were all gaping at her and started whispering to each other. She only caught the word "goddess."

The girl grinned inwardly to herself. Quickly, she climbed the rough walls around her. The two tribesmen closest to her helped her up. The man with more tattoos and jewelry than the others (the chief) pointed at Isabel and yelled "ἄθεος ἄδῆς ἡγήσατο" at the women. They immediately scurried off, and came back shortly with food. He gestured at our friend and told her, "ἄθεος ἄδῆς ἡγήσατο."

The guest of honor stood there, timid like a mouse. Then she spotted someone in the crowd that she recognized. The last time she had seen him was when she was a baby (if you don't count the photographs), but still...

He was taller than she remembered. And he was starting to have a little mustache. Standing there, looking straight at her, was her father.

She started to run to his side, but was held roughly by some guards that were shaking their heads. She kicked them, in vain. She was led away by these strange people, away from the only person she loves (apart from her mom), crying the whole way.

Isabel was placed in a dark, damp cell infested with rats. She slumped down against the far wall, where her guardians couldn't see her, and thought things through. Her mind bubbled over with questions: *Why was Dad here? Why can't I see him? How can I help him? How can I escape?*

Suddenly, a boy came out with her food. He said he sneaked it out of the kitchen for her. When he left, she slowly got up and slammed her foot down in a deep puddle of water in frustration.

That's it! Water!

"Maybe I can also MANIPULATE liquids as well as walk on them," thought Isabel. Eager to try, she closed her eyes and thought about the water rising around her and pushing her through the window. Our heroine opened her eyes, but the water hadn't changed.

Desperate, she thought of helping her dad. This time, the water swished in the hole. Isabel shut her eyes and thought of him more than ever. She let loose all the emotions she had kept inside her for so long. Then, she felt water wrapping around her, dancing with her, making her rise up toward the window. At the top, she scurried through the window, nimble like a fox.

Her father was in a glorious palace made of gold. It was quite a way from the main village, and it took Isabel quite long to find it. In front of the massive doors, she formulated a plan.

Pushing open the doors carefully, she crept inside. Rushing from room to room, she searched for her father. Finally, after thirty minutes of searching, she found the aquarium.

It was empty except for a dolphin whose tank was pushed to the back of the room, under a tarp. At this sight, Isabel laughed in glee. One minute later, she was riding the dolphin, surrounded by a massive wall of water.

He knew where to go, and they quickly got to the throne room. It was gigantic, and made of pure gold. But the best sight of all was the king. He was dressed in the richest clothes ever, and you could mistake him for part of the tapestry behind him, he was so radiant. Next to him, bound, was her father.

As she rode into the room, the king looked at her. He had the most piercing blue eyes, and Isabel finally got a good look at him. To her surprise, he was the boy that had brought her food in her cell!

When he saw her, he grinned at her, as if telling her: I knew you would escape! His oh-so-radiant smile vanished when he heard voices approaching. He beckoned for her to come, and when she was at his side, he bent over and whispered in her ear, "I will let your dad go. Just write on a piece of paper 'Your bars were very easy to break!' or something like that, and place it in your cell, and you can go home."

His voice was soft like honey when he said this; she felt she had to agree. They unbound her father, and the trio sneaked out into a hidden passageway. Isabel followed his instructions and father and daughter left on the dolphin's back. When they got where they wanted, they left the dolphin swimming happily in the lake.

The two of them rang the doorbell and were enveloped in a warm, motherly hug.

That evening, Isabel went to sit on her favorite perch she usually used to share with her dad and looked at the stars. Her dad came and sat by her and told her all about where he had been. "Isabel, darling," started Dad, "what did Mom tell you about where I was?"

She told him about Beijing, and he shook his head.

"No, no, I wasn't in Beijing. But let me start at the beginning.

"I have a confession to make to you. I haven't been completely truthful about my job. You see, I am actually (here he lowered his voice to barely a whisper) a spy. I worked for the SIS (Secretly Intelligent Spies). My mission was to pass on a power, a secret power that even I did not know, to a certain Mr. McLean.

"I was torn. Should I leave my family to embark on this mission? Should I quit my spying and settle down? I couldn't decide, but the agency

found out about my choice and told me that I could watch you grow up if I accepted the mission. So I accepted.

“McLean was a great sorcerer, but a week after I began my assignment, he died in a fight against a ferocious and mysterious monster. If the agency found out that I had failed my mission, I would be kicked out.

“I thought for days and nights for someone I could give it to. Finally, I got an idea when I saw a locket in an antique store. Of course, I modified it so that it would give you its power only when you were ready to take it on.

“I suspected your mother would find out what I was planning and confiscate the locket from you. So, I ran away. I had heard suspicions that the volcano was inhabited, so I turned to the Wonkadooka tribe for a disguise. After many tests (they took up two years), I was accepted as one of them. I have been looking over you ever since.”

Isabel remembered the feeling of being watched she had felt so many times before. She also remembered the strange but comforting feeling she had felt when the “ghost ran through her.” That must have been the power transferring!

“My daughter?” Dad asked her.

“Yes, Dad?” she responded.

“I am curious about one thing. What was the power?”

“The ability to walk on any liquid surface.”

“Wow. That is quite a shocker. Now, why don’t you tell me your side of the story?”

Isabel obeyed. Once she was done, he lay on the tiles and stared into space. Finally, he spoke. “You have braved many dangers and have been very brave. I think it is time for me to introduce you to my boss. Who knows? He might even hire you as a new spy.”

And that was just what he did.

They also had a very unexpected guest that evening: the boy king! They had a meal of pork pie (not traditional), turkey (very not traditional), and, for dessert, chocolate ice-cream (he said he’s going to have to introduce it to his people!). He kept on coming for more meals. He still hasn’t stopped.

# Jungle Walls

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*In JUNGLE WALLS, by Natalia McIntyre, two friends fall into a mystical world and go on a journey to save the jungles of the strange land and learn about their new skills. Many others have gone on this same journey; why should Sol and Natalia succeed?*

Sol and I were pressing our heads against my bedroom window, staring out at the backyard. It was a hot summer afternoon, one of those days when weather guys on the radio say that it's dangerous to go outside because it's so hot. Now, my babysitter is not the nicest person in the world, and the second she heard the weather guy, she used it as an excuse to lock my brothers, my friend, Sol, and me in our rooms. That's right; she locked my friend in my room with me. Now, usually I would jump out my window, but my mom had planted a pokey plant right under my window, so it was probably not the best idea.

So, there we were, stuck in my room with nothing to do except talk and no way to get out of it. After awhile, we got bored staring outside and started to stare at my wall. Now, if you don't know me, you probably don't know that my bedroom is decorated like a jungle. In fact, two of my walls are covered in a mural of a jungle. The strange thing about the mural is that there are way more animals than usual for that amount of space in a real jungle. Plus, some of the animals live in different parts of the world. I don't really care, though; it makes it way more interesting.

Anyway, I had been staring for about five minutes when I noticed something I hadn't seen before. One of the trees was shaped like a door. Apparently, Sol noticed it at the same time because she walked over to the wall, touched the "door tree," and, with a little ripple, disappeared. That's right: She disappeared, right into my wall!

"Oh, shoot!" I said. I know, that sounds lame, but I couldn't think of a word that would suffice for the situation.

"What's going on up there?" said my babysitter.

I yelled, "Nothing!"

"Uh, huh, *sure!*" she yelled back. I was certain that she was too lazy to come up, but maybe she was afraid that I was having too much fun. A few seconds later, I heard someone coming up the stairs. When she got to my door, which is inconveniently right at the top of the stairs, I freaked out and jumped right into my wall.

We were in a jungle, my jungle on my wall! The first thing Sol and I noticed was that I was a kinkajou and Sol was an elephant. The second



thing that came to mind was that we had no way to get out of this foreign jungle. We have been through a lot together, like the time we got stuck in a tree and it started to rain, so we weren't too freaked. Sol disagreed; she said that I looked so scared that she almost laughed. *Sure*, I did. That's when I saw them. The animals were everywhere! They started creeping closer and closer to the clearing where Sol and I were standing.

Five hours later, we were seated around a campfire giggling and chatting with four other animals from camp number 5½ (don't ask about the camp name). The four other animals were Carlos the dwarf rabbit, Diego the Mexican chameleon, Mia the giraffe, and Victoria the boa constrictor. Suddenly, two more members walked up. I'm not sure about Sol, but I couldn't believe my eyes at first. If my eyes were seeing the truth, I was seeing two unicorns! We discovered that their names were Abbie and Emma. After we got acquainted, they started to tell the tale of how all the animals had gotten into that jungle.

Emma, the unicorn, sadly stated, "The Thunder Clouds' lumber yard was a booming business. That was good for them, but soon they ran out of their special supply of rare rat wood, and they decided to start cutting down the special reserves in the national parks."

Abbie added, "Within a few years, they cut down everything except the small stretch of Amazon rain forest which we are currently in. Even now, they are continuing to destroy what is left of the precious habitat."

Suddenly, a shrill cry rang through the jungle.

Diego said, "Anyways, on that happy note, it's time for a slumber."

"Wait," Emma cried, "I'm not done with the history lesson yet! Besides, who here is tired?" No one raised his or her paws, with the exception of Diego.

"The only way to save us is to find the Three Wisdom Turtles," Abbie finished.

In the morning, Sol and I woke up to the sound of the strange cry that had gone off the night before. We decided to look for the turtles, but one thing bothered me.

"Why has no one found the Wisdom Turtles?" I wondered aloud.

"Because no one has ever gotten past the Grumpy Hippo River," Victoria hissed. "I was wondering if I could be your guide as far as the river."

"Sure," Sol answered, "Great, now we can get going?"

About an hour later, after being stepped on about 50 times by Sol, we finally reached the river. The river was churning so much that it looked like a frothy cauldron. Just as I was beginning to wonder what was making the water turn so much, a huge shape rose out of the water.

"What do you want this time, Victoria?" the lump grumbled.

“I *want* you to come out of the river and talk to these friendly animals, and do it quickly Lindsey,” Victoria yelled back. As the lump lumbered out of the river, I realized that it was a hippo!

“Er, hi, I’m Sol. My friend Natalia and I were wondering if we could cross the river,” Sol said.

“How about... NO!” Lindsey yelled back.

I asked, “Why not?”

Lindsey replied, “Because, as long as those cranes are here and attracting baboons, I’m too annoyed to let anyone cross my river.”

“*Such* a good reason,” Sol commented.

We tried to bribe Lindsey and even be friends with her (both plans failed). Since she was not being helpful, Victoria called over a baboon named Bob and scared off Lindsey. We crossed the river with no other problems.

When we got to the other side, Victoria sadly said that she could go no farther with us, for she needed to get back to the camp before nightfall or she might get lost in the dense forest. So there Sol and I were; it was like being in my bedroom all over again with nothing to do. Except this time, we were terrified of the dark jungle noises instead of the baby sitter. Just as I was going to give up hope, I heard something.

“Well you sure look lost. Wait, an elephant and a kinkajou traveling together, I know who you are! You must be those people who are looking for the Wisdom Turtles,” said a voice. “Hi, I’m Abby, the monkey, and I was wondering if I can be your guide to the Turtles.”

“Sure,” Sol said, “as long as you know what you’re doing and you don’t ditch us.”

“*Victoria*,” I coughed.

“Well,” Abby said with a mischievous glint in her eyes, “I’ll do my best.”

It turns out that she was not planning on ditching us. In fact, she became good friends with me and Sol. When we finally got to the Tree of wisdom (the turtles lived under it), Abby looked around.

“*So*, what ‘cha want to do now?” Abby asked while hanging upside-down from her tail. Her question was answered when a door opened in the trunk of the tree. All I was thinking was, ‘*Wow*’.

We crept into the hole and stood up. I looked around in amazement. That’s when I spotted them. The wisdom turtles were sitting on magnificent pillows with beaded patterns that depicted the ‘story of the end of the world’ as Mia, the giraffe, called it.

“Er, hi, um,” I stammered, “we were wondering if you could help us save the forest.” I know, I know, it sounds lame, but if you were there, you would be stammering too.

The turtle in the middle stared down at me. Then, with a sudden movement, she was next to me.

“I am Morgan,” she said. “You must answer this riddle to go any farther with this quest.”

The turtle next to Morgan, his name was Steven, told us the riddle: “BROTHERS AND SISTERS I HAVE NONE, BUT THAT MAN’S FATHER IS MY FATHER’S SON. WHO IS THAT MAN?”

I thought for a moment, it sounded familiar. I then remembered. It was the same riddle my dad had made me answer before he let me have ice cream a few weeks ago. I racked my brain for the answer. I walked over to my friends and told them my answer. Sol was a little worried, but she said it was better than her guess. I walked slowly up to Steven.

“Your son,” I answered.

“Correct,” Steven said, “and what a fine son he is.”

Morgan, who was getting impatient, yelled, “Now you may press the button.”

“Wow,” Abby murmured, “I didn’t think it would be that easy.”

“Me either,” Sol agreed. We walked over and pressed the button together. It shocked us so strongly that we jumped back a few feet.

“What did pressing the magic button do besides shock us?” I wondered aloud.

“Well,” said the Turtle to the left of Morgan, “It sort of magically hypnotized the workers of Thunder Clouds Lumber Yard. Now they all want to do is put on ballet tutus and replant the trees they’ve been cutting down.”

“Why the tutus?” Abby asked.

The Turtle next to Morgan smirked and said, “Well basically they don’t serve a purpose, we just thought it would be funny. Don’t you agree?” The three of us laughed and nodded our heads in agreement.

As we were leaving, Morgan yelled after us, “By the way, you are all shape shifters now. You will need these necklaces to change.” She tossed us the necklaces and somehow they each landed around one of our necks. Mine was shaped like a wolf. It was made of ‘tiger’s eye’. Sol’s was an ivory turtle. Abby’s was an elephant made of gold.

“Hey,” Sol said to Abby, “isn’t that supposed to be mine?”

Morgan answered, “No, you each received the correct ones.” Just as she said that, we transformed into the animals on our necklaces.

“Cool!” I mused. I looked down at my necklace, expecting to see the wolf, but I saw a wolverine instead.

“In time you will learn to control the animal on your necklace. When you want to change back into a human, say ‘*naslac*,’” said Morgan.

After a long trek back through the jungle, we reached the “Tree Door”. Abby came through the enchanted tree with us, and, soon, we were sitting on my floor. Abby was telling the story of how she had gotten stuck in the “jungle wall” a few days before us, and Sol and I discovered that she had light colored hair and was very funny.

We go into the jungle every time my parents are away and we try to visit all my friends like Mia the giraffe and sometimes even the hippo. I invite my two friends over often. We all figured out how to control the necklaces pretty quickly.

I will never forget the day I first jumped into my wall.

# The Land of Google

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*When an evil elf tries to destroy the world of Google, three creatures will try to save it. In **THE LAND OF GOOGLE** by **Angela Goncalves**, three very unlikely creatures work to save their home planet and everyone on it.*

Google was a place of wonder. Anything and everything that someone could think of was here. It was like a cyber-wonderland in a way. All was good and right.

In this magical land called Google, life was odd. All of the life depended on a single item. There was a little golden coin that controlled all life in Google. This coin was held on a special tree. All life would die out if it was taken.

Most things loved the land. But one did not. A sour, old elf could destroy it all easily. The elf had a horrid attitude. He was crude and hateful, and he could never be pleased.

The elf was never given a name, and he hated all life and everything about it. He would say things like “Horrid world” and “This is too happy.” The elf was very depressive and ungraceful in every way possible. He knew the only way to stop all the light and goodness. It was to take the coin. One day he did, with help from the under creatures. He took the coin to just spite everyone.

Other than the regular people of Google, under creatures were creatures that could not stand any light. Their skin or fur would burn or dry. There was never any kind of light seen where the under creatures lived.

When the elf took the coin bad things happened. Under creatures started to come out and pillage everything. At once everyone saw that the coin had been taken. Everyone went into a frenzy. Not one person did not have a panicked look on his or her face. Life went black and dead at that very second. It was like a barren wasteland now in the once happy land.

No one would go out to find the coin. So, three very unlikely creatures went out to find the coin.

Three of the main inhabitants were Helen, Alba, and Marcy. Marcy was a tall pixie with long, weak wings. She barely ever spoke. On the other hand, there was a person with the face of a tiger named Alba. Lastly, there was a normal person whose name was Helen. That was the most uncommon thing there was. She lived there as a human, because she was born that way. She was the misfit of all her family.

They would go off to stop the elf. Alba, Helen, and Marcy thought that he would likely be in a cave. The Elf kind loved cold and dark caves.

They passed a large purple forest on their way. Forests were known as a dead territory. Forests were also often found near caves. You could hear the whispers of anything that wasn't there. It had uncommon animals like grizzly bears and mountain lions.

Alba was scared out of her mind of the whispers. They were said to kill. She ran and screamed at the slightest noise. Finally Helen would scream at her to shut up. Soon after her yelling, things would jump out. They looked like jesters, and Alba would scream more. The screaming caused more to come, and they all would have to run.

After a single hour that seemed like years they got out. Alba thought she would kiss the ground when she was out of there. She started to scream about how she had missed safe land.

There was a giant half-broken bridge that looked like it was made of cobble. It looked rickety and unstable. On the other side was a cave. Helen saw an under creature running hurriedly that way.

Marcy tried to step on the bridge, but the part gave away. She screamed like she was getting her head cut off. It had shown them a steep fall that no one could survive. She would have fallen if she couldn't fly. She could only float for about five seconds. The cave was only a bridge away, but it was deadly.

Alba was yelling more than ever, and Marcy wouldn't move. Helen was acting like a mother trying to keep children in line. Alba fell on the bridge while running in a circle. They found out that they could crawl on it though as long as their feet did not touch it.

After that they made it to the cave. Like the inside of a phone, it was complicated and intricate inside. The outside was blunt and dull, and the inside was a complex mess of wire. Only in this case it was a cave with large, intricate protections. The protections were very advanced and impossible to understand. To sneak inside it would be difficult, but it could be done with the right thought. All they had to do was sneak in through the vent. It sounded simple enough to do until they did it.

Alba was larger than most of the creatures: not weight-wise, but with more parts. Her snout and tail took up space. Her hands had large cat-like nails on them. They made a loud clicking noise with every step she took. She now had to walk on her palms, and she would continually fall to her side.

Once they were out of the vents they had to get the coin. They were in a dim room. It was packed to the top with boxes and other storage. It was well-protected, and the floor was filled with electricity.

The room was in the deeper caverns of the cave. Alba and Helen would have to walk. Marcy had very weak wings. She could not fly, float or even stay up in any way for five seconds. It was not possible to do it anywhere close to two minutes without stopping. She would feel like you would if you had tread water for too long.

She refused to do it. Helen looked like she could kill her when she told her that. She said that she would try after the death stare she was given. She tried to fly as hard as she could. She beat her record of five seconds and went 20 seconds. She noticed when she was falling that there were things she could land on. She did her best not to scream as loud as she did at first. None of the three wanted to be heard.

When she got to the coin she swiped it away without thinking. Marcy knocked over a vase onto the floor. It made a high pitch, screechy crashing sound when it hit the electrified floor.

When the vase hit the floor all of the electricity went out. Everyone ran for the exit as fast as possible. You easily could hear how hard Helen was breathing. It was raspy and hard. She knew that the entire cave must have known what happened.

The three saw a closer exit. The elf sent out angry hounds on the three creatures. He was fuming with rage. The hounds were foaming at the mouth and had a determined look in their eyes.

The three could nearly feel the breath on them. Alba had the idea to hide from the dogs. The three were ahead of the dogs. All of them had time to hide in a small hole on the side of a mountain. The dogs lost their sent, and then all of them ran to the tree. Everyone ran till they all got to the coin's tree.

The elf, Alba, Marcy and Helen fell on the tree. Marcy threw the coin in, and light filled the land. Every second felt like a year.

All three girls were thanked for doing what no one would. The elf was later put into a prison for what he did. He liked it there, and it was dark and depressing. He stayed for the rest of his life.

Google was now restored to the regular way it was.

# Lucky Harms

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*In LUCKY HARMS by Quentin H. Borts, a wacky group of friends and enemies moves through the world in their own style. See how they warp the rules of the natural world.*

It was a quiet day in the big oak tree, and then Lucky Harms came outside with his three kids, Stack, Napple, and Dop. Unfortunately the Cookie Demon, aka Superfly Cookie Guy, attacked Stack. Stack reached for his weapon, but it was not enough. Then Anthony, aka A-Fluff, had a special connection with Stack, so he jumped up in the middle of the classroom and said, “Stack...”

Then Mr. Brownrigg said, “Anthony, sit down!”

“Mr. Brownrigg, you’re disrespecting,” said Anthony. Then he sat down.

So when school was out Anthony said, “Que-Ball, I had a vision where I got my money up.”

So I said, “Ok.”

He also said he fried his junk. And I said, “Whatever floats your boat.”

“Dang right that floats my boat!” said Anthony.

That night he called me and said I had to cover for him because he was going to save Stack. He said, “It’ll work great for you because you have supersonic speed and whatnot.” It did not help that I was a complete and total klutz.

So, I went to bed like usual, and the next morning I was walking through school and I had to walk like two people. Then I ran into Alexis, and she said, “Hi, Quentin.”

“What’s up?” I said.

Then I (or Anthony) said, “Get your money up right quick.”

Alexis said, “What?”

“Nothing,” I said.

“Ok, Quentin,” she said.

Anthony is on his adventure and all, but I have to tell you, it is not fun. Anyway, Anthony is adventuring, so he is walking along the trail when an angel comes up talking on the phone and says, “Hey, LaRonda. No, I have five people on hold, but I can talk.”

Anthony was confused, “Who’s LaRonda?”

The angel said, “Mind your own business.” Then she started to walk away.



Anthony said, "You're just mad because I stole your man."

Angel came to a complete stop, slowly turned around, and cocked her head sideways saying, "Excuse you?"

Anthony snapped his fingers and shook his head back and forth. "You heard me."

Then Angel started to run at him. Anthony braced himself and ran forward, and Angel turned around and started to run in the opposite direction. But she fell over on Anthony. Anthony closed his eyes beforehand and ran over Angel. So Angel, out of anger, tried to hit Anthony, but she is very slow. So, Anthony just grabbed her hand and threw it down.

Later, Anthony decided to lie down, but he lay on a moving thorn bush. Then he sat down and said, "OUCH! I'm going to fry your junk right quickly." So the moving thorn bush ran away sounding suspiciously like Lucky Harms.

Anthony, using his mental connection to Stack, walked into a cave and walked in. As he grasped his sword, the Cookie Demon, aka Superfly Cookie Guy, saw Anthony, Anthony raised his sword and said, "Get your money up!" Then the Cookie Demon killed him.

He was healed by Taylor. But Lucky still thought he was dead.

You see, Anthony and the Cookie Demon were twins.

Then Taylor Wightside came up from inside the cave where she had been hiding, planning the assassination of the Cookie Demon, and said, "You died, fool!"

Anthony said, "What happened?"

She said, "You died."

Anthony stomped his feet, "I didn't want to die."

Then Lucky Harms stabbed Anthony and said, "YES!"

Taylor said, "You killed the wrong person, fool!"

"NO," said Lucky Harms, "A MISCONCEPTION!"

Since Superfly Cookie Guy killed Anthony, he killed himself. Seeing the Cookie Demon's stupidity, Taylor brought only Anthony back to life. When she healed Anthony she lost her healing powers forever.

They found out that Superfly Cookie Guy was wearing a mask. When they lifted it they discovered that Superfly Cookie Guy was Stack all along, which is why the Cookie Demon died with Anthony. They had a mental connection.

"Never did like that guy," said Anthony.

# Magic

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In **MAGIC** by *Alexis Arbaugh*, Trina has a stone necklace that her evil classmate Jacob wants for its magical powers. He will do anything to get that necklace from her, even if it means going to another dimension with her to get it.

“*P*sssst, Vanessa, come to my house right after school to work on the math project,” whispered Trina from across the classroom. Vanessa nodded yes. Trina was so excited about leaving school for the weekend, she started doing what she always does, looking around the weird classroom until the school bell rang. Her science classroom was so boring. All it had in it was a lot of books and a couple of desks and chairs to go with them. It smelled like very stinky fish, like the kids were all in a giant fish tank! What place could be more boring than Atlanta, Georgia? Trina would never listen or for that matter would any of them.

“You should listen to the teacher because he always has something important to say. Also, stop pushing me around whenever you turn to look at something else,” whispered Trina’s worst nightmare, Jacob. He was staring at her necklace like it was a piece of pie. Trina thought of saying something much more horrible to him because of the way he had been treating her for many years. She was just about to say something mean but something stopped her, maybe it was her kindness or that she did not want to get in trouble. Trina started whispering in Jacob’s ear.

“You better leave me alone or I will, I will, I will, well, I don’t know what I am going to do, but it’s going to be painful to you!” she said. Mr. Smith talked on and on and on about the history of dumb rocks. Finally, one kid stood up and said to Mr. Smith that this is not history class it’s math class and he was not planning to learn history for one hour.

*DING, DING, DING!* clanged the school bell. “Yes! I get to go home! See you at my house later!” Trina yelled. The weekend was finally here, but for Vanessa and Trina it wasn’t. They had skipped math class so many times they had to do an extra credit project to get caught up.

Down the long and meandering road Trina sprinted home to see if her mom was there. If she was Trina couldn’t have Vanessa over, but if her mom was not there the girls could work on their project together. Vanessa got in trouble a lot at her house and was not allowed to come over. Trina arrived where her house should be; but it was not there.

“I think I’m imagining this, but I’m not. Where did my house go?” Trina thought. “I must be in the wrong neighborhood,” she said to herself. She ran as fast as she could to the front of the neighborhood

where the sign was. “Yeah, I’m in my neighborhood, I’m pretty sure of it.” Trina carrying her big and heavy backpack trotted back to where her house was not and stepped on to the empty patch of dirt. “Where is my house?” she yelled in her head.

“I know where your house has gone Trina,” said Jacob.

“Who needs your help? I hate you!” yelled Trina surprised by his presence.

“But I know where it went; I can help you!” ordered Jacob.

“I don’t need your help and I certainly don’t want it!” said Trina yelling even louder.

“Step on the ground where your house was,” said Jacob.

“I already am. See?” cried Trina.

“Fantastic,” whispered Jacob to himself.

“Get away from me you jerk!” screamed Trina. And all of sudden she was zapped to a whole different dimension.

She looked around. The space was all dark and cold and sort of like a cave but with a science lab in it. “Where am I?” asked Trina to herself when she spied someone in the corner. “Mom, I found you!” she screamed aloud

“Don’t try to come and get me,” warned her Mom.

“Why?” asked Trina.

“Because there is an invisible shield around me!” said her mom. “Sit down and they won’t hurt you,” her mom, Lillian, whispered

“They who?” asked Trina. “The people who trapped me here, THEM!” yelled her mom, her voice quivering. The ground starts to vibrantly shake and a loud roar comes from right behind Trina.

“Do as your Mother says and sit down little girl!” bellowed the huge, hideous monster.

“OK,” whispered Trina as she plopped herself on the icy, cold floor. Trina twisted around slowly to see what the monster looked like. She could feel its warm and nasty-smelling breath from where she was sitting. Now she was face to face with the ugliest monster in the universe.

“Hi there big guy!” said Trina in a scared voice giving the brown and hairy monster a nudge with her fist. Next to the big monster was a tall and cute looking guy that had a strangely familiar face. “Jacob, is that you?” asked Trina

“Yes, it’s me, Jacob, from your school,” he said in a robotic voice.

“Why are you talking funny? And weren’t you just at my house trying to get me to go onto the brown dirt where my house was? IT WAS YOU!” yelled Trina getting the monster kind of mad. Trina kept thinking that she hoped she was not trapped in a cave with her arch enemy!

“It took you that long to figure me out. And I thought you knew me oh so well,” said Jacob. By now she was looking all around to see what this intimidating place was. All around Trina was dark brown rock with light peeking through some of the cracks. Scattered around were lanterns lit by candles. It was dark and cold down in the cave and she feared she would get frost bite.

*Vanessa's house in Atlanta, Georgia*

“Mom I’m going to go to Trina’s house to work on a project. Is that ok?” asked Vanessa to her mom. Vanessa walked out the door because she really did not care what her mom thought about her going to a friend’s house.

Her mom yelled out, “I don’t mind, have fun.” Vanessa walked down Trina’s street looking closely for her house. “I was sure her house was right here,” she kept thinking to herself. At that point, she thought she was totally losing her mind and decided to walk up and down the neighborhood street and look around a bit. Now she’s walking up and down the streets in Trina’s neighborhood looking for her everywhere. Finally, she arrived back to the place where Trina’s house should have been and it still wasn’t there! Vanessa stepped on the dirt where Trina’s house should be (Trina did this too) and she was also zapped to a different dimension! The only thing left of her in their real dimension was her notebook and a pencil for starting the project.

“Hello is anybody here?” asked Vanessa timidly.

“Vanessa is that you?” asked Trina.

“Yeah, who are you?” asked Vanessa.

“It’s me Trina. You were supposed to do your project with me but these weirdoes took us here and there is no way out.”

“What do you want with us anyway?” asked Vanessa. She looked around and then stopped when she saw the monster and asked, “What is that thing?” Vanessa wanted to prevent Jacob from saying something smart like, this is a highly trained monster but it is not a monster it is a Yoda and I am the king of this land and blah, blah, blah.

“Well, this is a monster and it is very hairy and has really smelly breath,” replied Trina sarcastically. The monster stared at Trina and Trina stared right back into her beady eyes. “What are you looking at, Mr. Ugly?” yelled Trina again.

“UHG, UHG, UHG, UHG, UHG!” said the big monster thing. Jacob began to talk and we all dozed off into space.

“I have brought you here because you have something I need,” he said.

“Can you tell us what it is? And while I’m asking things, why was our house gone and did you really need to take it?” asked Trina.

“I was about to tell you about the necklace but you butted in and said a couple horrible things about my Yoda. I have been greedy all my life but this is truly the most I have ever wanted something in my life. I want that necklace that you are wearing, Trina!” commanded Jacob.

“Look at this, do you really want it? It was my grandma’s and it’s all rusty and has a rock in it. It’s all smashed and crumbled but, no you can’t have it! And I’m asking you again why our house was gone!” said Trina in a loud voice.

“But he wants it; just give it to him so he shuts up and returns us all back where we came from. It has special powers like the power of everything and can do anything you ask it,” said the Yoda.

“You, you monster, you were not supposed to tell her that! You’re so stupid! OHHH and what happened to your house? We needed something to make sure you came, not just staying in your house doing absolutely nothing and not coming here to our pretty cave.” yelled Jacob.

Trina tries standing up for the monster but gets way too afraid. “You are making the monster scared and you are hurting his little feelings. He was just trying to be nice and you should be ashamed of yourself Jacob. Trina tried to say that as nice as she could.

“Don’t talk to me that way about my monster, Trina. He is just a Yoda and as I said he is very, very stupid and ugly!” Jacob said in a harsh voice trying to sound horribly mean.

“Since it’s her necklace she should know!” whispered the Yoda monster as Jacob called it. As Vanessa looked around the cave, bats were flying out of the ceiling and climbing into the cracks that she guessed lead to an outside world.

“By the way where are we?” asked Vanessa.

“It’s pretty self-explanatory, a cave!” Jacob said. “Well, you don’t have to be so mean about it! She was just asking a simple question,” said Trina.

“I just want to get out of here in one piece, OK? My mom thinks I’m at your house working on a project,” said Vanessa angrily. Trina’s mom, Lillian looked at her phone and it read 4:56 P.M.

“You guys are not going anywhere until I get your necklace,” said Jacob sternly. Trina looked at her necklace and saw a blue rock in it and the same look-a-like rock on the ground by where they were sitting. She took the rock from inside her necklace and quietly slipped it in her pocket and placed the rock on the ground into her necklace.

“You want my necklace? You can have it! I don’t need the dusty old thing anymore,” Trina threw the necklace on the ground in front of Jacob.

“Now you can go and when you get back your weird house will be there,” said Jacob. “ZAP”! In just one second they were back right at home.

“I’m so glad to be home, I could kiss the grass!” said Trina.

“Great, there’s my mom. How am I going to tell her we went to another dimension, that we don’t even know about and your house went missing too?” whispered Vanessa to Trina.

“The strangest thing just happened to me. I’d been driving around your neighborhood for such a long time trying to find your house and I have looked here at least ten times,” said Vanessa’s mom, Molly.

“Did you know what our house looked like Molly?” asked Lillian.

“YES, I remember because I’ve been here before to pick up Vanessa,” Molly said. Both of the moms had the strangest look in their eyes and right then looked straight at their daughters. Vanessa’s mom started to talk first,

“Girls, how come your mom does not know I have been over here before to pick you up?” she asked.

“Well that’s an interesting question.... My mom loses her memory a lot and more than usual. That is exactly why,” whispered Trina to Vanessa. See I told you I would think of something,” said Trina.

“You know what? I don’t have time for this right now. We will talk about this a little later Vanessa,” said Vanessa’s mom Molly.

“I will talk about this a little later with you too, but right now we have to go inside and discuss something else a little bit more personal. I will be inside if you come on in,” said Lillian. Trina’s mom quickly walked inside and Vanessa’s mom slowly walked to her car and said the same thing to her daughter.

“It’s going to probably be mother to daughter stuff and you know how that stuff goes blah, blah. I will text you what she says a little later,” whispered Trina to Vanessa secretly.

“See ya later!” screamed Vanessa from inside their car.

As Trina ran into her house she stepped in something. “Mud, I hate mud, ugh, gross!” she said aloud.

“What do you want?” Boom, boom, boom sounded her mom as she walked down the stairs.

“Honey, I need to talk to you about something. Come into the kitchen please,” whispered her mom.

“Why are you whispering?” asked Trina.

“Come here and let’s talk,” her mom whispered.

“Did you really think that your necklace had special powers? Did you really give it to them? That was your grandmother’s, and...” said Mom.

“Mom, not to cut you off or anything, but I really do think it has special powers because the way he sounded like he was telling the truth and I did not give it to them. Calm down mom, you are really starting to freak me out,” Trina spoke in a hurried voice.

“You have to whisper. You did not give it away? I have seen in movies that this same thing happens and there is always a secret camera in the house because they were in it!” whispered Lillian again.

“Mom, you’re right, I did not give it away! You know that all the stuff on TV is not real, wait, you are the one who always tells me that.” Trina’s mom tends to go on about something.

They both walk outside to see a hologram pop up in their front yard. It was Jacob.

“I will get your necklace one day. Ha, ha!” Jacob said in the hologram.

“Leave us now and never come back!” commanded Trina. The rock started to glow in her necklace and in an instant Jacob was gone.

“Wow, I told you it had magic powers. Mom, I am scared of this guy. I mean Jacob goes to my school and I don’t want him to get me because of my magical necklace!” said Trina.

“Don’t be afraid and don’t worry about it, everything is going to be fine,” whispered Lillian.

# The Magic Walking Stick

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*Peter is given a magic walking stick by his grandpa, and then his grandpa is kidnapped. Peter and his friend Theo must go save Peter's grandfather in **THE MAGIC WALKING STICK**, by **Harvey Reeves**.*

Peter Jones was small compared to most eleven-year-olds. He was about four feet five inches tall and pretty scrawny with short brown hair. His life changed forever the day of the car accident that killed both his parents. After the accident, Peter then had to go live with his grandpa. Peter's grandpa was an old man but was as strong and lively as a horse.

