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

**Edited by
Daniel Fisher**

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TO THE AUTHORS

Your editor congratulates you on a job well done.

You laced up and got to work.

You will continue to do great things as
you put your best foot forward.

Just do it.

BACK AT IT

ABUSED

*Dylan's mother was killed right in front of him, and for his whole life he has been tortured and beaten. It's only a matter of time before he fights back in **ABUSED** by **Emelia Moore**.*

“**S**hut up!” my father screams as he throws me against a jagged brick wall. “Have you forgotten who you are? You’re my son, so I can do whatever I want to you. So if I feel like punching you multiple times I will!” He’s screaming loudly, so now spit is flying everywhere. I cry as quietly as I can while my dad is yelling. All this yelling and abusive behavior leads me to think about my mother. I hope he doesn’t kill me like he killed my mother.

She was the only person who would defend me when my dad was beating me up. He didn’t mean to kill her. He hit her for trying to defend me after I got a C on a test. When he hit her she fell over unconscious. Her head hit the side of a glass table. She died right in front of me while trying to protect me. I cried for mercy as I frantically shook her, bending over her bleeding head. There was nothing we could do.

I never felt so useless in my life; I screamed at the top of my lungs and kicked my dad. That night was the first time he almost killed me too. He beat me till I was unconscious and black and blue.

My father buried her in the backyard. He warned me if anyone ever found out he would kill me and blame everything on me.

My father just tells people she fell and hit her head and fell into a coma and never woke up. Every time he tells that story it slowly kills me on the inside because I know what really happened.

She was the one who tucked me in at night, even though she was all bruised up. She would say, “One day everything is going to be ok,” and then she would sing me a song in her soft voice. Now all of that is gone, forever. I still sing it silently to myself every night and think of her.

“Are you listening to me? You’re as stupid as your mother,” my father says in an intimidating voice.

“Don’t talk about my mom that way!” I scream as I punch him as hard as I can, knowing I am going to be a walking dead man after that.

WHAM! A burst of air comes out of me. I immediately stop breathing for a second while my dad punches me in the stomach. I’m lying on the ground struggling for air to reach my lungs. I desperately gasp for air as my dad walks away, but everything’s blurry. My head hit that brick wall pretty hard. I reach my hand to the back of my head and bring it back in front of me. My hand is no longer the same. Now there is rich, red blood all over it. I don’t care, though. I can’t concentrate on anything, except for my sight that’s going dark. I give up and just let myself fade into the darkness.

“Wake up, moron, it’s time for school,” my dad says while shaking me. I’m still on the ground, and I’m also dizzy. I slowly reach my hand to the back of my head again, and the blood is dried; I can feel it in my hair. I slowly lift myself up with care and walk to the bathroom. I have to take a shower before school like my father orders. He makes me take a shower so I have no visible sign of injuries.

As I walk into the bathroom I stop right in front of the mirror. I close the door and slowly turn to look directly at myself in the mirror. I study my bumps and bruises and turn them into excuses to hate myself even more.... Maybe my dad’s right...maybe I am just a worthless body. I whisper to myself, “Why am I here?” while I slowly start crying. I turn on the shower to hide the sound of my weeping.

The only good thing is school. School is actually not too bad for me except for sometimes being bullied. I have an amazing girlfriend named Jenna. We have been dating for five months. I love her nicknames for me, like Dyli or Dylan the Villain. I don’t know how someone like her fell for such a brown-haired, green-eyed loser like me. She means the world to me. She’s what keeps me going. Every day I stop by her locker and we walk down the halls together. She tells me all this funny stuff like how Thomas got his gum stuck in the teacher’s hair. I have three main friends at school: Bryan, Johnnie, and Alex. They’re always there for me. But today I’m going to the park with Jenna. She said she has something to tell me. I think it’s going to be good news.

Anyway right after the bell rings I go to Bryan to ask if I can come over today. He says he will text me when he gets home. I walk

out of the school toward the park, which is about two blocks away, so it's a pretty short walk. It isn't very nice outside. It is cloudy and gloomy, a regular day in Seattle, Washington.

As soon as I get to the park I see Jenna on the swings. She looks a little sad, but maybe it is just the weather bringing down her mood. She gestures me over without looking at me, so I walk over with half a smile on my face. I start to get a little worried. Jenna usually runs up and hugs me, which always makes my day.

I sit on the swing next to her and say, "Hey, what's up?" She looks up at me, and her eyes are so red I don't see the white in them. Her makeup is smeared, and dark tears run down her cheek.

"What happened...?" I say in a shaking voice.

She looks over at me and says, "Dylan...I've been giving a lot of thought lately and I...I..." She bursts into tears as she whispers, "I'm breaking up with you."

I whisper, "NO...no, why?" I speak hysterically.

"I just don't feel a spark anymore. I found someone new," she whispers. "I still want to be friends, though. I care about you so much, Dylan. Please understand."

"It's too hard to be friends. I can't take not being with you," I say while a tear runs down my cheek. I can't bear it anymore. My soul feels empty. I feel as if I just died.

I bolt off the swing, and just sprint. I run and run and run as fast as I can. I want to run away from my feelings and my life.

I give up. I have nothing to live for anymore. I don't care if I die because I have nothing.

I call up Johnnie. I explain my whole life story: my mom dying, my abusive father. I tell it all to him in tears. He can hardly understand me. I am hyperventilating and feel like I have nothing, and I am nothing, and there is nothing. I don't even care about anything. All I want to do is die.

I tell Johnnie to call the police. I can't take it anymore. It's like being on the edge of a cliff and someone finally pushes me off.

I go inside my house and go straight up to my dad. I have nothing to lose anymore. I scream how he's a murderer, how he's a heartless piece of trash that deserves to die, I tell him how he pushed me over the edge, I tell him how he killed mom, and finally I say to him, "Why don't you kill me already?"

And then there it is: the police at the door. "POLICE. OPEN UP!" they yell while almost kicking the door down.

“Fine, I’ll grant your wish,” he whispers as he stabs me in the back.

All I feel is a shock wave. There is no time for pain...I am just...dead.

I open my eyes, and I am being lifted toward a bright light. In that light is my mother, waiting for me with open arms.

ALWAYS TALK TO STRANGERS

In ALWAYS TALK TO STRANGERS by Maliyah Smith, a stranger at the mall changes everything for Lily and Meg.

There was a girl named Lily and her best friend Meg. They had been friends forever since they were kids. Now they are older.

This day is Lily's birthday. Meg and Lily went to Northland Mall. When they stepped into the mall they went into the store and got clothes, jewelry, and makeup. They spent most of their money in one store.

They went to a pretzel place and got pretzels. After that they went to one more store to get lip gloss.

When the both of them turned around some man was in the corner of the store watching them. They bought the lip gloss and walked out.

When they walked out the man followed them. They were walking faster and faster. The man was, too, and when Lily and Meg stopped, he did, too.

Meg and Lily talked about it. Lily faked that she was hungry and she told Meg to go and get her food. Meg told her, "Do not talk to him." Meg went to the car and was looking for her food.

Lily went up to him. She was shy at first, but the two of them talked. He asked for her name. She said, "My name is Lily Henderson."

When Meg came back from the car she saw that Lily and the guy were talking.

Lily asked for his name. He said, "My name is Morgan. I recognized you from school but I can't remember your name. My dad worked with your dad a long time ago."

Meg walked over to Lily and the guy and freaked out, but Lily calmed her down. After that, she was back to normal. Lily told Meg that his name was Morgan.

The three of them walked to a café and got coffee. Lily saw her dad having coffee

Lily saw two guys come in. Morgan asked Lily what she was looking at. She said, "Those two guys over there." Morgan turned around and saw the two of them.

The two guys pulled a gun out and shot at the four of them, but Morgan pulled his gun out and shot back to save Meg, Lily, and Lily's dad from getting hurt. However, one of the guys shot Meg and Lily's dad in their stomachs. Morgan shot the two guys.

Morgan and Lily ran to the parking lot, got in the car, and drove off. They drove off and left the other two behind because they thought the police would blame them for shooting Meg and Lily's dad. They drove for hours and hours until they got to a big house. They went in, got unpacked, and went to sleep.

The next morning they looked at the news and saw that Meg and her dad were in the hospital. Morgan and Lily couldn't go out of the house or they might get hurt. When they turned the TV off they were walking up the stairs and heard a bang on the floor. They both jumped like they were rabbits. The two of them walked down the stairs in the dark and saw nothing, but they both bumped into something or someone. It was someone.

Morgan turned on the light and saw an old man with a glass artifact in his hand.

When Morgan got in the shower, Lily and the old man went into the basement and saw a picture that looked like Lily, but it was not Lily. It was her mom. When Lily was growing up her dad told her that her mom killed herself. That is what she told the old man, but the old man knew Lily's mom. He said, "Your dad almost killed her, but she gave you back to Mr. Henderson."

Lily's mom ran away, but later on she died because she got poisoned. Mr. Henderson poisoned her.

Lily and the old man went up stairs. Then Morgan and Lily went out of the house to find Meg and Mr. Henderson. Morgan and Lily found Meg and Lily's fake dad and killed them both because Lily found out that Meg and Mr. Henderson were working together. They shot both and the two of them died.

THE ART OF A MURDERER

In **THE ART OF A MURDERER** by *Rachel Akaba*, the new man on the police force works hard to find a murderer who is a liar, a deceiver, and a straight up heartbreaker to those who trusted him.

“ . . . **A**nd that is why I called you guys to a meeting, to introduce Chase Sondburg to the police squad,” said the sheriff. The police squad and secretary crowd clapped bluntly. “Okay, back to business. Secretaries, you are dismissed to your computers and answering phones and whatever you guys use, except, of course, for Lucy.

“Oh, and last thing, starting tomorrow, Lucy will be an official officer. I have been training her for quite a while and she has shown me what she can do.