About half a year later, Peter and his grandpa were watching the Lions beat the Packers. At half time Peter's grandfather said to him, "Come down to the basement with me." So Peter went downstairs with him.

Once they were in the basement Peter's grandpa went into a storage room where Peter was never allowed to go. He came out a minute later with a cane in his hand.

Peter got a confused look on his face. His grandpa didn't need a cane. The old man could walk fine how he was. Peter's grandpa then said to Peter, "Here, I want you to have this," which confused Peter even more.

"Um, Grandpa? Why are you giving me a walking stick? I don't need one."

Peter's grandpa smiled. "It's special. I'll show you how to use it," he said. The old man went back in the storage room. Peter heard some rustling of boxes. Then his grandpa came out with a tennis ball in his hand and set it on the ground.

"Let me see the walking stick," said Peter's grandpa. Peter gave him the walking stick and took a few steps back because he didn't know what would happen. His grandpa stood staring at the tennis ball and tapped the stick on the ground twice. The tennis ball disappeared into thin air! Peter stood there with his jaw hanging wide open. Then he started laughing.

"All right, Grandpa, that was a good trick. Where did the ball go?" he said as he started to look around. The old man stood there with a grin on his face.

It took Peter's grandpa a lot of explaining for Peter to understand that it wasn't a trick.

"I got this from my grandfather when I was about your age. My parents never knew about it and your parents didn't know either," said Peter's grandpa. "My grandfather was a magician, but not the kind of one that you go to a show and see. This was real magic. Now, my grandfather



created several different walking sticks, but since he destroyed the rest because of some controversy with the scientists, this is the only remaining stick. A couple of years ago some scientists discovered that I had the stick. I have no idea how they found out but they wanted me to give them this. I refused to do this and I had to move here to Michigan from Ohio where the science lab is. I'm pretty sure those scientists are trying to hunt me down to this very day. This can be very dangerous if it falls into the wrong hands." Peter could hear how serious his grandfather was. "I actually think they have found me," said Peter's grandfather. "When I was shopping the other day some guys were watching me carefully. It worried me, but I think we will be okay."

"Okay, Grandpa, but I have a couple of questions," Peter said. "Why did the tennis ball disappear and not the shoes over there?"

"It's because the stick can sort of read the mind of the person that is controlling it," Peter's grandpa replied.

"Also, if you use the stick on a person, isn't that like murder?" Peter asked.

The old man rubbed his chin for a second thinking about the young boy's question. "Well, yeah. It is like murder, but you should only use it if you 100 percent need to and your life or my life depends on it. Why don't you take your mind off of the stick and let's go and finish watching the game."

That night, Peter had trouble falling asleep. He looked at the clock. It was 4:47. He looked over to the stick that he had put on the chair in his room. He didn't want to use it in case he made something disappear that he didn't mean to. He was staring at the stick when he heard a car door slam.

He quietly got out of bed and crept over to his window. Since he was on the second story of the house he could see the people get out of the van and onto the driveway. Peter watched them carefully and took note of them.

They were very muscular in dark shades and suits. One guy had short, brown hair and the other one was bald. The bald guy's head looked like a tan melon.

He watched them step on the porch before running downstairs just as his grandfather opened the door. Melon Head spoke with a deep voice. "We're with the International Science group. We're going to need you to come with us, sir. The kid will stay here."

"Great Scott! They've found me! The scientists! Run, Peter!" Peter's grandfather yelled as Melon Head and the other guy grabbed the old man by the arms and dragged him to the van before throwing him in. Peter chased after the van as it drove down the street. The last thing he saw of

the van was the telephone number of the science group on the back of the van. It was 496-979-2302.

Peter went straight to the computer and typed in the number on Google. The science group's website came up, and Peter instantly clicked on it.

"Come on, come on..." Peter muttered to himself. He scrolled down the page and came to the address. "Bingo!" said Peter. He grabbed a sheet of paper and wrote it down. Then he got dressed and grabbed the walking stick which he hid under his jacket. By that time it was 7:00. He rode his bike to his friend Theo's house where he rang the doorbell. At first nobody came to the door so he rang it again, and then he heard a muffled "Coming!" Theo's dad opened the door. He looked as though he had just climbed out of bed. "Yes?" he grunted.

"Is Theo home?" Peter asked quickly.

"Yeah, but you gotta wake him up," Theo's dad replied. Peter thanked him and ran up the stairs two steps at a time. Peter burst into the room.

"Wake up, Theo!" Peter said loudly. "I need to tell you something!"

"What the...? What time is it?" Theo said half asleep.

Peter glanced at his watch. "It's 7:30, just sit up and listen." Peter then explained the whole story from the Lions game to the kidnapping. By the end of it, Theo was awake and listening.

"I don't believe you," Theo said. "Prove it."

"Gladly," Peter said as he took the walking stick from inside of his coat. "Do you have any worthless junk that you don't want?" Theo stuck his arm under his bed and fished his hand around and pulled out an old apple core. Peter looked at it with disgust.

"Well? You gonna prove me wrong or not?" Theo said with his arm out holding the apple.

"Put it on the ground," Peter said. Theo did what he was told and Peter took a couple of steps back. He took a deep breath, and tapped the stick on the ground. Nothing happened.

"What? What happened? That was supposed to disappear!" Peter said with disbelief.

Theo yawned. "Oh well. Guess you made that up. I'm going back to bed," he said as he climbed under the covers.

"No, I swear! It was real when my grandpa first showed me!" said Peter. "What went wrong? Did I not do it right?" Peter thought. Then it hit him. "I know now! I didn't tap it enough times!" Peter exclaimed.

Theo sat up. "Go on then. Any day now," he said. Peter took another deep breath and this time tapped it twice and the apple core disappeared off of the floor.

Theo had the exact same reaction that Peter did when his grandfather

told him the night before. After some more explaining, Theo finally learned that it was not a trick.

“So your grandpa really was kidnapped by power-hungry scientists?” Theo asked.

“Yeah,” Peter said as he took the piece of paper out of his pocket. “This is where they took him.”

Theo looked up the address on his iPhone. “Quick question, how on Earth are you going to get to Ohio?” asked Theo.

Peter had already thought about this earlier. “Bus. I’ve got some money for a ticket from here to there. Wanna come?”

Theo got a reluctant look on his face. “Okay, fine,” Theo said. “But what do I tell my dad? My parents are going to worry that I’m gone.”

“Um...” Peter said. “I got it! Tell them you’re coming to the lake in Ohio with me for a couple of days. Part of it’s true.”

Theo thought about that for a moment. “That’s not actually a bad idea,” he said. “I’ll go ask them.”

Ten minutes later Theo was packing his stuff in a drawstring bag and Peter had gone home to get some money and get a bag for his stuff. Within an hour they were on a bus heading for the science lab. Peter fell asleep on the bus ride because he had had no sleep the night before. Theo stayed awake, and he woke Peter up two stops before their stop.

“According to this map that I picked up at the bus station,” Theo said, “we still have to walk a half mile before we get to the science lab.”

“Uggghh!” Peter groaned loudly. “I’m starving! It’s 3:00 and I didn’t have breakfast or lunch.”

“Well,” Theo said while studying the map. “There is a Jimmy John’s nearby our stop. Do you have any money left?”

“Yeah, twenty bucks,” replied Peter.

After a hearty sub they headed to the science lab.

“Look, it’s some of those guards,” said Peter quietly. The two boys didn’t exactly need to be quiet because they were on the opposite side of the street to the guards.

“Make ‘em disappear with the stick!” said Theo. Peter had concealed the stick uncomfortably under his jacket for the entire bus ride and was not reluctant to take it out. Two taps of the stick made them disappear. Peter’s stomach went funny when the guards disappeared. He regretted his decision a little bit.

“Let’s go!” said Peter. They managed to get through the rest of the obstacles that kept them from the building, because there were no other guards on duty. When they got inside, they realized that it wouldn’t be easy finding one old man in this huge place.

“How are we going to find him?” asked Peter.

“Like this,” said Theo as he walked up to a man in a lab coat. “Excuse me, sir? Do you know where the--walking stick experiment is?” Theo said that last part quietly as if it was the world’s best-kept secret. “My dad is working on that project and my friend and I are visiting him for the day.”

The scientist didn’t hesitate to answer. “Oh, okay. You just gotta go up two floors in that elevator over there,” he said pointing it out. “Then you turn left and it is the third door on the left.”

“Thank you very much!” said Theo with a fake smile.

Sure enough, the boys followed the directions perfectly, and they found the room. They didn’t want to use the walking stick because there might be someone on the other side that might see them. They barged down the door. The room was about as big as a gymnasium and was full of people all staring at them. Peter’s grandpa was at the front of the room with a table with a bunch of tools on it.

“Peter! Theo! You’ve come!” exclaimed Peter’s grandpa.

“Guards! Get those kids!” shouted an old geezer that looked like the head scientist. Peter whipped out the walking stick, and Theo grabbed a giant metal rod from the nearest table. Two bodyguards charged each of them. Peter tapped his stick and made three disappear while Theo gave one a whack to the head and a mild concussion. Peter’s grandpa was trying to get to his grandson, but a guard was holding him back.

“Let go of me!” shouted the old man, fighting the grip of the guard.

One scientist grabbed the stick from Peter.

“Hey, give that back!” yelled Peter. Peter grabbed a rod like Theo and started hitting scientists everywhere. As he was beating up scientists, one came up behind him and whacked him on the back of the head. Then everything went black.

He must have only been out for a few seconds because when he got up not much had changed. He saw the guard holding his grandpa, and he could feel his blood starting to boil. He got started beating every single scientist or guard left in the room. Scientists were trying to run out of the room, but Theo and Peter beat them up before they could get out. It took about a minute before everyone that they beat was on the floor.

Peter’s grandpa ran to him and hugged him. “How did you guys get here? What just happened with the stick and the rod and the hitting and the-the...” his sentence trailed off as he started laughing with happiness.

“How did you guys learn to fight like that?” Peter’s grandpa asked Peter and Theo.

The boys smiled. “We’ve been in a couple of Kung Fu classes,” Theo replied. “And by the way, how are we going to get rid of these bodies? I assume they are all dead.” Peter got that sick feeling in his stomach again.

“Yeah, how are we going to do that?” asked Peter’s grandpa.

Peter smiled. "I think I've got an idea," he said. They decided to use the walking stick (which they grabbed from the guy who stole it) to get rid of everything in the room and the room itself.

As they were walking down the hallway, a scientist said to them, "Hey, didn't there used to be a room there?"

"No, I don't think there ever was a room there," said Theo with a straight face.

The scientist shrugged. "I guess you're right," said the scientist.

The two boys explained the whole story on the bus ride home. Once they got to their stop, Peter and his grandpa dropped Theo off at his house.

"Theo," Peter said as his friend climbed off the bus. Theo turned around. "Thanks for everything."

"No problem, amigo," Theo replied with a smile. "See you guys later."

Once Peter and his grandfather got home they both went into the backyard, and Peter's grandpa started a bonfire.

"Grandpa? Why don't you keep the walking stick? Isn't it important to you because your grandpa made it?" he asked.

The old man smiled and replied, "Well, yeah it is quite important to me, but it has caused me so much trouble since the day my grandfather gave it to me. It is not worth keeping anymore. I bet if my grandpa were here he would have agreed with me."

"Yeah, okay," said Peter.

Then they both threw the wooden stick into the fire and watched it burn into ashes.

# The Magical Adventure In Landtropolis

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*In the story THE MAGICAL ADVENTURE IN LANDTROPOLIS by Julia, a girl named Jamie wakes up to find her parents gone. Jamie enters a magical door, finds a world filled with rare creatures, and makes friends while looking for her parents.*

“**A**HHHHHHHHH!” I heard a large crash downstairs. I sat up in my bed and froze. I grabbed my best softball bat and was on the move.

I walked down the cold, wooden stairs slowly with the bat in my sweaty hands. When I got to the last step I was careful not to be loud. As I was investigating I saw a note with my name on it. It said:

*Jamie, I have taken your parents  
and you will never find them unless  
you give me all of your money.*

*-Unknown*

*(P.S. I have been watching you!)*

I started to cry. I couldn't believe what was happening. I was about to call the police when I saw a bright light out of the corner of my eye. Next to the window was a door I had never seen before. I was drawn to the bright light coming from the door when I decided to enter, hoping this was the key to where my parents had gone.

As I stepped through the door my feet slipped out from under me. All of a sudden I was falling through a dark tunnel.

When I landed on the ground I was surrounded by the most beautiful sight. I saw lush green trees and majestic animals. It was like a meadow, but better! I saw animals that I didn't know existed!

After I walked around for a couple of minutes I saw a unihorn. It was bright pink with a rainbow tail and mane. I approached the animal and asked, "Where am I?"

She said, "Who are you? How did you get here? Are you a human?"

I replied, "I asked you a question first! And I am Jamie. I found a secret portal in my house and walked through it, and yes I am a human."

The unihorn said, “You are in a faraway land called Magical Landtropolis and my name is Fluffita.”

I told Fluffita the story of the note I found and the door with the light. Fluffita wanted to help me find my parents. She also told me she saw a suspicious man walking around with a dark green bag. We decided to set off to find my parents.

When we reached the top of a hill we were surprised by the sight below us. It was a kingdom full of deadly dragons. Luckily, all of the dragons were sleeping. (Apparently it was “nappy time” for them.) We decided to carefully make our way past the dragons when Fluffita accidentally stepped on a dragon’s tail. We didn’t notice until the dragon woke up and looked at me with its bright, green eyes. He was bright orange with big claws and seven wings, and he looked hungry! When I saw the dragon rise up, I ran.

The dragon chased us and eventually caught up with us. “WAIT! I AM FRIENDLY! I LIKE PEOPLE!”

We decided to stop. We asked the dragon, “What’s your name? Why were you chasing us?”

“My name is Dragon. I was chasing you because I thought you stepped on my tail on purpose. Wait, why are you here? I haven’t seen you here!”

Then I told him what happened to my parents. He said he wanted to help. We decided to let him help only if he agreed to be our bodyguard for the whole trip.

He said, “Sure thing!”

On our way we found footprints resembling those of a large man. We followed the footprints into an old, abandoned building. We walked towards the creepy-looking structure. When we entered the building it was pitch black! Once inside we could hear the floor creaking beneath us as we walked. Then I heard voices talking quietly.

“I have a daughter at home! You can’t do this to me!”

We followed the voices until I saw a light shine on two faces; I knew it was my mother and father. I saw them in a big chair with straps around their arms and legs. I could see that they were in pain. I ran to them and started to cry. Then I saw a man wearing all black. He had a dark face and didn’t look friendly at all!

He came up to me with a smirk on his face and asked, “How did you get here?”

I didn’t answer. After he asked me that question five more times, I gave him a little punch in the stomach. He didn’t do anything. Then I realized he was probably a big, strong guy, so I tried to unlock my parents while the man was distracted by Dragon dancing. Dragon was doing his

special dance. He starts out with the Macarena and then shakes his hands like he is shaking the maracas.

The straps were too tight for me to pull them off. I asked Fluffita to use her horn to cut the straps. It worked!

I took my parents quietly through the way I came in. All of a sudden the man saw us and ran toward us. Then Fluffita charged at him. She killed him.

Fluffita, Dragon, and I all gave each other a hug.

We decided to have a big party for our accomplishment. We had the time of our lives! All of Fluffita's friends were there. We couldn't invite Dragon's friends or else we would have been eaten!

There was food, a bouncy house, and my favorite thing ever, PATRISHA THE PENGUIN! She was there to take pictures with everyone! Patricia is not just a penguin, though; she is a life-changing animal that talks and sings! She also does a little dancing!

After the party, I sat on the smooth grass thinking, *Is this real?* Then I had an interesting thought. What if that extra room in my house could be Dragon's and Fluffita's room? So I asked my parents, and they said yes, only because they had saved their lives. We found another portal, we went through it, and we were home.



# The Magical Tree

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*In THE MAGICAL TREE by Camille Guellec, Jack is playing hide-and-peek with his friends when a door appears on the trunk of the tree. What do you think Jack does next?*

**I**t all started years ago when an old magician had a magic seed. He wanted to hide his seed because it was one of a kind and in the hand of anyone else, it would have caused the end of the world...

One evening, Evilo, a criminal who was involved in the S.S.O.M (Secret Society of Mayhem), saw the magician and understood that he had the seed, so he ran after him. Fortunately, the magician was a fast runner, so he outran the bad guy, but as he went to take a look at his precious seed, it was gone. He had dropped it! He retraced his steps and saw that the seed had already grown into a tree.

The magician burnt full of anger. He kicked the tree really hard. Suddenly, the tree ATE him! From then on, this town had a magical tree that, when touched, caused something good or bad to happen.

The tree had been left alone for hundreds of years until one day Jack and his friends decided to play hide-and-peek. Jack decided to hide, and his best friend Leo wanted to count. "1, 2, 3..." started Leo. And that's when Jack finally realized that he was supposed to start hiding. He ran around looking for a place to hide.

"...48, 49, 50!" Leo finished counting and started looking for his other friends. Jack couldn't take it. He had never lost this game, and he wasn't going to start now. So, he climbed up the nearest tree. He was so into the game that he had lost track of where he was exactly.

"Wow! I've never climbed a tree this high before!" Jack thought. But it was only a matter of time before he found out that this was the magical tree. "Ummm...this is NOT good!" Before he could think of anything else to say, the tree threw him off, and Jack hit the ground head first, with a big *THUMP!*

Jack got up slowly with one hand over his bloody nose. But he wasn't thinking about his nose; he was staring at the tree. A door had suddenly appeared on the tree trunk.

He wasn't the kind of boy who would run away screaming. He was the kind of boy who was curious, very curious. As soon as he saw the door he ran in, saying: "Ha, ha, ha! Nobody will EVER find me in here!"

And he was right. Nobody was even looking for him anymore, because right after that, the door had shut behind Jack.

Leo said, “Jack! Wherever you’re hiding, come out! This game is getting boring, and it’s getting late.... See you tomorrow!”

Okay, now let’s get back to Jack...

He was walking down a very dark tunnel. It was pretty wide, and also, pretty tall. He was examining his surroundings (which he couldn’t physically see, but at least he was feeling his surroundings). He wasn’t paying attention to where he was walking, and he fell down a dark hole. It was very deep, and I mean VERY deep. His fall took about thirty minutes. He even wondered why it was that long, because after all, he was only in a tree. (Apparently, he had already forgotten that he was in a magical tree.) So, since his fall takes a long time, I’m going to take this time to describe Jack.

He had golden brown hair, thick, dark-brown eyebrows, a short nose that was rounded on the end, dark gray eyes, and a tanned face.

Okay, now back to the story...

And just as he said, “Is this trip going to last any longer?” he hit the ground. It was so sudden that his nose started bleeding again. It was just then that he saw how bright and foggy the room was—too bright, in his opinion. It was just like staring into the sun, he would say.

But, anyway, in this room he could see a dark, inhuman figure. It was slowly coming near him—closer and closer until it stopped.

Now, Jack could see what the figure was. It had a human form, but it wasn’t actually human. This person (or thing) didn’t have a head, only a hat, with big, blue, almost cartoon-looking eyes sticking out of the top. The hat was on his shoulders. He was wearing a long black coat that was purple in the inside and a glossy black on the outside. He also wore some of those white gloves that Mickey Mouse has, a black belt, a purple bow-tie, and shoes that were all worn out, ripped and covered with mud and dirt. But otherwise, he wore black pants, and a ruffled white dress shirt. The man said with a deep but comfortable voice: “Hello, young boy, I’m the tree man.... But, may I ask, why you have entered MY tree?”

“I...I...I’m not a little boy, I’m 10,” mumbled Jack in response. “I awoke the tree by climbing on it, and then I went through the front door.”

“I was born from these roots. I am the source of power for this tree. And you should never, and I mean NEVER, mess with the tree man!”

“You?”

“Yes, me! Who else would I be? The queen of England?” replied the tree man with an angry voice.

“Well, the power of this tree has caused a lot of pain and misery to my village, and if you’re the source of power...”

“What? I would never be mean to ANYONE!”

“Well, you are. So, let’s get out of this tree...”

“Fine! But, only because I don’t want to hurt anyone! Now, lead me to ‘your’ world,” said the tree man, annoyed.

“I would, but we’re stuck in this tree.”

“No! We are not stuck in a tree like crazy, useless, awful, people!” shouted the man. “There’s an exit right over there,” the tree man added.

So, the tree man led Jack to the door, and they climbed up a long corridor of about 1645 steps. (Well, at least that’s where Jack stopped counting.) But, finally after what seemed like hours, Jack saw the door that led outside (it was already wide open).

The tree died immediately after the tree man left, but, after the tree died, there was something left: the magician! Jack and the tree man found him curled up in a ball right before he jolted up with the surprise of the cool afternoon breeze blowing softly on the back of his neck. He was relieved that he was out of the tree, and he started asking a lot of questions, like, what year it was, if there were any magicians left and what the coolest clothes to wear these days were. (To make this clearer I’ll just say that that tree exchanged its life for the magician from the beginning of the story.)

The tree man and the magician decided to live with Jack’s family. Soon after that they decided to destroy the S.S.O.M. (Secret Society of Mayhem), but that’s another story. Soon enough, the town lived happily ever after!

Wow, that sounded too much like a fairy tale, so let’s just simply say:

The End

# A Merry Hanukkah

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*In A MERRY HANUKKAH, by Rachel London, Santa and Gimmel the Dreidel battle to see who can behold the best holiday. Can Gimmel and Santa put aside their differences or will one come out a winner?*

One Christmas Eve, Santa Claus was having a celebration after all the presents were delivered throughout the night and for what seemed to be a perfect holiday.

“Ho, Ho, Ho!” said Santa Claus. “It’s another fine Christmas of mine!”

“Oh, yes sir, indeed, sir! I cannot believe how well the elves got into the houses this year, it was like they weren’t even there,” said Buddy, the Head Elf.

Suddenly, just before Santa could reply, the Dreidels attacked. Santa Claus screamed at the top of his lungs, “Everybody get under the tables, it’s the Dreidels!” The Dreidels came in and broke Christmas ornaments and spun around in a tornado-like form.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here? I suppose Santa Claus is trying to steal Hanukkah’s thunder. Hanukkah will always be the best holiday and you better know it!” said Gimmel the Dreidel.

“What a shame, we used to be friends. I wasn’t trying to steal your thunder. I was trying to do my job so that all the little Christian kids would be as happy as the Jewish ones,” said Santa Claus.

“Sure, you weren’t trying to, but you did! And that means war!” said Gimmel. “We will be back to fight, fight, fight till the end of this game,” Gimmel yelled as he left Santa’s office.

“Okay,” said Santa Claus. “Then we will be ready when you come. Just remember, you started this, it didn’t need to go this way. But, just as you said, I declare war too!”

Buddy heard the declaration of war and put ‘Plan Ho, Ho, Ho’ right into action. Buddy explained to Santa Claus, “I have a great idea and I think it’s so brilliant that I should be rewarded.”

Santa replied with the loudest, “Are you crazy? I cannot believe you would think that you wouldn’t be rewarded, or punished, if this doesn’t work.”

“Right, I did not think of that last part, but that is because this plan is fool-proof,” said Buddy.

Later in the day, Buddy and Santa discussed their plan and it was decided that they would work on shooting the elves out of a cannon and

then attack the dreidels with wrapping paper and throw them down the chimneys.

Take aim and fire! Buddy's plan was in full swing by late evening and the worst thing imaginable happened; elves shot out of cannons and were launched at the Dreidels while they slept. The Elves came armed with red and green sparkly wrapping paper. They had managed to wrap up all the Dreidels as presents, wrapped for any Jewish boy or girl in America. Gimmel was so furious that all of his steam that had built up helped rip open the wrapping paper he was in and started their attack.

"OMG, Santa Claus is going to get it!" screamed Gimmel.

"Ho, Ho, Ho and a Merry Christmas to you!" replied Santa.

"Ok, this just got personal," said Gimmel. "So, you think a little wrapping paper is going to hold us back, eh? Well, I just won't have it."

Santa and Buddy ran off since they feared that their plan had failed and were quickly trying to get back to the North Pole for safety. In the meantime, the Dreidels helped each other out of the wrapping paper and began to plan their next move.

"I've got it, Dreidels, let's break into Claus's Headquarters and destroy everything including all the Christmas presents for next year!" yelled Gimmel.

"Yeah!" screeched all the dreidels.

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's get them!" And with that, all the dreidels headed for the North Pole.

Forty minutes later, CRASH! All the windows in Claus's North Pole headquarters were smashed and broken.

"This, Santa, is called the Dreidels' revenge." Just then Gimmel started to jump on all of next year's Christmas presents and ripped off the wrapping paper.

"I told you this wouldn't be the end, Buddy!" screamed Santa to Buddy. "I've known these dreidels way too long. They won't stop until we surrender!" "

"But sir, if we surrender now, what will happen to Christmas?" Buddy asked.

Just then all the Dreidels left with all the presents in their hands. Then Santa got worried expression on his face and ran upstairs saying, "I have to go let Mrs. Claus know that I am all right." And then Santa went off to find Mrs. Claus. Five minutes later, Santa came back with a puzzled expression on his face.

"They have taken her!" reported Santa.

"I am so sorry sir, I know you loved but by now she could be..." began Buddy.

“No, I will do everything in my power to find her and I will make those Dreidels pay,” interrupted Santa.

Back at their hideout, Gimmel and the rest of the Dreidels unpacked Mrs. Claus.

“I am the greatest dreidel that ever lived!” announced Gimmel.

“You will never get away with this,” screeched Mrs. Claus. “It is impossible!”

“Just watch me; he ruined Hanukah now I must ruin his life. And you are the only way to do it!” said Gimmel.

Just then Santa and his reindeer burst through the door and surrendered. Santa soberly spoke and said, “I, Santa Claus of the Holiday Christmas, vow to surrender under complete control of Gimmel the Dreidel.”

And, with that, Santa Claus stepped back and sat down quietly.

“So that’s it no war? Nothing? Yes! I have defeated Santa Claus. I am so smart, yes I am, yes I am!” screamed Gimmel.

Santa sat back up and said, “I wasn’t finished you know. I will do all those things if we can agree to give me my wife back, become friends, and end this silly war once and for all.”

“What you must crazy old man, what fun would that be? You can get your wife back and we can be friends, but, really, the war, it’s so much fun coming after you and Buddy ever year! It’s kind of become part of our holiday that we look forward to seeing you. I guess we were using it as an excuse to come and see you,” said Gimmel.

“Our holidays are supposed to be completely different, but that doesn’t mean we can’t be friends, right?” said Santa.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right, we both win. But, can we still be pretend enemies?” asked Gimmel.

“Sure, old buddy, old pal! Now I must leave, it’s late and Mrs. Claus and I need to get home,” Santa said happily.

“All right, goodbye!” said Gimmel.

Just as Santa was leaving, he stopped his reindeer in midair and yelled to Gimmel, “I’ll be back next Saturday for lunch...friend!”

And, that was how Santa and Gimmel the Dreidel became friends.

# Pepper and the Squirrel

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*Pepper is a dog that likes to chase squirrels. Learn about Pepper's life in **PEPPER AND THE SQUIRREL** by **Ben Hager-Henry**.*

If I am looking out the window, chances are I've seen a squirrel. They are my enemies, and it's my job to chase them away. They are always trying to get into the bird feeder. The squirrels are already too fat!

My name is Pepper. My mom was a Jack Russell terrier, and Dad was the black lab next door. I had five brothers and sisters, and when I was just a few months old, my human family came and took me home. Now I'm five, but I still feel like a puppy. I always want attention, and I love to play fetch with the ball. However, the squirrels are my favorite things to chase.

One day, I almost caught a brown squirrel. They are so slow and fat, you would think I would have caught him, but he was able to get up a tree. I wish my humans would let me out faster, but they always make me wait! I almost think they are warning the squirrels, and then they always tease me when I can't catch them.

"Why do you always bark and bang on the door? You will never catch me that way!" That's what I imagine the squirrel says when I bang on the door. It makes me really mad, and even more determined to feel his furry fatness in my mouth.

A few days later, I actually did catch a squirrel! It was not running fast enough, so I was able to catch it. Its plump, fluffy body felt just like I imagined. It struggled and shrieked, as if begging me to set him free, but I would not let him run away. I felt so good and happy that I finally caught a squirrel. I really wanted to eat it, but then that evil Ben chased me and made me drop it.

Now the humans tease me by saying the word "squirrel" in front of me so I will run to the window and start barking, whether or not there is a squirrel in the yard. I love my humans usually, but that makes me so mad!

The squirrels still tease me by chattering at me from the wires high over my head. They chatter at me like they're saying, "You can't catch me because you're just a dog!" That makes me bark and bark, and it's also frustrating because I know my humans will never let me catch one. But Ben is not always outside, so I will not give up. I know I will have that tasty squirrel one day!

# The Quest to Find the Almighty Cupcake

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*It started off as a normal day, but when the rainbow that powers the unicorn's magic appears colorless, four unicorns must go on an adventure to save their world. Find out what happens in **THE QUEST TO FIND THE ALMIGHTY CUPCAKE**, by **Emma Hourdakis**.*

Emma galloped out of her house to meet her friends at the beach. She had been waiting for weeks to get together with them, but when she walked outside, she instantly noticed something was different. Unicorn World was usually bursting with color and full of unicorns leisurely galloping around the town. Today, it was much, much different. Average, everyday horses walked around the dark town. The land was cold and just being outside in the depressing town made Emma feel unhappy. The magical rainbow, which powered the entire unicorn magic, was colorless. That meant the unicorns were going to lose their powers! They had to find the Almighty Cupcake. He was the only cupcake in the whole world who could fix this. Emma quickly galloped over to Rachel's house.

Rachel's house was always her favorite house in Unicorn World. It was pink and very tall. It jutted out in certain spots and was very curvy. She knocked on the door for a minute or two. Finally, she realized Rachel wouldn't be coming to the door, so she karate-kicked the door down.

Emma galloped right into the house. She turned into the kitchen and found Rachel baking a cake. Around the kitchen table were Abbie and Claire. They all looked perfectly normal and colorful. The loss of magic had not affected them yet.

"Everyone, we need to go on an adventure to find the Almighty Cupcake," said Emma. "We only have one day before all the magic is lost."

They all looked around at each other. After a short pause, someone finally spoke up and agreed to go. After that, everyone else agreed. We all grabbed a slice of Rachel's cake, and then went off on our adventure.

"Does anyone know how to find the Almighty Cupcake?" Emma asked. Everyone looked around, waiting for someone to say something. Finally, someone spoke up.

"I have heard rumors of where he is. Most say he lives in the Marshmallow Clouds. I say we try there first," said Claire.



They all agreed. Rachel grabbed the map and plotted out how long the trip would be. It would take at least a day. The first place they had to go to was the Chocolate River.

They started north and continued that way for at least 20 miles until finally, they reached the Chocolate River. When they got there, everyone was covered in mud. The trek was absolutely horrible. The fairy bites were horrendous. They were everywhere and swarming around the unicorns. Emma had to have at least 40 fairy bites. The bites were getting swollen and Emma felt woozy.

They all boarded one of the boats by the river. It was a small chocolate canoe. It smelled incredible. There was a rich scent of chocolate wafting through the canoe. They were all pretty hungry by then, so they each decided they could take a small bite out of the canoe. After they each took a bite, they started rowing. They all rowed until they got to the end of the river. Their legs were sore from walking earlier and now their arms ached. The unicorns all hopped out of the canoe and went to Fairy Town.

Fairy Town was not far from the Chocolate River. They walked for a quarter of a mile, until we reached the entrance of the town. They galloped on over to the nearest fairy, Twinkle.

“Would you mind doing us a favor?” asked Rachel.

“Of course, but what do you need me to do?” replied Twinkle.

“We need to sprinkle your fairy dust on us to shrink us,” said Claire.

“Of course I can do that,” said Twinkle, “it is very easy.”

Then she grabbed out her small wand and tapped each of the unicorn’s horns with it. They all instantly shrunk down to the size of a fly.

“Thanks so much,” said Rachel, “I know you’ve already helped us so much but would you mind giving us an extra pouch of fairy dust?”

Twinkle grabbed out a pouch of fairy dust and handed it over.

After that they galloped one mile to the coldest and windiest part of Unicorn World. The wind there would blow you anywhere you wanted to go.

They arrived at the small town. The fog was so thick that they could barely see a foot in front of them. They finally reached the windiest part of town. They grabbed each other’s legs and formed a chain. Then they positioned themselves westward and off they went. They were blown all the way to the highest cloud.

“This is way too high,” complained Rachel, “The Almighty Cupcake would never be this high up.”

They sat there and whined until finally, Claire came up with a great idea. It was to jump down from cloud to cloud. It was the easiest and fastest way to get down.

After 20 minutes of jumping and desperately looking for the Almighty Cupcake, they finally found him! He was big, and fluffy, and had colorful sprinkles that sparkled. His frosting was a light pink. All the unicorns jumped down to the cloud that the Almighty Cupcake was on.

“Hi, we are unicorns that live in Candy City. The magical rainbow that powers all of our magic is colorless!” said Rachel.

If you don’t fix it soon, then we will all turn into horses forever. You have to help us!” begged Emma.

“I would love to help you but Candy City is all the way across Unicorn World!” said the Almighty Cupcake.

“We know a way to get you back. You have to come. Millions of unicorn’s lives depend on it!” pleaded Abbie.

“All right, if you have a way to get back, of course I will help,” he said.

They grabbed the pouch of fairy dust that the fairy had given them and poured it over the Almighty Cupcake. He shrunk down to the size of a dime.

“We don’t have much time to get back to the village,” stated Claire, “We must hurry!”

“This way!” yelled Emma, and she pointed to the ground.

They all began jumping from cloud to cloud until they finally reached the ground. They were once again in the dark and cold town. The unicorns shuttered as they felt a gust of wind blow past them. They all locked their hands together and prepared to be blown back to Candy City.

Almost immediately, a huge wind came and blew them right back to the city. The Almighty Cupcake examined the rainbow.

“It is a good thing you called me. This is a very tricky thing to fix. I am the only person in the whole Unicorn World with the ability to fix such a huge mess,” declared the Almighty Cupcake.

Then he crawled up to the highest point of the rainbow. By now he was restored to his original size, and that made it easier for him to climb up. He stood up and began to shake. He twisted back and forth. It looked like a strange dance.

“He is crazy! We should have never asked him to help us,” said Rachel. They all nodded in agreement.

“He has gone insane. Let’s just face it, we are going to be horses forever,” whined Claire.

Then, all of a sudden, sprinkles from the Almighty Cupcake flew onto the rainbow. They danced across the rainbow, and at the same time, every single one burst like a firework. Sparks flew into the air and then rested onto the rainbow. The color of the rainbow began to reappear. It stretched out across the rainbow, until finally the magic in the rainbow was restored!

“He did it. He actually fixed the rainbow!” yelled Abbie.

Immediately, the horses began to turn into beautiful unicorns again. Everyone came out of their houses and stared in awe at the rainbow. All the unicorns hugged and stared as the sky turned into a wonderful light blue. The colors on the rainbow were more spectacular than before!

The Almighty Cupcake hopped down from the rainbow. He turned and examined the rainbow. He must have liked it because he nodded approvingly at his work.

“Thank you so much, Cupcake! You saved Unicorn World,” praised Abbie.

Then her friends galloped up behind her, and the unicorn’s galloped home. All the magical creatures in Unicorn World lived happily ever after!

# Rabid Rabbits

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*What will the carrots do when rabid rabbits invade? Read **RABID RABBITS** by Alexander Dobry.*

In a large vegetable patch, something terrible was going on. The rabid rabbits were eating carrot soldiers left and right. Others were firing radishes at the rabbits, but the rabbits were strong so they ate away at the army. Soldiers were strong, too, and they fought back by throwing marigold seeds, and firing rabbit repellent. Finally, rabid rabbits let up and they returned to their log home.

Captain Carotene looked around and all he could see was carnage. The cucumbers, the carrots' ally, were gone. They were eaten by the rabbits. The chicken wire fence that surrounded the vegetable patch was ripped. It lay on the ground where the rabbits had trampled it. Topsoil was flung up everywhere. Carrot soldiers lay on the ground either dead or wounded. President Caleb, the president of the vegetable patch, waddled up to Captain Carotene. He was an old carrot, very round with hardly any trace of a sprout on his head.

"You need to do something about these rabid rabbits. We can fend off normal rabbits just fine, but these rabid rabbits are just too vicious."

"I'll give anything you need to fight off and destroy the rabbits!" said Caleb.

"Yes, sir," Captain agreed.

So, they began the work of the carotene bomb. Captain gathered his best soldiers and headed toward a place unknown to carrot kind. They were going to have to go to the rabbits.

"Why are we headed towards the rabbits, our second worst enemy?" asked Charlie, a carrot soldier who was very muscular.

"We can find out the rabid rabbits' weakness and possibly make an alliance with them," replied the captain.

They came to a hollowed-out tree, probably struck by lightning. Rabbits weren't the only things that were high alerts; there were also squirrels and pigeons. Squirrels were the worst; they would slam you on the ground, gnaw on you, and then, finally, eat you. It was the worst thing they could imagine.

Every sound made the soldiers jump, even the screeching of an owl. It did not help that it was very cold and dark. Suddenly, something darted out of a bush and grabbed Charlie and scurried back into the bush. You could hear Charlie's screams get fainter and fainter as he was eaten.

Captain saw how afraid his soldiers were. He chased after the squirrel through the bush, looking for any remains of Charlie. He found his helmet but that was it. He found the squirrel's hideout in a hollow oak and Charlie was gone. Captain returned to his loyal soldiers.

He told them about the grim fate of their friend. "This is why we are out here," he reminded them. They continued on their journey to the rabbit hole. It was rough terrain walking through thorns that wacked at them and rocks that made their hairs hurt. At last, they came to the large rotted stump that was their home. A thin streak of fog wrapped around the log.

Captain Carotene yelled, "We are carrots! We come in peace. We want to form an alliance."

"Yes, we will give you all the cucumbers you want! Just tell us their weakness."

"Their weakness is potato slices," they yelled in a very spooky voice.

Captain and his men raced back to the vegetable patch, sacrificed a few potatoes by putting them in the bomb and bombed the rabid rabbits. They became the best vegetable dictators of all.

# The Second World

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*Two kids go on a journey to save our future world and defeat an evil queen in **THE SECOND WORLD** by **Alanna Rosenthal**.*

“No, Lisa!” said both of the adopted twins. They absolutely hated their foster mom; she was abusive and was a terrible role model. Sara and James’s parents had died in India while observing the tigers. When the drought came they got dehydrated, and couldn’t live off of Earth’s resources.

That night as they were sneaking into their foster mom’s stuff, they stole one of her new red-soled shoes that she wore almost everywhere. As they pulled the shoe from the shelf a secret door opened, and inside was what looked like a portal. The kids were appalled and shocked. They wondered why Lisa would have that in her closet. But more importantly, why would she want it there? They had to find out, but first they had to go into the portal.

They stepped inside the portal. As any other thirteen-year-old kid would do, they pressed the brightest buttons, jumped in, and took off. Once they stepped out of the portal they found that they were in a world like no other. There were bodies everywhere and evil guards wearing black as night suits appearing in every corner of their eye, holding some sort of weapon that would kill anyone “misbehaving.”

The people that were still alive were holding up signs saying “GO MALICENT” or “THE RULER OF THE SECOND WORLD” and had big iron chains that were tarnished and rusted from past rain. This seemed like a terrible place to live. Sara and James felt lucky to live in the world where they came from. Then they realized that this “second world” was just Earth in the future. Sara and James realized this once they saw posters with past Presidents’ faces and big X’s through their faces. They knew that they had to do something to defeat this Malicent, the ruler of the Second World.

As they stepped back into their foster mother’s closet they found her listening to her music and stomping her feet as she was brushing her teeth. Once she saw them she washed her mouth out, pulled them both by their ear and put them into the “time-out corner.” Lisa had made them a corner where all of their worst nightmares could be seen. All of them were revolving around their parents; she had pictures of them in their worst condition, desperate for something to drink. She obviously knew that Sara and James came from the portal.

After that terrible night they snuck out to the park that their parents used to take them to and started to think of a plan. They couldn't sacrifice all of the people in the Second World, unless they had their permission to take charge and defeat Malicent. They needed weapons and all the people to come together to fight against Malicent and her evil guards. They knew exactly where to get the weapons: their crazy uncle Laurence. He used to be in the army and was absolutely crazy, but he was protective and nervous and suffered from agoraphobia. Then it was time to get the people together. Since all of their friends were totally outlandish and supernatural, why wouldn't they want to help?

It was time to go back to the Second World and deliver their plan to the people. When they got back home they snuck into their foster mother's closet, pulled the shoe, and hopped into the portal for their journey to the Second World.

When they arrived they called a meeting to communicate their plan to the people of the Second World. James and Sara both thought it was good to understand what they were fighting for, so they asked what had happened to make Malicent so repugnant and malicious. The people explained that Malicent's anger stemmed from her sister who was chosen by their parents to become the leader of the land. This caused Malicent to steal her sister's powers and kill her and their parents.

Once the plan was in place, James and Sarah started the war by killing one of Malicent's guards.

The war went on for years with a lot of horrendous things happening. Many innocent people were killed, but a lot of Malicent's army was killed as well. As the war went on, fewer and fewer guards were showing up for duty. Malicent hid but was tracked down and banished from the Second World. Thanks to Sara and James, the future is better for all.

As for Lisa, she was never seen again. Sara and James guessed that she got worried people would find out about her evil side. After the war was done Lisa was acting suspiciously. The next morning she was gone. All of her stuff, including her red soled shoe, was gone.

After the war was over and Lisa was gone, Sara and James were lucky to be adopted by new parents whose children had gone off to college and therefore wanted to start a new family. Their names were Susan and, surprisingly, James.

# The Secret World of Fairies

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*The fairy by the name of Blue Blueberry has risk his life to save his mother fairy from the beast for the sake of his city in **THE SECRET WORLD OF FAIRIES**, by **Adara Sesi**.*

The sky turned pink, dust filled the air,  
Fairies were flying everywhere.  
There was a sudden burst of screams.  
Panic was among them.  
The monster that they once put to sleep  
Was awake and fiercely looking for  
The fairy that once put him to sleep.  
How would Green Leaf ever be the same?

1,000 years before

As the big purple sun rose forming morning, the fairies of Green Leaf rose from their flowers, greeted their neighbors, and went to work gardening, watering plants, and making the soil rich and new. The day was going by as well as it could until the beast came. His smell entered the air before they even saw him.

The monster was hot pink and had ferocious-looking teeth. His feet were as big as five flower houses put together! Not only was his favorite food fairies, but he needs fairy dust to keep his strength. If a fairy loses its fairy dust it will die, and Green Leaf will never be the same.

But the terrible beast was not just looking for any kind of fairy. It was looking for the mother fairy. Before the fairies could do anything, the monster was already at the mother fairy's flower, ripping a lifetime of work. (The crops and houses take five years to grow and bloom.) By the time the monster had gotten the mother fairy, the other fairies could do nothing; the beast was too strong.

The fairies that had witnessed the destruction of their city were heartbroken. It was mind-blowing and depressing. But the worst part of it was they just sat there and watched. None of the fairies could stop the beast but one. The fairy's name was Blue Blueberry, and he had no clue that he was going to.

As the young fairy was on his way to work at the strawberry patch he was approached by a fairy that he did not recognize at first. As the fairy



got closer to him he knew EXACTLY who it was. It was the wisest fairy in Green Leaf. His name was Omega.

When Omega finally got to Blue he told him that he was the chosen one because he had the same birthmark as the mother fairy. “You must go after the beast but not kill it because fairies do not kill. Put him into a deep sleep for thousands of years. First you must put the beast into the deep sleep. Then you must save the mother fairy. The only thing is you need to use a special needle, and you have only one chance. Do not blow it!”

As Blue walked home from work he was thinking about what had happened. He wondered what his parents were going to say. What if they wouldn’t let him go? Then his city would be ruined and nobody would be the same.

Blue had to go whether his parents liked it or not. Even if he didn’t want to go, he had to go for the sake of his city, as the wisest fairy had said.

When Blue got home his parents greeted him like every day. They were in a good mood, so he broke the news to them. They did not like it at all and were so mad that they rushed to Omega. “This must be a mistake!” said the parents. “There is no way that he is the chosen one. He will not be going,” the parents said.

The wisest fairy said that he had to go or the city would face desolation. Blue’s parents realized that he had to go for the fairies and even their own sake. But they said that he would only go if he could go first thing in the morning. “If he left now, by the time he gets to wherever he is going it will be night anyway,” said the mom very sadly.

When the city found out that there was a brave fairy going out for the mother fairy they were happier than they had been the day before. When they found out who it was they were very surprised. They were waiting to see what happen: if he came back with the mother fairy, or if he came back at all.

The morning that Blue was going to find the beast it was very uncomfortable. All the fairies were looking at him differently, putting so much pressure on him. “What if I can’t do this?” he said to himself. “What if I don’t get him in the right spot? Then everyone will hate me but my parents.” Without saying goodbye, Blue left.

Blue had no clue where he was, but he knew that he was headed in the right direction because of the big footprints. He thought that they were leading to the volcano. Little did he know that he was correct. Fairies do not do well with high temperatures. They lose a lot of fairy dust.

As Blue grew closer and closer he finally saw the beast lying on the side of the volcano, asleep. Blue also saw the mother fairy tied to a rock by the beast. She was asleep, too— or she might be dead. “I hope she is not dead,” said Blue to himself.

Blue slowly grew closer to the beast, about to put the needle in his foot. Blue hears “Rrrrrrrrrrrr Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaa rrrrrrrrrrrr aaaaaaaa.” *The beast was awakening!* Blue thought with alarm.

“Sshhhh,” said the mother fairy, “he is sleeping.”

“You’re not dead,” said Blue. “Are you harmed?”

“No, but I’m going to be if you don’t save me by dawn. After dawn he will drain my fairy dust and I will become deceased. But you don’t want that now, do you? But I will do anything for my little fairies.”

“I will do whatever it takes to put this monster to sleep,” said Blue.

Blue slowly crept up to the monster and went down by the monster’s foot. “What if it only works if the beast is awake?” Blue said under his breath. “I didn’t ask him if he had to be up or sleeping.”

“What are you waiting for?” said the mother fairy.

“He has to be awake,” said Blue.

“Then wake him up, and I will distract him, ok?”

“Ok,” said Blue.

Blue wiggled the beast, and he woke up as planned. Then instead of looking at the mother fairy, he looked at Blue. *No, no*, Blue thought.

“Who do we have here?” said the beast. “We have friends joining us. Does he want to give his fairy dust to me? How sweet.”

“No, I came to save the mother fairy. Why do you want the mother fairy anyway?” Blue said, very scared.

“It all goes back to when the mother fairy and I were both looking for land to raise a city. We both found the city you are living in now. We had a vote on who got it, and the mother fairy won. I did not, so I want revenge because I have to live on a volcano. Don’t get me wrong; it’s nice. But nobody wants to come over because they think they are going to be exploded on. I am lonely. This volcano never erupts, so yeah, I want revenge.”

“By killing her?” said Blue.

“Basically, yeah,” said the monster.

“Why didn’t you kill her right away?” said Blue.

“Because the more I wait, the more fairy dust is there.”

“You are crazy, beast. By the time the sun rises, you will be in a deep sleep.” Blue ran for his feet, dodging the swings of the beast, tripping the beast with a root from the ground, and inserting the needle into his foot and saving the mother fairy.

1,000 years later

The sky turned pink, dust filled the air,  
Fairies were flying everywhere.  
There was a sudden burst of screams.  
Panic was among them.  
The monster that they once put to sleep  
Was awake and fiercely looking for  
The fairy that once put him to sleep.  
How would Green Leaf ever be the same?

# Stuck in a Mysterious World

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*In STUCK IN A MYSTERIOUS WORLD, by Jessica London, Eli ends up in a world he wished he never saw. Only he and his friends can save their fates. They have to figure out a way to escape to free everyone.*

**M**y body froze so I couldn't feel a thing, not even my left arm. Where was I? How did I get here? Is this possible?

When I woke up, I heard some people talking. Who are these people? There were about 100 of them. They were either building houses or picking up the trash. But, what I really noticed were these guys in uniforms. They looked like they were bossing the kids around making them do the work. I also saw a couple of guys who seemed like they were on a break. I asked them their names. One was Michael, he was my age, 14, then there was Kendal, she was 12, and Donovan, who was 16. I told them my name was Eli. I asked them how they got to this place and Donovan said all he could remember was snowboarding and he slipped off the edge of the mountain. Then, everything went black.

"So where are we?" I asked them.

Michael said very quietly, "We are in this place where these horrible soldiers take kids and put them to work for no pay. There is no way you can escape."

"There is one way to escape," Kendal said quietly.

"Well, then, what is it?" I asked. "Maybe I could help you guys free yourselves."

"But, what if the soldiers realize that they have another kid to put to work?" Michael asked.

"Don't worry," I said. "They will never notice that I'm here. So, Kendal, how do we escape?"

"Ok, to escape there is a map in the head soldier's office which leads to a room that you need a pass code to open. In a small box, there is a key which is how you can get out of this place. Only with this one key," Kendal said.

"So, here is what we are going to do," I said. "First, Donovan, you're going to distract the head soldier and make sure he doesn't come back to his office. Kendal, since you're smaller than us and you know where he hides the map, you can go in and take the map. But, make sure you are very careful. Ok, next, Michael and I are going to find out the pass code that has the key in it, so we're going to do some major spying on them. Next, all of us are going to find the place where they hide the key. We are

going to put in the pass code and see if we can get the key so we can all escape. This is going to be very dangerous. Is everyone ok with this plan?"

"Yes," everyone said quietly. "Ok then, one, two, three break."

While Donovan is thinking of a distraction, Kendal sneaks away and gets ready to get the map. Michael and I need to find out a way to get the pass code that opens the doors to the key.

"So let's think," I said to Michael. "What do we already know?"

"Well," Michael said, "we know that the pass code is only four numbers long. And we know that the assistant head solider keeps a book filled with all of the head solider pass codes in it."

"Does he usually carry the book around with him?" I asked.

"Yes," Michael said. "Always, and, he always keeps it in his back pocket."

"I have a plan," Michael said.

"Ok, then what is it," I asked.

"So, first," Michael started saying, "I will distract the assistant head solider by telling him that his shoe is untied. Then, when he bends down to tie it, you will get the book out of his back pocket."

"That seems easy enough," I said. "Ok, let's do it in 30 minutes. So, you can just go back to work," I told him.

"Ok," Michael said. "I will meet you back here."

I wonder how Kendal and Donovan are doing, I thought. I ducked down behind a bush so no one would find me. When I was hiding, I saw Donovan doing a distraction for the head solider. He was trying to keep him from going back up to his office. All of a sudden, I heard Kendal screaming for help! She was being taken away by a soldier.

She probably got caught trying to get the map, I thought. Donovan also saw Kendal get taken away. So, he came running to me.

"What should we do now that she was taken away?" Donovan asked me.

"I think we should just go back to our plan, but, maybe I can help you get the map because Michael and I are not going to get the pass code for 30 minutes. I have time to help you. Once we get the key, we can try to free everyone else, including Kendal."

"Ok," Donovan said, "sounds good."

"So, Donovan, do you have any way to get the map?"

"I think I have one," Donovan said. "Ok, so here is what we're going to do. There is a room where all the soldiers get their outfits and they have some extra ones. You can go into the room and put on one of the outfits so they think you are a soldier. Then, you can go up to the headmaster's office where he keeps the map. You can say that you're

going to guard his office now. So, when I come to sneak in, it doesn't really matter. And we can get the map."

"Ok," I said.

I was running to the closet. I found an outfit and put it on and casually walked up to his office. When I saw a guard, I told him that I can guard now and he was off. I saw Donovan and I let him sneak into the office to get the map. He got the map and we were both off. That only took 20 minutes. I went back to the closet to get undressed. Then, Donovan and I went to the spot where Michael is going to meet me. We waited there till we saw Michael coming. We told him all about what had happened and the stuff about Kendal. I told Donovan to just go back to work because Michael and I have this one.

"Ready, Michael?" I asked. "You know the plan."

"Yes," Michael said.

As Michael started telling the assistant head solider that his shoe is untied, I got ready to grab the book. When he bent down, I quietly grabbed the book from his back pocket and he didn't even notice it was gone. Michael and I ran back to get Donovan and we went to get the key. When we got Donovan, we looked for the pass code. When we found it, we ran as hard as we could to the place where the key was. We found it and put the code in and it opened! Then we ran as fast as we could to get out of this place. As I slowly put the key in, it opened! And every kid in the whole place ran to the door.

We were all free!

# Surprisingly a Mermaid

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*Ally Figgleburger has become mermaid at the beach, but by surprise. Go on the adventure of being a mermaid with Ally in **SURPRISINGLY A MERMAID** by **Kendall Pollard**.*

**S**aturday, March 24, 2011 8:00 A.M.

Dear Diary,

Ally here! I just used my allowance money to buy this new diary. I was on the Florida Beach and I really wanted to go swimming in the ocean, but I was kind of scared of the sea creatures. The last time I went swimming in the ocean, I saw a jellyfish and almost drowned because I was so scared. But I was brave, and I went out into the water. Before I go to bed, I will let you know how everything turned out.

Goodbye, Diary!

Yea, I did it! I am in the ocean. Wait a minute, what is that? Is that a dolphin? The dolphin is coming toward me! I have to try to swim away! What is going on? Why can't I move? OUCH! The dolphin bit me! My leg hurts badly now.

I am out of the ocean, and my leg is hurting badly! I am in a lot of pain. All I remember was that I was in the water, and then I saw a big sea creature coming toward me. The next thing I knew, I was in pain. I was really confused on what happened, but there was a really big mark on my left leg. It was red, and it had dolphin bite marks on it. At least I think it was a dolphin. I didn't think that I should show my mom because she was going to freak out. So I won't tell her. Besides, it's no big deal anyway. I have to try to hide my leg from my mother. I should probably go take a bath to wash it off.

I am so happy I am taking a bath. It feels so relaxing to soak in this nice warm water. Oh my goodness, what is happening? Something magical is going on here. Seriously, there are, like, sparkles in the air.

Where are my legs? My legs have been replaced with a tail, like a mermaid or something! This tail that I have is purple and scaly. Okay, my life just gets weirder and weirder every moment. I should probably dry off now.

I am drying off now. *POOF*, my tail is gone. I have always pretended that I was a mermaid, but I never knew that it was to be so difficult. I can't let anyone know, or people will try to make me into a freak show.

Well, that's what happens in the movies. But my biggest question is, "Why am I a mermaid?"

I really don't want to tell anyone, but I have to at least tell my best friend, Taylor. I really hope she doesn't freak out like I did. But if I tell her I have to be careful not to get wet or else, plop, by fifteen seconds, I am a mermaid. Wow, being a fairy tale sea creature that I only thought existed on TV can be really hard. Why did this happen to me? Out of the all people in the world, why me?

Okay, so I am calling Taylor instead of walking up and telling her that I am a mermaid. She said, "Hello?"

"Hey, I have to tell you something."

"Yeah, what is it?" said Taylor.

"You probably won't believe me, but I am a mermaid."

"AWESOME," she said sarcastically. "I got to come over and see this."

"Just come to the back door. That way I'll be away from water."

I really need Taylor's help on figuring out why the bite mark caused me to become a mermaid. But the thing is, how will we figure it out when people are going to start questioning us to find out why we are researching mermaids? We need at least one trusted adult to help us. Never mind, that is a bad idea.

The doorbell just rang, so that is probably Taylor. "Hey, it's me," said Taylor with a cup of water in her hand.

"What are you doing with that water?" I said.

"Well, I want to know if you're really a mermaid or not." Then Taylor poured the water on me. I fell to the ground, and my tail started to grow. By this time Taylor was taking pictures of me and sending them to the whole entire school. I am so mad at her. I am going to have to talk my parents into letting me transfer schools. She is really not my friend because she betrayed me; a real friend never would have done that.

Sunday, March 25, 2011 12:00 A.M.

Dear Diary,

So it turns out that the bite mark caused me to become a mermaid. I made the biggest mistake of my life by telling Taylor. Now the whole school knows my secret, I can never go back to that school again. But luckily, I didn't have to convince my parents into allowing me to transfer schools because my dad just accepted a new job in California. I won't tell anyone my secret at this new school.

Wish me luck at my new school, Diary!



# Tedi the Transporting Bear

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**TEDI THE TRANSPORTING BEAR**, by *Jordyn Wolf*, tells that when a little girl hugs the teddy bear, she gets moved into a completely different world. Read the story to find out how she gets home.

The first night of Hanukkah I got this really cool teddy bear. The first time I hugged him I got transported to this weird, magical candy world. When I arrived I said to myself, “What is this place?” I looked down, and Tedi my teddy bear had come to life. He was now a blue gummy bear, and he started to talk to me. He said to me, “You are now in Candy Land.”

I was so surprised when Tedi told me where I was. I was really pale for a second because of how shocked I was, but then I was back to normal again. Also, I said to Tedi, “Wait, I’m so confused, please restart.”

Tedi said, “You are in Candy Land, not the real world anymore.”

There are two reasons why I was so surprised. One, how is my teddy bear talking to me, and two, how did I even get here? I asked Tedi how I got here. He said, “When you hugged me I transported you to Candy Land. I am a magical bear. When a kid hugs me, I transport them to Candy Land. If a kid never hugs me then they don’t get an adventure.”

“What if an adult hugs you like my mom when she is making my bed?”

“Well, when your mom hugs me she doesn’t end up in Candy Land. The transporting part only works with kids.”

“Tedi, how can you talk?” I asked.

“Kelsey, when I come here I turn into a gummy bear, and in this world gummy bears can talk,” Tedi said. Tedi is the best teddy bear I have ever had. But back to the story.

Tedi built me a bed out of chocolate, and gave me two marshmallow pillows. As Tedi was making the bed he asked, “What it is like in the real world?”

I said, “It is fun, but not as much fun as here. Do you like living as a gummy bear, or a stuffed bear better?”

Tedi said, “I think I like living better as a gummy bear because I can do more things.”

“What kind of things?” I asked.

“Well, I get to swim in a lake full of Slurpees. I get to eat the trees. I can do anything here!” he said.

“Would you want to come back to the real world with me?” I asked.

“I would want to come home with you because I would get bored of this place after a while. I like switching between two worlds! I think it’s really fun!” Tedi replied.

That night we had a bonfire around a giant gumdrop fire lined with chocolate rocks. We roasted taffy while Tedi told all of his friends and me a story about the Jawbreaker Monster. It scared me a little, but it was a great story. That night I had a wonderful sleep on my chocolate bed and marshmallow pillow. The only problem was the chocolate started to melt a little bit because of my body heat. I got hungry at around 3:00 A.M. so I took a bite of chocolate and marshmallow.

When I woke up the next morning, we ate candy cane pancakes. They were delicious, and not that minty. We went to Blue Raspberry Chill Lake. The lake is made out of blue raspberry Slurpees. If I was thirsty I could just take my big straw, stick it in the lake, and swallow, which I did. It tasted really good. The fish in the lake were gummy fish, and I caught one and ate him. Sorry, little fishy! Tedi and I swam for a little bit in the lake, and then we had a giant picnic. It was awesome.

All of a sudden a bunch of Tedi’s friends came running out of the mountains. The rest of the day we had so much fun. We swam again. We caught more fish. We danced and sang a lot!

That same night we did a scavenger hunt. I said to Tedi, “Why does a kid need to complete the scavenger hunt? Why not you?”

Tedi said, “Every time a kid in Candy Land completes the scavenger hunt five gummy fish come back to life.”

“Who made the scavenger hunt?” I asked.

“Milty the chocolate bunny made this scavenger hunt hundreds of years ago,” Tedi said.

I said to Malty, “Why do I have to go through the scavenger hunt?”

Milty said, “A child has to go through the hunt because a human needs to complete the tasks, and not one of us in Candy Land.”

Each clue told me how to get home. Tedi and I did the scavenger hunt together. Some of the clues were Minty Forest, Chocolate Egg Farm, and Blue Raspberry Chill Lake. At each place you had to complete a task. In the Minty Forest I had to find six mint trees, crush them up, and make candy cane pancakes.

As we were walking to Chocolate Egg Farm I said to Tedi, “I hope I get to come back. I really enjoy it here.”

Tedi said, “You can come back whenever you want!”

At Chocolate Egg Farm I had to find 60 chocolate eggs, get the prize inside, eat two of them, and put the prize together. Finally at Blue Raspberry Chill Lake I had to catch seven gummy fish.

At the end of the hunt I was almost home. I had to do one more thing. Tedi told me to get home I had to eat seven gummy fish.

After I ate seven gummy fish I said, "Thanks, I enjoyed staying here with you all for a week."

"Thanks for coming! We will miss you here," Tedi said.

"I will miss you too. See everyone else soon!" I replied. I said my goodbyes, hugged Tedi, and we were home.

When I got home, I was sitting on my bed and it was nighttime. Apparently, being in Candy Land for a week was only one day in my world. That shocked me! I told Tedi, "I had so much fun. We have to go back soon."

I went to go get ready for bed, and when I came back, I hugged Tedi. After I hugged Tedi, I realized that I was going back. I was wondering if it would be the same, or if it would be different this time. "Well," I said to myself, "we will see what happens!"

# Trapped in a Snow Globe

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*In TRAPPED IN A SNOW GLOBE by Annabelle Honet, Ralphie will go into the unknown place of a snow globe. A button is normally an unimportant thing in our lives, but when you're trapped in a snow globe, finding one could mean the difference between life and death.*

Who would have thought that being stuck in a snow globe would be so much fun? Who would have thought I would never want to leave?

It happened yesterday in the mall at Snow Savvy. Just because it said “Emergency Only” and happened to be hidden, well, doesn’t always mean trouble if I push it. But, in this case, it did. Let me start at the beginning of the story.

I walked into the mall by myself with ten dollars to buy a present for my best friend, Brad, who collects snow globes. This year, his present had to be perfect because last year’s present wasn’t the best. Last year, I painted him a picture of a giraffe, his favorite animal, and all he did that night was yell, “Ralphie, this is the worst present ever.” He had the right to yell because it really was the worst present ever since I can’t even paint.

I thought Snow Savvy would be a good place to start since it only sells snow globes. I walked all around the mall twice before I finally found the store in the very back left corner of the mall. Don’t ask me how I missed it the first time because the sign was neon green with a light-up snow globe. And, there was a big blow-up snow globe right by the entrance. There was also a big yellow and red banner that said “GRAND OPENING” on it.

There wasn’t much of a crowd when I walked in because snow globes aren’t the most exciting things. I scooted my way through a very small crowd and started on a search to find Brad a present. There were snow globes with everything you could imagine in them. From little burgers to ninjas, there was nothing you couldn’t find in the snow globes. I walked around looking at all of them trying to find the perfect one. Then, I found it! I started to rush over to it, but, as I was running, my foot got caught and down I went, taking a shelf full of snow globes with me. *Uh, oh* was the last thing I thought before I saw the emergency only button and slammed my hand down on it as the salesperson came to see what the commotion was all about. This was a pretty big emergency, at least to me.

A loud clapping-type sound came and then all was silent. At first, I wasn’t sure what happened since I was still staring at the angry

salesperson's face. But, before I knew it, I was smaller than a penny and I was trapped.

I fell from the sky onto solid, sandy-colored dirt and, as I sat up, it took me a minute to catch my breath because the fall knocked the breath out of me. Where was I? I looked around and I saw lots of tall trees and plants like a forest or jungle. Off in the distance I heard a loud stomping noise and then came a loud growl. Then, I saw my first dinosaur ever. It was big and red with sharp, long, teeth glinting in the sun. I saw it before it saw me and it took all I had to not scream like a little girl. I backed away slowly and didn't see where I was going. Of course, I stepped on a twig that immediately broke and the dinosaur snapped his head over to look at me. As it walked over to me baring its teeth, I looked around for something...anything to save me. Then I saw the familiar red button. I must have had my hand on it when I came into wherever I was and it came with me. I sprinted over as fast as I could to the button, but the dinosaur was one step ahead and was between me and the button faster than I could get over there. Thinking as quickly as I could, I slid under the dinosaur and basically fell on top of the button. The loud clapping sound came again as the dinosaur turned around and started walking over to me.

"Adios, dinosaur," I said as I was transported to, once again, I don't know where.

I was wet. I was soaked from head to toe and treading salty water that I assumed was the ocean. This was the first time I had a chance to actually look at my surroundings. There was an island with one palm tree to my right. On that island, was a bunch of survival stuff along with lots of electronics and there was what looked like a glass shield around the edges of the water. As I tried to look at what else was around me, I felt myself moving upwards. I was soon looking straight at somebody who appeared to be one million times my size. Its eye alone was bigger than me. Then it came to me - the dinosaur, the ocean, the giant person - I was in a snow globe!

I was in the snow globe that I saw on the shelf as I was running through Snow Savvy. Oh no, I also know that on the other side of the island are sharks. I had two things to worry about; the giant person carrying me and the sharks. I didn't want to be dropped and have the snow globe crack, but the sharks were also right there. If I could only make it to the island before the sharks saw me, or before the snow globe was dropped. I felt myself moving downwards again and that's when I made my move. I swam quietly and carefully going as fast as I could. It was no use. They already spotted me. What to do, what to do? They were surrounding me and probably figuring out who was going to take the first

bite. I couldn't swim under or around them because there were too many of them and not enough of me.

I heard a loud splash and realized I wasn't the only one in the snow globe. I was too worried about the sharks to worry about whatever was going on to my left. The sharks? Where did they go? This was my chance. I swam over to the island and as soon as I stepped on dry land, my stomach dropped and I heard a loud, defining crack.

I was life size again; I was standing in Snow Savvy. There was no mess with any angry salesperson and Brad's perfect snow globe was still there. I walked over to it being way more careful than before, but not careful enough. The button was back once again, but this time it was underneath my foot.

"Oh brother," I whispered to myself as I was once again thrown into a snow globe because of my clumsiness. Somehow I was in the mall. I would have bet anything that I had just stepped on the button again and gone into a snow globe, but somehow I was right at the entrance of the mall. There were other people here with me, with the same stores, in the same place. It was just a small, exact replica of the mall stuffed in a snow globe. I figured in order to get out, I had to find the button again, or get dropped like in the last snow globe.

To get out of the snow globe, I thought the most sensible place to start would be the place where this whole thing started, Snow Savvy. As I walked over to the store, there was a very slow shake that was getting faster and harder as I moved closer to the store. I didn't notice before, but all over the ground were little crystals that looked exactly like snow. Soon, all around me, the crystals shot out from under me and swirled around crazy in the air. I took off right after them and I was thrashed from store to store, all around. Someone was shaking the snow globe and I was right in the middle of it!

I was worried that the chance of getting out of this snow globe would be slim or even impossible. I tried to get my balance, but it was not going to happen. I eventually just let go and let it take me wherever it wanted to. Weirdly, it stopped as soon as it started and right in front of me was Snow Savvy.

Every snow globe was in the same place as I remembered them. It seemed so strange that they could make something so small so perfect. It took some time for me to walk normally because I was still dizzy, but eventually I got it and was walking just like before. Right when I walked in, I found the button and walked right over to it. I slammed my hand down on it, but the loud clapping sound didn't come and I was in the same spot. As I looked closer, everywhere around me, there were red buttons. There were hundreds of them.

I ran around hitting every button I saw but none of them were working. At this rate, I would never get out of here. I had no way to keep track of which ones I was hitting, so, for all I knew, I was hitting the same ones over and over again. This was obviously not the way to get out. I ran outside and figured if someone dropped the snow globe and it broke, why couldn't I break it myself?

I looked around the snow globe for something to throw at the glass. Finally, at the back of the miniature mall, I found a ladder. I climbed up the ladder with a few heavy rocks that I could barely carry up. I looked at the rocks, picked up a medium sized one, and threw it at the glass as hard as I could. I ducked down expecting a loud crash, but the rock did not even scratch the glass. I picked up a bigger rock and threw it against the glass, for the second time, expecting a crash. Once again, the rock didn't make a scratch. I used all of my energy and balance and picked up the biggest rock. I pulled my arm back and threw the rock as hard as I could against the glass. This time there was a small crack. I watched as the small crack spread and moved slowly around the glass globe. Almost as if it were in slow motion, I turned in circles following the spreading of the crack around the globe. Finally, the glass shattered and I immediately grew.

There I was, back in the mall, standing in Snow Savvy. I had to look around to really believe that I was out of the snow globe and back in the mall. I focused my eyes and saw that I was standing in front of the most perfect snow globe! It was not your typical domed snow globe though. Instead, it was very narrow and tall, just tall enough to hold a bright, orange giraffe. There was no way that Brad will be mad at me this year.

I walked out of the mall and I was happy that I was going home, but even happier that I had found the perfect gift for Brad. I was so lost in my own thoughts that I almost missed Brad walking into the mall as I was walking out. I was so relieved to see him that I practically threw the bag with his present inside at him.

"Happy birthday," I said, as I gave him the present.

Brad opened it up and said, "Wow, this is the coolest snow globe ever. I can't imagine how long it took you to find this one."

"You have no idea," I said to him with a small smile.

Maybe by this time next year, Brad will have stopped collecting snow globes and will be collecting something easier to buy, like baseball cards.

# Two Special Kids

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In **TWO SPECIAL KIDS** by *Pearce Kerley*, a brother and sister face a problem that sends them on an adventure. They learn more about how special they really are. With help from their parents, an uncle, and each other they might be able to solve the problem.

**W**ebb- abbb! Webbb-abbb!

“Come on, Troy, we have to get out of here, the police are coming.”

“Just wait, Mary. I am almost done with the lock, give me five seconds.”

The mission was to get enough money from the bank to get money for the kidnapper. Their parents have been captured by somebody of an unknown name. He left a note that said that their parents would be on Kepler 22-b, the new planet, but they also needed \$1,000,000,000,000 right on the spot. I think I should tell you the beginning first.

One day everything was normal. Troy and Mary both went to school, and Mr. and Mrs. Lafferty went to the lab. When Troy and Mary got home it is normally an hour before their parents get home, but today it had been two and a half hours since they got home from school. When Troy went to get the peanut butter out of the cupboard for his peanut butter and jelly sandwich he found a note.

“Mary, Mom and Dad have been taken away!”

“Ha, ha, ha, very funny, why should I believe you?”

“Because there is a note on the refrigerator and it says that Mom and Dad have been taken away to the new planet that was recently discovered. It also says if we want them back we have to have \$1,000,000,000,000 on the spot.”

“Oh, this is bad if it is true because we don’t have that kind of money, but I still don’t believe you.”

“There is a note, how do you not believe me?”

“You just wrote it yourself.”

“No, I don’t have this good handwriting, come see.”

“Wow, you are right,” said Mary. “You did not write this note, but where are we going to get the money?”