“Oh, um, last thing for real this time, remember fellow police members, I do the talking,” the sheriff snapped. “You all know the complications, the stress, the complaints of safety issues, and the lack of enough technology that is impacting our process of finding the murderer. It is a hard process but I believe that with the right men and women, and with the right strategy, that this process can be much faster. As you can see—,” the sheriff turned to Lucy. “Lucy, pull out the process board,” the sheriff whispered. “I said as you may see, our improvement is—wait for it...z-e-r-o, zero. We absolutely need to find the murderer.”

Many boring minutes later in the same meeting room

“I can see that some of you have fallen asleep, so let’s make things more interesting,” said the sheriff. “Here’s the deal: I’ll make out a check for one hundred grand to anyone who can supply me with information, proof, and pictures of the murderer.” As backs were being straightened and snores were subsiding, Chase said to himself: *Wow, I have to be the man to find the murderer, and I, Chase Matthew Sondburg, is one hundred percent sure that he will find the murderer.*

A few hours later

“Chase, may I have a word with you?” asked the sheriff.

“Of course, sir. What can I do for you?” said Chase.

“Oh, nothing. I just have a few errands to run, that’s all.” Chase noticed the sheriff’s bulky, black trench coat. Chase could tell the trench coat had mysterious big items in it, but what? “What’s with the trench coat?” asks Chase.

“Oh, nothing. I just heard that it is high fashion these days. Anyways, I have some errands to run. Here, catch. Those are the keys to lock up the building. At least I think it is the right pair.” The sheriff looked the keys up and down.

“But there is more than one,” Chase responded.

“Oh, I know,” the sheriff replied. And just like that, the sheriff was gone. *Okay, that was weird*, Chase thought to himself. *Maybe I should go to his office, just for a minute. Then I’ll be out.* Chase walked to the sheriff’s office. *Locked*, Chase thought. Luckily Chase is a smart lad. He pulled the keys out of his pocket and tried each key until, *pop!* The door was unlocked.

Chase walked in the sheriff’s office, and something caught his eye: the computer, which was surprisingly on. The computer was on, all right, on to a very interesting page that had all the evidence, all the pictures, and all the information that he needed. What he found was disappointing, but would make an interesting story on the front page of newspapers.

The next day

“Sheriff, may I have a word with you?” said Chase.

“Of course, Chase,” the sheriff said.

“It was you,” said Chase.

The sheriff changed position. The sheriff suddenly stood up. “You really think I’m the murderer.”

“Yes, I do, and I have images and proof, too,” Chase said while backing up slowly.

“You are absolutely correct. Do you know what I’m going to do now?” replied the sheriff?”

“N-no, sir,” Chase stuttered.

“I’m going to kill you!” The sheriff quickly grabbed Chase’s neck and covered Chase’s mouth. Then he dragged him to the police station’s basement room. “I’ll be back in a few; I have more *errands* to run,” said the sheriff. “You have nowhere to run now, Sondburg.”

BANG! Chase banged on the basement door. “Help, me!” Chase yelled.

“Chase?” said Lucy. “Chase, is that you?” she said.

“Lucy? Y-yes, it’s me. Chase Sondburg,” Chase said.

“What on Earth are you doing locked in the basement room?” asked Lucy.

“I didn’t intend to be in here, just let me out, please.”

“Okay, hang on. You’ll be out in a second.” Lucy took out a key and unlocked the basement door. “What happened?” she asked.

“The sheriff locked me in here a-and h-he said he was going t-to k-k-kill me,” Chase was panting. “

“What? No, the sheriff wouldn’t do such a thing,” she said. “I mean, it’s not like he’s the murderer or something,” Lucy chuckled. She couldn’t, wouldn’t believe Chase.

“Lucy, I’ve got a whole lot to tell you.”

“Okay, I’m all ears,” she replied.

Thirty minutes later

“Wow, this is unbelievable. What do you think we should do?” she asked.

“First of all, hide from the sheriff. Then inform the FBI so we can put him in jail.”

“What if they don’t believe me?”

“They’ll believe you if you show them what I showed you.”

“Okay, I’ll make it work, but first I want you to hide at my house. I’ll drop you here at work tomorrow.”

The next day Lucy pulled up in her work parking lot with Chase. “The FBI officers will be arriving here at twelve p.m. to arrest the sheriff,” Lucy said.

“Perfect,” Chase replied.

At twelve p.m., the FBI knocked on the sheriff’s office door. “Sheriff, open up!” an officer yelled. The sheriff opened the door.

“Officers, what a weird surprise.”

“We’ll do the talking here; anyway, we’ve come to arrest you. Now put your hands up.” The sheriff was surrounded; there was nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

“B-but I didn’t do anything,” he said.

“I said we’ll do the talking, Sheriff, or should I say murderer. We know your tricks, and we’re not fooled anymore. We’ve come with evidence,” said the officer.

“Oh, really. And where did you get this evidence?” replied the sheriff.

“From Lucy and Chase Sondburg.” The sheriff gasped. “Now put your hands behind your back.”

“B-but you don’t understand, I’m not the murderer,” said the sheriff.

“Tell it to the judge, Sheriff.”

One week later

“Thanks again, Sondburg, for all of your help,” said Luke, the arresting FBI agent and Chase’s friend.

“No problem,” said Chase.

“Before I go, I’d like you to know that those so-called *errands* were actually murders, and my FBI squad figured out that not only were they murders, they were also kidnappings,” said Luke.

“Oh no,” said Chase.

“Oh yes. We also found out that the sheriff took the captives to a basement in an abandoned house,” said Luke.

“Wow, I think I’ve heard enough news today. I’ll see you later, Luke,” said Chase.

Epilogue

The sheriff was found guilty, put in jail, and all was finally well. Chase became the new sheriff and five years later married Lucy.

CARL'S INTERESTING DAY

*When a government scientist is kidnapped, Carl must face the enemies to make it out alive. But it's even more difficult when love gets in the way in **CARL'S INTERESTING DAY**, by **Margaret McQueen**.*

This day started out like any other day. It did not end that way.

I felt quite content when I arose to my loud *Star Wars* alarm clock. The red flashing lights that spun around on Darth Vader's light saber were a great and frightening way to wake up. Today was the day that I was supposed to get my promotion; it was great that I was getting a promotion (being a scientist and a computer genius for the government and all). I quickly downed my tall glass of orange juice and bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios.

I ran up the staircase, brushed my teeth, and put on my best suit. It fit perfectly, just like when I had tried it on. I combed my hair back and even put gel in it. All of my co-workers always told me I looked like Buddy Holly. I figured it would be right for the occasion. I put my phone in my pocket, and lastly I threw on my black overcoat and hurried out the door.

When I walked out the door I realized that I had left my car keys on the counter. I rushed back in only to be stopped at the doorway by a man in a dark, black suit. He had disheveled brown hair and an uncertain look on his face. After I quickly studied him he asked my name. I wasn't sure what to reply with, and I was stupid enough to say my real name, Carl Vitalli.

He answered with a stern voice and said, "Get in the car!"

I wasn't that much of a tough guy, and this guy looked like he goes to the gym every day, so I said, "Okay," my voice small.

The guy took me to a white Camaro. I had no idea how it got there. He opened the long door and ushered me into the back seat. *The back seat, is this guy serious? So first he's going to kidnap me, and now he's putting me in the back seat? What the heck, where did this guy learn to kidnap at? My first guess is the worst kidnapping school ever.*

Again, this guy is a lot... "larger" than me, so I swiftly dove into the back seat. He put the key into the ignition and sped away. He was going so fast I slammed into the back of the seat. *Of course he*

had to take me on the day of my promotion...wait a second, could all this be for work? Jeez, I hope not. I barely even do anything at that agency anyway. What would they want with me?

Then he took a sharp left turn and my face was pressed against the side of the window. "Hey, watch it!" he shouted as I wiped my face print off of the window.

"Sorry," I muttered.

Then he took about four left turns, a few right turns, and I think a U-turn. By now we were in this rural area that I had never seen before. It would have been relaxing if I wasn't worried about being killed. The guy didn't say a word the entire car ride.

Finally we pulled up to a large building. The building was all white and in the shape of a square. The corners were so flawless that it looked like you could cut your finger if you were to touch them.

The guy got out of the car and walked around to the other side of the vehicle to get me out. He opened my door, ripped me out of the seat, and knocked me out with a baseball bat.

I woke up inside of an all-black room with no windows. *As expected, there is a large door to my left-hand side. Again, these guys weren't very good kidnapers.*

Suddenly the smell of an expensive perfume hit my nostrils. I took a deep breath in, slightly afraid to look at my captor. I gathered my courage and raised my head slightly. I realized that the rest of my body was strapped tightly to the back of a metal chair.

I looked up and saw the face of a beautiful woman. She had long, blonde hair spilling over her shoulders. Her lips were pursed, and she had a calm expression on her face. Sure enough, her outfit was all black, and her bright blue eyes were shining like the Atlantic Ocean. She was amazing. Just from looking at her you wouldn't think that she could be working for the people that were holding me hostage.

The woman saw I was awake, and she introduced herself. "My name is Vanessa Cabaldi; you are here because you know of the government's plans. We are an agency that is against the government's ways, and we have come to see if they have started to figure out the location of our base. We need you to get rid of all of the government's plans to destroy us." I sat there shocked at the guts of this woman to tell me every one of her plans to destroy the government.

Now this lady was beautiful, so of course I was going to do what she said. I know you think I'm insane, but I wasn't going to pass up an opportunity like this.

"Yeah," okay I said, "but I still have one question."

"What is it?" Vanessa asked anxiously.

"Why are you so determined to destroy the government?" I said.

Vanessa took a deep breath, and she began to tell me a really long story, so I'm just going to sum it up for you. Basically her father was killed in the first Iraq war, and the government refused to give her family any money.

After the story was done Vanessa showed no sign of mourning for her father, and she quickly continued with her devious plans. "So what is the password?"

"Oh that's easy," I said. "It's 1234679810."

"Yeah, super easy," Vanessa said under her breath.