“We will have to rob a bank.”

“That doesn’t sound like a good idea to me.”

“Me neither, but it is the only way.”

“OK, but I am not going.”



“You have to go, I need your help.”

“If you need help, go get the police to help you.”

“If I go get the police they will never believe me. The note says they are on a planet in outer space.”

“OK, I will help you, but I don’t like the idea.”

“We are robbing the bank and that is the only thing we can do.”

“OK but if we get caught I am telling Mom it was all your idea!”

“Don’t worry. We have never been caught at anything else we have done. It is like people can’t see us do the bad things.”

“Yeah, we have always been able to cheat on tests in school, and the teachers have never seen us.”

“Yeah, the police will never catch us.”

“Yeah, I can kinda see us getting away now.”

They go and do not have trouble getting through the security because they have always been able to slip past people and do other things that are abnormal. The police were on their trail, but they were not fast enough to catch up to them. Troy got past the security cameras without being seen. He also got through the locked doors on the way to the safe as if they were butter.

As Mary and Troy ran down the long hallway, they could hear the police right behind them. The police were gaining ground, but they were still behind. Troy had trouble with the safe’s lock because the lock was much more complicated than anything Troy had tried to unlock before. He got the lock done just in time and only took enough money to pay the kidnappers. The police got there a little too late and only got a glimpse of them just as they were leaving.

“So how do we get to this planet if the only way to get to it is to take a rocket?” asked Mary.

“I don’t know. Mom and Dad always said to call Uncle Brombo if we ever got into a sticky situation.”

When Uncle Brombo got the call he was over there freaky fast and told them that they had had magical powers since they were born. He said that their parents had tried to keep it a secret so they would not get hurt. He also told them that is why they had been able to do so many things other people could not come close to doing. He also said, “Why do you think your parents always take so long to get home? They are at the magical societies meetings every afternoon.”

“I don’t believe you, but we don’t have anything else to try,” said Mary.

“Well, how do you think you have been able to slide past everybody?” said Uncle Brombo.

“I don’t know.”

“Even though that is not your power, just having powers lets you excel at other tasks because it lets you use more of your brain to physically and mentally excel.”

“Yeah, I guess that is why we can sneak past people and hold our breath underwater and do and other things that are special.”

“Yeah, I guess we can try,” said Troy.

“Put your arms behind your back and say, ‘Awake, awake awake my powers,’” ordered Uncle Brombo.

Mary and Troy did not feel any different, but Uncle Brombo told Troy, “Try to fly by jumping and flapping your arms twice.”

It worked after a couple of times, but he could not control where he went. Uncle Brombo said to Mary, “Your power is to see the future, and that will kick in later. It will be very important to your survival.” Uncle Brombo told Mary and Troy to go outside, and then for Mary to get on Troy’s back. Uncle Brombo told them that they would be able to breathe fine up in outer space just like they were able to stay under water for a long time. Uncle Brombo said, “I am sorry, but I cannot go any further on this journey with you, because I have been stripped of my privilege to go on quests.”

Troy flew to outer space to find their parents. At first the ride was very scary because Troy could not steer, but after some time he learned how to steer. It took a very long time to find the planet they were looking for, but it helped that Mary had taken a class about planets so she knew everyone.

Once they were on the planet it was not hard to find where their parents were because it was the only building on the planet. When they were walking to the building, which seemed miles away, Mary went into shock and collapsed. A couple of minutes later she awoke and said, “This is a trap.”

“How do you know?” asked Troy.

“I had a vision showing me the future. I just had my first vision and there will be many more.”

“But we still have to save them. Right?”

“Um, yeah, I guess so. I did not see the vision that clearly.”

When Troy and Mary went in the building the people were waiting for them at the door.

Kidnapper Number One said, “Give us the money and we will show you to your parents.”

“Are they all right?” asked Mary.

Kidnapper Number Two said, “Yes, they are fine. Well, it depends on what you call fine.”

“What did you do with them?” asked Troy.

“Oh, you will see when you get to see them, but in the meantime, give the money over.”

Troy and Mary gave over the money, and the kidnappers took them to their parents. Their parents looked awful. They looked like they had not eaten for a while. The kidnappers handed over their parents, and the kidnappers sent them all down in an escape pod. When they landed on Earth Mary got another vision.

“They are not done. I can’t tell what they were doing, but they are planning something as the next step to their plan.”

“We are sorry for not telling you about your powers, but we knew it would make your life much more dangerous,” said their mom.

“We need to get back to that planet and figure out what their plans are,” said Troy.

“Your father and I need a good sleep and some food because they did not treat us very well.”

“Was it that bad?” asked Mary.

“No, it was not that bad. They just did not give us food or water, but we did not get beaten or anything.”

The whole family got a good night’s sleep, and then went back up to the planet that the kidnappers were on. They went from the back of the planet and sneaked up on the building.

“What do these people have to do with us anyways?” asked Troy.

“They have been enemies with us for a long time. They also have magic powers. Their names are Bulwart and Jogley,” said their dad.

“And what do they want this time,” said Troy.

“They want to destroy Earth and all living things,” said their dad.

When they got into the building Bulwart and Jogley were not there. But they left behind a blueprint of their plan. They were going to go to all different places around the world to buy parts for their laser. Then they would come back here to build it. They would shoot it at Earth on New Year’s Day 2012, which the Laffertys had totally forgotten was tomorrow.

The Laffertys made a plan of their own. Their plan was they were going to hide in the attic, and when Bulwart and Jogley came back in, they could jump out and take them out as they were building the laser. The Laffertys thought that this plan would work perfectly.

When the time came the Laffertys jumped out and took down Bulwart and Jogley, but there was a problem. The laser was already built, but not in position to shoot Earth.

They all started fighting each other. The Laffertys were fighting because they did not want Earth to get shot, and Bulwart and Jogley were fighting because they wanted to shoot Earth. It was a madhouse in there. People were throwing punches and kicking other people. It was so chaotic

in there somebody must have hit the shoot button on the laser and it started to count down.

*BAM!* The laser shot, and it hit a satellite in space. The beam bounced around, disintegrating every planet it touched. It destroyed every planet but Earth.

The Laffertys thought it was over, and were happy. Bulwart and Jogley thought that their plan had been destroyed, so they were mad. Nobody was looking, and the laser disintegrated Pluto. It hit Kepler 22-b, disintegrating it, too.

The Earth survived, but the Laffertys, Bulwart, Jogley, and Kepler 22-b were all dead and would never be seen again.

# Two Worlds

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*In **TWO WORLDS** by **N.B.**, a fairy named Tootie goes to the human world. What happens if she's discovered?*

Once upon a time, there was a fairy named Tootie. She was named Tootie because she tooted a lot. She and all her friends lived in Chocolate Wonderland. Tootie's land is named Chocolate Wonderland because all they eat is chocolate and fruit.

In Chocolate Wonderland everything has a theme. For instance, one house might be a strawberry. The themes were things like that.

Everything in Chocolate Wonderland--the stores, restaurants and mall--are very big. Even though fairies are small, they need lots of room. Most fairies are small. Not all fairies have powers. But if they do, their powers would be water, fire, earth, or wind.

One day Tootie and her mother went to the strawberry patch for food. There are certain places fairies aren't supposed to go. But Tootie disobeyed that rule. When she went to the strawberry patch, she ran off. Her mother was trailing behind her. Tootie kept running and running until she hit the everlasting woods.

The everlasting woods were named that because the woods never end and there are lots of dangerous things in there. There are some legends. Here's one.

One day a little fairy boy went to the mall with his older sister. The little boy whined and whined about not getting the toy he wanted. The sister dragged her little brother out of the mall because he was behaving badly.

She almost forgot to get some strawberries for her mother, so they went to the strawberry patch. "Now I need you to be a good, big boy and stand here with me. Don't run off, and behave well!" said the sister sternly. The boy just nodded fiercely.

The sister bent down to get some strawberries when the boy ran off! He ran and ran until he hit the everlasting woods. He knew there were bad things in there, but he didn't care. He just wanted to get away from his sister. She was running while yelling and screaming the boy's name when he disappeared in the woods.

The boy looked around. There seemed to be yellow eyes watching him from all around.

The sister by now was panicking for her little brother.

Scared as ever, the little boy ran faster and faster until something attacked from the rear. At first he thought it was just his big sister...until it started biting. He tried to fight off the animal, but he was too small. He fell helplessly on the ground, dead.

By the time his sister got there she was too late.

Tootie's mother caught up with her. She was breathing hard. "Tootie, don't run away from me like that!"

"Mom, I'm almost 200 years old now. I think I can handle being on my own."

"Young lady, don't you ever talk to me like that! We are going home!"

"But, Mom, I'm being good!"

"No buts or excuses. We are going home!"

Tootie and her mom marched home. They lived in a blueberry. "Go to your room!" yelled Tootie's mom.

"Fine, there's nothing to do anyway!" yelled Tootie back. Tootie stomped up the stairs and to her room, and slammed her door.

The first thing she did was make a plan. Tonight she was going to go in the everlasting woods. Tootie is an explorer.

Before she knew it, it was nightfall. It is the most beautiful thing to Tootie because she was born in nightfall.

"Mom, I'm going to bed! Hopefully tomorrow will be a better day!"

"Ok, Sweetie, goodnight!"

Tootie slammed her door and waited until midnight.

When it was midnight, she crept out her window. She went down the streets making sure she wasn't being followed. Then she hit the strawberry patch. She ran to the everlasting woods and stopped at its entrance. There was a sign that said DO NOT ENTER. But Tootie didn't pay attention to the sign. Tootie entered the woods. She turned right, left, and then right again only to find a cave she had only heard about in legends.

She remembered the legends but reminded herself to be brave. Scared, she entered the cave. She saw ancient writings and pictures. "Maybe that's why Mom wouldn't let me in here," Tootie said to herself.

She touched one of the ancient pictures. It seemed to Tootie that everything in this cave tells a story. She moved from one picture to the next. Then something happened. She felt as if she had pressed a button. The wall slipped back and revealed a lab!

She looked around until she saw something blue. She had found a teleporter! It spun around and around, faster and faster by the second. It had great force. It was pulling Tootie in! Before Tootie could say “Mississippi,” she was in a different world than her own.

She started to wander around. She was by a trash can. She heard cars, advertisements, and people talking. The only reason she knew about the human world was from hearing people all around her talking about it. She knew about humans, cars, advertisements, trash cans and people talking because she had all these things in Chocolate Wonderland, except for the humans. She read books and even studied it. But this world was much different than her imaginary human world.

She saw a person walking toward her. Tootie didn’t notice he dropped something until it hit her. It was a Chinese food box! She used that as a shield and started to move.

As she moved she thought about the human world. In her imaginary human world the people were monsters eating everything that they could. She thought their world was full of lava and metal. But this world was far too beautiful to be that kind of imaginary world.

She could feel people’s feet impaling the box, but she stayed strong because that was the only way to get to safety. She kept moving until she hit something. She tried again, but she couldn’t get through. She pushed off the Chinese food box and looked ahead. It’s a door! Tootie said in her mind.

Just then the door opened. A girl, about 14 years old, looked around. She was closing the door when she looked down.

Tootie hid behind what she thought was a pot. Then, the girl looked at Tootie. The girl had long brown hair with sky blue eyes. Tootie thought she was beautiful.

Kimberly thought she saw something. Then as if she had rehearsed it, she looked behind the flower pot. She looked down and gasped. She charged right at Tootie, but picked up a butterfly. “Aww, you poor thing! Let’s put you somewhere safe!” said Kimberly. Tootie sighed, but then Kimberly turned around and looked down and gasped. “What are you?” she stuttered.

“I’m Tootie the fairy. Who are you?” asked Tootie.

“I’m Kimberly. I’m 14 years old and human. How old are you? Where did you come from? Are you hurt? Are you hungry?”

“I’m 200 years old. I came from Chocolate Wonderland. I’m not hurt, and, no, I’m not hungry.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“So you are a fairy? Do you want come in? Wow! I always wanted to see a fairy! Now I do!” said Kimberly frantically.

“Thank you. I would love to come in. And, yes, I am fairy. I’ve studied about you humans too! You seem pretty. But my books make you look like a monster!” said Tootie.

“Ok then! Cool. Then we know a little bit about each other. But we humans are not monsters. But come on in!” said Kimberly. She paused and asked, “Umm, can I pick you up? Because you seem kind of small to walk in. No offense,” said Kimberly.

“No offense taken! Sure you can pick me up,” said Tootie brightly.

“Ok, good!” said Kimberly, scooping Tootie up and bringing her inside. Kimberly went upstairs and to her room and shut the door. “Do you want to go back to Chocolate Wonderland?”

“I don’t know. My mother was being very unfair. She always told me to stick with her. Now I know why.”

“Well, maybe we should hang out a little bit. Then maybe you could go back, because you can’t stay here forever. I’m sure you miss your mother. Where did you pop up?”

“I popped up around a garbage can around Toledo. We fairies are supposed to be scared of you, but you seem so nice to me!”

“Wow, thanks! You too! What do you fairies do? What’s your favorite color?” asked Kimberly.

“Well, my favorite color is purple. How about you? Also, fairies really don’t do anything. But we do have parties. Probably just like a human’s birthday party,” said Tootie.

Kimberly and Tootie looked at each other for a long time and knew. “Maybe you should be getting back now,” said Kimberly unhappily.

“Yeah,” said Tootie.

Kimberly took Tootie back to where she said she popped up. “Look familiar?” asked Kimberly hopefully.

“Very,” said Tootie. Kimberly and Tootie looked for something unfamiliar and found a metal calculator. “There!” said Tootie.

“Try it,” said Kimberly, putting Tootie down.

Tootie walked up to the calculator and said, “This is it,” and said goodbye to Kimberly. “Thank you so much! Here’s something to remember me by,” said Tootie. Tootie handed Kimberly a little fairy ring.

“Thanks. Now you have to go! Bye!” said Kimberly.

Tootie jumped in the box, and before she could say “Mississippi,” she was back in the cave.



# The Ugly Boot

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**THE UGLY BOOT** by *Heddy Hermes* is about an orphaned boot who wants to take over Shoeville! Can Mike and his awesome shoe, Nike, stop him before he takes over this ancient town?

There once was an orphan that lived in Shoeville. You see, he was a boot that was literally torn apart. The strap was torn off, the leather was scratched in every direction, and there was barely any fur left. The reason for his ugliness was that when he was young, he got beaten up by some dogs. They had razor sharp teeth with claws that were more than three inches long. He was lucky that he was alive.

But then one day, somebody actually adopted him. It was the first time somebody ever adopted him. He was very happy that day.

Years passed by, and he said he couldn't take it anymore. The reason was that he couldn't stand being an ugly, torn boot that everybody made fun of every day. That's when he decided to take over the world. He couldn't stand seeing the nice-looking people, so this is the plan he came up with. "I will make a machine that will make everybody ugly for the rest of their lives, but I will let the other ugly shoes conquer the world with me, too."

He worked on it for months. He was finally done.

The machine looked like a gun, and it had three rings going around the tip. The only problem with the machine was that the energy emptied out fast.

He went outside to try it on some nice-looking shoes. *ZAP!* The color was bright red, and it looked like a lightning bolt. One nice-looking Ugg turned into a hideous boot. The smooth fur that was once there was now all old and ripped. "It worked!" he exclaimed. He ran inside his house and stayed in his room for the rest of the day.

Since he now knew how to build the machine, he could build it faster, and he could also make a bigger and better one. Even though it was bigger, it would have about thirty times more energy than the previous one.

The story of his making shoes ugly went on the news. Everybody stayed in their house and locked every door.

Even humans heard about it. Mike's shoe, Nike, told Mike about the news. Nike kept on begging Mike to let him go to Shoeville and let him stop the ugly boot. "Please let me go to Shoeville with you, Mike," Nike said.

“Sure, but only if you stay calm.”

Nike accepted.

Shoeville is really on Jupiter, so they stole one of NASA’s rockets. On their trip they just ate space food. It was disgusting!

When they got there, they saw everybody running in every direction. It was chaos.

First they asked people where the ugly boot was, and they said that he was in the bank. That’s when they found him trying to make the mayor of Shoeville ugly! They caught up to him just in time. Mike snatched the machine from the ugly boot’s hands and shot it at him. The ugly boot was two times uglier!

The ugly boot was shocked. After that the ugly boot pretty much gave up.

Mike and Nike had saved the mayor! The best part is that every year they have a parade that is all for Mike and Nike.

And as for the ugly boot, he stayed crying in his jail room cell for many years. Shoeville stayed undisturbed for many centuries.

# Unicorn Powers

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*In the story UNICORN POWERS by Ellery, a girl named Alexa falls asleep and wakes up in her favorite TV show. Her favorite character is trying to kidnap her sister!*

One day, a little girl by the name of Alexa was walking to school with her best friend Emily. Alexa and Emily were in seventh grade. Every girl in seventh grade had a favorite TV show, but Alexa and Emily's was unusual. Alexa and Emily's favorite TV show was *Unicorn Powers*. Every time a new *Unicorn Powers* episode was on Emily would go to Alexa's house. This time Emily had a play practice and couldn't make it, so Alexa had to watch it alone.

After school that same day Alexa went home without Emily, and was going to watch *Unicorn Powers* alone. The show was on in an hour. Alexa had to start getting ready because the show was an hour and a half long. She went to the storage closet and got down a sleeping bag to lie in while she was watching the show.

About an hour later the show was starting. Alexa began in her sleeping bag. She fell asleep for about a half hour of the show, because she had no one to keep her up during the show. Then something weird happened....

Alexa's mom called down to Alexa in the basement and said, "Dinner's ready," but she heard no answer. After Alexa's mom called Alexa up for dinner three times she decided to go downstairs and get Alexa herself. Alexa's mom screamed really loudly.

"Peter, come downstairs now, Alexa is gone!"

Peter ran downstairs as fast as his feet could carry him. When he saw that his daughter was gone he said, "Where is she? Where did she go?" and then started hysterically crying.

Alexa awoke in a strange world. She wondered where she was and how she had gotten there. She looked around and noticed that she was in the show *Unicorn Powers*. The houses and buildings were all pink, purple, or blue, the roads were made of lollipops, and the trees were chocolate and cotton candy. She went over to one of the "trees," and her favorite character Yogurt was there. Yogurt was yellow with a rainbow horn and purple hooves.

Yogurt said, "It's time for supper."

Alexa knew something weird was happening because she had never heard the word "supper" replace the word "dinner."

Alexa went with Yogurt to what he calls supper.

At supper she had unijuice, which they serve on the TV show and which she had always wanted to try, and some salad. The unijuice was a pinkish reddish color and tasted like apples and oranges mixed. After supper she asked Yogurt, "How did I get here?"

Yogurt's answer consisted of, "When kids fall asleep during *Unicorn Powers* I come out of the TV and take them into the TV show, and the only way you can get out is if you are in here for a week or more."

Two days went by, and Alexa ate the same thing every meal of the day. Alexa missed her family, and she thought that her family missed her and was worried about her. But she also thought to herself, "If they missed me they would have come by now. It has been two days already."

The next day Yogurt invited her to a sleepover at his house, and she said, "I would love to come."

That night Alexa went to Yogurt's house for her sleepover. When she walked in Yogurt said, "I have the stuff set up in the basement." When they went downstairs he was acting like a freak. He was jumping up and down, and screaming, and also he was shaking.

Yogurt had set the stuff up right next to each other. Yogurt and Alexa talked while they watched a movie. During the time that they were talking Yogurt said, "The real reason you are here is not because you fell asleep during the show. It is because..."

About a minute passed by, and he picked up where he had left off. "... I need to kidnap your sister."

Alexa said, "What! Why? I am never watching this show EVER again. I am leaving right this second."

He said, "Because I need a servant and you are too chatty and I don't think you would be a good cook and cleaner, so I thought about your sister and how she would be good one. You can't leave now; you have not been here long enough. I need to learn more stuff about your sister before you leave."

Four more days passed by, and Alexa could finally leave. So that is exactly what she did.

When she got home she told her sister all about the Yogurt thing, and about the servant thing, and everything that had happened during that last week. She said, "We need to hide someplace that he could not find us and where I can never watch that show ever again!"

Two days passed and Yogurt came to Alexa's house looking for her sister, but never found her. He only found her parents, and they would not say anything about where they were and their ages.

The next day at school Alexa told all her friends about her adventure of that last couple of days. All of them did not believe her. She promised them that she was not lying, but they still did not believe her.

# Useful Magic

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*A little boy has to sit in bed because he twisted his arm. All he wants to do is be with his best friend. Can magic help him? Find out in **USEFUL MAGIC**, by **Dani Ostrovsky**.*

Some people always say that their life is horrible. You may want to look up the meaning of horrible because, for this young boy, he had no choice but to stay in bed.

My name is Logan. I had twisted my arm and all I could do was lie in bed with occasional pain. Since I hadn't done anything for two weeks, it felt like two months. If only I could play with my best friend, Philip, then I would get over my boredom. But, that wouldn't be possible because the doctor had informed me that I shouldn't get out of bed.

One day, I was sitting in bed daydreaming about magic. I said the word, 'magic' out loud three times. Out of nowhere, appeared a wizard. He was wearing a slick black robe and had a beard that reached his ankles.

"Hello there, sad fellow," he said. I almost screamed, since he scared me, but I didn't. He could help me you know."

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am your godfather, Godfather Quinsy," explained the wizard. "And, I am here to help you with your problems."

"Umm, are you magical?" I asked shyly.

"Precisely! I have been watching over you for awhile," responded the wizard.

*Watching me? How could he be doing that? Would that be considered stalking?*

"So, why am I still in bed?" I asked, starting to get anxious.

"Well Dear, I could've helped you, but when you got hurt you never said 'magic' three times out loud," explained the wizard.

Feeling disappointed, I said, "Well, can you help me now?"

"I am sorry to say this but, 'no', said the wizard. "You are definitely in a bad condition."

He started to walk around the room. "But, I can tell you that if you believe in magic and say it three times, the wizard committee might give you the opportunity to get out of this dull room."

I started to think about what to say, but all that came out was, "There is a wizard committee?"

He looked alarmed. "Yes, but, aah, I got to go. Oh, and one more thing, make sure only the people you trust know about this, but don't tell your mother."

I didn't have time to ask why my mother was a bad person to trust because the wizard left into thin air. The next day, after my great lesson, I had asked my mom if she could drive me to the library. She started to say 'no, that it was too dangerous', but once I had whispered 'magic', my mom jolted and said 'yes'. Once I got there, I went to my favorite place in the library; the back where the old history books are located.

I started to look at a book about the Civil War. I saw a really dusty book at the end of the shelf that I had never seen before. The book had purple clouds coming out. I looked at it and dared myself to open it.

"Whoa," I said loudly. Immediately, I was shushed.

"What is this?" I whispered.

"This is a magic book," the book said. I jumped almost knocking into the bookshelf behind me.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am your godfather, remember?" And, out of the book, fell Quinsy. "So isn't this book incredible?"

"Yeah, um, this thing is awesome.

"This *thing!*" he said surprisingly. "This *thing* is a book. Treat this with respect."

"Yeah, this book is awesome." I said embarrassingly. "Sooo, what does it do?"

"This lets you do anything as long as you take the book around. First, you should check the book out and go home. People can be spying any minute." He turned his back at me and then turned around and gave me a small golden mirror that looked like a stop watch. "You will need this to make sure that nobody will be in the room when you leave."

I checked it out and went home. Back in bed, I had a lot of interruptions since my mom was getting my lunch. But, after she went to the store, I opened the book up and it said,

*You are the luckiest person in the world.*

There was so much information in the book that it would take me a year to finish the whole book. I flipped to a page that interested me the most, it said,

*How to teleport through phones.*

It was unusual, but the best part was that it was easy. All you had to do was call someone and say "magic" three times, then you would transport to where the other person is.

First, I had to decide if Philip was the one to trust. I haven't seen him in two weeks. What if he found another friend? I had to call and figure it out.

"Hello," Philip's mom answered. "Who is calling?"

"Hi, Philip's mom. I'm Logan. May I speak to Philip?"

"Of course, that would be a good change. I have been noticing that Philip has been very bored. I'll go get him."

Grinning, I waited.

"Hello?" Philip questioned.

"Hey, Philip," I said. "Whatcha doin'?"

"Nothing. So, why did you call?"

Deciding he is trustworthy, I told him. I told him about Quinsy and about the book. I told him about teleporting through phones. He sounded very interested, but didn't believe me most of the time.

I decided that I needed to prove it, so I said 'magic' three times. I transported too quickly to notice what I was doing. I got there and saw a guy with glasses staring at me. Then, I noticed it was Philip. He was staring in awe and had nothing to say.

I was so excited that I had nothing to say either. I was going to explain everything, but then I looked into the golden mirror and I saw my mom opening the house door.

"I have to get back," I said.

I needed to go. I looked to see if my mom got back and she was in the kitchen. I transported back and fell on the floor. The sound was too loud and my mom heard. I hid the book under my bed along with the mirror.

My mom came in and said, "What happened?"

"Nothing," I said sitting in bed.

After that, Logan noticed that he had reached his goal. He learned how to be with his best friend, Philip, regardless of any condition.



# What Would Happen if You Found a Human?

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*In WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOU FOUND A HUMAN? by Miranda Vordermark, Grech stumbles upon a cabin in the middle of a forest with a homeless human inside. What will she do with her?*

In a land where fairies open portals to Earth and there are creatures that even I can't imagine, there live only a certain amount of humans. They can only live there if they are born on a special time and date. Many other creatures are there too, but they aren't very important. There is a girl (well, a witch) named Grech. Every morning she walks into the woods behind her house to pick berries.

She walked out of the house with quick steps hoping to find a new berry tree. She walked on the path for ten minutes, not seeing one berry tree. Almost giving up, Grech saw something out of the corner of her eye. It was a cottage.

Curious, she walked over and banged on the door expecting some ogre or fairy, because in the land Grech lived in (Lattery Land) those are what most of the creatures are. Grech, being a witch, didn't worry about anything. She just opened the door to find a small, shriveled up, old witch. Beside the bed was a human!

Grech only knew of two humans in Lattery Land and that was the shoemakers. They moved back to human land after the capture of their daughter. She had never heard of another one here. Grech knew that the daughter was probably dead, so she just assumed that the witch had adopted the girl from Human Land. Anxious to see what they were doing in the woods, she started to talk to the older witch. "Why are you living in the woods?" Grech asked nicely.

"Our family..." the old lady took a breath, "has... has... lived here our whole lives," she said.

The old lady told Grech their story. Grech was eager to leave. She tried to stop the old lady, who invited Grech to stay for dinner. Grech ran out saying she would be back tomorrow.

Grech dreamed of the little girl and how quiet she was. Something about them made her nervous.

When the next day came she decided to go to the cottage. She walked into the cottage to find the girl sobbing by the old woman's bed. "What's wrong with your grandma?" Grech asked.

The little girl spoke quietly to Grech. “She is dead, and I have no more family left.”

Grech, thinking fast, asked the girl what her name was. “Stephanie, but grandma called me Stef.”

“Would you like to come to town with me, to find you a new home at the orphanage?”

The little girl agreed and packed her stuff and left with Grech. Grech and Stef walked into town and right into the town’s police office.

“How may I help you?” said the police officer.

“Where is the nearest orphanage?” Grech said while looking at a picture of a girl that looked like Stef.

“Down the road,” and he handed them a map.

“Thank you.”

Grech talked to Stef about her family, and asked her what had happened. She said that grandma took her from her family. “She said that they were undeserving.”

Grech thought that was way too strange, so she decided to find a fairy. They went to Grech’s house and looked in the newspaper for any free fairies. There were none but one that said that she wasn’t in business but would do the work for an emergency.

They walked to the fairy building. They walked in and went up to the front desk. “Where is the fairy Alanna?” Grech asked the man at the desk.

He pointed to the elevator door. “50,600th floor is where she lives.” In their world you don’t see all the floors. They are invisible.

The two got on the elevator. Grech pushed the button for the 50,600<sup>th</sup> floor and they waited.

The elevator shook and screeched to a hard stop. Outside of the elevator door there was a door and a giant doorbell. Stef ran up and tried to press it. She was too weak and small. Grech gladly came to help. All of a sudden the door flew open and a sad, sad fairy emerged.

“Whyyyyyyyy, wwwwwhhhhyyyy me?” said the fairy. “Sorry. Just come in and try not to ruin anything.”

“Why are you so sad?” said Stef.

“I don’t know; I just woke up and felt like crying,” she said sarcastically. “I am sad because my grandma died four years ago today.”

Grech thought that was such a stupid reason to not work. If you didn’t work here you couldn’t live. The fairy finally stopped crying and said, “Which portal and what are people’s names?”

Grech said the shoemakers’ names, and the fairy knew exactly where to go. She opened the portal and pointed into it.

“Aren’t you coming with us?” The fairy thought for a minute then agreed.

They walked into the portal to see a giant house. The only thing the girls could think of is how did they get so much money? They pushed that thought aside and rang the doorbell. A man opened the door.

“Hello, how may I help you?”

“Are you Mr. Blast?” asked Grech.

“No.”

“Never mind. Thanks for your time. Bye.”

They walked away with their heads down in shame. They knocked on all the doors of the houses that were close by. Finally they went up to a door where the man at the door said yes. He gladly took Stef in to the house and invited them in too. They declined and said they had to go home. He thanked them for bringing their child home.

Alanna opened up the portal and locked it tight.

Alanna left her home in the fairy towers to live with her new best friend Grech. As for Stef, she blended well with her new family. She now has new family members: the dog Barley, baby sister Miranda, and big brother Kevin. As all fairy tales end in happily ever after, this one ends in a very bright future.

# “What?”

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*When summer break first begins, Dee decides to buy a book from a bookstore in her neighborhood. The book is dangerous in a deadly way.... The librarian shares with her an emotional story about it that had happened years ago.... What could be wrong with such an innocent-looking book? You'll be surprised what could be possible in “WHAT?” by **Gabriana Farah**.*

Dee sets off to the bookstore. She grabs a book and goes to the register.

“Be careful with that book, Dee,” said Mr. Vow, the librarian, in a thoughtful voice, avoiding Dee’s strange look. Then, he went to his office.

“What?” asked Dee, taken aback.

There was no answer. She shrugged and ignored this statement. She then slowly walked home and called Lynn, telling her to come over.

“Nice day to watch a movie,” Lynn said matter-of-factly as Dee opened her front door and Lynn entered. The living room was visible beyond the beige painted walls that were located to the left of the front door, where a couple of couches were scattered in a rectangular circle in which Dee’s dog, Chivas, rested upon one of them. The kitchen was visible beyond a small hallway in which pictures of Dee’s brother playing soccer were collaged onto black paper that had been framed. The kitchen had the warm colors pink and blue. The French door that led to their backyard was painted white. There was a deck outside, beige colored, in which a set of tables and chairs were neatly arranged. The grass beyond the deck was nearly turning yellow because of the June sun.

“Hi, Chivas!” exclaimed Lynn as the tiny dog jumped off the couch and started running towards Lynn. The dog had a grey body with a caramel colored head. The paws were also caramel colored. Lynn noticed that his collar was blue as she stroked his head.

“Let’s go to my room,” Dee suggested. The two girls made their way up the wooden stairs. There was a sweet smell of cinnamon buns on the top floor. All the brown doors were shut, and only one white door lay open: Dee’s bedroom. It was dimly lit by one lamp, and the curtains were closed. You could tell someone was reading because of the pile of some of the books that lay open. There was a mattress on the ground, where a pillow and a couple duvets sat there untidily. That was where her sister slept when she came home from college during the beginning of summer break.

“This is not very important, well, to me at least, but I figured you might still want to know. So, before you came over, I was at Mr. Vow’s bookstore, you know, in our neighborhood, and I bought this green colored book with a silver spine, and it had no title. But Mr. Vow told me to be careful...then he went into his office. I have no clue what he means..... It must be something just not important, I guess,” explained Dee.

Lynn thought for a second or two.

“Then he might mean to take care of the book? No? Or there might be a scary story in there, and he might think that you will get nightmares....that’s it!” said Lynn more to herself than to Dee.

“You may be right, but I don’t really get nightmares *that* fast. Let’s just not worry about that right now—”

“Let’s go then! I really want to know what he’s talking about,” said Lynn not hearing what Dee had said.

“Oh, all right, sometime tomorrow,” sighed Dee.

Lynn nodded thoughtfully. The girls read magazines, took Chivas for walks, and chatted until they finally fell asleep.

The next morning, the two friends ate breakfast and left for the bookstore, leaving a note to Dee’s parents.

“Hello, girls,” greeted Mr. Vow as Dee and Lynn walked in through the clear double doors of the bookstore. There was a customer that had just walked out the door and Mr. Vow was still at the register that was located to the left of the door. The room smelled like fresh ink when you would open a freshly printed magazine and smell the papers.

“I was wondering—” started Dee.

Mr. Vow sighed. “Yes, I knew you’d come back for that,” said Mr. Vow as Dee stared at him, wide-eyed. “There is a story related to that book of yours, Dee,” he continued.

*I knew that*, thought Lynn as she crossed her arms.

“So what’s the story?” asked Dee, eager to learn more about it.

Mr. Vow hesitated, “Well, it makes me sad just thinking about it...but, oh well. There was this one young girl,” said Mr. Vow. He wiped a tear at those last words because he never did have a daughter of his, “about your ages, and she used to come every day, no exceptions, to my library, not to buy books, but she used to come for me, each time giving me a cup of coffee, thinking that if I wasn’t shaking after the first cup, I truly needed another cup,” he chuckled, “Well, one day, she didn’t come. I wasn’t worried at first, but when I started thinking about it, I became more than worried. I started calling her phone, including her parents’ phones, but there was no answer. The next day, I get a phone call. She’s dead,” and then he sobbed even more, and after minutes of silence, he

started speaking again, “and...and...people suspected something about the book she had bought, which was lying open on her bed where she was sleeping. I can’t believe it was my fault! I just can’t! The book was...was....the same one you...you...had bought,” and with that, he had emptied the newly bought tissue box.

“Do you know exactly how she died?” asked Lynn, tears in her eyes.

“No.”

“I’m so sorry!” Lynn said, tearing up some more. Dee stood there, helpless, wondering if she could be any use in such a situation. She hadn’t seen Lynn be so sad in a very long time. Lynn has a soft heart, but it’s not that easy for her to tear up.

“I feel terribly sorry for that loss, Mr. Vow. I bet she was a really kind girl,” said Dee.

“Yes, me too!” cried Lynn.

“She was an extremely kind girl. Well, I have some work to do, girls. You better go enjoy your day somewhere other than this boring old bookstore. And please do be careful with that book, Dee,” said Mr. Vow, stepping back into his office.

The girls were in Dee’s bedroom, followed by Chivas.

“I guess Chivas wants to sleep next to us tonight,” said Dee cheerfully. She wanted to cheer up Lynn. Chivas always made her happy. He liked to be pat and could share your deepest secrets. Lynn’s parents were going on vacation for a month; therefore, Lynn had to spend that time with Dee.

“Lynn, as you might not know, my parents are going on vacation too. For a week only, though. So during that time, I have to be at my aunt and uncle’s house. They honestly hate me, actually everyone, in general. I figured you might not want to come with me, but, I guess I should ask you first....”

“Good choice. You should have asked me before you assumed things....Well, anyways; I have nowhere else to go, so obviously I’ll have to go with you, no matter how much you aunt and uncle hate everyone.”

“Seriously?” And without waiting for an answer, she gave Lynn a bone-breaking hug. Lynn laughed.

“You wouldn’t like them. They’re probably the total opposite of my parents. Anyway, we can pack together, and we’ll have to leave here in three days, then, we’ll leave their house in a week, right when we get there. Let’s watch a movie. OK?” explained Dee.

“Sounds good,” replied Lynn. The girls snuggled into a couch and watched a movie. Hours after chatting, they fell asleep.

Three days had passed, and the girls were at last at Dee's aunt and uncle's house.

"Wait, Dee, won't they be bothered by me since they didn't invite me over?" asked Lynn, worried as the girls were getting out of the car.

"Well, they didn't invite me either!" Dee replied while she waved goodbye to her parents. "This is the only family we have here, so this was my only choice." Dee rang the doorbell. The door opened and the girls stepped in.

The girls were happily at Dee's joyful house again, after being greeted with glee by Dee's parents. The girls read books and magazines. Dee just sat there, reading intently. It was then that Lynn realized that Dee was sleeping, because she was snoring, with her book open flat right on her face. It was a couple of minutes before midnight, and the time had encouraged Lynn to sleep. The girls were soundly sleeping...until suddenly, Lynn hears an alarming scream and wakes up.

"Dee...? Is that you?" Lynn squinted her eyes. "Oh, no...."

Lynn flipped the light switch, but there was no power; a terrible storm had occurred during the night. Then she nearly ripped the curtains off the pole they were hanging from. There was barely any light outside. All Lynn saw were vines that were wrapped around Dee's neck that were about to suffocate her. She sprinted down the stairs and brought back a knife, thinking that they would cut the vines, but instead, the knife cut her. She was bleeding severely, but decided to help her friend; Dee's case was more important.

Lynn ran to Dee's parents' room and knocked hurriedly. Without waiting for a "come in," she raced through the room and told them all that had happened pushily. She quickly guided them to the room. Dee was yelling horribly loud. Lynn thought her eardrums were about to explode. There were so many voices inside her head and all the screaming and commotion. Dee's father took the knife and tried to cut the vines, but no damage was made at all, though he still kept trying. Lynn saw a flash of grey: It was Chivas. She looked at what he was pawing at: the book. She suddenly clamped the book shut. Everything stopped dead; the vines slipped all the way back into the book; Dee stopped yelling and her color turned back to normal, and her parents froze.

"Lynn, what...how...what...what did you do?" asked Steve, concerned.

"Chivas...he...he led me to the book and pawed it and that made me think that he wanted to make me close it...then I thought about the problem with Mr. Vow's customer and the book..." Lynn said with difficulty as everyone stared at her, wide-eyed.

“Thank you so much, I will never be able to thank you enough, for calling us, being here with us, and saving our lives!” Lily said, sobbing harder and harder each second. She hugged Chivas who had secretly hidden under the bed. Dee was so taken aback that she couldn’t say anything.

“You saved my life, Lynn...wow...you did! And Chivas, what a clever dog you are!” exclaimed Dee, getting up and hugging her friend and Chivas. The family and friend hugged each other, wordless, tears still in eyes.

The following evening, the girls told Lily and Steve their plan, and set off to Mr. Vow’s library. Every single little detail was explained to Mr. Vow, who stood there, mouth open in awe.

“Don’t you have the address of each person or company that delivers your books?” asked Lynn expectedly.

“I do, I do! I tried to stop the deliveries right when people suspected something about my book? Well, the deliveries just wouldn’t get stopped, so I stopped trying to stop them...” explained Mr. Vow.



# What's in There?

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*A boy named Max needs to get out of this strange world he was sucked into. Will he ever make it out? Read **WHAT'S IN THERE?** by **Jailen Lozzi**.*

“**Y**es, I finally made it! Now I can go home!”

One Week Ago

*Beep! Beep! Beep!*

*Click!* A hand with claws turned off the alarm clock.

One day, a boy named Max woke up and got ready for school. “How did you sleep, Honey?” his mom said.

“Fine,” Max said as he swallowed down a piece of toast as if it were not there. “I gotta go. The bus is here. Love you!” he said, bolting out the door.

“I love you too, Honey! Have a good day at school!”

When he got on the bus, he sat down next to his best friend, Rex. “Hey dude, wazzup,” Max said.

“Not so good. Didn’t you hear on the news? Three kids disappeared last night! No one knows where they are!”

Rex said. “Just relax, man, it’s all right,” Max said. They spent the rest of the time arguing about which game is better, *Call of Duty* or *Gears of War*. Nothing else happened for the rest of the day except him getting D’s on most of his tests.

Later that night, he got his pajamas on and went to bed. When he fell asleep, a hand appeared from his pillow! It grabbed him by the head, and he was dragged into his pillow!

He got up and looked around. He was in a place that looked like it was a Japanese video game. He looked down and there was a baby... something, at his feet. Then it started talking! “Hello, my name is Mir! You are my master!”

Max screamed. “AAAAHHHHH! You can talk! Where am I?”

“I don’t know,” Mir said. “I’m just a baby.”

Max said, “I gotta get out of here! Someone might—”

To his right an orange mushroom attacked him, but Mir shot out what looked like a blue fireball! All of a sudden, the mushroom disappeared.

“Hey, how did you do that?” Max said, terrified.

“I don’t know! I’m just a baby!”

“But you— baby, yeah. Well, how do we get out of here?”

“Well, there is this portal, but it’s really hard to get through. Do you want to go anyway?”

“Whatever. Anything it takes to get out of here.”

So they headed out, trying to find a way out. They battled monsters, and got some items.

“Hyah,” Max said while attacking a slime. All of a sudden, the monster dropped something. “What’s this?” Max said.

“I’ve heard of this. It’s a wand. It boosts the fireball I shot! Don’t ask how,” said Mir.

“Ok, awesome! Let’s keep going! Wait, what’s that?”

“That’s called a portal. It teleports you somewhere. Don’t know where, though. Let’s try it!”

“Ok. I trust you.”

They jumped into the portal, and all of a sudden, they ended up in the next area! “Whew, thanks, that was such a rush!” Max said. “Let’s keep going!” They kept moving until they reached a stranger portal. “What’s this?” Max asked.

“It’s Aseroth’s doorway,” Mir said. “You have to beat him before you reach the portal. But be warned: He’s REALLY tough. Are you ready?”

“You bet I am!” They entered the doorway and saw him.

“I am Aseroth.”

“I want to go home, to my world,” said Max. “And I’m taking Mir with me!”

“Very well, but first you must defeat me!”

He started using dark magic, but Max and Mir started firing blue magic at the orb, and it turned blue, and then blew up, destroying Aseroth’s staff. “Very well. I shall let you pass,” said Aseroth. Then he opened up the portal.

“Finally! I made it! I can go home!” They went through the portal, and everything went back to normal—except for the baby dragon.

# Zebra Land!

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**ZEBRA LAND!**, by *Ashley Smith*, is about a girl named Penny who has a poster portal to the magical place called Zebra Land. Once Penny gets there she finds out that the lions from Lion Land are planning an attack on Zebra Land, and it's up to her to save them.

There was a girl named Penny. Penny lived a normal life until she was told to clean her room by her mom. Penny was so mad about cleaning her room she started kicking everything around her room, making it even worse. Then she looked at her zebra poster.

Penny was obsessed with zebras. She would look at that poster whenever she was mad or sad. Penny looked at it and thought, *I wish I was a zebra so nobody could boss me around and tell me what to do. I wouldn't have to clean my room, vacuum, or take the garbage out. I could just run free and hang out with friends.*

Penny then touched her poster, but when she touched the poster her hand went through. Penny said, "That's weird." She touched it again. Her hand went through again. Then she said, "What's going on?" She thought, *I wonder where this poster would take me if my whole body went through the poster.* She was very curious, so she decided to just jump right in the poster.

When she jumped through the poster it seemed like she was going through a tornado or something. She was always afraid of tornadoes. She was screaming the whole way down. Then she saw an opening with a bright light!

A minute later she was on land. She looked up, and there was a pink, striped zebra looking right at her. Penny didn't believe what she was seeing! She reached out to touch the zebra to see if the zebra was real or if it was just a dream. The zebra kind of flinched. When she reached out she felt fur. She looked up and you could see in her eyes that she was truly amazed at what she was looking at. She saw that the zebra was very confused and a little afraid.

She got up and saw this big rainbow and a big crystal-clear waterfall. Then she started seeing different colored striped zebras like purple, blue, yellow, green, black, brown, and red. She saw a zebra yelling and freaking out, saying, "The enemies are coming, the enemies are coming!" Once the zebras heard that, they too started to scream and run around panicking.

She tried asking the zebras who the enemies were, but they didn't hear her from all the screaming. She then thought to herself, *What is going on here? Are they possibly scared of me? Do they really think other people and I are*

*enemies?* Penny was also worried that she would never find her way home. She knew that she came through the poster, but how?

Penny kept on thinking and thinking while she was just walking around the island. She noticed that the buildings were kind of rusted and looked old. She looked around and went in different stores. Then something really caught her eye: the newspaper stand and the maps.

She picked up a newspaper and saw a picture of a lion. Then she read the caption that went along with it. It said, “Lions Are Planning an Attack on Zebra Land!” That made her so happy to know that the zebras weren’t scared of her. But then she really thought about it and said to herself, “Oh my gosh. Zebra land is in trouble. Lions are going to take over their land. The zebras are going to get hurt! I have to do something about this!”

She was about to go out the door when she remembered, *I have to find out where I am so I can find a way to get home!* She went back to the counter and picked up the map. Then she tried to find her location. She saw that she was in Zebra Land. She also found out that Zebra Land is found between Panther Land and Puppy Land.

She now knew where she was, but she didn’t know where to go to get back to her house. She thought, *Well, I got here from the portal, so maybe I can just go back to the portal and jump back in!*

Once she found all that out, she went back by the waterfall and was about to jump through the portal. When she looked back she saw that the zebras were sad. She asked the pink zebra why they look sad. The pink zebra replied, “Well, since the lions are planning an attack on us and our land, we were hoping you could try to stop them. We were counting on you, Penny. But, hey, just go back home and live.”

Penny started to feel bad. She saw the zebras turning around with their heads down walking to their huts. Penny knew she had to do the right thing, so she said, “Hey, who said I was going to let you all down for my own selfish reasons? Yeah, I want to go home, but, hey, I put others first! So what do you say? Can I help?”

The zebras turned around, and the purple one came up and said, “I think we should give her a second chance! We need all the help we can get!”

All the zebras started to cheer. Penny felt so happy that everybody was counting on her. She felt so important!

Penny didn’t know what she should do to help. She decided to start by asking the zebras questions. She started with the blue zebra. Penny asked, “So why are the lions planning to destroy everything in Zebra Land and take over?”

The blue zebra was nervous, so he kind of stuttered. He replied, “I-I don’t know everything but-but I know that that one reason is that we are the prey of them so I-I guess that’s why.”

Penny didn’t want to have the blue zebra be even more nervous, so she just wrote that down and said, “Thank you!”

The blue zebra was kind of relieved that he didn’t have to answer any more questions, so he said, “Whew, you are welcome!” He just walked away.

Penny knew that zebras were the prey of lions, but she didn’t know that the lions would do that much. Then Penny asked the yellow zebra, who was way more relaxed, “What can I do to help you guys and zebra land?”

The yellow zebra replied calmly, “I don’t really know, but you can ask the king.”

Penny didn’t know who the zebra king was or where he lived, so she asked the zebra, “Well, could you please tell me what his name is and where he is home is so I can ask him?”

The yellow zebra told Penny everything she needed to know to contact the king. Penny wrote down all the information and went to find the king. The king’s name is Ziggy.

When she got to where Ziggy lived she saw that it also looked rusted and old. She also saw two guards in front of the door. She told the guards that she needed to talk to the king right away. The guards asked what she needed to talk to the king about. She said that one of the zebras had told her that she had to ask the king what she could do to help Zebra Land.

The guards let her in. The castle was big and comfortable. She had to walk down huge hallways and up huge staircases. Then she finally found the room. The room was called “Office.”

She knocked on the door, and the king said, “Come in.” Ziggy’s voice was low and deep.

She walked in. The king was reading a newsletter that said, “This just in: The lions are planning an attack on Zebra Land. They say they are going to break into the gate, eat every zebra, and then rule Zebra Land and make it a play land for the cubs.” Penny could tell he was stressed and worried.

Penny sat down in the chair in front of his desk and said that she wanted to help Zebra Land. He chuckled, but then looked up at Penny and saw she wasn’t joking. Then he got serious. He said, “Well, I don’t really know what you could do to help Zebra Land. But there is one thing that might help Zebra Land. But it’s far too dangerous for a little girl to do.”

Penny felt angry. She loved zebras, and she didn't want them to be destroyed by a bunch of lions. "Listen, I will do anything to save zebras. I love zebras and I don't want you guys being destroyed."

The king was impressed by how much courage she had. "Oh, all right. I guess if you want to do it so badly you can. But you can't back down from this," the king said.

"Don't worry, I won't," said Penny.

"Okay. Well, this is what you have to do. Go to Lion Land and spy on them. See what they are planning," said the king.

Penny agreed and then left. She went down the hallways and stairs and went outside and told everybody that they won't have to worry. Then all the zebras cheered that there was someone that could save them. Penny was really excited also.

The next morning she got up early and packed a backpack with notebooks, pencils, and a camera. She got on a boat and left. She felt strong and powerful but also kind of scared. She had just realized that she was pretty much risking her life. But she wasn't going to back down. All the zebras were counting on her.

Her boat finally reached land. She was shaking with fear as she got out of the boat and stepped onto land. All the lions were staring at her like she was a giant piece of steak. She gulped.

She needed to cause a distraction so the lions would stop looking at her and she could go to the king of lion's castle and get the plans for taking over and destroying Zebra Land. She did the oldest trick in the book. "Look, there are some gazelles prancing in the field!" They all turned around.

She quickly ran into the castle, quickly grabbed the plans, and then left the castle. She ran out of the castle and quickly ran to the boat and left. She noticed that Lion Land's buildings were a lot nicer. She was out of breath. She couldn't believe she had actually done that.

When she got back to Zebra Land everyone was so glad that she came back and had gotten the information. She ran to the castle and ran to the king's office and threw the file on his desk. "Here's everything that the lions have planned on destroying us."

The king was very surprised that she had actually done that and come back. He and his army could take care of the rest.

Penny asked him what her reward was. Ziggy looked at her and said "Well, what would you want?"

Penny thought and then said, "What I want is to get to come here whenever I want."

Ziggy thought it was fair and they shook on it. Penny noticed that Ziggy had a very firm handshake. Ziggy said, “Thank you,” and that she could go now.

Penny said, “You’re welcome,” and then went. She felt proud of herself.

The next morning Penny woke up to the sounds of roaring. At first she didn’t know what it could be. Then she really thought about it and realized that this was the day of the attack. She sprang out of bed and ran out of the hut. The first thing she saw were lions clawing, scratching, and biting the zebras.

She ran over there and yelled, “Hey! Everybody, just stop and think. Think about what you are about to do. This is a huge mistake you all are about to do. Lions, I know zebras are the prey of you guys, but they have families just like you guys. So I suggest we all just stop fighting and you go back where you came from.”

The lions all looked at each other. Then the king said, “You know what. That was a very meaningful speech. What are we thinking? You know what? Let’s go, guys. I’m sorry, Ziggy and the rest of you. We promise we will never threaten to eat you and take over your land.”

The zebra king was shocked. “I think we all had some fault in this. We forgive you.”

The lion king smiled. “Well, let’s go, lions. Bye, zebras, and thank you, Penny.”

The zebra king smiled. “Bye.”

Penny then smiled. “You’re welcome.”

The lions left, and all the zebras started cheering, hugging each other, and dancing everywhere. They all thanked Penny. Penny felt very proud and felt like she could do anything.

Penny wanted to stay at Zebra Land, but she knew she couldn’t. Since she had to go, Penny then went back to her hut, grabbed her awards, said bye to everybody, and went back through her poster portal.

She was back in her room. She thought that she had been gone for a night, but it turned out she was gone for only ten minutes. She felt happy, but she saw that she never cleaned her room! She quickly cleaned her room, and was done by the time her mom came in and told her it was dinner time.

Penny was happy that she saved all the zebras and Zebra Land and hopes she will go back there again.







# **News Feed**



# The High-Seas Basketball Showdown

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*Guess how hard it is to play basketball with people that don't even speak the same language as you? You find out in **THE HIGH-SEAS BASKETBALL SHOWDOWN** by **Mitchell Pitts**.*

**T**he story could be called “The High-Seas Basketball Showdown.” You might ask why, but let me explain.

My family and I went on a Caribbean cruise last year on winter break. Our itinerary included Haiti and Jamaica, traveling on the Atlantic Ocean. The interesting thing about the cruise ship was that there were thousands of people on the ship, many who spoke languages other than English.

Early in the cruise I wandered up to the sports deck where I thought that I had found a piece of heaven. Actually, it was a full-court basketball court. I knew that during the cruise I would spend a lot of time there.

After going through the formalities with my family, eating dinner and being told to be careful, I found my way back to the sports deck. There, I met several boys my age shooting hoops and doing dribbling drills. We soon discovered two things about each other: We loved to play basketball and we all spoke different languages. The guys spoke English, Portuguese, French, German, and Japanese. We introduced ourselves the best we could. Their names are Louis, Peter, Francis, and Yoshi.

Determined not to let a small thing like a language barrier prevent us from playing like a team, we developed physical cues. The system, really simple, consisted of using our fingers to mean pass, toughing our chin and ears to mean shoot, and rubbing one elbow to mean pick and roll. The system became second nature to us, replacing our need to speak the same language. After many hours and two days of practice, we bonded as a team. The court became our second home.

On the third day of the cruise, we met a group of boys our age, but they stayed together and played together as well. We soon learned that they were all from the same boarding school in southern Italy. After they watched us play awhile, they challenged us to a series of games. The first team to win two out of three games would be crowned king of the court. This honor would allow the winner to pick the basket with the sun to their backs for the rest of the cruise. (When the sun is facing you, it's hotter and more difficult to see.) Our team accepted the challenge.

However, we worried about our language barrier and whether our system of communication would actually work under game conditions.

Game one was close, but the Italian team pulled it out by two points. Game two was not as close. Our system worked fairly well, better than in game one, and we won easily by four points. As we began the final game, a large crowd began to gather. I even saw my parents and my sister cheering me on. The crowd's noise was almost unbearable. This caused the Italian team difficulty when trying to call plays and speak to one another.

The noise didn't bother us because of our system of physical cues. I was really surprised that our system worked so well. Each signal called for a different play to be executed.

Near the end of the third game, the pressure was intense. It was all even at 20. The next score would declare the champion. The Italians had the ball and took two shots, both missed, a credit to our defense. We rebounded the second missed shot. The play called for me to pick and then roll toward the basket and pull up for a jump shot.

After what seemed like an eternity, I finally had the ball in my hand ready to shoot. I then thought, *This is a real high-seas showdown*. Of course, I made the shot and we won the series.

I was so proud of my team because we overcame a barrier that seemed insurmountable, our languages. I will never forget those guys and will always be thankful to my parents for the experience of a lifetime.

# My Trip to Mexico

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**MY TRIP TO MEXICO**, by *Dylan O'Leary*, is the story of my family vacation to Mexico in 2009. It tells us of the fun times that my family had while we were there.

All the kids were out of school for Spring Break in 2009. My two brothers, sister, parents, and I were going to Mexico for spring break. We packed our clothes, bathing suits, and sunscreen and then, we were on our way to the airport. When we arrived, every line where the security guards see your passport and you go through the metal detector was full. There were lots of twenty-year-olds that were going to Mexico, too. We tried to get through the lines faster. We got to the line to get on the plane, but we had to wait for hours because the plane was not ready. We got McDonalds, then we got on the plane and we were finally off to Mexico.

Three and a half hours later, we arrived in Mexico and were excited to go to our hotel. My Dad checked us in, and then gave us wrist bands. The bands meant we could get anything at the hotel for free as long as we were wearing them on our arms. I didn't know how much they cost, but I knew they were expensive. We went to our rooms and my brothers, sister, and I had to share a room. My parents had their own room. The rooms were very nice, and every time we left the room for a while, there would be sodas in the small fridge. There was also a big painting of parrots on the wall.

All day, every day we were at the pool. There was a bar at the pool where we could get drinks and everything was free. We laid in the sun a lot and every day I would treat myself to a virgin strawberry daiquiri.

In the evenings we would get dinner. On my older brother's fourteenth birthday, the waiter gave him a kiddy cocktail. He dumped all of it down his mouth, so it must have been good. We went to bed and would get up and do the same thing over again.

At breakfast, I would get waffles and orange juice. Every morning, my parents would get towels to put on the chairs where we would hang out by the pool. After breakfast, we would go to the pool. The pools were so long, they were like a river. In one of the pools, there was a big waterfall with big boulders and I enjoyed standing under it. When we went to lunch, I would have a burger and fries.

One week later, we packed our bags and went in a shuttle to the airport. The lines were short this time to get on the plane. It was eight o'clock at night when we were on the plane and we were off to Detroit. I listened to my iPod since I couldn't read. On the plane, reading gave me a stomachache. It was so dark that we couldn't see out the window and it was cold in the plane.

Three and a half hours later, we arrived back in Michigan on Easter Sunday. The first employee said, "Happy Easter, Folks!" The lines were long although it was almost one in the morning. We went to the parking garage, and then we were finally on our way home. My dad was driving and everyone was sleeping except us. We couldn't wait to get home. We arrived shortly after one in the morning.

Our trip to Mexico was officially over.

# The Time I Had Cancer

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*Makena Duval, a seven-year-old, has cancer and is terrified for her first surgery. See how it turns out in **THE TIME I HAD CANCER** by **Makena Duval**.*

**T**his is the time I had cancer. I was seven when it happened.

One day I found a lump on my arm. I didn't know what it was, so I asked my mom what it could be. My mom didn't know what it was. She brought me to the doctor. The doctor said it was nothing to worry about.

After that my mom and I went to a surgeon. His name was Doctor Sumet. Sadly he said with fright he thought this could be a highly cancerous tumor and in all his 30 years of practice he had never seen anything like this!

I had cancer. I was so upset and absolutely terrified. I could feel a teardrop ready to slip right out of my eyes. Also, my stomach had butterflies in it.

My mom set up an appointment for the surgery right away. I was tugging on my mom's purse and bawling with tears. "Please don't, please." I was scared out of my mind about the surgery. It was my first time ever having a surgery before!

The date of the surgery was October 18, 2007. I was so nervous! My mom, dad, sister, and I all drove down to Providence Hospital. We were all nervous. We just checked in, sat down, and just waited.

The nurse poked her head out and said, "Makena." My stomach dropped, and I gasped for air.

We got to the room. All the nurses were trying to comfort me. The hospital was really scary to me. I was scared out of my mind. I lay on the bed and the nurse put a mask on me. Then I blacked out.

After three hours of surgery I woke up from the sleeping gas. I got in the wheelchair, and my dad rolled me down to the car. When I got home I was very tired and groggy, I slept for what seemed like days!

The scar was very long and was glued with a kind of superglue for bad scars. I had a bandage over it.

Then I was hungry, so I got a blueberry bagel. But it wouldn't stay down. I felt something. So ran up to the toilet. Finally after that I was so exhausted I got to bed and snuggled up into the covers. "Good night," I said to myself quietly, and I went to sleep.

*One Month Later*

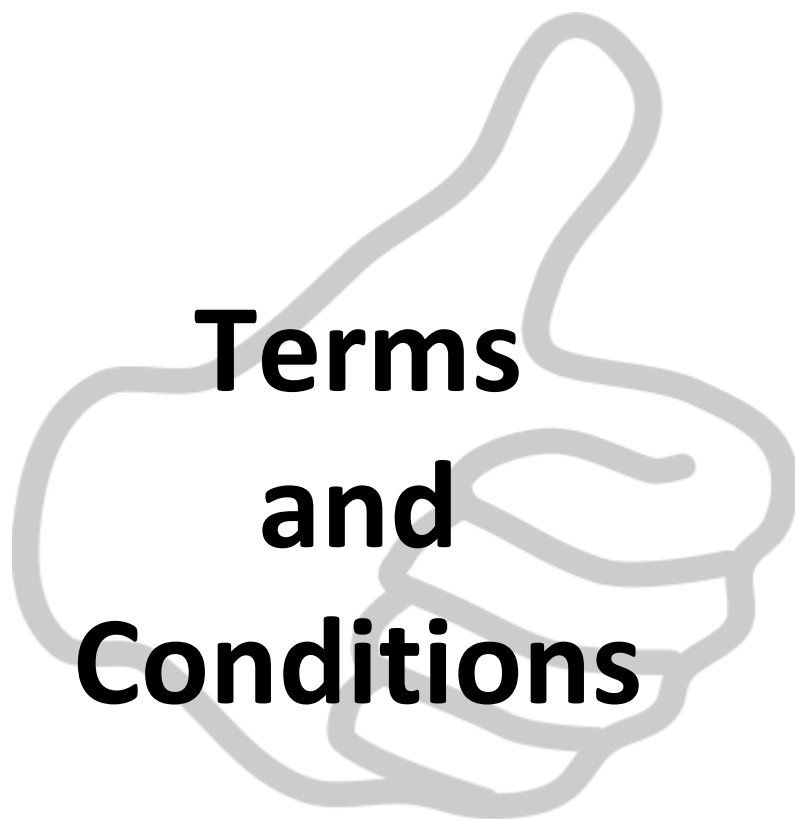
I overheard my mom talking on the phone with someone. At the end

of the phone call I heard my mom say, “Thank you, Dr. Taub.” I had no clue who this Dr. Taub was. Then my mom came to say something to me. “Makena,” she said, “you have to go get an MRI.”

“What is that?” I said with a huge gulp of spit about to run down my throat! An MRI is a scan that takes a picture of the place you had cancer and makes sure you don’t have it anymore.

After one nervous week I got the results: It was clear! I was so happy. I was about to cry!





**Terms  
and  
Conditions**



# Alien Town

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*When three friends find themselves in trouble one day, they prepare themselves to fight a strange creature. These characters show that friendship and courage is what drives humans to be the way they are in **ALIEN TOWN**, by **Samy Meradi**.*

**B**illy, Marie, and Mike were normal kids in middle school, until Marie got taken away by an alien from the planet Mars. He took Marie because he was low on food. When he saw her, he took her to the cave where he was hiding.

At first, Billy and Mike didn't know Marie had been taken. They were looking for her as they would on any normal day. Her mother said she was in the park, but they found nothing.

They started to get worried. They looked all around town in the shops, including Best Buy and the Apple Store. They had no luck until they saw a weird shape. It was an *alien*!

The two boys ran back to their house, locked the door, lowered the curtains, and thought of a good plan. They had the plan figured out in no time.

The plan was that one would distract the alien, while the other one took Marie. So they got brave enough to go outside. Billy said, "Where did it go?"

Mike whispered, "I don't know."

They followed their plan, but first they thought they should tell Marie's mom and dad. When Marie's parents heard there was an alien roaming around town, they cried. Only their daughter mattered. They were thinking the worst: that their daughter had been taken away. And in fact that was true. After this horrifying news they told the whole town. The town freaked out.

The two boys wanted to know where the alien was. They went on and tried to find the alien. At one point Mike got scared, but they continued anyway—right until the alien came up behind them from his dinner of bugs! Billy ran forward into his cave and found Marie while Mike distracted the alien. Marie couldn't talk because the alien had put Super Glue on her mouth. Luckily Billy had a lighter from when he had gone camping a few weeks back. He took the lighter and very gently at a fair distance swayed the lighter back and forth until the glue melted.

They had to take care of the alien and kill him. Billy noticed a weak spot. It was his mouth. He took his lighter and threw it in the alien's mouth. Then he took cover and watched the alien burn. The alien turned into a bunch of slime.

Mike and Billy brought Marie to her parents and went on with their lives that they loved because of their friendship. The town also thanked them for killing the alien.

# Foreigners

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**FOREIGNERS**, by *Dylan Young*, is a story about an invasion of the United States. But just who was invading? Was it the Chinese? The Russians? You are about to learn it was neither.

**C**reak....Creak....CRASH!  
“AHHHHHHHHHHHA!” The screams of the men, women, and children were deafening. The thud of the helicopter blades echoed, as well as cars honking and beeping. I was still in shock, watching from my rooftop the great building falling. I was almost 100 percent sure that the plane I was seeing was not built on Earth.

It was the scariest day for humans around the globe. It had finally happened.

There was a ~~whizzzz~~ above me as the Black Hawk helicopter fired its rocket. I felt like I was in a movie, not just because the Empire State Building was falling, but because of the plane, the only thing that is new to us as humans. I mean not because the plane crashed into a building, which had already happened to us on 9/11, but because of the foreign design of it. That was new to us. When you saw it you practically froze.

Just then soldiers from a helicopter starting coming down on ropes in front of me and onto the street below. They hit the ground with a thud and jogged off, splitting up into streets and alleys while yelling things I couldn't make out.

By the way, my name is Jeremiah, Jeremiah Wilson. I grew up in New York City and have stayed here. My parents died in a car accident when I was 12. Since then life has been dull. I live in a foster home with my foster parents, Bill and Sharon. Sharon is pretty nice, but Bill, well...let's just say he doesn't do much. Basically he sits around all day smoking cigars and playing poker with his buddies in “Bill's Room.” Now I am fifteen and “grown up.” That pretty much means that I'm dumped out on the street in a year and am on my own if no one ever adopts me.

Just then a military officer yelled for me to get out of here. I said, “Why?”

He said, “Because it is an official drop zone for troops.” So I fled down the stairs, ran outside, and then jumped onto my motorcycle and drove off.

As I got closer to the crash site, everything got louder. I realized that some people didn't even know what was going on. They just sat in their cars like it was a normal day in the city. Then other times empty cars were scattered all over the road, as well as trucks, taxis and even fallen

motorcycles and bikes. At that moment I realized I was three hundred yards away from the Empire State Building. I slid to a stop right before I was about to hit a ton of “Do Not Cross” caution tape next to at least 100 other people watching in horror.

At that moment I heard a loud squeaking. I looked behind me. An M1 Abrams tank was rolling up from behind me as a military officer escorted it with a bullhorn yelling, “MOVE OUT OF THE WAY, PEOPLE!” So I moved myself and my motorcycle without thinking twice.

The tank passed along with the officer, so I ran to a nearby alley and started to climb the fire escape. I reached the top, and by this point the next building over was the one the plane had crashed into. I jumped from the building through one window in the next.

Inside it smelled like a skunk. It was dark inside, and all that I heard were faint creaks and some rumbling. Just then I saw something move down the hallway. It was a woman. She looked middle-aged and frightened.

“Hello?”

“I saw it.... “

“Saw what?”

“The...the creatures.”

When someone says “creatures” to me, I think of lizards and stuff, so that’s what I thought. I said, “Are you afraid of reptiles or something?”

Just then there was a crash from down the hall. The woman whispered, “Come with me.” I did, and she took me to a room filled with many desks. She crawled under one.

I followed, and there was a hole. She jumped down, and I did too. Below, what looked like a bank safe was filled with gooey green stuff and stacks of money that looked like towers. She went behind a tower and said, “I need to show you something.”

You would never believe what was behind that stack. Behind the stack of money, there was a body in the shape of a human that looked like a lizard.

I knew at that moment what I had gotten myself into. I was going to die on the day the aliens invaded Earth. I also had just realized what was wrong with the plane. You probably did too.

# If You Hate Giant Virgin Piña Coladas

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*Barry is at a beach in Honolulu, Hawaii taking a nice vacation until disaster strikes. All this and more is in IF YOU HATE GIANT VIRGIN PIÑA COLADAS by Giovanni Romano.*

In the sunset of Honolulu, Hawaii, there was an airplane with a whole bunch of Russian scientists who study nuclear waste; one in particular is named Dr. Vundervich. The Doctor had a window seat with a faulty window that could be opened. Dr. Vundervich had two large, opaque containers filled with waste, which would mutate you if it came in contact with your skin.

“Zeez are no good,” said Dr. Vundervich, and he threw the containers out the window.

As the plane flew by overhead, the bartender on the beach put a virgin piña colada on the counter. Out of nowhere, one of the large, opaque containers came plummeting down at 400 miles per hour. It landed in the glass, there was a violent bubbling, and the glass started to shake. The bartender started flipping out and ran into the wall of the bar and fell unconscious.

Slowly but surely, the virgin piña colada grew and grew and grew until it finally stopped at the height of 500 feet. It had hands, feet, and a face, and its umbrella was the size of the Empire State Building. (To save time we will call him Bill.)

Bill started to terrorize the island. He ran around crushing parked cars and swiping at buildings. Everyone but Barry Manilow was flipping out and trying to escape by getting in their cars. Then they started running each other off of the roads trying to reach the airport.

Meanwhile, the other waste container fell, and hit Barry on the head. He had been napping, when the waste container cracked open and greenish-yellowish goop oozed all over his face. Barry (being woken up by the container breaking on this head) got up and started to spaz out. “AhhhhYAHHHHBahh,” Barry howled in pain, shaking and screaming as he grew to the same height as Bill.

As Barry wiped the waste from his face he saw a small boy on the beach. Kevin was building a sandcastle and did not see or hear the commotion. He didn’t even notice that his mother was squished into the sand. And now, Kevin was about to be crushed by Bill’s foot. To save

the little boy, Barry socked Bill in the face. Bill fell back on his butt, just missing the flailing mother.

Kevin looked up. He saw two giant men, one smelling like pineapple and coconut and sitting on the sand while the other one stood over him. Kevin turned his head and found his struggling mother near the man on the sand. After he ran to her, she shoved her phone in his hand and yelled at him, "Call 911 while I get out of this hole." Kevin did so. Just as he pulled his mom from the sandy pit, Kevin saw the tanks driving up the sand and jets flying overhead.

Kevin looked around and saw the two giant men fighting. He didn't know which of the giants to cheer for when the tanks start firing and the airplanes start dropping bombs and paratroopers. But the army's fire was just ticking off Bill even more.

Barry turtled over the little boy and his mother to protect them from the explosions. Bill ran up to the tanks and knocked them over.

Kevin peeked under the giant's arm and saw the Channel 3 news truck and the anchor standing in front of the camera.

"Leopold Von Licktensaën reporting from Honolulu. This just in: a giant virgin piña colada is attacking Hawaii; 698 people killed, and two people injured. Who will stop this menace?" he exclaimed to the camera.

In the background Barry was rising up and up from his crouch over a woman and a little boy, and the camera man zoomed in on him. Barry smiled. Leopold tapped the cameraman on the shoulder and said, "Film over there by the tanks."

Everyone turned their heads to see Bill spewing lasers out of its eyes and hands. Buildings exploded and houses burned. Barry ran to Bill using the bar's roof as a shield and socked Bill in the jaw. The oversized umbrella drink fell backward into the ocean still shooting lasers; there was a big flash, and suddenly both giants disappeared.

Barry didn't know he could teleport, and he certainly didn't mean to bring Bill to the White House. The people of Washington, D.C. stopped and stared as the two fought it out. Barry had blood and puss gushing off every part of him. Bill had coconut milk leaking out of him, yet neither would surrender. This was truly a fight to the death.

The president, Barrack Obama, was in his bunker under the White House seeing dust falling from the ceiling as Bill battled Barry on the rubble above.

A lightning bolt crashed from the clouds above Barry. He fell to the ground while arcs of electricity came jumping off of his body.

Barry got up and yelled "Gababababababaaaaa." Being zapped by lightning gave Barry a new mutation. He could now shoot giant hamburgers from his hands.