Then a man in a brown suit and a purple tie walked in the door. He had charcoal hair and brown eyes. This man had broad shoulders, and he looked pretty tough. He came in with a computer, and he kissed Vanessa on the cheek. My jaw dropped open. Vanessa has a boyfriend? What would she want with a scientist like me? The only reason I was here was because I knew the government's plans. Why on Earth would I help her? I can't even be falling in love with this woman with her giant boyfriend; I had no chance with Vanessa. I had to contact the government before they got into the system.

My phone! That's how I can contact the government, but I need a distraction. I took off my shoe and threw it across the room. It made a large *bang!*

"What was that?"

Vanessa and her boyfriend whipped their heads around and looked over in the corner where my shoe was lying. The number was pre-dialed, so all I had to do was press call. My co-worker Mackenzie picked up the phone.

"Hello?" she said.

"Mackenzie, it's me, Carl, I'm being held hostage, track this phone, and come to the place where you track it!"

"Okay, okay, it's being tracked, a S.W.A.T. team is on the way, hang in there, Carl!"

"Okay, bye, Mackenzie!"

Vanessa and her boyfriend were standing above me with guns, "You better give me that phone or I'll shoot!" said Vanessa.

“Okay.” I tossed the phone to her.

Vanessa caught the phone and then flipped a switch that sent the building into lockdown mode.

About 20 scientists in long, white lab coats rushed past the doorway with large stacks of papers that were threatening to tip over. Shortly after, Vanessa and her giant boyfriend sprinted out of the doorway.

By now, all of the sweat I had produced from anxiously waiting for the S.W.A.T. team to arrive made it easy for me to slip out of my restraints. (They hadn’t done a very good tying them in the first place).

After I was free, I hurried down the hallway after Vanessa and her boyfriend. The red flashing lights in the dark hallway were starting to make me a little woozy. I decided to keep going and make sure that they didn’t get away. The long, dark hallways were starting to get hard to navigate through.

Luckily the giant arrows that said “Hey, we’re a secret agency that hates the government. You should check us out sometime” were lighting my way. I thought those arrows were way too obvious for something that was supposed to be a secret passcode room. I must have run for at least a mile before a light from outside hit me in the face like Joe Frasier’s punch.

Moments later the S.W.A.T. team arrived and took Vanessa, her boyfriend, and the rest of the agency. They cuffed them and sent them all to prison.

Vanessa screamed as they locked her wrists up in the metal restraints, “I WILL GET YOU, CARL VITALLI, YOU JUST WAIT!” Then the doors of the police car closed with a *SLAM!* Vanessa was gone forever. Then the world started to spin, and my vision blurred.

I woke up the next day in the hospital with reporters all around me asking about my experience with the criminals. All I could remember was a single name...Vanessa.

CHANGE OF HEART

*Chico is part of an organized theft ring. However, he has second thoughts about a life of crime in **CHANGE OF HEART** by **Leonardo Benavides**.*

Whoosh! The helicopter's engine and the winds were really loud, like the sound of meteors falling toward Earth. Chico was watching the propellers spin. "So are you ready for the mission?" Eddy asked.

"No, I don't want to do it," said Chico.

"Come on," said Eddy, "you're the best guy and you lead all the robberies. And the percent of dying went down to 70 percent."

"I know but—"

RING! RING! RING! Eddy's phone went off. "Oh, be quiet, they're calling."

"Agent Eddy and Agent Chico, are you there?"

"Yes, we're here."

"Ok, good. So your mission is..." A hologram of Manhattan came out of Eddy's secret agent phone. It was a hologram of a building, a bank as usual. "You will rob this bank. Go in the hotel next to the bank and then you burn the window in the hotel room with the lava hose. Shoot the zip line across to the top of the bank. Slide down on that, and then you open the vent. Then go left, right, left twice, and right once and left once. Go down the pipe that slides down and open the vent. That room is where they keep all the money. Slide all the money down to the lobby area. The money will fall out the vent, and the other part of the team is down there. Everything will be taken care of down there, and I am not going into detail about it. They will collect it and put it in their cars that they crash through the doors with. Slide down the pipes when all the money is gone and go in one of the cars. But be careful. The vent on the top of the building is only open for 30 seconds because then it triggers the alarm, so make it quick. And also leave all the hacking to the hackers. Do you accept this mission?"

"Yes," said Eddy.

"What about Chico?" said the caller.

"I guess," Chico sighed.

"Ok. See you after the mission." *Call end* said the phone.

“This phone will self-destruct in 5...4...” Eddy chucked the phone out of the helicopter, and the phone burst into fiery flames.

Chico pulled out a picture of his mom and dad. They were dead. Chico never could remember them but only had that picture. He was in the evil society forever. He had been training his whole life. He never thought it was right to steal. He never wanted to do any of it, but he was forced to because he didn’t know better. He just had a feeling it was wrong.

“Ok, we’re here,” said the pilot. Chico looked up from the picture and saw the beautiful city of New York. The shiny sun beamed at the skyscraper in the big city on Manhattan, nearly blinding him. *We’re here.* Chico looked down at the hotel. He got nervous. Chico was afraid of heights.

“Hey, don’t forget to put on the glider,” said Eddy.

Chico grabbed the glider and put his feet on it. Then he got up and flew off the helicopter. The air was rushing in his face. As he got closer to the Marriott sign he let go of the gas so he wouldn’t hit the sign. Chico dodged the sign by going through the O and went down. Once he got down he jumped off the glider, and it shrank into and little pocket-sized box. He picked the box off the ground, put it in his pocket, and walked in the hotel. There he spotted Eddy and walked over to him.

“Hey,” Eddy said, “I got the ear microphones for you. Just put them in your ear and talk normally.”

“Ok, cool,” Chico said. “Hey, did you get a room?”

“Yeah. 124 on the 16th floor. So let’s go.”

Eddy and Chico headed toward the elevator. Eddy pressed the 16 button, and they went up with a jolt.

“Hey, who am I going to be talking to with these microphones?”

“Jeff,” answered Eddy. “He’s going to tell us when to open the vent.” *Ding!* The elevator door opened. They got out and went to their room.

“Ok, time to get things started,” said Eddy. He got out his duffle bag and searched through it to find the lava gun. It was nowhere to be found. Eddy said. “Oh no. We have no lava gun!”

“We could just use the laser.”

“Oh yeah.”

Eddy quickly carved a hole in the glass. “Ok, Chico, shoot that pole on the roof,” said Eddy. Chico accurately hit the pole. The rope wrapped around it, and they were on their way.

“Jeff, come in, Jeff,” said Eddy.

Jeff’s voice came on, and then Jeff gave them some info on what to do. “Ok, so the vent will open in five seconds, and be open for about 30 seconds. So be quick. Bye.”

They opened the vent and went in the pipe. They went left, right, left twice, and right once and left once, and then down the pipe that slides down. They opened the vent. They jumped down in the room with all the money. They were piling up the money and throwing it down the pipe to the lobby where things were being taken care of when Chico got this strange feeling that he shouldn’t be doing this. Then Chico heard something. Jeff must have left the speaker on because Chico heard, “What are we going to do with Chico?”

General Kenneth answered, “There are too many people on our own team, so we might turn him in after the mission.”

Chico had heard enough.

“Hey! Eddy!” yelled Chico.

“What?” replied Eddy.

Chico picked up a bag of money and slapped it across Eddy’s face. Eddy got knocked out. Then Chico picked Eddy up and threw him down the vent pipe. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! Eddy’s body crashed against the sides of the pipe. CRASH! Eddy’s body landed on someone, and he got knocked out, too. Chico jumped down the pipe and landed on Eddy and the other guy.

“Hey, Chico, what are you doing?”

“I’m a good guy now. And you’re all going to jail.”

“Get him!” shouted the guy.

The fight was on. Someone jumped on Chico’s back. Chico swung him off, landing him on two other goons, who probably got knocked out. Chico hurled a punch at one guy sending him to the ground out cold. There were three guys left, all circling him in the shape of a triangle.

One took out a knife and threw it at Chico. Chico dodged the flying knife, causing it to hit the other guy in the face and leaving two guys left including the guy who threw the knife. One guy charged at Chico, screaming like a maniac, but Chico grabbed his arm and twisted it. He kicked his knee, leaving him squealing on the floor. *Wham!* The other guy ran up and kicked him on the table and jumped on him. Chico spotted a nearby lamp and smashed it on the guys. The guy fell to the floor.

Chico got up off the table. Suddenly the cops ran in. They arrested everyone in the building.

The cops arrested Chico, even though he saved New York a whole lot of money.

THE CHASE

THE CHASE by **Andrew Ouellette** is the story of a government team that is determined to find a mastermind criminal who has kidnapped a boy named Roy Jones.

Let's go! Detective Pitt and his crew are determined to find a kidnapped boy named Roy Jones. Roy Jones is an 11-year-old boy. He was kidnapped seven hours ago.

Roy's parents are friends of Detective Pitt. Detective Pitt received a phone call from Roy's mother after school. Mrs. Jones was crying on the phone when she was talking to Detective Pitt. "Roy didn't return home on the bus after school. I called the school to see if he missed his bus home. The secretary told me that Roy was absent that day. But I watched him walk to the bus stop from the porch. I had to go inside and make an important conference call. I didn't see him get on the bus."

Detective Pitt and his crew are ready to go and get Roy Jones back. "I am on a mission to find my friend's child and bring him home safely," said Detective Pitt. He had a feeling deep down in his stomach that this was the work of Ramsey. Ramsey is the most dangerous kidnapper on planet Earth. No one has caught him. The reason Ramsey has not been caught is because he is good at disappearing from a scene quickly and staying away for a long time. Ramsey has committed 678 homicides and has kidnapped over 1,000 people.

Detective Pitt had local police officers and dogs searching the area for Roy while they hacked into a website where kidnappers sell people. They discover Roy Jones is for sale for \$167,000. The hacking crew and Detective Pitt see who is selling Roy Jones. His name is Ramsey. Detective Jones has been hunting Ramsey all over the world since 1991. From nine years of hunting Ramsey, Detective Pitt and his crew have loads of plans to catch Ramsey on their computers.

"I know the federal agencies are after me, but they haven't caught me. I will continue to outsmart them. By selling these children, I will continue to make a lot of money," said Ramsey to himself. This is how Ramsey makes his living. Ramsey hacks into

Detective Pitt's computer and erases all the important files and plans.

The hacking crew and Detective Pitt go to visit Ramsey's friend in prison named Tom Yanks. Tom tells the crew and Detective Pitt, "I will give you Ramsey's cell phone number, in exchange for getting out of prison early." Detective Pitt is desperate and is able to make a deal with the prosecuting attorney for Tom's early release for cooperating with his agency.

Detective Pitt tells Tom, "If I have Ramsey's cell phone number and call it, we will be able to trace his location." The crew and Detective Pitt think that Ramsey has special technology to block anyone from tracing him. However, the crew and Detective Pitt are preventing Ramsey from blocking the trace by contacting their fellow peers at the National Security Agency (NSA). The NSA collects hundreds of millions of emails, texts, and phone calls every day. They also have the ability to collect and sift through billions more. Detective Pitt and the crew also contact the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Security Branch Analysis Center (NSBAC). Combined, these two agencies have more than 1.5 billion government and private sector records about US citizens collected from commercial databases, government information, and criminal probes. Detective Pitt and his team do this in order to trace and locate Ramsey.

On Sunday, January 24, 2000, the FBI, CIA, U.S. Military, and local police officers trace and locate Ramsey and Roy Jones.

Roy Jones continues to cry and replay the moment he was grabbed at the bus stop in his head. He remembers the fear he felt when the masked man grabbed him and put a bad-smelling rag on his face.

Ramsey could feel he was being hunted like an animal. "I don't think I am going to escape this time, but I have to try," said Ramsey to himself. But on second thought, Ramsey thinks, "If I bring Roy with me and escape from Detective Pitt, I will be able to sell Roy for a lot of money." Ramsey put the smelly rag on Roy's face again. He stuffed Roy in the trunk of his car.

Detective Pitt and the other federal agencies set up roadblocks and spike strips, and are ready to make an arrest. A black Nissan GTR flies by at 106 miles per hour. *Pop!* The tires blow. The black Nissan GTR spins out of control and finally stops. The police and

government crews are pointing guns at Ramsey. They command him, "Step out of the vehicle with your hands up!"

Ramsey steps out with his hand up. Ramsey, with a smirk on his face, asks, "What took you guys so long to find me?" Ramsey gets on his knees and puts his hands behind his head. Detective Pitt is so relieved and satisfied to finally put handcuffs on a man he had been hunting for so long.

Ramsey is taken into custody and questioned. He doesn't fight. Ramsey refuses to speak to anyone without a lawyer. Although Detective Pitt is disgusted by Ramsey, he remains professional.

The police hear something flopping around in the trunk of the vehicle. They open the trunk and discover Roy Jones. The officers are surprised that Roy appears unharmed. They take Roy Jones to the hospital to be examined.

While at the hospital, Roy is interviewed about the details of his abduction. Roy tells Detective Pitt, "I was the only one at the bus stop on that cool, foggy morning. I was wearing my backpack. I kneeled down to tie my shoe. All of a sudden, a white van rushed at me with its side door open. A masked man grabbed me and put a smelly rag on my face. Then I woke up with one arm and one ankle, chained to a wall in a cold, dark room. It was all so quick. I didn't even have a chance to scream or leave a clue that I had been taken. Even when I was chained to the wall, I never saw his face. He would bring me food with the mask on his face and never spoke a word to me." Roy is so grateful to be reunited with his family and go home.

On February 14, 2003, Ramsey is found guilty of multiple homicides, kidnappings, and selling children illegally. He is sentenced to death row and placed in the Pelican Bay State Prison, which is a supermax California state prison in Crescent City, California. The 275-acre facility has an "X" section designed to keep California's known "worst of the worst" prisoners in long-term solitary confinement.

After 11 years of appealing his sentence to death row, Ramsey failed. On February 17, 2014, Ramsey was executed by lethal injection. Roy Jones was not present at Ramsey's death, but he knew the date it was scheduled.

Roy Jones was then 22 years old. He woke up that morning and said, "I forgive you, Ramsey, for what you did to me." Roy Jones forgave the man so that he could move on with his life. Roy

graduated from college with a psychology degree and plans to help children who have survived kidnapping.

A FAMILY TRIP

In A FAMILY TRIP by Lauren M. Talbot, a car ride threatens to become a tragedy for one girl and her unsuspecting parents.

One cold, icy morning, the Cooper family was leaving for a nice family camping vacation in Florida. The daughter, Marie, did not want to leave. She said, "It's too icy and cold for the road, and our car is stinky." She, of course, had to come along with her family.

Once they were in the car driving, the roads got really slippery, and Marie got really scared. Her mom and dad were cautious, and continued slowly along the roads.

When her dad turned on the radio, everyone was fretting about the weather. The reporters said that there was going to be a massive snowstorm coming their way, and not to drive on the roads. Dad was looking very nervous. His hands were shaking on the wheel, and he was driving slowly, not knowing what would come next.

Suddenly, the car was making noises and turning off and on. "What's happening!"

Marie screamed. The car was slipping on ice, and it finally ran into a pile of snow on the curb. When Marie opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was her scraped-up knees and shattered glass everywhere.

Everyone in the car was dead silent for a whole minute. Everything was cold, wet, and damaged on the inside. They were all sitting in the car in shock. Finally, the parents got out of the car by shoving over glass that was all over their seats. They helped Marie out safely, too.

The Coopers screamed and yelled at each other over whose fault it was. Then they tried calling the police, but could not get through. They also tried the internet, but that did not work either. Marie was in terror, screaming and shouting, "Why today, Dad!"

"We will just have to walk," said Dad.

After they finally gave up walking for a mile, they decided to hitchhike their way to town.

With each passing car, the family saw that no one would give up their time to help a poor family out. They kept trying. Marie saw a

van approach, and she held up the sign. The van quickly stopped, and the man greeted them.

Mom and Dad were relieved to finally have someone take them to town, but they did not like his looks. The driver was nice to them and said that it would be fine to do this. Marie's parents finally gave up and went with the man.

The man drove fast, like a rocket. There was one strange thing with this guy. He was really creepy and gave Marie stares as he drove. Marie thought he was really disturbing, so she kept quiet.

The creepy trip finally ended. "Well, here we are!" Mom said, and thanked the man. It all happened in a flash. The driver got mom and dad out first. Marie came second, but the door was suddenly stuck. "Hey, guy! Can you please open the door for me?" said Marie, but the driver didn't even hear her. The parents did not notice that Marie was still in the van. They just kept walking.

Marie was trying to open the door, but it would not budge. Marie was getting nervous. She was screaming for her parents while the man was running towards the driver's seat. The parents looked back as the man drove away. Marie was already gone.

"Where's Marie!" Mom screamed while she was looking for her.

"Marie!" Dad yelled. They quickly found out that their daughter was still in the van with the man!

"Shhhhhhhh, don't make a move," said the driver. Marie screamed and shoved to try to get out of the van, but the driver would not let her. She was far away from town now, and she was scared her parents would never come and get her back.

While the parents were still trying to find Marie, her dad was calling the police and telling them that his daughter had been kidnapped. Then he remembered the time when Marie got lost in the park. He had tracked her phone down and found her. He got this idea and told it to the police.

When they found out where she was, the police drove to that highway and called her. "Oh! It's the police!" she said.

"Now what?" said the driver. The man was really scared of the police catching him, so he dropped off Marie on a sidewalk in a different city and just left her. She was still on the phone with the police and told them what just happened. She also told them his license plate number. After the call, the police quickly picked up

Marie and went back to town, and the parents got their daughter back.

The day after, the police found the van. The police finally arrested the man.

The Cooper family ended their crazy trip by towing their car, getting a rental, and heading to Florida for the sunny beaches.

THE HEIST

After her day turns fishy, Margaret realizes she shouldn't judge a book by its cover in **THE HEIST** by *Ella Plumstead*.

It was Monday, which meant that we went out to eat dinner as a family. My parents are really busy, so we have a day each week to catch up on what was going on. I was in the car with my parents, fidgeting with my seatbelt, when we lurched to a stop.

My dad shouted, "We're here! Japanese food, here I come!"

I hopped out of the car and started to walk in. Japanese food is my favorite thing to have for dinner.

"Margaret! Hurry up!" said my mom.

"I'm coming, Mom," I replied.

I walked into a room of great smells and realized that this might be a great day. I saw the chef preparing my favorite Japanese meal, sushi. The chef asked me if I wanted to try a sample, and it was the best sushi that I had ever had! It was crunchy, and it had warm rice with fresh fish. It made my mouth water for more.

Immediately after we sat down I knew what I wanted to eat. After I ordered the sushi, I ordered fortune cookies for afterward to enjoy. Our food came about ten minutes later, and I gobbled it all down.

I decided to eat my first fortune cookie at the restaurant. I slowly took the wrapper off, and I pulled the fortune out from inside. It said, "Don't judge a book by its cover." I thought, *What a cheesy fortune*. As soon as I finished my cookie, we got in the car. I wanted to eat my second cookie, but I decided to save it for later.

As our beat-up, old, gray Jeep pulled into the driveway, I noticed a moving truck in the driveway of the house directly across from us. The movers were moving boxes and furniture into the house. There was a dad, a mom, and a little boy about my age who was riding his bike around the movers. I decided to go introduce myself to the family. I said "Hi! I'm Margaret! I live in the blue house across from you! Welcome to the neighborhood!"

The mom replied, "Hi, Margaret! I am Mrs. Lewis, and this is my husband, Mr. Lewis. The boy over there on the bike is my son, Max. We just moved here from Michigan. This seems like a lovely neighborhood."