Barry shot a basketball-court-sized hamburger at Bill. It hit him square in the face, knocking him all the way to Japan. Barry teleported to Tokyo, Japan, following Bill.

The fight looked like it was going all nine rounds. Barry and Bill were lopsidedly punching and shooting when suddenly Barry got a lucky shot and knocked Bill down onto buildings, shops, and people. Buildings were crushed, and there were explosions and 50-foot craters in the ground where the two giants stepped. There was a bunch of collateral damage. Houses were destroyed, people were killed, and power grids were wiped out until all of Japan had no electricity.

Barry was standing over Bill, and one huge hamburger later there was another tourist sight in Japan: the giant virgin piña colada had been shoved halfway into the ground in the center of Tokyo.

After the battle Barry would stay huge forever, or at least until Dr. Vundervich threw another container out the window. Now Barry Manilow is back to his regular size, well, almost. He is now a few inches taller, and has lost the power of teleportation and hamburger chucking. He got a few good songs written about the ordeal, though. He even has a new number one album, "Tokyo."

# Robots Vs. Humans, Basketball Game

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*In the story* **ROBOTS VS. HUMANS, BASKETBALL GAME** by **Kevin Stoops**, Michael plays a basketball game against robots. The only problem is that nobody knows they are robots.

There were ten seconds left in the game, and the Wildcats were down by two. Michael, the best player, steals it away. There were only three seconds left on the clock. “3, 2, 1...” Michael shoots from half-court... SWISH! The Wildcats made it to the playoffs!

The crowd went wild. The whole team raced off into the locker room with excitement.

All the kids sat waiting for their coach to speak. The first thing he said was, “WOW!” The whole team listened for what Coach T. had to say about how the Wildcats played. He said, “That was a magnificent game. I’m very proud of all of you. We still need to work on our defense. And we can’t let them get that far ahead. Otherwise, you did a great job. I look forward to see how far you get.”

After the locker room talk was over, Michael raced to his parents. They quickly left the hot and big stadium. Michael and his parents walked in the cold dark outside, looking for their blue car.

Michael had a good ride home. His parents kept asking him how he could shoot that far, and how did he feel? Michael said, “It felt great.”

When Michael got home, he changed and went to bed, still thinking about the playoffs.

*BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEPPPPPP*. Michael got up immediately. His dad came into his doorway and said, “Get ready for practice.” Michael was really excited for practice.

When the whole team was at practice, Coach T. said that all they were going to do at practice was free throws. Michael was great at free throws, although his team wasn’t the best. The only player that was better at free throws than Michael was Calvin. Calvin was tall and strong and a good shooter. At the end of practice they played a free throw game. Michael came in second place and Calvin came in first. On the way out of practice, Coach T. said that their first playoff game was in a week.

*One week later*

Michael was ready for the game. His parents took him to his game and dropped him off so he wasn't late. When Michael got inside, he saw Coach T. taking the team into the locker room.

The game started a lot more quickly than he expected, and the game ended more quickly than he thought it would. Michael had a great game! He scored 24 points and had 13 rebounds and 9 assists. As usual, Coach T. had a talk with the team.

Their next game was in two weeks. Michael was upset! He had to miss that game because he had to visit family up north.

Michael called his best friend John after the game to see what had happened. John answered immediately, and he was talking in a sad voice. He said, "It was a close game, but WE WON!"

Michael was so happy. He asked when his next game was. John said, "Tomorrow, and it's the championship." But he was mad that his friend would make him that sad.

### The next day

Michael suited up for the game. He was very nervous, but very excited. Michael heard that the Lions were very good, and their record was 20-0. The Wildcats were 18-2.

The game finally started. On the way out to the court, Michael pumped up his team. He was singing "We Will Rock You." After about two minutes his team and the crowd joined in. Also Michael started to jump around at half court.

The game started well, and each team was playing good defense, until number 27 on the Lions dunked on Michael. The crowd had seen nothing like it. Coach T. called a time out. Michael could hear his dad saying, "How can a 12-year-old in middle school dunk?" That answer was later found out.

At halftime the Wildcats were trailing 34 to 15. It was not looking good. Michael tried to cheer his team up, but nobody listened. When halftime was over, it only got worse. He was sweating like crazy, but he noticed that nobody on the other team was sweating. Also he heard faint sounds, but he was not sure what it sounded like.

With five minutes left on the clock, Michael was covering a kid. He started to hear the sounds again. This time it was easier and clearer to hear the sounds. It sounded like *beep, boo, bot*. Also when somebody moved his arm on the Lions he heard robot sounds, like a computer had just broken. Michael called a timeout. Coach T. went crazy. He was super upset. "Michael! That was our last timeout. What do you think you're doing?"

Michael said, “Coach T., please just trust me. I think this will help our team.” He told the whole team to let them dunk.

At first nobody listened. Calvin said, “Michael what are you thinking? This is the Championship if you didn’t notice. And also, why do you want him to dunk?”

Michael responded as fast as lightning. He said, “Calvin, I understand, but you need to trust me. I think these kids are robots, and if he dunks his robot arm will fall off.”

The best player on the Lions took the ball, and then dribbled toward the rim. Once he saw nobody in sight he dunked. His arm flew off.

The robot’s team started to look worried, but they couldn’t. There was an expression on their face like they has seen this before. There were sparks and wires all over the court.

The crowd started to panic. Most of the people started to scream like a baby girl.

The ref picked up the silver, mechanical arm. He dropped it right away; it was way too hot. He told the audience to calm down, and said that he had seen something like this before. He explained that many coaches have always wanted to win championships, so they make robot basketball players. Still some of the crowd thought a real player lost his arm.

The police came right away, and they arrested the Lions coach! The coach started to fight the cops, and once they had him in handcuffs he started to scream. The whole crowd started to boo. Most started to throw plastic cups, popcorn, and used napkins. The orange maple floor started to fill up with trash. One kid in the audience actually went on the court and kicked the coach.

After everyone calmed down and was seated, the ref went into the middle of the court. He stood on the championship logo and said, “Even though the Lions crushed the Wildcats, no offense, The Wildcats will be the 2021 Middle School Champs.”

Everyone started to cheer. Michael tackled his teammate, and was piled up into a dog pile. He was very amazed, and he sure was happy. Coach T. went to the ref and took the trophy. He showed it to the audience and screamed, “WE DID IT!”

# Saving Deregen

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In **SAVING DEREGEN**, by **Paul Raab**, three people are fighting to take back the country of Deregen, which has been taken over by the evil force VEO.

## *P*rologue

Demalaria, a city in the north of Deregen, had been taken over by the evil force VEO. The city's population was about seven million people in 2077, the year this all happened. VEO had forced the Demalarians to work for them and were mistreating them. The capital of Deregen had been captured, and now VEO was going through cities and overturning their governments as well, with Demalaria being the first. So the only people able to fight this evil force were our friends, Bill West, Jack Turtle, and Meggie Itwa.

\* \* \*

They heard the sirens in the distance. "Faster!" Jack urged Bill.

He replied, "Yeah, whatever," and kept on hacking into the bank's high-tech computer system. "There, almost," he told his companion, as he eliminated the last firewall that was protecting the system. Bill quickly transferred the money to a secret bank account, and said, "The only people that store money here are VEO's people anyway, and we need the money for our airships." He then deleted all signs of him ever hacking the system. "Let's get out of here," he whispered in Jack's ear. They quickly went up to the second floor and climbed on the roof. A ladder fell out of the clouds, and they hung on. The ladder was instantly pulled up into *Urania*, a UFO-like shuttle. The shuttle took off.

They could see the VEO-police's shuttles in the distance as they approached their base, located in the top of a huge mountain.

*Okay, we have to turn off the radar shield in order to enter through the door. Fortunately, our base has a fairly good shield, which gives us at least some protection. But the chances that we'll be spotted are still 10 percent,* Jack thought. Jack was a little embarrassed, because if he didn't repeat the things that Bill had told him a thousand times, he would forget to do them.

Bill sighed as Jack quickly typed in the command to turn off the shield. Jack knew very little about technology. His job was fighting. He was strong and big, and knew everything about warfare, but he didn't know a lot about tactics. That was Meggie's job. She was smart, and

probably the best strategist in the world. Bill himself was the tech guy. He knew pretty much everything about electronics. Bill hated bloodshed, but he would fight if necessary.

The “garage” opened and *Urania* landed. “Good to be home,” he yawned as he got out of the ship.

“How’d it go?” Meg asked.

“It went all right. I hope we didn’t get spotted on our way back, though,” Bill replied. “Let’s just go to bed now! I’m tired!” He stifled a yawn as he walked toward the sleeping quarters.

“Yeah, I agree,” Jack added.

“If you guys don’t mind, I’ll just stay up,” Meg said.

“Knock yourself out,” came a muffled reply from the bedrooms.

The next morning Bill woke up just in time to hear Meg screaming, “Alarm! VEO has spotted us! Jack, get the guns ready!”

“Yes, ma’am!” replied Jack, as he marched toward the defense system, which included over 50 different guns and rockets.

“This is our only chance to overthrow ‘em! Let’s do it!” Bill shouted.

“Jack, send out the drones!” Meg commanded, a stern look on her face.

“Okay,” he replied and pressed the button.

Five minutes later the drones sent back this information:

Drones	x10
Gunships	x40
Elite Presidential Ship	x1
BATTLESHIP	x5
Firestars	x100
Elite Airship	x1

“Oh no! They have an Elite Airship! I thought those were banned years ago! There’s no way we can take that thing out, unless there’s a trick!” Meg wailed desperately.

“Way ahead of you. It says here that they have an exposed wire leading into the engines,” Bill said.

“Good. Jack, send out two gunships to take out their drones and fire up the lightning bolt blaster,” Meg sighed with relief.

“Yeah, good idea. After all we don’t want them knowing what we have. It might scare them off,” he said with a broad smile.

Bill smiled too and asked, “Why don’t we send some missiles at their BATTLESHIPs?”

“Nah. Their anti-missile systems are too strong. I’d send some missiles at their gunships and Firestars instead. By the way, all their drones are down,” Jack replied.

“Yeah, I agree. By the way, start shooting at the Firestars with the lightning bolts,” Meg said.

“Hey, why don’t I go upstairs and man the bomb-shooter, since I can’t really help you guys out down here?” Bill asked. He felt kind of awkward since he was inexperienced in warfare.

“That’s a great idea! Just target everything but the Elite Airship, because we won’t be able to take it down that way,” Meg said.

So it turns out that Bill was having a very good time (it was kind of like a video game to him) while Jack and Meg were lost deep in thought on how to cut that wire.

Meg decided to radio Bill, to distract her from the annoying problem that they were facing. “How are you doing up there?” she asked, even though she knew exactly what airships Bill had taken out.

“Excellent! There are only three BATTLESHIPS, the Elite Airship, the Elite Presidential Ship, and a couple gunships left,” Bill replied in a good mood.

“Awesome! Bill, keep on doing whatever you’re doing up there. Jack, try to take out the rest of the BATTLESHIPS. Once I take out the Elite Airship, get in something and capture the Elite Presidential Ship. I want to turn them in to the real government, which we will free, once we get done with this! See you later, guys, I’m going sniping!” Meg shouted as the elevator closed that would take her up to the balcony.

Jack shouted, “We’re doing good! Let’s do this!” so loud that Bill almost fell off his chair.

“Let’s do this!” he said laughing.

“What’s so funny?” Jack asked.

“Well, you shouted so loud that I almost fell off my chair, and as I almost fell off, I hit the fire button and took out two BATTLESHIPS!” he replied.

They both burst out laughing. It felt good to be laughing again. All of a sudden, a loud *BOOM!* interrupted them. They both got back to work right then. Nothing was funny anymore.

Bill looked at the monitor, and his face was very pale all of a sudden. He couldn’t believe his eyes. That one shot that the Elite Airship fired had brought their shield’s health down by fifty percent. “Jack, turn on the emergency shield!” he shouted.

Meg was lying there, all alone, and had zoomed in on the gleaming hull of the airship. The wind ruffled her hair, and she relaxed for a

moment. The wire was about one millimeter wide. *How do you expect me to hit that from here? We might have the best sniper in the world, but that's still almost impossible!* she thought. She sighed and took aim. She missed by a yard. The second shot bounced off the hull, and left a scratch. She completely missed the next two shots. The fifth one missed by only a couple of inches. Sixth shot. The bullet was propelled away by a magnetic force. She was boiling with anger. She was determined to make the next shot. She put every bit of her concentration in the shot. The bullet cut straight through. Nothing happened.

A laser extended from the ship, and she could see it heating up. Then the ship started falling. She saw the laser shoot a beam, which cut through a mountain nearby. Then a giant explosion shook the windows, just like when a jet breaks the sound barrier, but much stronger.

Bill and Jack both expected to die right then because of the loud sound (they thought the shields had failed), but instead when they looked out the window they could see a giant airship lying there in pieces. They also noticed flames and smoke rising from pretty much everything. They felt shocked that such a giant airship could go down just by cutting one single wire.

"I got it!" Meg shouted into the walkie-talkie, full of joy. "I hit the wire! The presidential ship went down with it, though." They couldn't completely understand her because they were still a little deaf from the boom, but they got the general idea.

Two hours later, when they had talked about what had happened and what it would mean for them, they went to bed. But Bill couldn't go to sleep, so he looked through several old files on his computer, until he fell asleep as well.

He woke up the next morning wondering why he had files from the year 2053 open on his computer. Later that day, they flew into the town center and were greeted by the town's entire population. They would live on to be the greatest heroes of the year 2077, and would forever be remembered by those who were saved by them.



# The Time Machine

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*Long ago, a mad scientist invented a time machine. A boy named Leo finds this long-lost time machine. But will he change the course of history? Find out in **THE TIME MACHINE**, by **Lea Cazaudumec**.*

Leo's favorite class is history. He was staring at his history teacher and wondering, *What if Christopher Columbus hadn't discovered America?* Suddenly, the bell rang. He grabbed his backpack and rushed out of his school.

Today he was going to walk home. Leo always walked by a warehouse that he wanted to go inside. And there was the ugly warehouse. There was something unusual about the warehouse today. This time the door was wide open! This was his only chance to finally go in!

He walked into the warehouse. In a corner of the warehouse, there was this mysterious but shiny silver machine. He was curious to know what it was, so he pressed a big, light red button. He went inside, and all he could see was a shimmering white light. Then it stopped. Suddenly, Leo was standing in a different room. What had just happened?

He had just been transported through time and into the 1800s. Leo did not know this yet. He was in an old room where the paint was coming off and the wood was beige instead of brown. The room was a big rotunda with a low ceiling. Leo saw a pianist right in front of him wearing a white wig and powder. He was writing music rapidly while humming at the same time. The first thing the man said to him was, "Who are you and why are you wearing those weird clothes?"

Leo was just about to ask the same thing but instead asked him, "What year is this?" and the man answered that it was 1792.

Leo was shocked by his response. He was in awe when he heard him play part of a song by Beethoven. Leo seemed to know the song. Leo remembered that his great-great-great-great-great-grandfather was Beethoven.

Leo asked him, "Who are you?" The strange man would not answer any of his questions until Leo helped him finish the piece. He challenged Leo to hum what would come next in the piece. Leo answered exactly what Beethoven was thinking!

"Ludwig von Beethoven, that is my name. Now leave." Leo had just met one of his ancestors. Beethoven ignored Leo and continued playing the piano.

Leo stood there doing nothing, as still as a piece of paper. If Leo didn't find the time machine fast, what would happen? What if he even changed the course of history? What if he was stuck back in time forever? He needed to find that time machine, and fast.

Leo decided to go on a hunt. He searched and searched for the time machine. What if there was another button? There must have been a different button to transport him back.

Leo decided to take a walk in the streets. The streets were all dirty, were made of brick, and had lots of people with wagons. Everybody was looking at him weirdly. He didn't care what other people thought.

He saw men building what looked like a warehouse. Suddenly, he realized that it was the warehouse that he had found that same morning! What if the time machine was there?

Leo ran as fast as he could. When he got to the warehouse, he was dripping with sweat. You would almost think that he had come back from the pool. He opened the front door, and to his surprise there was the time machine.

All Leo needed to do now was find the button. He found it! This time, it was a big green button, the color of a perfect apple. He pressed it. There was a loud click. Leo was standing in the warehouse.

Leo was relieved. He was back. That was the coolest thing he had ever done.

# Torg and the Mailmen

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*What will happen when three musical aliens crash on earth? Find out in **TORG AND THE MAILMEN**, by **Drew Paluda**.*

“Noooooooooooooooooooo, it’s the Occupy Wall Street protesters!” yelled the Yultites. Torg, Alex, and Jim sprinted to the emergency shuttles. They had just left the atmosphere when they watched as their planet, Yult, exploded. The Occupy Wall Street protesters must have gotten into the nuclear weapons storage unit. It didn’t matter to them, though; they just wanted to live. They only had one place to go, Mars.

Torg, Alex, and Jim weren’t average Yultites. During the day they were mailmen, but at night they had a band. Their band was called Torg and the Mailmen. They were an intergalactic hit. People all throughout the galaxy had posters and t-shirts that read, “TORG AND THE MAILMEN ROCK MY WORLD!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Just as they came to their senses, the shuttle started blurting out, “NO FUEL! NO FUEL! NO FUEL!” They didn’t know what to do. Their shuttle was being tossed back and forth by the constant flow of asteroids hitting it. They were blacking out one by one until Torg was the only one left when, *BANG!* None of them were conscious anymore.

They each awoke in a dazed state. Nobody knew where they were, but they were pretty sure it was Zuccoti Park, New York, New York. As soon as they realized that there were people holding Occupy Wall Street signs running at them, none of them were too eager to stay. They walked until they came to a large building with a very pointy top. This seemed to be the most crowded place around, so they entered the building hoping for some answers.

The only thing they were able to find out was that the building was called the Empire State Building. Torg was trying to think when he was interrupted by Alex and Jim who started singing their hit song, “When Nothing Goes Right, Go Left.” Torg was about to tell them to shut up, when a man who introduced himself as Axel Rose said, “You guys are amazing! I want to sign you to my record label.”

The group decided to take the one-million-dollar deal. They thought it would be cool to play for a new audience. Their first concert was scheduled for the first Tuesday of the next month.

Torg and the Mailmen practiced for hours on end in preparation for the concert. With Torg playing lead guitar they were unstoppable. Jim was a star pianist back on Yult, so he gave the music great feeling. Alex

completed the band with his drum set. He gave all of their songs a great beat.

When the day came, they knew they were ready. They got up on the big stage in Madison Square Garden and rocked the city of New York. That day will live on forever in rock history as well as in the hearts of Torg, Alex, and Jim. Although they could never resume their galactic performances, to this day Torg and the Mailmen is the best band in the galaxy.

# The Unicorn Problem

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*Terrible things happen when evil unicorns interact with humans in* **THE UNICORN PROBLEM** *by* **Gina Rathbun.**

Once upon a time, there were magical robot unicorns in the land of Roktacon. They had a metallic color, and they were tall and strong. They had arms and legs and the head of a unicorn. Their planet was hot, and had very little water.

The robot unicorns were evil, and the most evil one of all was robot Prince Evilkins. He had just discovered our world, or planet, as they would say, and they wanted to destroy it. Robot Prince Evilkins thought there was only room for robot unicorns in this lifetime, so he decided to come up with a plan to destroy our world.

He thought months and months about his plan, and then robot Prince Evilkins finally came up with one. He wanted to attack the new planet and kill everybody there. He called his crew and said, "I have a journey for all. You either die or die trying."

The next day, Robot Prince Evilkins left on his journey with his crew of 1,000 robots. It took several days to get there by spaceship. The spaceship was tall and long. It had a pointy nose. It was silver in color. They also spent every moment of their time training. They learned how to use weapons and how to fight. They didn't know exactly how to destroy humans.

They finally arrived undetected, and landed in one of the biggest cities of the world, New York City. They saw humans for the first time and learned more about them, but humans weren't the only ones being learned about: the unicorns were, too. Both humans and unicorns saw other living creatures as a threat.

As the unicorns learned more about the humans, Robot Prince Evilkins and his crew all ran out of the ship and started killing humans left and right. He found chopping off their heads was the best way to do it. The unicorns were killing anyone that got in their way: men, woman, and kids. Hundreds and hundreds of humans were dying, and almost all of New York City was destroyed.

As the unicorns were killing humans, the humans attacked, too. They were willing to risk their lives, and it was a surprise to the unicorns. Robot Prince Evilkins had not known that humans had an army and weapons, too. Every way you looked, north, south, east, or west, there were bombs dropping off ships. There were also tanks shooting bombs at the robot unicorns. They were strong, but the bombs were too much for them.

Robot Prince Evilkins didn't have those kinds of weapons. The robot unicorns had nothing like that, and they realized that they were not as strong and amazing as they thought they were. There were a lot of humans, and they knew how to defend themselves.

During the war, the unicorns were distracted in fighting, so the army found their ship and destroyed it. This weakened the robot unicorns greatly because they didn't have access to their ship anymore.

After days of fighting, the humans defeated the robots unicorns, and none of them were left standing. The robots unicorns were never seen again. They learned their lesson not to attack humans again.



**Unfriend**





# Dark World

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*The Earth has fallen to a perilous barren wasteland dominated by killers and vicious creatures controlled and made by death himself. Our fearless juvenile hero is in a mission to save humanity in **DARK WORLD** by **Jacob Smith**.*

**R**UUN... RUUUN...RUNNN.

This screeching melodic chant filled my ears and made me want to scream. Every day 500 healthy people died. Most were ripper incidents, but some were said to be the work of death himself.

Some people said this is where I could find death, and I was here to see for sure to redeem my dead friends and family. With half the people on Earth dead or in paralysis, death and its shadows had a chance to thrive. The creatures did only what they knew to survive: kill or paralyze. The abandoned streets, disheveled parks, and boarded-up houses offered no comfort.

Flashes of pure black made my blood run cold. Although no mortal thing survived here, I felt cold, steely eyes watching me. My pace was ever slowing as I turned in 360 degrees. I hugged my flashlight close to my body with my finger on the button, ready, I thought. "Ready." The word rolled off my tongue like the sap off a pine and seemed to hang in the putrid air like fog before the awkward silence took over once again. I bit my quivering lip. I felt...alone—horribly terrified in a place of no mortal being. The warehouse was full of life, just not mortal life, which chilled me far more. Swirling black residue whipped about like a tornado of pure nothingness. Typical rippers: They never wanted you to see them until it was too late. At least I hoped it was rippers. My biggest problem was none had ever seen death and lived, so if he were here I did not know what to expect. This was where he was; it had to be. It was obvious that death needed a place to create rippers.

I finally reached a dark room. I clicked on my flashlight. A ghastly hissing and screeching filled the empty, noiseless warehouse. I was hit with a wave of black and was sent falling backwards. I got up as the rippers disappeared into other rooms. The warehouse was like a puzzle, with thick iron pillars and concrete floors and hundreds of dark rooms whose inhabitants I was not looking forward to meeting.

Small fragments of debris were thrown from the darkest of rooms. I understood what they were doing: It was a coordination of the beasts. One was probably going to come from behind and kill me if I looked. This almost never happened, so it was easy to tell they hated my being so

far into their domain. It almost seemed like they were protecting something.

The farther I went in, the more rapid these things became. Although ugly, lifeless assassins, stupid was definitely not the word for a ripper.

They were starting to get a little braver... too brave. A broken teapot hit my bare leg. This was too much. I picked up a small remnant of china and sent it whirling back toward the room. Their small assaults only ceased for a second. The teapot had no effect on a shadow.

This time a whirling piece of scrap metal hit my flashlight... it shorted out. Just a moment later, hissing jumbles of words could be heard coming from the rooms and seemed to be getting ever louder. I shook the flashlight furiously. The batteries clanked around empty in their sockets.

Suddenly a small flash of light made my hopes jump. It flickered and soared back to full life. A rush of exhilaration and adrenaline hit me.

A low, deep grumble was coming from a room. Then a flash of blinding purple light exploded through the doorway. A lumbering, black mess of goo slowly shaped itself with claws, arms and formidable-looking jaws. A shadow bear! I quickly clicked my flashlight on, preparing for what I was sure would kill me, but when I turned back all I saw in front of me was a pile of goop.

I ran into the room it had come from to find a thin man wearing all black. "Hello," he said in a voice that sounded like grinding gravel or nails on a chalkboard. Suddenly the thin man said, "Raven," and with a flash of black a raven was standing at my feet with nothing else in the room. I heard a loud *auuuuunk* come from the raven, and the man was back. The man's skin was as pale as the moon as he strode around me in pronounced circles. I was young but not stupid; I understood this man was death.

I quickly flashed my flashlight at him; the man just stood and laughed. I now understood what he had believed since he first saw me: I was nothing but a defenseless fool with no protection but a light.

He took his time like he had all the time in the world, but I knew he was just thinking of ways to kill me. He was very confident that I could not hurt him in the least, so he just took his precious time.

He summoned a few things as he paced: a lion, a few rippers, and a tiger. My mind was still racing and then ... I had it. Only shadows could kill their puppeteer. Just how could I pull it off? Then I knew what to do.

I gave each thing a flash with my light. They all, as expected, disintegrated. I gathered up the goop and said, "Knife." I had done it. I knew if I could just catch him I would slay death.

This quickly turned the smirk on his face to a concerned frown, although he still tried to keep up the act of not caring.

I ran at him. There was a flash, and he was on the other side of the room. His smirk was back. This time I juked in his direction and threw the knife the other way. He flashed right where the blade was and was an instant pile of ashes.

I finally redeemed myself, my dead friends, and my dead family. They would have been proud to see I had slain the enemy.

As I proudly walked away I knew I had won. Rippers were running into the sunlight and disintegrating on the spot. Without their puppeteer they were extremely disoriented and confused. The ashes turned into shadows that soon fled to revive their old master. I knew that I had just saved the world.

# The Doll of Death

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*A six-year-old girl purchases a doll, but it turns out to be her worst nightmare, or possibly her last. Find out why in the fascinating story of **THE DOLL OF DEATH**, by **Olivia Siklich**.*

“**A**nd, the doll was back in the store, out to kill again,” said Lauren. “**WAIT!**” I yelled as I ran out of the bathroom, “can you tell it again?” I got mixed reactions from my cabin. Most of them were whining that it was too scary, and the other half wanted to hear it again.

Lauren agreed to tell it again. All the girls who didn’t want to hear it just went to bed while the others stayed to listen.

“This story is called Italian Girl Dolls of Death,” said Lauren. “It all started with a little girl named Jodie. It was her sixth birthday and her mom had taken her to the Italian Girl Store to pick out a doll.”

“What color hair did she have?” asked one of my campmates.

“Just let me tell the story!” said Lauren rudely.

“Jodie already had five Italian Girl Dolls, all from her previous birthdays. She had Vincenza, Grazia, Isabella, Giovanna, and Gabriela. It took a half hour for her to find a doll that seemed different than all the others all the way in the back corner of the store. This doll had moving parts.”

“Oooohhhh!” said some of the girls.

“The doll was the same size, and looked the same as all the other dolls, except for one thing,” Lauren continued. “Her arm was moving back and forth while she was holding up two fingers. Jodie showed her mom the doll. At first, her mom was a little skeptical, but then agreed to buy it.

“Wow, it’s been a while since I’ve seen this doll!” said the cashier who was shocked to see the doll. “It hasn’t been purchased and returned in years! I thought we got rid of it!”

Lauren’s campmates were unsure about hearing the rest of the story. But, they didn’t stop her as she continued with the story.

Jodie’s family had just gotten a new puppy, so when they got home they put the doll in the basement so the puppy wouldn’t find it. They were afraid that the puppy might chew the doll.

Later that night, while Jodie was asleep, she heard a sound coming from downstairs. It sounded like little thumps. The noise woke her up. At first she thought it was rain, but then she realized that it was getting louder and louder, but only a few at a time, so she ruled out rain. Then she heard a small, but very faint voice.

“Jodie, I’m on the staircase!” said the doll, aptly named Devlyn. Jodie hid under the covers since she was scared. She heard it again; some little thumps, and then she heard the voice again.

“Jodie, I’m in your parents’ room!” said Devlyn. Now Jodie was really scared so she hid in her closet for protection. The she heard the most frightening and sad thing she has ever heard in her life.

“Jodie, your parents are dead!” continued Devlyn. More thumps.

“Jodie, I’m in your brother’s room!” She heard a scream.

“Jodie, say goodbye to your brother!”

“Jodie, where are you?”

Jodie started screaming bloody murder, which was what it was about to be, which gave away her location. Jodie slowly opened the closet door and saw Devlyn standing there soaked in blood with a tiny little knife in her hand. Jodie was freaking out like you couldn’t believe. Then Jodie wondered where the knife came from? Oh, of course! It must have been a part of her Dad’s tool kit downstairs. By the time she finished zoning out, there was a huge gash in her leg, and she fell over sideways. Then, Devlyn stabbed her in the chest, slit her throat, and left her on the floor to die.

Two weeks later, when people started noticing that her parents were not at work and the kids were not at school, somebody decided to call the police. The police searched their house and found all four family members dead with slits and gashes and cuts everywhere. Blood was spewed all over the floor and the police were left stumped. They called in a detective crew to investigate, but no trace of evidence was found, except for the murder weapon. This murder was never solved.

The police found the doll, cleaned it, and returned it to the store. As the police left the store, something made them look back at the doll. They saw the doll’s arm waving back and forth and holding up three fingers. And that was the end to Lauren’s story.

“Wow, Lauren, that was pretty scary!” said my campmate.

“Thanks!” said Lauren.

Three weeks later, a girl and her family were reported dead and the police found the same details as the one in the scary story. Gashes and slits all over, blood spewed everywhere, and a tiny little knife left behind. The police needed to solve this murder. Remember, this is now reality since Lauren is no longer telling a story.

The next morning, a policeman that investigated the murder was found dead. There was blood all over and with a tiny knife right next to him. Again, the police searched the area, but did not have any evidence.

Was the Italian Girl Doll purchased by another family? Is there truth to Lauren’s scary story? Did any of this really happen? The police were stumped, but how about you?

# Haunted

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**HAUNTED**, by *Alena Ginopolis*. is about a girl with a loving family: a sister named Jenna, a mom, and dad. But to her, this is only the beginning of a murder story. She wakes up one day and everyone in her life is missing.

**T** HUMP! I hear a noise from downstairs. I go downstairs with a bat when I come upon a note that says,

I'm so sorry but we had to leave with or without you because the house is haunted. We have your sister with us we didn't take you because we think you are possessed. If you need anything you have your phone. Call us soon! We're sorry! Love, Mom, Dad and Jenna

I think I hear the car pulling out. Maybe I'm not too late. I open the door, it immediately shut itself. I try again, but the handle falls off. I remember that I have my cell phone. I got it from the kitchen and open it.

"WHAT?" I yell, "No signal?"

I lay on the couch. I turn the TV on, but the screen is all fuzzy and the lights begin to flicker off and on. I went up to the TV. It almost looks like I can go in it, so I put my hands on it and I fell in.

I wake up in my bed like it was all a dream. I go downstairs because I smell bacon, eggs, and toast. When I got down there I saw Mom, Dad, and little Jenna. Mom is cooking, Dad is reading, and Jenna is playing with her food. After we eat, we go to a family movie, *Alvin and the Chipmunks*. After the movie, I go to my room and I see two figures. I close my eyes and I open them, but they are even closer.

"Hello, anybody there?" I ask.

"They're coming for you!" a strange voice replies.

"Who is coming for me?" I ask.

"They are coming for you," another voice replies.

A bright light appears and I follow it, although I don't know what it is. The last thing I see is a portal. I find myself in a strange place that's dark. I have a feeling that it is my basement. I don't know how I got there, but I turn around and find a knife at my neck.

"Don't move or you die," a voice demands.

I don't move because I don't want to die. The body, or the thing with the body, is moving me over to a corner so I sit there until I decide to run. I finally go upstairs, but there are these voices everywhere; I can't think. I want to make it end, so I go to the kitchen and get a knife.

“Don’t do it! This is what the house does,” says a voice like an angel. “It wants you to die and it won’t stop until you’re DEAD!”

The angel voice turns into an angry voice, “I wish I never moved here, it’s ruining my LIFE!”

So, I go back to the kitchen and get the knife. But that same angel/angry thing comes and takes the knife away. I tell him that I want this to be over. He locks me in a room with these two other guys or ghosts, Timmy and Billy.

We plan an escape, so we could live our lives. The first thing we needed was get out of the room. We try to open the door, but it is locked.

“I have an idea!” I yell. “What if one of you dies, so you can go through the door and unlock it?”

We find a knife and Timmy takes it and is about to stab himself, but the devil comes and takes the knife away. A couple seconds later the devil comes back and stabs him. We all got startled, but Timmy never comes back. I think he is gone for good. Billy gets all mad at me because he thought that I killed Timmy, but I didn’t. So, Billy wants to kill me now.

“But, if I die then you can’t get out of here,” I tell Billy.

“Good point,” Billy says with a strange expression on his face.

Until Timmy was stabbed, I was in a room with two dead bodies. I did what I had to do to distract the ghost guy. I grab the knife and tell him that Timmy was coming back alive, but he doesn’t believe me. When he isn’t looking, I take the knife, but Billy takes it before I can stab myself.

“It’s going to be harder than it looks,” I say to myself.

I have an idea! I will run into a wall and the knife would accidentally stab me. So I did just that. I see a puddle of blood and then everything goes black. The next place I find myself is in heaven, I think. I find myself surrounded by others like me. We play tag and fun games.

“I love it here,” I yell at the top of my lungs. “I never want to leave!”

# Home Alone Until the End

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*In HOME ALONE UNTIL THE END by Reece Moosher, a young girl named Meghan gets home from school and hears a strange noise coming from her closet. She runs with her heart beating.*

It was a warm summer day. Meghan had just come home from school and called for her mom. Her mom didn't answer the phone, so she called her dad and again received no answer. She picked up the phone with her hand shaking. She called her mom and then her dad on the phone, but no one answered either phone. She knew everything would be fine, though.

Meghan went on up to her room to start her homework that was due the next day. Once she got to her room she heard a weird noise coming from her closet. The noise was like something breathing, almost like an air conditioner blowing. At first she thought that she was breathing loud but then figured out it was not her. Meghan's body was shaking like a blender that is making a smoothie. She walked the farthest she could from the closet. At the same time she was thinking she should open the closet and see what it was. She knew she shouldn't, though. So down the stairs she went, and she called the police.

"What is your emergency?" the police said.

"There is a suspicious noise coming from my closet. It's almost like someone is breathing, but I am the only one at home."

"So I take it you're home alone."

"Yes, I tried to call my mom and dad but they would not answer their phone."

"Okay, we will be right over. Go over to a neighbor's house," the police said.

She hung up the phone and started running toward the front door. She heard a thumping coming down the stairs leading to the patio. She saw a large, moving figure, and her heart started to slowly stop. She tried to calm down, but she could not, and she had to hide in her house rather than going to her friend's, because it was too late.

She hid behind a pot in her backyard. As she was telling herself to try her best and hardest to calm down, she saw a shadow on the patio in the backyard from the sun. The shadow was in the shape of a body. She was breathing so loud that the stranger could hear her.

He walked over and pointed a gun at her face. She tried not to look, but she had to. She saw the guy pull the trigger, and that was the last second of her life.



The police arrived too late. They found Meghan dead on the ground in the backyard. They searched around the house. In the backyard the police found two bodies in the pool. They took a finger scan and found out that those were the parents of Meghan.

A few weeks after the three family members got killed, there was a funeral. The whole community and police came to the funeral.

Later that year they found the killer in a gas station about to take an item. The people in the gas station got scared, and he killed one person that was buying an item. The murderer was put in jail for the rest of his life. His background was not good. He had killed many other people, and it was not his first time in jail. He also almost got put in jail for his fifth time for robbing someone's house and taking many items.

# The House of Silence

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In **THE HOUSE OF SILENCE** by *Nathaniel J. Abbott*, two boys attempt to escape the clutches of their worst nightmare.

**T**he candles blew out, and the room went dark....

There was a small town in upper Michigan years ago in 1964. But now it no longer exists, because of that tragic day.

It was a sunny day in Golden Leaf, Michigan on the last day of school when it all started. David and his little brother Adam had just gotten out of school when they came up with a plan to see if the rumors were true.

“David, wait up!” yelled Adam as he caught up with his brother. “I thought that school year would never end,” said Adam. “Every day felt like a year, and to make it worse I had the worst teacher EVER!”

“Mr. Smith is not that bad. You’re the only person in his class that doesn’t like him,” David said. “And I hear he’s teaching fifth grade next year.”

“I’m not going to be in his class, no way!”

“There are only going to be two fifth-grade teachers next year and he’s one of them.”

“That stinks,” Adam said as they passed by the park bench in front of their school.

“See ya, Adam!” yelled Adam’s friend Jimmy.

“See ya!” Adam yelled back.

The sun shone through the trees above them, giving the impression that they were in a dense wood. But they were right next to Main Street on a small sidewalk that led straight to their school. David was thinking of what he could do this summer with his new slingshot he had gotten for his birthday, when suddenly his train of thought was broken by Adam’s comment.

“David, you know the haunted house?”

“It’s not haunted,” David said. “They only say that because it’s old and it looks spooky.”

“Well, I think it’s haunted, and some of my friends were saying maybe you and I can see if it’s haunted or not.”

“No, you would get scared in two minutes.”

“No I wouldn’t,” Adam protested.

“Yes, you would,” David said as they crossed Williams Street to get to their neighborhood. “Remember that time we watched that scary movie?”

“Yeah,” Adam said, “I do.”

“That movie wasn’t even that scary, but still you had to sleep in Mom and Dad’s bed for two weeks. Even though they told you fifty times that vampires weren’t real.”

“I was only, like, three,” Adam said.

“You were eight,” David corrected.

“I won’t get scared, I promise,” Adam pleaded. “Please.”

“Okay, fine, I’ll take you tomorrow.”

“Yes!” Adam yells.

“But remember, if anything happens you’re taking the blame,” David said. “Mom’s already mad at me since I trampled her flowers. So I’ll pack a bag tonight and we’ll leave tomorrow. I’ll tell them we’re going to go to the park for a couple of hours,” David said as they walked up to their driveway. They had a small three-bedroom house with a tall apple tree, a tree house in the backyard, and their dog Burton guarding the door of their house. “Remember, you can’t say anything about your haunted house.” And as David said that, their dog Burton greeted them.

“Adam, get up!” David yelled.

“Is it time already?”

“Yes, now if we’re going, we need to go now!”

As David and Adam walked down the street where their haunted house lay, they began to have a strange feeling. “Hey, David, I don’t think this is as good an idea as I thought earlier,” Adam said as they walked up to the house. It was a warm, sunny day, and yet around the house it felt like midnight. “David, I don’t want to do this.”

“You have to. Come on.” They slowly walked up to the front porch, which was rotting away. The house seemed to be a million years old. All the window frames were completely destroyed, there were glass fragments under and in the space that used to be a window, and part of the roof had caved in. David slowly grabbed the doorknob of the front door when Adam grabbed his shoulder.

“David, no,” Adam says.

“Come on, Adam! I took the trouble of sneaking around the house grabbing things we would need for this so-called haunted house, and we are not going home without going through this house!”

“Okay, fine, but we’re only going through a couple of rooms,” Adam said.

David slowly pushed open the door, and at the same time they heard a strange moaning from inside the house. The door led to a dark room with a set of stairs to the right and a hallway to the right of that. In the center

of the far wall hung an old portrait of a sailor. The sailor had dark brown hair and a blue coat. Suddenly the door behind them slammed shut.

“David, what’s going on?” Adam said.

“I don’t know.” On the painting the sailor turned his head and faced David and Adam.

“David,” Adam says in a distressed tone. “Look at the painting.”

“What?” David said.

“David, just look at the painting.”

Right when David looked, the painting said, “You’re never leaving this house.”

Suddenly all the windows went dark, throwing the house into darkness. Then three candles lit on every side of the room except for the side with the door leading outside. Adam attempted to open the door, but it seemed to have bolted itself shut somehow.

“David, I’m scared,” Adam said.

“Don’t be. Mom and Dad probably figured out we were coming here because you kept talking about it!”

“Sorry. I was just excited because we were coming here.”

“Okay, fine. Let’s go find Mom and Dad.” Then suddenly the candlelight dimmed and they saw what was in front of them.

It was a tall, pitch-black creature with what seemed to be dark purple snowflakes coming off of it. One glimpse of the creature would send a painful shiver down your spine and give you haunting images for the rest of your life. With one wave of its hand, the creature threw everything in a dark void where nothing existed except for David, Adam, and the creature....

“News Flash: Suddenly this afternoon there was an unexplained explosion that engulfed all of Golden Leaf, Michigan. Nothing is known of the fate of the residents.”

# Kidnapped?

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*Four girls meet up with each other, but they end up doing something that gets them in big trouble. They try to help themselves out of danger, but do they? Find out in the story **KIDNAPPED?**, by **Stephanie Johnson**.*

This is the story about the four girls that got captured. Their names were Makenzie, Kelly, Stacy, and Kandace. The three went to the mall to meet up with Kelly.

They walked out of the mall doors and saw Kelly. “Hey, Kelly, what’s up?” Stacy said.

“Nothing much, I’m just really hungry.”

A big, black limo pulled up, and the window closest to them rolled down. “Hello!” said the limo driver. “You girls just won a free limo ride, from this mall!”

The girls looked at each other for a few seconds. “Why?” asked Stacy.

The limo driver replied, “Because you four are the first to walk out of the mall when I drove up! So that made you the winners of the free limo contest.”

“Are you sure?” said Makenzie.

“Yes, unless you would like me to give the ride to those people over there.” The driver raised his hand to say hi to the people.

“No! No! No!” Kelly said. So, they all got in the shiny black limo.

“By the way, I’m Christopher,” the guy said. Christopher pulled out a gas mask and put it on. The girls tried to get out.

“The doors are locked!” Makenzie screamed in fright. Christopher pulled out a shiny gray tube with purple wires on it.

“It’s a bomb!” Kelly yelled. They all started to scream. Smoke came out of the tube. All of them, except for Christopher, passed out.

“Where are we?” Stacy said when they woke up.

“I don’t remember anything, so I wouldn’t know,” Kelly said. It was dark in the room and smelled very stale. They started to look for a light switch. Makenzie bumped into a chair and started to cry. Then suddenly the lights came on.

“Hello, girls, I’m glad you’re awake,” said a familiar voice. The girls looked puzzled. “Yes, it is me, Christopher.” He paused for a few seconds. “I want you to know my real name before you die.” He paused again for a couple of seconds, which felt like an hour to the girls. “My name is Jack.”

Makenzie dropped to the ground screaming, “You are really going to kill us? Why?” Kelly went over to Makenzie, crying as well. The lights went off.

Kandace was surprisingly calm. She grabbed Stacey and went over to Makenzie and Kelly. She crouched down and told them to hold hands. “We are going to run over to the right wall. I know a way out of here. The light switch is over here somewhere!” Kandace said reassuringly.

Makenzie started to scream again, “I don’t want to die!”

“Quit it, Makenzie!” said Stacey. “Just hold our hands and walk with us.”

They made it through the door but couldn’t seem to find a way out. There were several rooms that seemed to lead to nowhere. “We are in a maze that has several rooms that are just like the previous rooms, having a couch, two chairs a table and a door. There are no windows,” Stacy voiced.

“Really? ‘Cause I haven’t noticed,” Makenzie replied sarcastically.

“Please stop being so negative, Makenzie!” said Kelly.

Kandace felt the walls to look for a light switch in the next room. “What is this?” Kandace said jumping back.

“Hello,” yelled a little scared voice, “Who is this?” the voice said, and the light turned on.

“Why are you here?” Stacy asked.

“I don’t know, I just woke up here,” she replied.

“Okay, how old are you?” Kandace replied quietly.

“I’m seven. I think,” she replied. All of them looked at her like she was crazy. “I don’t know how long I’ve been here,” said the little girl.

Makenzie found a door-like wall. She pushed, kicked, and opened it.

The girls ran out of the room and into the next. In this room, it was brighter because of a candle that was lit. The room was circular, and the walls were black. The room was empty other than the candle. The room lit up with a ceiling light, and Jack’s voice came back, “Let’s see if you can make it past this level of our little game.”

Jack’s words made Kelly extremely angry. She responded, “Listen to me, Jack, this is not a game.” The lights went off, and then came right back on.

All of a sudden, people jumped down from the ceiling. All the girls just stood there full of fright and clinging to each other. The people looked down at the ground, and the little girl simply walked by them. She looked back at the girls hugged together and asked, “Are you guys coming?”

“Yeah,” they said, and walked quickly into the next room.

“Does anyone else think it was strange that the people just jumped down and didn’t do anything?” said Stacy.

Kelly asked the little girl what had just happened. The little girl shrugged her shoulders and replied, “That’s what they’ve always done since I’ve been here.”

“Are these walls getting closer together, or am I just really tired?” said Kelly while rubbing her eyes.

“No, I think they are actually coming closer together” replied Makenzie. “Wait, where are Kandace, Stacey and that little girl?”

“I have no clue but I don’t care, because there is a vent right there that we can climb into and not be smashed like pancakes!”

“We can’t just leave them here.” But it was too late for Makenzie to talk Kelly into staying. Kelly was almost fully into the vent. Makenzie didn’t know what to do, so she followed Kelly.

Kelly started coughing. “Kelly, are you okay?” Makenzie got worried.

“I’m okay. I...I just need a little rest.” Kelly yawned and dropped from her crawl position and fell asleep. Makenzie tried to wake up Kelly, but she wasn’t budging. Makenzie was afraid that Jack would find her and kill her. She left Kelly lying there. She crawled over her and left Kelly to go get help.

*Where am I?* Makenzie thought. *Am I really all by myself?* She was scared and alone, wondering what might have happened to her friends. Still, Makenzie didn’t stop, because she knew that she could tell the police where the guy took her friends once she was out. She felt very tired and felt like she was going to drop like Kelly. *Will I die?* That was the question that kept circling around in her head.

Makenzie saw trees, and she was finally out. She started running, and then she dropped to the ground in silence.

A police officer found Makenzie and took her to the hospital. When she felt good enough to talk to the police, she told them about her friends. The police found them and arrested the guy.

# The Lonely Strawberry

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*There is a pair of possessed shoes going on a killing spree. Luckily Jesse and Cody devise a plan. To find out if the plan works, read **THE LONELY STRAWBERRY** by **Cole Hendrickson**.*

“Sophia, look behind you!”

“What?”

“There is a pair of shoes coming up with a baseball bat, turn around!”

Victoria quickly turned around, but it was too late. She got hit in the face, but luckily she didn’t die.

As she was hit in the face, she kicked the shoes, and they went flying. They got back up, ran over to Victoria, and stomped on her until she was dead. The shoes swiftly ran back to their store with only Riley seeing what just happened. He thought, *That’s why no one gets those shoes anymore.*

Riley ran out of the mall and straight to the house of his two best friends, Cody and Jesse, who are brothers. When he knocked on the door, he heard “Come in,” so he did.

He went straight up to Cody’s room. Cody was taking a nap. He woke him up and said, “You will never believe what I just saw at the mall.” Cody asked him what he had seen. Riley replied, “Do you know Sophia?” He answered yes. “While I was at the Aéropostale store in the mall, I saw her get jumped by a pair of shoes that ended up stomping on her neck and killing her.” Cody told Riley to go tell Jesse, who was in his own room.

As Riley was walking through the hallway, Jesse ran into him, and they both fell. Jesse asked Riley what the hurry was. He told him that there was something that he had to tell him. “When I was at the mall I saw Sophia get attacked by shoes.” When Jesse asked if she was okay, Riley answered, “No, she was killed.”

There was a knocking at the door. Jesse ran down the stairs to answer it. On the ground he saw an awesome pair of Nike Free Run 2.0s. He called down Riley to see if he wanted them. Riley said ok.

Then Riley noticed that it was the pair of shoes that had murdered Sophia. He quickly told Jesse to run away, but he wasn’t fast enough. The shoes got a bat and knocked Jesse out. Riley ran up the stairs.

The shoes stomped Jesse’s face until he was dead.

Riley ran into Cody’s room and said, “Jesse just got murdered by the shoes that killed Sophia.”

“We should go tell the police that there is a pair of killer shoes on the loose,” replied Cody.



Riley and Cody ran to the local police station as fast as they could. When they got there they saw their friend Sally. Cody overheard Sally saying that she had just been attacked by a pair of shoes.

Riley and Cody ran up to her and said, “Cody’s brother was killed by a pair of shoes, and so was Sophia.”

The police officer said, “We need to track down this pair of shoes and have them destroyed.”

Riley, Cody, and Sally left the police station and went back to Sally’s house so they could figure out a plan to catch the shoes. When they walked into Sally’s house, Sally’s mom (aka Mary to her friends) said, “Hi, kids.”

Sally replied, “Hi, Mom.”

They went up to Sally’s room and thought of a perfect plan. Sally called her b.f.f, Adele, and asked her to meet her at the mall so she did. Their plan was to use Sally, Adele, and Sally’s mom as bait. Hopefully the shoes would come and try to kill them, and then out of nowhere Riley and Cody would cut the rope to a trap that would fall on the shoes. When Cody told them the plan the girls freaked out and said, “Why can’t Riley and you be used for bait?”

The boys said “because we are smarter than you, case closed.”

When they got to the mall they started their plan. Sally, Adele, and Mary lay on the ground with their necks completely vulnerable. Cody and Jesse hid behind stuff and waited for the shoes.

Eventually they saw the shoes coming. Sally gave Cody a thumbs-up, and as the shoes walked under the net, he tried to pull the rope. But something was wrong. The left shoe kicked Sally repeatedly in the ribs until she died, the right shoe kicked Adele in the face until she died, and both shoes strangled Mary with their laces.

Riley picked up a board of wood and screamed, “No more!” He pounded the shoes to a pulp.

That day everyone that died (Sophia, Jesse, Sally, Adele, and Mary) had a funeral in the mall cafeteria.

# The Movie Theater

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*One day, six friends went to the movies. For Patrick, Colton, Anthony, Offie, James, and Noah, it was the scariest day of their lives. Find out what happens in **THE MOVIE THEATER**, by **Noah Tatum**.*

**G**ood friends are hard to find, and finding friends that you can have fun with and share things with is even harder. I made good friends when I went to Beverly Elementary School, such as Colton and James. When I came to Berkshire Middle School, I met new friends such as Offie, Patrick, and Anthony. I talk to my friends almost every day, and I also text them.

One day we were all bored, and Patrick brought up the idea of going to the movies to see *Paranormal 3-D*. All of my friends decided that it would be a good idea, but Anthony really did not want to go, because he thought that the movie may have been too scary. Someone who saw the movie told Anthony that the movie was really scary. After talking to Anthony, we were finally able to convince him to go to the movies with us.

Now all five of my friends and I met at the movie theater, bought our tickets, and went inside and found seats. We all sat in the front of the theater right next to each other. This was one of the scariest days of me and my friend's lives.

While watching the movie with our 3-D glasses on, Colton and Anthony screamed and said that something popped out of the movie screen that looked like a man with brown, dirty hair and a face with cuts and holes in it. Colton and Anthony both ran out of the movie theater.

Patrick, James, Offie, and I all said, "They are some wimps." We laughed, and then we heard a loud growl. When we turned around we saw this guy who was in the movie, and now he was sitting right behind us. He just stared at us. His face was bloody, and he was holding a knife. Patrick, James, Offie, and I all ran out of the movie screaming and yelling, "Help!"

We all met up at the ice cream shop down the street from the theater called The Famous Ice Cream. We went to the table to eat our ice cream, and the scary guy with the holes in his face was waiting for us. We all got up and ran out of the store.

We called Colton's mom, and she told us to go to right to Offie's house. Once we got to Offie's house we went in his room and started watching TV.

I went to the closet to hang up my coat, and I saw the guy holding a knife in the closet. He tried to grab me because I was the closest to him. I

punched him in the face and ran, and then the guy chased me and my friends around the house.

We came to a dead end, and he caught all of us. He kidnapped us, took us to his house, and threw us in the basement. The basement smelled like dirt and sewage, and it was dark and cold. Then the scary guy got six chairs and tied us up to the chairs.

Patrick had scissors in his pocket, so we told him to cut the ropes on his hands and then help us get untied. When we all got untied, we ran and were screaming for help! Then we saw Colton's mom's car. We told her what happened, and she drove us to the police station.

That is my story. I hope you enjoyed it. Hopefully, this will teach kids a lesson to never go to the movies when you're young and the movie is scary and you are not with a parent.

# The Mysterious One...

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*What was supposed to be a great night turned terrible when a little girl became the next victim in a murder. In **THE MYSTERIOUS ONE...** by **Wallis Hechler**, find out if the cops get to the murderer before he gets to someone else.*

It was a cold, damp Saturday afternoon in Rutland, Vermont. It was early September, so the leaves on the trees had just started falling. Fifteen-year-old Megan Burgandy smelled the cool, crisp air as she stepped onto her porch. She had skin that looked like brown sugar, long hair the color of rich red-velvet cake, and bright green eyes that stood out in the crowd. Her body had the perfect figure, which complemented her gorgeous face in the most striking fashion. And not only that, but she was the sweetest person the world had ever met.

It was quite unfortunate, the situation she was in. Just the night before, her best friend Julie Abernathy had been murdered during their sleepover. Megan was just on her way to the police office to sort things out with Officer Cohen, one of her mom's closest friends. Once she arrived, she entered an interviewing room to talk to the officer.

"I'm going to ask you one more time...what do you remember?"

"I don't know!"

"Just tell me everything that happened...ok?"

"Okay. It was one of the last days of summer break, and Julie wanted to have a sleepover. So we decided on my house, since it was bigger. We watched our favorite movie, *The Mysterious One*, about a million times. We filled up on junk food until our stomachs started to hurt. We played games all night, having so much fun we didn't even stop to go to the bathroom. We were having the best time, even when my little brother overheard us talking about boys. Around three A.M. we heard a door open and someone came out. "Ian! Go to bed!" I yelled upstairs, but no one answered. It didn't seem to bother us, though, because we went right back to playing our game. Julie stopped laughing, and all of a sudden got really nervous. "I think I heard something! Megan...I'm scared!"

"Don't worry," I told her, "it's probably just the dog." Rufus was always moving, wanting to be by everyone. "Rufus! Come here boy!" In came Rufus, tail wagging and belly swaying. "See, just Rufus. Nothing to be scared of."

"Ok, good," Julie sighed with relief. She was glad that the noise she heard had been made by a harmless puppy.

"We must have crashed or something, because we woke up at around five A.M. 'What happened?' Julie asked, rubbing her eyes as if she couldn't see clearly.

“I don’t know,” I replied, still a little drowsy. We turned on the TV to see what was on, flipping through the channels until landing on our favorite show.

“Look, Julie! *Comedy Central* is on!” When she didn’t answer, I turned to look at her. And that’s when I saw it. A knife was jabbed into her back and she was gushing blood. I started to panic. Scream after scream escaped my mouth until my mom came rushing down the stairs.

“Megan! What’s the matter!” My mom shrieked while trying to get down the stairs without tripping on her night gown.

“It all came out in one big heap, and I couldn’t take it back. ‘Julie’s dead!’ I barely got this last sentence out before collapsing on the floor next to where my friend lay, motionless, and I started to sob.

“And that’s all I can remember.”

“Are you sure?” Officer Cohen said in a calm, soothing voice. He didn’t want to upset Megan, who sat across from him with tears rolling down her cheeks.

“Yes, Officer Cohen, that’s all I can remember...” With one final swipe of her hand, Megan wiped away her tears and walked out the door.

And that was the end, at least for now. They were scheduled to have another interview the next day. Megan was tired, and angry, and miserable all at the same time. When she finally got home, she sulked up the stairs to her room. The instant she lay down on her bed, she was out.

The next thing she remembered was being awakened by her mother, telling her it’s time for breakfast. After a silent breakfast, Megan started off toward the police station yet again.

“Megan.”

“Yes, Officer?”

“I have some news about who killed your friend Julie.”

“Really! Do you know yet?”

“Not yet, but I have some suspects.”

“Who?”

Officer Cohen looked down at the papers in his hand. The evidence of the murder lay in the packet he had been given in the processing lab.

“Well, there’s this guy named The Hooded, and he’s been going around and committing murders to random people. So we took a fingerprint sample from the knife that killed Julie, and compared it to his fingerprint. It turns out that the fingerprints match up. Megan...? Megan...? Megan!” The officer gasped in surprise at the sight in front of him.

Megan lay head down on the table with a knife in her back and gushing blood. Behind her chair stood The Hooded.

# Nikki's Tragedy

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*A girl is in a horrible tragedy in NIKKI'S TRAGEDY, by Alexis W. Join her in this chilling horror story.*

One day a girl named Nikki was walking home from school. Nikki had had a really bad day, and all of sudden it started to rain. Nikki couldn't see anything. She went to cross the street, and a huge truck ran into her. Nikki went flying across the street and hit a tree.

The truck driver got out and didn't see anything, so he got back in his truck and kept driving.

Nikki's mother, Nicole, had been waiting for Nikki to come home. It was 8:00, and she was getting worried.

On Elm Street, Nikki was lying under a tree slowly dying. She tried to grab her phone and call her mom, but everything went black.

Nikki was slowly waking up, and she could hear her mom crying. Nikki quickly woke up and tried to comfort her mom, but her arms went straight through her. Nikki was trying to talk to her mom, but her mom just kept crying.

Nikki was getting angry that her mother couldn't hear her, so Nikki screamed at the top of her lungs, "MOM, listen to me!"

Suddenly Nicole stopped crying, looked in Nikki's direction, and got up and ran for the nurse. Nikki got out of the bed and ran after her.

Nikki was getting tired and stopped and asked a doctor if he had seen her mom. The doctor did not answer. Nikki looked at the name tag on the doctor. His name was Dr. Colemon. Nikki tried talking to him, but he didn't answer, so Nikki kept running until she saw her mother.

Nikki went to her mother and saw something in her hand. It was a form saying Nikki Walker had passed away.

Nikki ran back to her hospital room and saw her body. She realized she had died.

Nikki ran away and never came back.

# The Red Bandit

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**THE RED BANDIT** by *Patrick Walker* is a suspenseful story of crime and revenge.

It was a warm summer afternoon. Michael was home alone watching TV. His parents worked all day long and didn't get home until 9:00 P.M. He remembered that early that morning his Mom told him to go clean his room. So, he did what he was told.

He turned on the music on high. Just as he did that a guy broke the door window and unlocked the door. Michael didn't hear because he was listening to music.

The robber was known as the Red Bandit. The reason why he was called this was because he only stole red stuff. Michael's parents' favorite color was red. So, they had a lot of red (including their red Ferrari.)

The Red Bandit hadn't gotten to the garage yet. He was only in the basement when he heard Michael come down the stairs. The Red Bandit was worried. He grabbed his flashlight and hid in a dark room. When he got to the room he found a crowbar.

Michael sat on the couch to turn on the TV. Just as he did that the Red Bandit slowly went up the stairs. He went to open the door when Michael's phone went off right by the door. Michael wasn't going to open the door. He was going to make lunch for himself.

Michael went back to the couch to wait for the soup and grilled cheese to be done. The Red Bandit opened the door. He slowly crept to the couch. Just as Michael got up, the Red Bandit swung and hit him in the head with the crowbar.

The Red Bandit hid Michael in a bathroom closet and locked the closet door so, Michael couldn't get out. The Red Bandit just went on with his day. Michael was passed out.

When he woke up he felt his head, and it was bleeding pretty badly. He found a rag and covered his wound. He reached for his phone and couldn't find it. It must have fallen when the Red Bandit hit him.

The Red Bandit was already to the garage, but he didn't notice the Ferrari yet because he was too busy drinking all the beers in the fridge. When he noticed the Ferrari he walked over to it. He thought it would be locked, but when he went to get his crowbar he noticed the door was unlocked.

Michael was still locked in the closet. He heard the Ferrari start up. He thought, *Oh great, my parents are going to think I drove it away and crashed it. They*

*would think the gasp in my head would be from me crashing the car. They wouldn't believe me if I told them that a burglar came in and stole only the red things.*

The Red Bandit was already down the street when he noticed Michael's dad driving past him. He was thinking, *What should I do?* What he did was speed down the street, never to be seen again.

Michael's dad reported the theft to the police.

Michael's dad walked up the stairs and heard Michael yelling for him. He searched everywhere for him. He finally found him. He unlocked the closet door and asked Michael, "What happened?" Michael said that a burglar named Red Bandit broke in and locked him in there and he took the Ferrari.

The police called Michael's dad and said they found the red Ferrari crashed in a ditch, but there was no Red Bandit. Later when Michael's mom got home, she was so worried about Michael's head that she bought him a new phone.

### *When Michael Grew Up*

He was getting ready for bed in his dorm room, when he heard a *BANG!* on his door. He went to check, and it was the Red Bandit. He had a pistol. He shot Michael!

When the police got there they noticed that it was Michael. The police called his parents immediately.

His parents were devastated when they heard that he died. They were on a mission to find the Red Bandit. Once they found him they were so frustrated at him that when they found out that he was the Red Bandit, they shot him without thinking of all the trouble they were going to get in.

No one ever found out that they did. They just thought that it was a robber that broke into his house. Michael's parents didn't tell anyone.

Michael's parents were known to be nice until someone messed with their son. Michael's parents never understood why the Red Bandit killed Michael.



# Scared

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*In SCARED by Alexis M., four kids dare each other to sleep in this wicked house on Wicked Street. Little do they know that there will be some surprises—just not the good kind!*

There was this house on Wicked Street. There was only one house on Wicked Street and the house is called wicked.

Jazzmine, Brandon, Jordan, and I dared each other to sleep overnight in the house on Wicked Street and they all agreed that they would go. We head out with our sleeping bags and flashlights. When we step onto the porch, the door creaks open and we walk inside. When we step inside the house, the smell of mold and rotting food is strong.

“There is mold everywhere,” said Jazzmine, “on the furniture and the paintings. How can someone live like this?” said Jazzmine. The house was old, all the walls were not even there anymore, neither was the floor. We were stepping in mostly dirt with little bits of floor buckling up. As we walked inside the house... *SLAM!*

“IT’S LOCKED! We are trapped inside this wicked house without lights in the entire house,” said Brandon

“Oh well,” I said. “We will just have to make do with what we got.”

“I’m scared,” whimpered Jazzmine.

“It’s going to be all right,” said Brandon.

“We have all the things we need for the night,” I said. “It will be fine. Nothing is going to happen.”

It was around ten o’clock when we felt tired enough to sleep. Around ten thirty we heard a high-pitched scream! We all woke up. We looked around at each other. Jazzmine was GONE! I could feel myself start to panic when Jordan suggested that we split up and look for clues. I said ok and we split up.

“Go upstairs to check if Jazzmine is up there,” Brandon instructed.

“Ok,” I replied.

As I made my way up the stairs I thought to myself, *What’s better? Having to go upstairs in a wicked house without lights or having my best friend disappear into thin air?* At that exact moment I heard an “Ahhhhhh!”

“Brandon? Is that you?” I shouted. With my heart pounding, I crept upstairs and peered into the closest room to the stairs and there I saw Jazzmine - dead! She was lying there with blood coming out of her mouth and chest. Terrified, I backed out of that room and into the next one where I saw Brandon DEAD! He lay motionless on the floor with a knife

in his chest. I stumbled into the third room and there, too, was Jordan slumped over, a gun right next to his lifeless body. I was so scared! I ran into the fourth room and there it was - a chalk outline of a figure that was my size with my name scrawled across it!

Just then, a slow, deep voice bellowed, "*You're next...BOO!*"

"Ahhh!" I closed my eyes waiting for the knife to come down upon me. Instead, I heard laughter.

"Got you!" Jazzmine teased doubling over with laughter.

"We totally scared you, didn't we?" said Jordan.

"Yeah," said Brandon.

"That wasn't funny, you guys. You totally made me think that I was going to get killed today. But I do have to admit," I hesitated, "that WAS pretty believable." I started laughing too.

# Why?

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*MeShelle tells her life story of her hatred of being a vampire. Find out what happens when she meets a vampire she used to know in **WHY?**, by **Logan Fletcher**.*

**W**hy? I don't know, but for some reason it's every girl's dream to be a vampire. Well, not mine! Why? I am one. It's definitely not as good as it seems. You can fly and you have some powers, but, honestly, do you really want to live forever? Oh, trust me, this isn't going to be like a *Twilight* story or anything. We don't sparkle in the sun. Our eyes just turn this violet red color when we look at the sun; nothing major.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is MeShelle. I'm thirteen years old in human years, but, in vampire years, I'm really 1,337 years old. Wow, that is old! You're probably wondering why I don't like vampires when I am one.

One dark, stormy night I was furious with my parents and I ran away from home. I was only thirteen and, at that age, everyone loved vampires; even me.

*BOOM! CRACKLE! POP!* Thunder was just waiting for its storm. I darted though an alley knowing somebody was following; just stalking me. Oh no, I've come to a dead end.

At first, I was curious, then, once I saw her, I was terrified! She looked at me with her deadly red eyes. She told me I could be valuable. She had to make sure I would stay alive, so she terrifyingly turned me into a blood sucking vampire.

I was so excited. I had to tell someone, but I couldn't. Years later, after out living all my friends and family, I hated it! I really couldn't have friends or be a normal teenager either. WHY? What do you think? I'm a bloodthirsty vampire. I never found out the reason why that vampire wanted me alive or if my family ever looked for me, or ever cared where I was.

Well, it all comes to this: my death. What, vampires can die? Yes, but only with a stake that has holy water poured and stained on it. I really don't get why.

I was shocked, amazed, and sort of freaked out! It was her, the girl who ruined my life, the one with the deadly red eyes. How could I not remember her? I've been visualizing the moment I would kill her for what she did. She ruined my life forever.

But, she was too fast and too strong. She was too experienced and she knew what to do. She told me that my volubility in life is over!

Now, I'm dead because of that stake that she stuck through my heart. Let me just say this, I've never been happier.

I rest in peace.





**Unknown  
Status**



# The Day My Best Friend Got Kidnapped

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*A girl named Rebecca has a friend named Kaylin who gets kidnapped. Will Kaylin be found? Find out in **THE DAY MY BEST FRIEND GOT KIDNAPPED** by **Rebecca Levitt**.*

**T**his is my story. This was the scariest night of my life. If you don't like horror don't read on. It all started when my friend Kaylin was at my house.

Rebecca

"Kaylin, what are you doing!"

"I thought we were going to that party," said Kaylin as she climbed out the window.

"You can go and get in trouble, but when you get back I will say I told you so!"

"Fine, I will," she answered, but by that point I could barely see her from down the street.

*I am so mad at her, I thought.*

When I got downstairs, my know-it-all older sister slammed into me and knocked me down. "HEY!" But I was too lazy to go tell Mom.

Kaylin

"I can't believe she's such a party jerk," I said to my friend as we walked home.

"Give her some credit. She just didn't want to get in trouble. Well, this is my stop, so bye...."

As I was walking home it seemed to have gotten really dark since I was walking with Bianca. I started to run because I thought I heard footsteps behind me, and just at that moment someone grabbed me and, stuffed me into a bag! "AHHHHHHHHHH HELP ME, SOMEONE HELP ME. I'M TRAPPED!"

Dave

"Yes, ma'am, I will certainly try to find your daughter. I know what you're going through," I said to a lady whose daughter went missing. "Well, I have to get started...All right...Bye."

Rebecca

I was on my bed crying the next day. I can't believe my best friend is missing. I was such a bad friend. I wish I could go back in time and apologize. I am such a bad friend. If I tell my mom, she will think it's my fault because I didn't stop her.

I decided to run away and try to find her.... WAIT! I forgot she had her phone on her the night of the party. Maybe if I text her she will be able to tell me where she is.

I got out my phone, found her name under "best friend forever" in my contacts, and texted her, saying, "WHERE R U! I MISS U! R U HURT." I pressed send and sat on my bed thinking about what to do. If she doesn't call back tomorrow I will go looking for her.

Kaylin

I wonder where I am. I looked at my leg, and it was gushing blood. If I don't get to a hospital by tomorrow it might get infected.

At that moment my phone started to vibrate. OH NO! I hope the guy doesn't hear me. When I looked at my phone I was so relieved. It was Rebecca. It said, "WHERE R U! I MISS U! R U HURT!" I am so glad that she cared so much.

I flipped up my phone and in the middle of texting Rebecca back my phone died. "Oh CRAP!"

Dave

I asked Kaylin Montgomery's mother if Kaylin had anyone who would want to hurt her. She said no one would want to hurt her baby. "She's such an angel."

"I am going to find your daughter, but I have to get started now. If you will excuse me, I should be on my way." I left her house immediately.

When I was driving home my car ran something over, so I pulled over, got out of my car, and went over to take a closer look. It was a backpack with the name Kaylin on it. Also I saw muddy footprints. "I better follow them," I said to myself. I got my gun from the car and started following the footprints on foot.

I started to hear footsteps. The closer I got, the louder the footsteps were. I got to a dark warehouse. All of a sudden there was a sharp pain in my elbow. "AHHHHH!" I fell on the floor and was sobbing in pain when I saw her: KAYLIN. "It's all right, sweetie. Everything is going to be okay," I said to her. But it wasn't going to be okay. I am losing lots of blood.

"Say goodbye to your life," said the stranger in the background.

"Tell my wife I love her."



### JoJo

I can't believe I kidnapped someone. In a week, after the family is worried sick, I will ask the little girl her number. Then I will call them and ask for money. If they don't pay, I will kill her. I am so awesome.

But just as I was admiring myself I heard footsteps and turned around only to find a police officer holding a gun out. "Get down on the ground!" yelled the officer. Instead, I took out my pistol and shot the police officer in the elbow. Then as he was sobbing in pain I shot him in the head, and he fell to the ground dead. I dragged him and put him in the closet. When I went into my bedroom the little girl was freaking out, so I had to duct-tape her face shut.

### Rebecca

She hasn't texted me back yet. I am getting worried, so I packed my bag, and right when my parents were not looking I slipped out.

"I guess I should make a plan." I decided my best way was to start in the beginning of town, which is all the way across town. By the time I knew it I was halfway across town, and I was exhausted.

All of a sudden I saw a police car, so I ran to it. I was done. I'm only twelve. I can't handle this. So I walked up to the car, and no one was there, but I did see a backpack and a trail of muddy footprints. The backpack said Kaylin in big pink letters. *OH MY GOSH IT'S KAYLIN'S BACKPACK*. I knew the only thing to do was follow the footprints. I need my best friend back.

When I got to the end of the footprints there was a big, dark building. I heard screaming, so I ran. I followed a long maze of doors.

When I got to the door where the screaming was coming from, I opened the door and there she was. Kaylin lay on the floor bleeding badly from her leg. "KAYLIN!" I yelled as I ran to her feet.