Mr. Lewis said, "Yes, indeed it does. You seem like a nice young girl. Now if you'll please excuse me, I have to take Max to baseball practice. Max, it is time to go!" As Max was walking over, I couldn't help but notice that Max had a small scar across his left cheek.

Max replied, "All right, Dad."

Mrs. Lewis and I moved aside so Mr. Lewis's slick, shiny Lamborghini could pull out of the driveway. Mrs. Lewis said, "We should have you and your family over sometime for dinner, Margaret!"

I replied, "That would be great! I better start making my way back home. Bye, Mrs. Lewis."

Mrs. Lewis then replied, "Bye, Margaret."

When I got home, I opened the fortune cookie that I had received earlier. To my surprise, instead of a fortune inside, I found a weird sketch of a building and small writing at the bottom that said "7_27_15 BLFB ROBBERY. I thought "Wait a second, 7_27_15 might stand for July 27th, 2015! That's tomorrow!" I rushed inside and showed my mom the fortune.

My mom said, "It's just a sketch, Margaret. It probably doesn't mean anything."

I said, "But Mom, it has tomorrow's date and says 'Robbery!'"

My mom replied "Maybe, but it doesn't give any specific information like where the robbery would take place."

But it did mean something! I just felt it. I thought, "Who would believe me?" Then I saw that Mr. Phillips was outside watering his flowers. "He's a retired policeman! He would believe me!"

I quickly grabbed the sketch, and I rushed over to his house.

He greeted me politely and said "Hi, Margaret. Isn't it a beautiful evening?"

I replied "Yes, it really is. I need your opinion on something." I opened the fortune, and he glanced at it for awhile.

He finally replied, "What is this?"

I said, "I found this inside a fortune cookie, and it has a strange code at the bottom. I think that it means that a robbery could take place July 27th, 2015, but that is all I really know. This seems really suspicious. What do you think it means?"

Mr. Phillips responded, "It's very interesting, but I don't know what BLFB stands for. I think it is just a silly misunderstanding, Margaret. Don't worry about it. Enjoy the nice weather!"

As I was walking home, I thought, “Maybe Mr. Phillips is right!” But I was determined to figure out the code’s meaning. Right when I got home, I got on my computer and searched for “BLFB” in the area. One of the sites that I found was for Blue Lane Federal Bank. Then, It hit me! It stood for July 27th, 2015 Blue Lane Federal Bank Robbery! I rushed back to Mr. Phillips and explained to him what the code might stand for.

Mr. Phillips said, “I will mention it to the police. You will hear from me as soon as they find any information.”

I thanked him and I headed home.

The next morning, I was eating breakfast and watching TV when the reporter came on and said, “Breaking news! Bandits trying to break into Blue Lane Federal Bank have been caught! They are a well-known theft group who was posing as a normal family.” Then, the TV showed a picture of the bandits.

I stared at the picture for a second and I thought, *That looks just like Mr. and Mrs. Lewis and their son Max!* Then I noticed that the little boy had a scar on his face just like Max, and I knew it was them. I rushed my parents over to the TV. They were in awe too.

Then my dad said, “They seemed like nice people. You can never tell who someone is just by their appearance. I guess you can’t judge a book by its cover.”

HONEYDEW STAR

*It's a great birthday for one girl until things take an unexpected turn for the worse. In **HONEYDEW STAR** by **Anwen Jones**, join Honeydew as she works to solve a mystery before it ruins her happy life.*

It's Honeydew's 18th birthday, and she is with her parents, Mallard and Kellie Star, at their summer cabin. She decides to go to a meadow with a river nearby the cabin. She looks at the wood clock on the cabin wall, and it says that it is noon.

She walks to the meadow and feels a sudden sharp pain in her neck. Honeydew suddenly feels sleepy, as if she has not slept for ages. She falls asleep near the river, and doesn't wake for hours.

She wakes up and sees that the sun is starting to set. Honeydew runs to their family's summer cabin, only to realize that the door is wide open and no one is home. *What's going on?* Honeydew thinks. She walks into the cabin and sees scratches on the walls, as if someone was trying to escape someone else, or something.

She runs out of the cabin into the back, and finds a small note on a swing that hangs from a willow tree.

Dearest Honeydew,

Oh how much I hate you. You ruined my life, so I will ruin yours! Another note lies in a nearby place, closer than you think. Think about this swing, and what it hangs from. The notes will lead you to your parents. You must find them by June 3rd; otherwise they shall die! Hurry now, little one, or else.

-A.K.M.

Honeydew looks around, wondering where her parents could be, and who A.K.M. is. She starts to think about her cousin, Alice Khalid Monke, and how much she hates her. She remembers Alice saying

that she would get revenge. She also remembers Alice hating her because she thought Honeydew killed her parents.

Honeydew sits against the giant willow tree and hits her head on something. She discovers a little branch that she'd never seen before on the willow tree, and inspects it. She knocks on the trunk, comparing it to the branch. She realizes that the branch is made out of metal instead of wood, and tries pulling on it. Honeydew falls backward, the metal branch in her hand. Part of the tree sinks into the ground, revealing a secret room in the willow tree.

Honeydew drops the metal branch and slowly crawls into the room. The tree was hollowed, as if someone cut out the insides. She sees wires on the wall, and multiple computers on a table. She realizes that the wires and computers made the tree part sink. In the tree, there is a cotton bed, an oak wood table complete with an oak wood chair, and a small rug. It looks as if someone has been living in here for a while. She finds a journal, which says *"Honeydew went to the river today. I used my dart to make her fall asleep. I must go now, and capture them while I can."*

She looks for a note but is unable to find anything near the bed or table and chair. She looks under the rug, and finds another small note.

So you've found this note also, in my living area. Another note awaits you in a place filled with creepy crawlies, you know, the kind that you hate? Anyways, find that note, and it brings you closer to finding your parents. Remember, you have until June 3rd.

-A.K.M.

Honeydew takes the note, leaves the tree, and walks into the cabin, locking all the doors and windows. She walks into her parents' room, climbs into their bed, and sobs. She rubs her neck, squeezing the sides, and eventually falls asleep, cheeks tear-stained.

She wakes up the next day, hearing thunder outside, and walks to her parents' water-closet and washes herself. She changes out of the primrose dress she is wearing and into a flexible, flowing sky-blue dress. She unlocks the windows, but leaves the doors locked.

She walks downstairs and faces the door that leads to the cabin's basement. She slowly opens the basement door, only to hear a shrieking noise, and realizes it is just the door. She takes a deep breath and stares into the darkness that is waiting.

She runs into the kitchen and grabs a few candles and matches, lighting one candle. She walks down the creaky stairs that lead into the basement, holding the candle she lit, and sees a piece of a note out of the corner of her eye. She walks toward the note and reads it.

Ugh, why don't you just give up?! You have one more note to find, and it is a place where this all started, where you fell asleep after I shot a sleep dart into your neck. You probably don't know what I'm talking about because the dart numbs that area. A place of water and peace.... Or so it seems. Hurry now, because that is the last one.

-A.K.M.

Honeydew stares at the note, confused, and walks out of the basement and blows out the candle, only to discover a millipede on her arm. Honeydew screams and shakes it off of her hand. She grabs a pan and kills the millipede with the pan. She unlocks the door to the backyard, shaking.

She looks at the swing, and can't find another note. She becomes soaked from the rain, and she runs inside and looks into her room and her parents' room. *Where I fell asleep... The river!* Honeydew thinks.

She runs to the meadow and feels a sudden pain in her neck. She feels her neck with her hand and pulls out a large object. She drops the object and looks at her hand soaked in blood.

She runs into the river to clean off her hand and neck and looks around to find healing herbs. Honeydew trips on something and falls

headfirst into the river. She looks at what she tripped on. It is a bag on a bed of rocks. She grabs it and finds the final note.

Congrats, you found this note. Tomorrow your parents shall die. They are in a place you wouldn't dare go, a place of dread. Where people mourn and despise the idea of their loved ones under dirt. Hurry, or you'll live alone FOREVER.

-A.K.M.

Honeydew thinks, *How does Alice know that tomorrow is the 3rd of June?* She starts walking, not realizing where she is heading. Night starts to fall upon the world, and all is silent, except for the *click* and the *clack* of Honeydew's shoes.

Honeydew walks through the night until she reaches the town, which is bursting with activity. She eventually realizes where she is walking to. She walks into the town's mausoleum.

A few mourners are in there, but none notice Honeydew. She sees an area that is closed, with wood covering the doors. She hears muffled screaming and smashes through the door.

She hits the ground with a *bump*, and sees someone waiting for her. "So you've finally arrived. I was about to go ahead and then kill them, but what's the fun of doing that? I'll torture *you* by killing your parents in front of you to spice things up," says Alice.

Honeydew gasps and says, 'W-w-why, Alice? I've done nothing to you!' Honeydew tries to contain her tears of anger and sadness. She runs to Alice and tackles her to the ground. Her parents are gagged in a corner, and their screams are muffled by the gags.

Alice cuts Honeydew's arm, but Honeydew is able to grab the knife before Alice can do further damage. Honeydew uses the knife to stab Alice in the chest, striking her heart. Alice bleeds uncontrollably, and dies from the painful blow.

Honeydew's tears drip from her face as she pulls out the knife. She slowly walks to her parents and cuts off the ropes and gags. Her parents hug Honeydew and cry. In between sobs, her mother and father say, "My baby, are you OK? I missed you. Are you SURE you are OK? Thank you so much!"

Honeydew says, "I missed you guys, too. Are you two OK? Don't worry about me." They all hug and continue crying. Surprisingly, no one there hears them.

Honeydew and her parents walk out of the room and leave to go to the police. They lead them back to the room and Alice's body.

They go back to their house in Wales, and never return to that summer house, for it has too many memories, some bad and some good.