"OH MY GOSH GET ME OUT OF HERE!" she yelled.

I picked her up and ran outside without being seen. I told her to stay her and call 911 on my phone. I sneaked back inside, grabbed the police officer's gun, and ran to another room. I plugged my ears and shot the kidnapper. I didn't want him to come after us when he found out I was missing.

After that it kind of got all blurry. I think he shot me in the shoulder and I passed out. By the time the police came, JoJo was dead.

From that moment on I knew Kaylin and I were going to be best friends for a very long time!

# The House on the Dead End

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In **THE HOUSE ON THE DEAD END** by *Rachel Allen*, three friends embark on an adventure to a vacant house. Rumor has it that no one has entered it in many years. Will the three survive this risky journey?

Curiosity can be a good thing, or it can be bad. Before I tell the story, there is a little about me. My name is Jane Collins and I live with my mom and dad on a small ranch located on the corner of Maple and Lincoln. A few years ago a man lived in the house at the dead end and soon left and sold it because of a mysterious sound he had been hearing. He hated everything, dogs, people and especially cats. Later the sold sign was removed, but no one ever moved in. Gift baskets and “Welcome to our Neighborhood” letters were piled up on the porch. The door never opened and no one went in or out.

“Come on we have to go to see what is so mysterious about this house!” exclaimed my friend Annie Summers. My other friend Johnny Thomas and I shook our heads in disagreement.

“No way,” he said. “There is absolutely no way I am going into that house. It is haunted. The three of us were best friends and loved adventure. Annie had endless curiosity, like Johnny and I, but she took it *way* to far sometimes. I had a feeling this was one of those times.

“Please, Please, Please, Please, Please, Please, PLEASE! I really want to go! Please! I promise if you get really scared we will leave! Are you in or not?” Annie begged.

“No!” Johnny and I said simultaneously.

“Please,” she said in her saddest voice, “pretty please with cherries on top?”

“Fine,” I sighed.

“Let’s go then!” With that we were off on an adventure that Johnny and I weren’t sure we wanted to go on.

The three of us were one step away from the House at the Dead End’s yard.

“All right, remember the plan.” Annie reviewed the plan briefly.

“I can do it, I can do it, I can do it, I can do it,” Johnny whispered to himself. We finally stepped onto the yard, then the porch. Annie’s hand hovered over the door knob. Slowly her hand moved closer and closer to the knob until they touched. She turned the knob and the

door eased open, making a sound that reminded me of nails on a chalk board.

“Here we go,” Annie whispered.

She stepped in then motioned us in her direction. We stepped in. The wood floor was creaky and the ornate crystal chandelier was covered in cobwebs. The large chair’s floral print fabric was tattered along with many knit blankets. As we worked our way through the house, we approached the master bedroom. A king-sized sleigh bed had a torn duvet and the bathroom had a shower with a moldy curtain and many empty bottles of shampoo scattered about. The whole house was covered in stained carpet and rugs.

Suddenly I heard a soft sound. “Meeeeooooow, meeeeeooooow.” I jumped! Gradually the sound became louder. “Meeeecoow, meeeeeooooow.”

“What is that noise?” I said.

“I told you we shouldn’t have come,” Johnny said.

“You’re just imagining things,” Annie said. Then, a short figure with four legs appeared. We all jumped.

“Ahhh!” Johnny screamed. The fear in his voice slowly faded away. “Oh, it’s just a cat.” Annie slowly stepped forward to grab the cat.

“Mrroooow!” it growled.

“Fine, Mr. Sassy Pants,” Annie said.

“Wait,” I said. “Didn’t the owner say he heard noises?”

“That must have been the noise he had been hearing!” Johnny exclaimed.

“Didn’t he ever think that was *his* cat?” Annie challenged.

“He said he hated cats,” I said. Annie had an “oh yeah” look on her face.

“Okay guys, I guess this is just a normal vacant house,” she said.

“Yeah, vacant houses are really normal,” I said sarcastically.

“Yeah, let’s go. We can tell everyone and be done,” Johnny said.

“Oh no, we are not spoiling this surprise! This mystery keeps our town alive!” Annie said.

“Enough talking, let’s go! This house is giving me the creeps.” With that the three of us left, Annie confidently leading the way, Johnny following her and myself, closing the door behind me. Just then, I heard a noise from behind the door.

“Finally,” the voice said, “they are gone.”

I guess the house wasn’t vacant after all.

# The Kidnapping

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*In THE KIDNAPPING by Checka Buttazzoni, Mallery and Jake are on a walk outside their house when a dark van pulls up next to them and grabs them. Will they live? Will they die?*

It was the middle of summer in Detroit, Michigan, around noon, and there were two kids named Mallery and Jake. Mallery was a pretty, tall, funny girl. She loved shopping and hanging out with her friends, and sometimes she enjoyed playing with her brother. Jake was 11 and he loved playing with toys and their dog. He also enjoyed hanging out with his sister. Mallery and Jake were very close, even though Jake was 11 and Mallery was 15.

Mallery and Jake were the richest kids in Magellan Street. Everybody wanted to be them. They got everything they wanted, but today was different. Mallery wanted five shirts, three pairs of pants, two pairs of socks, five tubes of nail polish, eleven pairs of shoes from Forever 22, and tons of make-up. Jake wanted a G-Shock, video games, a TV, an iPod, and an Android. But today the parents wanted something too.

“Stop acting likes spoiled brats!” shouted the mother. Mallery and Jake weren’t used to their parents saying no.

All of a sudden Mallery blurted out, “I hate you guys! I wish you were dead!” Mallery saw the look in her parents’ eyes; they looked like they were about to cry. She grabbed her brother, dog, and its leash and stomped out the door.

“I wish they didn’t exist,” said Jake.

“Let’s run away!” exclaimed Mallery.

Mallery and Jake continued to walk and talk when all of a sudden a dark van pulled up and the front window went down.

“Are you the Bradly kids?” a man asked. Mallery couldn’t see the man’s face but she said yes anyway. The side door quickly opened and a hand reached out and grabbed them both, leaving their dog behind.

The next thing Mallery knew she was in a closet that felt like the temperature 30°F. Mallery was extremely cold, she felt awful. She was incredibly sad. She wished she knew where her brother was.

Suddenly a man burst through the door and dropped something on the floor. After he left, Mallery scooted over and tried to see what it was. It was awfully dark in the closet. Mallery couldn’t see what it was, but after one smell she knew what it was, oatmeal. There was also an orange. She

was very hungry so she took the orange and pushed the plate far away so she didn't have to smell the oatmeal.

"I just want my brother," sobbed Mallery. She began to cry. Just then she heard a noise. Mallery crawled to the other side of the closet and put her ear to the wall. It was Jake!

"Jake, do you hear me? It's me, Mallery!" she shouted.

"Hello," Jake said, trying to choke it out through his tears.

"Jake, don't worry. I'm right here, next to you. Everything will be all right," Mallery whispered.

"I'm scared, what if someone doesn't come for us?"

The same question was going through Mallery's head, but she didn't want Jake knowing that, so she said, "Jake I promise if someone doesn't come for us, I will get us out of here."

### *Mallery's Point of View*

After three days in a closet that could very well be 30 degrees or colder I began to feel like I was on the verge of dying. On the second day, the kidnappers heard me talking to Jake and took him somewhere else. I tried to scream for him but the man came in the closet and slapped me. Not knowing where your little brother is terrifying. I have never felt like this. I cried in silence for hours; it didn't take the pain or fear away. I was cold and hungry. I think they turned down the temperature again to keep me from crying. I've been eating oranges for meals; breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and I feel a lot skinnier. Plus I think the cold also helped me lose weight. After I get out of here, if I ever do get out of here, I'm going to write a book about losing weight. Step one: get kidnapped and only eat oranges for a meal. I sure wish I knew where my brother was.

### *Jake's Point of View*

On the second day, Mallery was talking to me but the men came in and took me away. I'm not sure what happened because they hit me on my head; but when I woke up I was in the car. It must have been a long trip, because I took a nap and when I woke we were still in the car.

When we got to the building I saw the address on the door. I was put in a dog cage and put down by a table where I saw the three men play poker. I must have been tired because I dozed off. I was startled when I heard the man say, "It was smart to leave the girl in the closet in the warehouse on St. Hugo Street. Now we can get double the ransom and only have to give one kid up. It was a good idea go to England was a good idea."

“Go take the boy upstairs in the room. Is he even up yet?” the other man said. I pretended to be asleep so they didn’t know I heard what they just said. I felt them pick up my cage and take me up stairs. When I had heard the door close I opened my eyes, they had opened my cage door. I crawled out of the cage. There was a bed and a bathroom, I looked in all the drawers but there was nothing in them. I tried to open the door and windows, but they wouldn’t budge. When they carried me through the front door, I saw the address, if only I could find a phone or laptop.

That night I picked the lock and crept down stairs. I didn’t see a laptop, but in the kitchen I thought I saw a phone. It worked! I was so happy. I dialed my house phone number.

“Hello?” my mom said.

“Mom, it’s me, Jake.”

“Jake! Where are you?”

“I’m in England, on Marble Street 3561. And Mallery is in the Warehouse closet on St. Hugo Street.”

“Okay, we will come right away!”

After that I hung up and locked myself back in the room. The next morning I had eggs, bacon, toast, hash browns, and orange juice. I read books all day wondering where my parents were.

### *Mallery’s Point of View*

I feel like I’m about to die. I wonder how Jake is doing without me; I feel so bad leaving him alone. I just hope he lives. Without one of us mom and dad would go nuts. We’re their life. “Goodbye Jake, I’ll miss you.” Mallery said to herself. Just then the door burst open and my mom dropped on the floor next to me.

“She’s in here!” my mom screamed.

### *Jake’s Point of View*

I was sitting at the breakfast table when the police come crashing through the door. The police came in all directions and surrounded the men. The men looked like they were in a haze; they had no idea how the police found them.

After the police took the men away I was reunited with my father.

“Dad!” Jake screamed.

“Jake, it’s good to see you!”

“How is our dog, did he get home safe?”

“Yes he’s fine; he’s actually the one who alerted us that you guys were missing. But don’t worry about him, how are you?”

“I’m fine, really, but where’s mom?” asked Jake.

“She’s at the hospital, with your sister.”

I walked through the big white doors looking at everyone I passed. Their faces were filled with pain and sickness. This was no place for my sister. All the rooms I saw had blood, shots, and heart monitors. How did my sister end up in here?

When I walked into Mallery’s room I said, “How are you feeling?”

“I feel better now that you and dad are here. Will you come see me every day?”

“I promise I will.” I never broke that promise, but Mallery never got better. Since her immune system was so weak, she got sick all the time. I never asked Mallery what made her sick or what disease she had because I knew it would make her feel even worse. Even though I saw her every day I was always so sad, she looked awful.

One day, she said, “Jake, I just want you to know that I’m going to miss you a lot, and I love you.”

“What are you...?” I saw Mallery’s eyes close, and the machine next to her went *beeeeeeeep*.

Every day until Mallery’s funeral people would come and drop off gifts and say how sorry they were. Nothing made me feel better; I would stay in my room away from everyone else. I just couldn’t bear the fact that my sister was dead.

I remember so much about Mallery, she was so kind and nice. (She wasn’t mean very often) Mallery was only 15 when she died and she was my best friend; I didn’t have many friends in school, she was all I needed. I cried for days after she died. I didn’t even go to her funeral, just thinking about it made me cry. There are a lot of things I wish I could redo, but I know that’s not possible. Mallery, I hope you can hear me when I say this. I wish I had more time with you; I wish we hadn’t had that stupid fight with our parents.

# The Makfib

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*A boy named Kevin wandered into a restaurant, and later, he is found unconscious in a bush. What happened? Find out in **THE MAKFIB**, by **Amith Dayananda**.*

Last Tuesday, a boy named Kevin Jones went to a new restaurant called Makfibbers. It didn't look promising, but he would eat just about anything after basketball practice.

"One burger, please," said Kevin.

"We don't have burgers!" exclaimed the cashier.

"Uhh...what do you have?" Kevin questioned.

"A Makfib."

"Okay, I'll have that," Kevin said.

"NO!" yelled the cashier.

"Excuse me?" Kevin asked.

"You're excused," began the cashier. "Go to the restaurant across the street if you want good food."

"Fine," Kevin went to the second restaurant called Mkfibbers. *Not a big difference there*, Kevin thought.

"I'll have a MkFib, please," Kevin said.

"Coming right up," said the cashier.

The sandwich looked pretty good, so Kevin took a bite. This was a bite Kevin would regret for the rest of his life. He noticed it immediately when his nose went numb. Kevin couldn't smell anything. And, then, a shovel hit him in the face.

"So," began Josh, "you say a mysterious restaurant appeared from nowhere."

"Yeah," said Kevin.

"And, then, you were found unconscious in a bush with no sense of smell?" Josh questioned.

"Yep," Kevin confirmed.

"I'll look into it," said Josh. He was Kevin's best friend.

Josh went to the restaurant the next morning. He snuck into the kitchen, which was full of grease. Josh saw a cook out of the corner of his eye. Josh ducked and watched the cook make a Makfib thing. He fried it, dipped it into another bucket of grease, and then he fried it like seven more times. Finally, Josh got it! The workers keep to themselves and hated to be interrupted. That was probably the problem. So, Josh sneaked back to cash register.



“Hello,” said Josh. “Do you have any burgers?”

“I hate you,” said the cashier. “Go to the restaurant across the street, will ya?”

“Fine,” Josh said as he walked out the door.

Josh walked across the street and, sure enough, there was a different restaurant. He went in, snuck past the counter, and entered the kitchen. Josh couldn’t believe it! They put every rotten thing that he ever hated inside the burger so you can’t see it. That’s when somebody saw him.

“Hey!” someone shouted. He saw the person grab a shovel, so Josh tried running.

Josh ran into a room with a giant bucket in the middle. He ran up the stairs to get to the edge of the bucket. Then, he lost his sense of smell.

“Hey!” The man was back, and he had on a gas mask. The man also ran up the stairs when Josh suddenly jerked to the left. The man fell into the gross disgusting stuff that was in the bucket. One thing’s for sure, he did not survive. Josh heard rumbling; a lot of rumbling.

“She’s going to blow!” someone yelled.

The bucket was about to explode! Josh ran as fast as he could and jumped out the door just in time.

“There goes bad food and bad service,” Josh said to himself. He saw the burnt remains of Mkfibbers. He lost his sense of smell, but saved many others.

Later, Josh and Kevin filed a complaint on the original Makfibbers. And, sure enough, they were shut down for over usage of grease.

“Thanks, Josh,” said Kevin.

Just then a new sign came into view, Makibbler!

“Oh no, not another one!” they yelled.

# The Mysterious Package

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In **THE MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE** by *Callie Barnas*, a young woman by the name of Lane is just trying to make her flight to Paris, France. And she was about to make it too, but not before a strange man blocks her path, offering her money to carry a strange package aboard. Lane accepts this strange offer, not knowing exactly what she just agreed to do.

“Flight number four to Paris, France leaving in five minutes,” the sweet voice said through the speakers on the ceiling.

“Damn it!” I mumbled to myself. If I didn’t get a move on, I was going to miss my flight.

“Excuse me! Oh, I’m sorry,” I said as I shoved my way through the crowd.

“I just have to—oh, sorry—get through....” Almost there, I could just see the attendant taking the passengers tickets behind the heads of all those taller than me in the crowd.

“Flight number four leaving in three minutes....”, so close! Just through another thin wall of people....

“Oh!” I exclaimed as I bumped into a man wearing a pair of tan pants and a black over coat. I quickly regained my balance. Too much in a hurry to be polite, I was about to walk around him when the man stopped me.

“Excuse me,” He said with a thick French accent.

“But would you be kind enough to take this package onto the plane with you? My flight was canceled, and now I have no way of delivering this to its selected destination. I will be willing to offer forty dollars in return.” I was honestly a bit creeped out by this. I mean what was in the package? (And who the heck IS this random man?) The look on his face told me that I wouldn’t be getting *that* information too easily. But I tried anyway.

“So.... If I do agree, will you tell me what I’ll be carrying aboard?”

As I suspected, he said, “That, I’m afraid, I cannot tell you. It is nothing illegal. After all, I have already been through security, haven’t I? But excuse me for my rudeness, I did not bother to introduce myself.” He extended his hand out to me. “Just call me Dr. D. and you?”

Dr. D? Odd, I thought. Shouldn’t that stand for something?

“My name is Lane” I replied, though as I shook his outstretched hand I was thinking about all the possible ways he could smuggle something illegal in. I came up with about ten, but half of them had something to do with flying pigs. Nope. Not illegal.

“Nice to meet you Lane. Now, about the package, will you accept my offer?” Now, before you start to think that I’m the kind of person who just wanders around taking mysterious packages from random strangers dressed like spies from old movies, you’re wrong. I would never have even thought twice about agreeing to this bizarre offer if I weren’t currently in these two situations. One, I was in a big hurry to move around this man who obviously won’t let me get on my flight until I accept. Two, I could really use the forty bucks because I wasn’t able to make it to the ATM due to the long line. Finding it hard to believe I hadn’t already missed my flight, I replied to Dr. D.

“I’ll take up the offer. But—”

Dr. D cut me short by holding up his hand. “All you have to do is carry this onto your flight. I will include everything in an envelope along with instructions that you open only when you get off the plane. Only then.” He gave me a small smile, handed me a small, brown package and a blue envelope, and then stepped aside.

“Best you be on your way then.” He said as I passed by. I gave him a quick nod, and handed the flight attendant my ticket just in time. I sat down and tucked the package in my bag. Then, I took a deep breath and prepared myself for the long flight.

I woke up to the ding of the safety sign above my head. Dazed, I realized I had fallen asleep.

“Please fasten your safety belts.” A young woman said from the aisle.

“We will be landing in approximately ten minutes.” And then, with a smile, she made her way back to the cockpit. That’s the thing about flight attendants. You could be hurling through the air towards the ground at a hundred miles per hour, and all they’re going to do is smile and say, “We are currently hurling towards your death. Hope you enjoyed riding with us today!”

Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I began to gather my belongings, (only after I had looked out the window to make sure I wasn’t about to die.) As I reached into one of my bags, I slid my hand against something and got a stinging cut. At first I thought some venomous creature had snuck into my bag. Then I remembered. The package! Stupid envelope. I took it out to examine it. On the front, written in an elegant cursive, was; *Information, Instructions, and where to go.* Where to go? Uh, I definitely did not agree to actually deliver this package to a specific destination. Geez, I’m beginning to have second thoughts about this Dr. D. Just then, my ears popping like crazy, we began to descend towards the ground.

Back in a crowded airport, I weaved to my way through a mob of bustling people and towards the exit. Soon, I had made my way out of the doors and was now stand among the long line of people waiting for a taxi.

I closed my eyes and inhaled the cool, autumn air. Ahhh, after a long, stuffy plane ride, this felt really good. I began to daydream about what I would do once I reached the hotel room. I saw myself snuggled on a fluffy, white bed reading a book. The window was open, letting in fresh air, and- *BEEP!* My eyes snapped open, leaving my happy fantasy world behind. A bright, yellow taxi pulled up in front of me, and the driver was yelling. I was only able to understand a few words, he was speaking in French, but they were not exactly nice ones. Realizing I was the last waiting, I stepped inside the cab.

“Um, *bonjour!*” I said, trying to be friendly. Taxi driver guy just scowled at me in return. Pretending I didn’t see that, I continued, “I need to get to the Vile Hotel on, uh...”

Now this man was just looking at me, an expression on his face that clearly showed that he thought I was an idiot. Oh just great. He doesn’t know English and I honestly didn’t really know what the heck *bonjour* means (Hello? Good day? Hey there pal? What does it mean? I feel pretty stupid right now.). So I pulled out my Webster’s French to English Dictionary and began to read from it. Or I at least tried to, anyways.

Ten minutes later, I was at the front desk, trying to make sense of what room I was supposed to be staying in. The rapid French speaking woman at the front desk was definitely not helping. It was impossible for me translate when she made every two words one. Maybe I should’ve practiced my French speaking abilities before this trip. Oops.

There was already a huge line behind me by the time someone who knew English, thank God, decided to help.

“Are you having trouble?” The girl asked, looking around my age. “My name is Macy. I can help if you’d like.” She smiled at me, and I was relieved that someone was finally helping.

“My name is Lane, and yes, I really do need help. I can’t understand which room I’m supposed to be staying in.” I glanced at the woman at the desk, who looked nothing but annoyed now.

“*Vingt-sept,*” Macy said in perfect French. “You’re in room twenty seven. It’s to the left.” She gestured to one of the many doors behind us. I gave her a grateful smile.

“Thank you so much. I better go now. Bye!” I turned around and started towards the door.

I tossed my luggage onto the floor and launched myself onto the soft bed. Ahh, I thought, exhausted (Unfortunately, this bed wasn’t a fluffy white one like my happy little day dream.) I just lay there for a while relishing the peacefulness that I hadn’t had in what seemed like days. After a while, I decided to open the envelope that had been tucked away in my bed ever since my run in with Dr. D. I tore it open, ever so careful not to

get another paper cut. Inside was a quick letter written in the same cursive that was on the front. It read: *Thank you for bringing this package with you. I really appreciate your kindness. Now, all I need you to do is address this package with the following. Then, just simply mail it.*

Just mail it? That was it? I looked at the address. Okay, that was odd. Why couldn't HE just mail the stupid letter? Back at the airport, Dr. D had made such a big deal of this. I have to admit though, I was actually really relieved that all I had to do was mail it. No crazy trips around the city, no meeting any of his weird black over coat buddies, nothing. Then why do I have a sneaking suspicion that there is more to this secret package than just mailing it?

So I copied the address as neatly as my messy scrawl would allow onto the package. I was too lazy to mail it today, so I decided to leave it on the dresser for tomorrow. Finally, I plopped down onto the bed, asleep the minute my head touched the pillow.

The next day, I put on a pair of purple sweat pants and jogged to the nearest mail box, which wasn't very "near" at all. I still thought it was odd that all I had to do was drop it in the mail box. But I did just that, listening to the solid plunk as it hit the bottom. And that was it. Or maybe I should say that *was* it, until I reached my hotel room and saw a man wearing tan pants and a black overcoat standing at my door.

# The Mystery of the Missing Doll

---

*As Meg walked home she turned her head and saw a person acting suspiciously, who then disappeared into the night. What this mysterious person was doing, and whether Meg can figure it out, is at the center of **THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING DOLL** by *Larkin O’Gorman*.*

It was a dark and chilly night in the fall of New York. I was walking down the street coming back from babysitting our neighbors a few buildings down. Only the bravest dogs were wandering the streets. The night was silent, as silent as death, as I walked down the street back to my apartment... Only the sound of the possums wandering to the last open garbage cans could be heard.

A chill came across my twelve-year-old body, as if I was frozen or like someone hit a pause button on me. I stood still without a breath. As I noticed a dark furry figure, he or she or whoever it was had a tiny paper bag in his or her tiny, bony hand. The bag seemed to have the shape of a doll body. The furry figure seemed to be in a hurry as the person jumped the fence and ran down the alley.

Then I realized where I was. I was standing next to the alley of the priceless doll shop which had been called Priceless Dolls as far back as anyone could remember. The sign was handcrafted with golden lettering above the fancy white door. Inside that door were the most valuable dolls from history. Then it clicked: The figure had stolen a doll, and before I could get a better look at the dark figure it was gone.

The next day, as soon as my mother was gone, I sprinted downtown to the police station. I told the guy at the front desk about the theft. He did not really care. He just gave a light chuckle, called me CUTE, and then asked me to leave.

I was so mad that I ran over to my best friend Collin’s house. He lived about two blocks and 170 steps away. His favorite thing in the world is to read mystery books! I could not wait to tell him about my mystery. We used to solve a lot of mysteries like who stole the cookie out of the cookie jar. But this was a real mystery. As soon as I got there I explained to Collin everything about the big scene.

Afterward, he just sat there blank-faced and said, “So you want me to help you figure out who it is?...OK...let’s go.”

When we got to the crime scene we looked all over for clues, but there was nothing: zero, zip, zilch, nada. THERE WERE NO CLUES ANYWHERE!

He asked me in a hushed tone, "Have you told your parents about the mystery?"

"No," I snapped at him. "You know they would kill me if they find out about the mystery. They hate me being nosy. Remember when I tried to figure out what our teacher was doing with all the things he took from kids in class and my parents had to find out from the principal?"

Then it clicked: We have to check the store itself.

When we arrived at the store we noticed this big picture above the cash register. It was a picture of the day the store opened at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Then we met eyes with the doll owner who was staring at the empty shelf hanging bare on the wall. We asked him if he knew what happened but he said no. After going to the back of the store we noticed the broken window. We searched and searched for the doll's stand but it was nowhere to be found. Then we SAW it. There it was in the dark corner: a rusty, small stand with a name plate in front that read "Cindy Rose."

We asked the owner to describe her. Quickly I flipped out my note pad and wrote every word he said. He said, "She was a small doll about eight inches tall with two small, bright, beautiful, gleaming eyes. She had peachy pink, perfect cheeks, a small nose, and a gently painted mouth. She had orange hair soothingly painted with great detail of different textures."

The last thing he told us about her was that she wore a baby green dress with beautiful white lacing around the bottom of the dress, around the end of the sleeves, and around the neck, and finally that she had a little blue bonnet. Then he showed us the picture of Oprah Winfrey buying a beautiful doll that looked similar to Cindy Rose.

Collin and I started to walk through the alley looking for clues from the night before. Then Collin found part of a fur coat and a little black hair. When we got back to Collin's house we found out that the fur was really fur from a furry winter coat and the black hair was from a person. Then Collin said, "I got it. The person must have tried to jump the fence, and the coat must have got caught and ripped." I knew that what Collin called his "laboratory" would help explain clues to this strange mystery.

Then I noticed this paper card stuck to my shoe. It must have been from the alley. It was scribbled all over, and looked like an old business card. The card read ".evA epoH." Not knowing what it meant, I went home.

When I got home I went to my room. As I walked past my mirror in my room I froze, in the mirror ".evA epoH" now said "Hope Ave."

Later that night I went to Hope Avenue. I walked very quietly like a kid after stealing a cookie out of a cookie jar. Strange lights flickered over my head as I peered around the corner and walked very, very slowly. Then I saw it: a fire. It was not just any fire. It was a hobo fire. It came from a blue barrel. I saw a few people warming their hands by the fire. They were all dressed in raggedy clothes and fingerless gloves, and one was dressed in a big brown fur coat with a tear at the bottom. The coat was the same color as the fur we found. There next to them was a big pile of dolls. The pile was filled with all different dolls like Raggedy Anne and other dolls. It was weird that some hobos would want to collect dolls.

Then I remembered my dad talking about police reports from the newspaper. Some little girl's doll was taken in the park, and another doll went missing after being left on a park bench. Maybe these dolls were stolen from all different places. I wondered if all the dolls were from the Princess Dolls store. Then there on top of the pile was Cindy Rose with bright, blue, beautiful eyes, just how the doll store owner had described her.

With my new high-tech camera I got for my birthday, I snapped a picture. Then scared, because I was sure the hobos saw the flash, I ran as fast as my new neon Nikes would let me. I turned the corner as the last flickering light died out.

After studying the picture forever at Collin's laboratory we realized that in the picture was the doll store manager's old friend, and his hair looked the same color as the ones Collin found in the alley. We recognized him from the picture of the ribbon-cutting ceremony the day the store opened. His friend apparently was part of his doll business. Collin found on the Internet on his laboratory computer that the store owner had fired his friend. We were sure that ever since then his friend has been trying to get revenge.

Collin and I thought we had figured out who it was. We ran once again over to the police station and told them everything. They must have believed us this time because of the picture, the story from the Internet, and the police reports I told them about. The police went to arrest the hobo, but instead he talked him into community service work, and his friend the doll store let him have a job. He also made sure all the dolls were returned to their rightful owners.

And as for me, well, I went on solving more crimes, and Collin, well, he helps. We aren't that bad for a couple of twelve-year-olds. Maybe we could make it far someday. Now everything has gone back to normal if that's what you want to call it. I finally saved the day, after just being a nosy kid getting my parents more principal phone calls than they wanted!



# The Race Against Time

---

*A girl, Abbie, meets her boyfriend online and she doesn't know a great deal about him. What she does find out will surprise you in **THE RACE AGAINST TIME**, by **Mia Turner**.*

It was a typical day in high school; pranking teachers, getting in fights, and overcrowded cafeterias. Abbie and I, her best friend, Bailey, were leaving our sixth hour class to go to the swim meet. We were seventeen and ready to graduate that year. Abbie had a boyfriend she met online. Before the swim meet, I met him for the first time. He seemed nice, but he never told me his name.

They stepped outside to talk. I waited inside to give them their privacy. When it was almost time to start swimming and we still weren't changed, I went outside to get Abbie. They were gone.

*If she isn't in school tomorrow I'll go over to her house to see if she is okay*, I thought.

Abbie was not at school. I went over to her house. No one answered the door. As I walked home, I had a feeling that someone was watching me. I arrived home, got my PJ's on, and tried to calm myself down. Within five minutes the doorbell rang. As I opened the door, I saw a note on the ground. It said,

Don't get too close. If you find me three things,  
I shall let your friend go. If you get me the  
wrong things, something bad will happen to  
your friend Abbie. Leave me a sign that you  
agree. If you try to catch me, I will know. I'm  
watching you.

After I read that note I was scared and didn't know what to do next. How do I know that he isn't trying to hurt me too? I decided that I would do it if I could save my friend. I found a whiteboard and wrote,

*I'll do it.*

I put the whiteboard up to all the windows thinking he may see it.

The next morning, I saw a piece of paper in my dog's mouth. It was another note. It said,

Great, I look forward to playing this game with you. Every rose has its thorn. Find a thorn that is usable in life.

What is that supposed to mean? I asked my parents and then I thought. Maybe he means the thorn that you can use most. That day, I went to a field of roses and found ones with very long thorns. When I got home I picked off all the thorns and lined them up. The longest thorn was a thorn from a blue rose!

*Where should I leave it?*

I got a note about an hour later.

Leave it where you welcome people in and escort them out.

I left the thorn on the doorstep and went to bed. When I woke up my mom gave me a note that came in the mail. It read,

Great, you completed your first task. Here is the next one. If you want to try a different look, what do you do?

If I want to change my look what do I do? Maybe change my hair style? No. Maybe use different makeup. I got it! If you change your hair color you have to change your makeup and your wardrobe. You would look completely different. Again, I got out my white board wrote down my answer and stuck hair die on my porch. I got a note an hour later.

Ouch, wrong answer. Good luck trying to save your friend. I play fair. And you made a deal. If you can figure out my identity, I'll give you another chance.

That was an easy one; the creepy note-leaver was obviously Abbie's online boyfriend. The only problem was that I did not know his name. He left another note,

I will call your phone once. If you can find out who I am, then I will give you your friend back.

About a minute later, I received a phone call. It was obviously him. I typed in the phone number on Google. A few people came up so I had to look at where they lived. The only person who lived somewhat around here was Maxwell Abut. I printed out the page and threw it out the window. As I was walking up the stairs, I saw a paper on the step. I picked it up.

Wow, you found me great. This is the last note I will leave. You must try and find your friend. It stinks and is in the middle of a place.

In the middle of a place? Maybe he means in the middle of town.

The next day, I went to town. I spent the whole night figuring out the exact middle of town. I was a store called Gash. I went there that morning and asked if they had a backroom or a basement, but they didn't, plus, it didn't stink. Maybe he didn't mean the middle of town. Maybe he means the middle of nowhere, like the middle of the forest. Again, I went back home, mapped out the middle of the forest all night, and drove there in the morning.

Before I left, I thought about this. Maybe he is trying to hurt me too. I should bring some stuff with me. I found my dad's hunting gun and his bullet proof vest. Just in case.

While I was driving, I drove past a barn which was almost in the middle so I decided to stop to look. It couldn't hurt, right? I put on the

bulletproof vest. I also put on a helmet that I already had in the car. I walked into the barn. As I walked in, I looked around. There were skeletons of humans and of animals. This guy is obviously a murder mastermind.

After getting past a pole, I got hit on the head. Luckily, I had that helmet on! It cracked, but I didn't get hurt. As I was running, I saw a door with a dim light, and then I heard a scream. I ran into the room with the gun in my hands. As I walked in, I saw people on stretchers. I snuck up behind the man and hit him on the head with the gun. I unlocked all the people. They were still alive, but they were frail. Only Abbie could run. I had to carry the old man and Abbie carried the old woman.

As we ran out, we were being chased. The car was so close, we had to make it. I got out my keys and unlocked the car. Abbie and I threw the old people in the backseat. Abbie jumped in the front with me and we sped away.

Abbie had learned her lesson. She would never meet anyone online. Maxwell Abut is dead, but some say his spirit still lurks around in those woods looking for victims.

# The Surprise

---

In **THE SURPRISE** by *Claire Weller*, it's a Saturday morning and Emily hears banging on her door and sees that there is a path of signs. Emily begins to follow the path and finds out her destination.

**I**t all started at exactly 12:32 A.M. on a Saturday morning. Emily was sleeping in her pink, cozy bed, when she heard *BANG... BANG... BANG!* on her front door.

Emily got out of her bed, walked on her beige carpet, grabbed her light green hoodie, and put it on while she crept down her spiral staircase to the main floor. There she went in the living room, took her pink iPhone, and looked out the window. She saw no one. *BANG... BANG... BANG...!* She heard it again. Emily started to wonder why her parents couldn't hear the banging on the door.

Emily gripped her phone tightly as she unlocked the door and turned the doorknob slowly. She opened the door and saw a sign that said, "**EMILY, FOLLOW THIS PATH OF SIGNS.**" She closed the door and went to get her UGG boots, a flashlight, and a cute hat from her laundry room. Emily opened the door and started to follow the signs.

Twenty minutes later Emily ended up in Times Square. When she got to the last sign there was a box marked: "To Emily." Emily ripped open the box, and there was a yellow note that read, "Stop at the place with the cutest clothes, stop at the place you loved the most."

Emily knew where the first one was...Caruso Caruso! Emily walked to the store and found a blue bag. She looked inside it and saw the dress she has been wanting for weeks! She put the dress back into the bag and put the bag over her shoulders. Now for the second place....

Emily did not know if it would be her favorite place a year ago or when she was four. So she just guessed it would be when she was around the age four, which was the ice cream parlor. Emily went to the ice cream parlor, and sticking on the door was a purple note that wrote, "Go to the place that represents the U.S.A. You might need to get a ride, so take the car that's yellow outside."

Emily knew right away it was a cab. Luckily she found a cab and got in. About ten minutes later they were at the docks where the ferries were.

"Thanks for the ride...uhhhh," Emily said.

"The name's Joe...and no problem," said Joe.

"How much?" Emily asked politely.

“No worries; you don’t have to pay...just think of it as a birthday present!” Joe said with joy.

“Ok...,” Emily said as she took her stuff and got out of the cab. She wondered how the cab driver knew it was her birthday today. Her phone showed 1:39 A.M. Emily got on a ferry (which was also no cost). When Emily got close to the door that led up the Statue of Liberty she found a pink note that read: “Time to find out the secret! Climb the stairs to the very top and you will find a surprise when u get to the top.”

Emily climbed up the stairs and saw it!

“SURPRISE! HAPPY BIRTHDAY, EMILY!” her friends shouted.

It was a surprise party! She was so thrilled that she could not speak! Her parents came up to her and wished her happy birthday, just like everyone else! They all had cake and opened presents! It was the best party ever!

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