JERRY AND THE TERRORISTS

*Life is not just a walk in the park. In **JERRY AND THE TERRORISTS** by **Charles Hermann**, an innocent stroll takes Jerry's life in a strange new direction.*

It was a typical morning in West Bloomfield, Michigan. When the light of the sun reflected off the shimmering grass, Jerry Jerrjerr knew it would be a great day. The sun smiled at him and said it would be amazing. The sun said his whole life would turn around. The sun was positive about this, as was Jerry. Jerry was also positive he should go see a therapist considering the fact that the sun had just spoken to him.

Jerry was 34 years old. He went to college for four years, no more, no less. He had a bachelor's degree in statistics. He had recently been turned down for a few accounting jobs he had applied for. Well, it was more than a few. He had applied for 36 accounting jobs, and been turned down for all but one of them. Today was the day he would find out if he gets hired for that job, and all the anticipation was overwhelming him. He decided to go for a walk in the park.

Now, Jerry hasn't been doing well in life (I really don't know how else to state it, but that's the best I could do). He is single, living in a small apartment building. He can barely pay his rent, so he didn't have anything but a fish to keep him company. It was a small, dark blue betta fish, to be exact. The other day, that fish died. Most people would have cried if one of their only acquaintances had passed, but Jerry took it as a sign. He thought it meant he wouldn't need the fish anymore, because soon he could raise a family. Jerry knew that that one job would do so much for him.

As he was walking gracefully in the park, he heard his cell phone ringing. He picked it up and saw who it was from. It was from the BIAS (Boring Institute of Accounting Stuff)! He picked it up eagerly, somehow not knowing he had wandered out of the park and into the street with fast-moving vehicles rushing around. He started to talk.

"Hello? This is Jer-" **BAMMMM!** He felt the indescribably hard touch of a fast-moving vehicle to his stomach. It was unbelievably painful. He saw these big, muscular men carry him into the trunk of

their car. Well, that's not what he saw. The impact of the vehicle had messed up his head, and so what he saw was a miniature cow and a big pig carry him into a big stack of hay. Why it was farm themed, he did not know. But he didn't have time to find out why, because he had blacked out.

He woke up roughly 10 hours later, still in the trunk of the car. As he started to make sense of his surroundings, he realized he was covered in guns. They were everywhere in the trunk. He would have screamed, except he had forgotten how to. The sound just couldn't come out of his mouth. He was trying to, but the more he tried to force it out of him, the more he started to cry. He didn't know why. He had no idea why any of this was happening. Why he was in the trunk of this strange car, he did not know that either. What he did know is that he must have amnesia, because he couldn't remember anything about anything that had ever happened in his life. He was sure that when the car stopped the nice men that were driving the car would explain everything to him.

A few hours later, the car made a sudden stop in this huge garage with an extremely high ceiling. Jerry stumbled out of the trunk, still not completely aware of his surroundings.

"Hello? Get up!" scowled one of the men. He walked closer to Jerry, as did the other man.

"Hello? Is that Adele and her magic dwarf?" asked Jerry, in a very puzzled way.

"What the heck are you talking about?" asked one of the men. "Just because I'm shorter than him doesn't mean you have to be rude!"

"Now, now, Mom, he didn't mean it that way."

"Yes he did, Dad," said the shorter one in an upset tone. Jerry finally started to come to his senses.

"Wait, you are Dad? And you, the midget, you're Mom?"

"Those are our code names. Mom and Dad. We work for a terrorist organization led by our leader, the Grand Mom. And you, Son, are our newest member," said Mom.

"Son, hmmm. Has a nice ring to it." At that moment, Jerry was eager to find out what this exciting ego that was given to him by Mom and Dad had to hold next. However, it wasn't exactly what he expected.

“Here.” Dad handed Jerry a pistol. Jerry was completely and utterly shocked.

“What do you want me to do with this?” asked Jerry.

“We’re going to the closest bank and taking \$2,000,000,” exclaimed Mom.

“Ok, let’s go!” said Jerry with excitement. He didn’t realize he was taking on this whole other persona. He assumed that the life he led before the amnesia must have been this one.

They jumped back in the car. He jumped in the trunk (Jerry assumed that’s where he normally sits). Jerry didn’t know what to feel: adrenaline or a lot of fear.

The road they were on was completely dead. There was no one driving, no people, and just a few parked cars.

Soon after they started to drive, Jerry felt something. It was some sort of memory. He was out on the street waiting for a phone call. He could tell it was important. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a car. It had a striking resemblance to the very car he was in right now. Then, suddenly, he felt the indescribably hard touch of a fast-moving vehicle to his stomach. It was unbelievably painful. He saw these big, muscular men carry him into the trunk of their car. Then, it all came back to him. He needed to get out of this vehicle. He made a terrible decision. He opened the trunk and jumped out.

All the excitement and pain overwhelmed him. As he hit the ground and rolled around rubbing against the gravel, all he could think about was, *Did I get that job?* He stopped thinking about that and turned around. He saw big puddles of blood behind him in the area he had rolled out of the car. He knew he would have to find some way to get back to Michigan. He decided to take one of the cars in the street, but before he could touch the handle of the door on the car, an old woman unexpectedly smacked his hand.

“You old whippersnapper ain’t gonna touch that car, for I am the Grand Mom!” yelled the women in an old, worn-out, gravelly voice.

“It’s you, the Grand Mom! Mom and Dad were talking about you! You’re the leader of this cruel organization!” exclaimed Jerry.

“That’s right, sonny! We needed a new member of our group so we decided to go to Michigan and run a random person over and kidnap them. And guess what? I’m gonna take you down!” she yelled. That’s when she made her first move. She whacked Jerry in the face with her walker. She struck him in the stomach so hard he

could barely breathe. For her final move, she karate-chopped his legs, and he collapsed on the ground.

“That will teach you youngsters to get off Grand Mom’s lawn!” said Grand Mom. Just when Jerry thought all was lost, Grand Mom collapsed on the ground. Jerry limped over to her and felt her heartbeat. There was none. She was dead. Well, she must have been at least 90.

Jerry knew that that must have meant he had won. Jerry felt an incredible triumph because he had won, but he also knew that he should probably mourn the loss of that dead old lady on the ground.

As he slowly limped back in the car, all he could think about was *Will I get that job?* He hoped that soon enough, he would find the answer to that question.

KIDNAPPED

*When a boy is kidnapped by wanted criminals, he will have to escape or die trying in **KIDNAPPED** by **Nicole Bozyk**.*

Jack was just an ordinary kid in sixth grade. He had a younger sister, a mom, and a dad. As Jack was walking home from another normal day at school, he looked into his neighbors' window and caught a glimpse of something. He saw two men stealing a television from the wall.

One of the men turned around and saw Jack standing there. He nudged the other person and pointed to Jack. They both were looking at him now. Jack had to get out of there quick.

As Jack was running to his house, he heard footsteps, and then a car door close. Jack's heart was racing as he heard the car getting closer and closer. The car pulled up next to him, and someone jumped out of the car and grabbed hold of Jack. He used the strength he could muster to try to break free from whoever was pulling him into the van. Suddenly he felt a sharp pain in his head, and he was out cold.

When Jack woke up he was in the back of a van with a pain that felt like he was getting hit repeatedly on the head with a frying pan. Jack was starting to freak out when he remembered why he was in this van. He looked at the two doors that could take him to his freedom. Jack noticed the van wasn't moving and took the chance to jump out.

He opened the doors. He could not believe the stupidity of these kidnapppers. A man in a mask looked at him from the passenger seat and yelled, "The boy, he's escaping!" Jack jumped onto the ground onto a front yard.

"This is where you will be staying for a while," said a gruff voice under a ski mask as he pulled Jack onto his feet.

"What do you want with me?" Jack asked.

"Nobody can know our identities," the bigger of the two said.

The men walked Jack into the house they were standing in front of and then took him back into a big bedroom with a king-size bed. They locked him in.

Jack decided to have a look around the room to make an escape plan. The windows had bars, the door was locked, and there were

security cameras everywhere. It looked pretty escape-proof to Jack. There was no place to go.

For the next day Jack was trapped there. He continued to try his best to figure out a way to escape. The men had taken Jack's phone the first day he arrived.

On the second night, he thought of it: He could take the guard's key when he was asleep. When it was nighttime, Jack slowly opened his door to check if the guard was asleep, and he was. Jack took the key to freedom and replaced it with a banana that he had stashed away from an earlier meal.

Jack was almost out the door when he heard footsteps. He looked around, but there was nowhere to hide. He braced himself. His sister Abby turned the corner! "Jack," she whispered, "over here."

Jack ran over to his sister. "What are you doing here? How did you find me? And why didn't you tell Mom?" Jack whispered.

"I used my phone to track yours, and Mom is not home. I couldn't wait till she got home because I thought if you weren't already dead, they would do it soon. Now, do you want to get out of here or not? Mom's hiring a detective if you don't come home ASAP."

They ran to the door. As Jack and Abby turned the corner they ran smack into one of the kidnappers with his mask off. Jack and Abby both gasped in horror as they both recognized him as one of the most wanted murderers ever known. "I was sent to kill one. Who knew I would be able to kill one more?" He looked delighted.

He drew a knife from his pocket and moved toward Abby. Anger leaped inside Jack like never before. Before he knew what he was doing, he grabbed a lamp nearby and beat the villain with it. As he was doing this, his sister kicked the knife out of the murderer's hands.

They ran faster than they had ever run in their lives. They ran even faster as they heard people running behind them. Jack risked a look behind him and saw the biggest man trip over a rock, tripping the rest of the men behind him. The kids crossed the front yard and ran across the street, all the way to their house and to their mom.

"Mom, there are kidnappers—"

"—and murderers—"

"—they kidnapped me—"

"—and I saved him—"

“—they kidnapped me!”

Their mom looked Jack straight in the face, and said with a very strict voice she rarely uses, “Jack Patrick Bush, I don't know where you have been, but don't make that sort of stuff up. I think you should go to your room, and when I come up there, you will tell me the real story.”

Jack walked to his room in shock at what just happened. He thought for sure his mom would believe him and pamper him for what happened. Just before Jack closed the door, he mouthed “Help me” to his sister.

A few days later, the news came out about how there were kidnappers and thieves on the loose in the area. Everyone was warned to stay inside until they were caught. At that point, Jack's mom's realized the truth.

THE KIDNAPPING

In **THE KIDNAPPING** by Sasha Miller, the aunt that Sarah never knew has devious plans for her.

What started out as an ordinary day for Sarah quickly turned into a very scary day. Sarah realized she was being followed.

Sarah was riding her bike to the corner market to get her mom a loaf of bread and pomegranate seeds. She noticed a lady following and staring at her in the store. As the lady realized Sarah saw her staring, the lady looked away quickly. Sarah was really creeped out, so she sprinted to the bread and fruit aisle.

The next day, Sarah was at the mall with her friends. She noticed the same creepy lady from the market staring at her. Sarah didn't mention it to her friends but kept an eye on the lady.

Sarah's friends were waiting in line for a smoothie, and Sarah was waiting outside of the smoothie place on a bench. Sarah got up to go join her friends so she could tell them about the creepy lady. Then the lady snuck up behind her and grabbed her. Sarah screamed, but nobody came to rescue her. Nobody saw the lady grab Sarah. The creepy lady squeezed one of her pressure points to make her faint.

The next morning Sarah woke up in a place she had never seen before. It was a very dusty and dark abandoned house. Sarah was speechless and frightened. She soon saw the creepy and wrinkly lady come sit down next to her. The lady said to her in a very scratchy voice, "Hi, I am your aunt that you have never met before, and I kidnapped you because I am very lonely." The aunt was lonely because she had never gotten married and she never had kids.

Sarah replied in a shaky voice, "I need to get home to my parents. I have plans tonight."

Sarah and the aunt argued for a while when all of a sudden Sarah's phone rang. Her parents were calling her. The aunt snatched the phone out of her hand. The aunt said to her, "Please stay with me. I need someone to talk to. I am so lonely, and you are so sweet. Please, Sarah."

Sarah said back, "No, please let me go!"

The aunt stayed really cautious after she knew Sarah didn't

want to stay with her.

Sarah knew she had to make a plan to escape. Sarah's plan was to wake up when her aunt was still sleeping, and then go out the front door and run home. When Sarah was attempting to escape, it did not go as planned.

At three o'clock in the morning she got up and was ready to leave. She finally reached the front door when she realized that every exit in the house was dead- bolted, even the windows. Her aunt had known the plan the whole time. Sarah turned around to see her aunt standing there with a nasty look on her face. The aunt punched her, and she passed out.

The next morning she woke up on the ground with a huge purple bruise on her face. Since she got punched so hard she lost all her memory. When the aunt walked in, Sarah said, "Hi, Mom."

The aunt was so surprised she said, "Mom? Oh yeah, right, I am your mom."

She just pretended to be her mom.

Three long years after being trapped in the house, Sarah gained back her memory when she stood up. She would just lie in her bed all day, and when she got up it made her brain go back to normal. When her aunt walked in Sarah remembered that her mom didn't look that way.

She saw a phone in her aunt's left pocket, and she remembered that her case looked exactly the same. She grabbed it and right away called 911. The aunt decided to just let her call because she realized how miserable Sarah was.

The police came and took the aunt away. Then her parents came and were so glad to finally see her because they thought she was dead.

After a long three years she had finally been reunited with her family. Her mother and father were in tears because they finally found their beautiful daughter. They were also furious at the aunt for kidnapping Sarah.

The aunt had to go to jail for the rest of her life for kidnapping Sarah.

THE KILLER ON THE RUN

THE KILLER ON THE RUN by *J. Wesley* is the story of a woman with a long memory and a bad attitude.

Well, I have been thinking of what he did to me 20 years ago. Jordan and I went to the prom together, and he dumped me. He went to hang out with my friend Kimberly. I will never forget that day. Right then I made a plan to kill him, and today was the day! I waited 20 years because I wanted him to have a family and take Jordan from his love ones. If I can't have him, no one can.

"Hi, Mom."

"Hey, honey. What brings you here?"

"Oh, I just came to get a nice cold lemonade."

"Sorry, V, I didn't make any today. Maybe come by and get some tomorrow."

"Hey, Mom, I am going out with some old friends tonight."

"Great! I was about to suggest that you should take a session with a psychiatrist or go on a date. I am happy for you, V, you haven't been on a date since prom."

"We must not speak of that," I said.

Now let's get back to the plan. Well, actually, you don't know my wonderful plan. The idea is to get a knife from Max's knife store, and then show up at Jordan's house when he is sleeping. That's when everything kicks into gear.

It was time to get the weapon. The store is a few blocks down from my mom's house.

I walked into the store, "Hey, Vanessa, haven't seen you in a while," said Max.

"Oh, I just have stuff on my mind. Can you get me the biggest blade knife you have?"

"What brand is best for you? We have killer knife and just stab? Ha-ha, that was just a joke," said Max.

"Thanks. I'll see you later."

Three hours later, it was pitch-black outside, and the nearby streetlights were out. I knew it was time. I casually walked up to Jordan's house and used the knife to pry the window open. I

climbed inside all spy-like and hid under the bed. I noticed that Jordan and his wife were in the bed.

I waited under the bed until Jordan's daughter called her mom. Once the wife left, I jumped from up under the bed and put a pillow over his head. I stabbed him 17 times.

Jordan's wife, Kimberly, came running in when she heard him yell for help. By the time she got there, I had slipped out of the window. Once I got out I ran for my life.

I had to find a hideout somewhere, and that meant far from home for a few years. I ran and I ran for days. I stayed at dirty motels and gave a fake name at check-in and I ate in the back of the restaurant dumpsters. After two months, I decided to stop running from the police and turn myself in because *I killed the love of my life*. What reason do I have to stay free?

I walked into the nearest police station and said, "My name is Vanessa Parker." An officer recognized me right away and handcuffed me and said, "You have the right to remain silent..."

KILLING ZONE

*A threat to his family takes Jack completely by surprise. It's up to Jack to stop whatever is out there in the forest in **KILLING ZONE** by **Nicolas Coignet**.*

Jack and Roenak woke up to a foggy and warm morning. The night before, they had had a sleepover. After breakfast Jack and Roenak went out into the woods to have some fun.

When they were outside, they heard a voice. They did not know what it was, so they went closer to this sound. They found a note that said, "I will find Jack's family and destroy them with all my anger." Attached to the note was a picture of Jack's family. In it were his mom, dad, sister, and Jack. The photo had a big red X marked through each face of his family.

Roenak said, "What is that? I am scared! I don't know what to do."

"The first thing we should do is get out of the woods. The second thing is we should tell my family. You should go home, and stay as far away from the forest as possible," said Jack. Then Jack grabbed the picture and ran home, while Roenak ran to his house.

Jack got inside and gathered his family around the kitchen table. He told his family everything he saw in the woods. He handed his dad the photo he found in the woods. Jack stated, "That's all I know right now."

Jack's family was silent. He looked around the table and saw his mom, dad, and sister staring blankly with their eyes wide open and their mouths dropped. They were looking at the picture.

"Where did you find this?" Jack's mom asked.

His sister stated, "Who could have done this?"

His dad added, "And why?" Everybody at home was shocked and scared at the same time.

Jack's family went to the police station. His dad showed the police the photo, and Jack told them about how he found it in the woods along with the sticky note.

"Who do you think did this?" asked the police.

Jack responded by saying, "I don't know who would hate me or my family this much. I thought I had really good friends."

Jack's dad answered, "Well, there is this one person who kept calling us and asking if Jack wanted to come over."

The police asked, "Could you tell if it was a boy or a girl?"

"It was a boy," answered his dad.

"Can you describe the boy's voice?" asked the police.

"Well, he seemed kind of mad at someone, but I don't know if it was us or someone else," answered Jack's dad.

"Did your family do anything to make someone mad?" demanded the police.

"No, we never did anything mean to anybody," answered Jack's dad.

The police told the family to go back home and be careful where they were going. They should try to stay in their home until the police had more information for them.

Jack and his family made it to their house. When they got inside, there was a message on their phone from Roenak. It was to Jack, and it said, "Jack, please call me! I have information that may help figure out who left that picture."

Jack called Roenak, and Roenak said, "On our way home, I remember stepping over a knife. That could have been from the person who left that note and picture." Jack was stunned. He thanked Roenak and hung up the phone quickly. Jack decided not to give this information to his family, and quietly sneaked out the front door to go and find the knife.

Jack recovered the knife. He picked it up with a glove so the DNA could possibly be picked up from this knife. He put it in a plastic bag. On the way home, he saw the police out looking in the same area. Jack gave them the knife and told them about his call from Roenak.

The police thanked him for the knife but said, "Why are you here? You should be at home safe with your family."

Jack replied, "I know, but I wanted to see if I could find this knife. Now that I have, I am heading back home now." The police wished him well, and Jack set off for home.

When Jack arrived at his house, he found a note on the front door. It was written on the same paper as the note in the woods. It read, "If you want to see your family alive and healthy you better come to the woods tomorrow night at 8:00 p.m." Jack grabbed the note and ran straight back to the police.

They looked at the note and said, "We will send a police car over to your house right away."

The police got to Jack's house and went inside. The house was empty. Jack was in the backseat of the police car and watching as the police came out alone. Jack was shocked to realize his family had been kidnapped from their own home.

Jack knew he had to make a plan with the police. They decided that Jack would go into the woods about 10 minutes before 8:00 p.m. Then the police would arrive and stop the kidnapper.

Around 7:50, he arrived in the woods and saw someone. Jack recognized the person's face. It was his best friend, Joey. Joey wasn't standing but was propped up against a tree. Jack went over to him and noticed he wasn't breathing. Jack shook him, and Joey just stared blankly into the woods. Joey was dead.

Jack fell to the ground and started to cry. He cried for almost a minute and almost forgot that he had come into the woods on the request of the person leaving the threatening notes. Jack knew he had to save his family before it was too late.

I don't know what to do, Jack thought. Then he realized that the kidnapper had not seen him arrive. That gave Jack an idea. He was going to sneak up and punch him. He was going to start sneaking around the woods until he heard a voice. "I knew you would sneak up on me because I know everything." Jack was stunned. He turned toward the voice, and swung wildly through his tears, hoping that his punch landed on the kidnapper. He uppercut the kidnapper right in the face, and the kidnapper bled but did not fall.

"You are strong, but not strong enough," said the kidnapper. He ran toward Jack and pushed him from the back. Jack fell into a pit and injured his back horribly. Alongside him in the pit was his family. They were tied up and had handkerchiefs in their mouths so they couldn't talk.

"You were a good friend while it lasted, Jack," said the kidnapper.

"What are you talking about? I don't know you," Jack said in pain.

"Yes you do. I am your old friend, Zach. We were best friends until Joey came along. You guys hung out every day, and even when I called your home your parents acted like they didn't even know me. That made me furious with you, and at them. This feeling made me out of control, and that is why you are here right now," said

Zach, the kidnapper. Zach was ready to kill him when all of a sudden the police arrived and stopped him by making Zach fall to the ground.

Zach said, "I will come back for you, Jack. You will pay. Everyone will pay."

Jack was in the pit this entire time. Once the police secured Zach, they tried to help Jack out of the pit, but he couldn't get up because he had broken his back. This injury caused him to be in a wheelchair for three years.

Jack didn't see Zach being taken away by the police, and he didn't see him again until the trial. Jack was in his wheelchair with his family when Zach arrived in the courthouse. After six hours of nonstop debating, the judge called it a day.

Jack and his family had to testify in court about everything that happened leading up to Jack's injury. The trial lasted two more days until Zach was found guilty of trying to kill Jack and also killing Joey. Jack was extremely happy that Zach would be put in jail for the rest of his life. Whenever he walks by the police station he keeps thinking of his lost friend, Joey.

Jack always remembers the day when he saved his family and risked his life for their safety. This gives him courage when he is down because he has to be in a wheelchair.

THE LIPPERT'S LOOTERS

Phil Dawson has much to protect, and there are criminals who know it in THE LIPPERT'S LOOTERS by Lucas Balow.

Phil Dawson, multi-billionaire, was driving down the street to his mansion. He felt unsure about his day. When he got to his house, he was greeted by Deasheen, the butler. “Good afternoon, sir,” said Deasheen.

“Thank you, Deasheen,” Phil replied. Phil then heard the shouting of chefs, maids, and other workers. “Hello, Mr. Dawson!” they all chorused. Phil was tired. The workers, chefs, and maids could tell.

Phil went up the stairs. When he got to his room he got in his casual attire. He turned on the television. The news reporter was telling a story about robber equipment that was sold to someone named Bean. Bean’s picture was on the television. The man who sold the equipment to Bean had confessed, and authorities were now on the lookout for Bean.

Phil was rich because he owned a million Lippert’s Loot dollars, the most valuable currency on Earth. One dollar of Lippert’s Loot is worth 10,000 U.S. dollars! Phil found the Loot while on a vacation—a whole truckload of it. No one ever claimed it, and the Loot became his.

Phil felt his eyes closing to the sound of his loyal staff talking in the distance making him drowsy. He quickly fell asleep, and entered a dream world where he was being chased by three men. He heard muffled shouts of unidentified people. He felt someone grab him and he fell backward. This awakened him, startled, from his dream. He jolted up, and he was sweating and breathing very fast.

“Sir, are you OK?”

Phil was surrounded by several staff members. “I had a bad dream,” said Phil. “Hey, Deasheen, can I get some water?”

“On it, sir,” said Deasheen.

“Thank you,” said Phil.

Phil had never felt so jumpy before. The dream had really shaken him. Then he remembered he was hosting a cocktail party that night. He got all worked up, rushed to his Bugatti Veyron, and drove off to the store.

As Phil was shopping for beverages a strange man approached him. “Are you Phil Dawson?”

“Yes I am,” said Phil, confused.

“You better watch your back tonight,” said the man, and he walked off.

Phil was too preoccupied to wonder about the man or what he said, and he drove back home. When he got home there were already people arriving. Phil joined the party and started talking to people and having a good time.

The catering had arrived, and Phil thought he recognized one of the caterers. “Everyone put your hands up.” It was Bean, the person from the news report, and one other guy. “Hand over the Lippert’s Loot, Mr. Big Shot,” said Bean.

They drove a truck into the mansion and loaded the loot into the truck and fled.

Phil did not know what to do. As he was considering his options, he was hit in the back of the head. It was Deasheen. Phil was woozy and shocked. “My name is not Deasheen, its Stoofen, and I’m with Bean,” he said as he ran away.

Then the other robber showed up—it was the man from the store. His name was Really. Phil tripped him, and he fell. Really pulled out a gun and shot at Phil. Phil took cover, found a glass bottle, and threw it at Really’s head. Really fell to the ground, unconscious, and Phil picked up Really’s gun.

Really was done, so now to find Bean and Stoofen. Phil saw someone running in the hall. He followed as the man turned the corner. He dropped something. It was his driver’s license. It said Bean Taylor.

As Phil ran, he managed to shoot Bean in the leg. Bean fell to the floor, hit his head on the table, and fell down the stairs.

Behind him Phil heard a gunshot. He dodged the bullet, and Stoofen ran up the stairs. Phil pursued him up the stairs until they were at the top floor. Stoofen had a bag of Loot. “This is what you get for treating people like slaves!” Stoofen shouted.

“You were like a son to me. Why are you doing this?” Phil pleaded. There were sirens below. They were 300 feet up. “After your parents left you they told me to make you work hard,” said Phil.

Stoofen fired at him. “My parents didn't care one bit about me.”

Phil stared into the dark eyes of his student. “You have let this Bean man twist your mind. Now I can barely call it a mind.”

Stoofen fired again and dropped his empty gun. Now it was a fistfight. They were several feet away from falling off the roof.

Phil kicked Stoofen over, and he slid off the roof and was holding on. “Help!” Stoofen shouted.

Phil felt remorse and ran over and pulled him up.

As soon as he helped Stoofen onto the roof, Stoofen pulled out a hidden gun and shot Phil, who fell off the building.

After that all went silent. Phil had died the second he hit the ground, and not even his massive wealth could save him.

Bean, Stoofen, and Really were arrested, convicted, and sentenced to life in prison.

A LOVED ONE GONE MISSING

*Avery could sense that something was wrong. In **A LOVED ONE GONE MISSING** by **Grace Sellke**, a story of danger, companionship, and love comes to life.*

Avery was in the stable, brushing Cody down from their lesson. She daydreamed about her upcoming trip to Brazil. Cody huffed softly onto her cheek. Loud noises and laughing could be heard down the aisle.

"I know you want me to turn you out, but there have been too many predators." She ran a hand down his neck. "Sorry, boy."

Avery finished grooming Cody and made sure his feed bucket was clean and full before walking out to the car.

"Avery!" her dad, Drew, called. He was starting to get impatient.

"Coming!" she called back. Suddenly Avery was swamped by her riding friends, who had been making all the noise.

"Ave, you and Cody were *amazing* today," her best friend, Josh, said. He smiled widely at her. Lexi, Talia, and Jake nodded in agreement with Josh.

"Oh, thanks," Avery laughed. "It's just an everyday routine. I'm used to it."

"Well, I have to go. Bye, A." Josh waved and walked off to his dad's truck. Avery watched him walk away before shrugging and turning on her heel. Lexi patted Avery's back before heading in the opposite direction, Talia and Jake trailing behind.

"Dad, I'm going to walk home in a bit. Cody wants to go out, but I need to watch him." Her dad nodded with understanding, and Avery hurried up to the hayloft. She picked up the guitar hidden amongst the straw, and carried it down the ladder.

She clipped a lead onto Cody's halter, and with her guitar in one hand and Cody's lead in the other, walked outside to the paddocks. Avery unclipped the lead and turned the stallion loose before sitting down on the railing of the paddock.

She started to strum as Cody grazed nearby. Avery sang quietly as the sun started to fall. Before darkness blanketed the stable, Avery had hidden the guitar once more, and returned Cody to his stall. She started her walk home.

“Dad!” Avery yelled, walking inside. She glanced around and hurried into the kitchen. “Daddy?” Avery said once more. A silver cross necklace sat on the table, and she scooped it up. Her dad was always home at that hour... Where was he?

Maisie, her Belgian Malinois that had once been a police dog, trotted in.

“Maisie, sniff,” Avery said, holding out the necklace. The Belgian Malinois sniffed at the jewelry before barking and running over to the door. Avery watched her dog’s behavior closely before turning and going upstairs. She searched the rooms and swallowed a lump in her throat. Avery hurried down the stairs to see Maisie waiting at the door. She walked over to the door and pulled on a coat. Opening it, she exited. Maisie padded along at her side.

“Maisie, go search!” Avery commanded. She thought hard on any enemies her father may have. He and Josh’s dad had fought...could Josh’s dad have done something?

The Malinois bolted off, and Avery raced after. They were at the barn soon enough. Maisie waited as Avery got Cody. Not even five minutes after, Avery was out of the barn on Cody’s back, following a racing Maisie.

The night’s indigo-and-white blanket of stars was settled over the land. Avery yawned, exhausted. Cody craned his neck to nudge her leg with his muzzle. Maisie whimpered softly in sympathy, but continued forward. Avery followed as the darkness swallowed the three up, with only the light of the moon guiding them.

* * *

Avery was hardly awake as the first colors of dawn surfaced, moving down the trail on Cody’s lightly dirt-dusted back. Maisie was just ahead, sniffing the trail. Suddenly, she was growling, her teeth bared and fur bristling. Avery hopped off of Cody’s back and walked closer to Maisie.

“What’s wrong, girl?” she asked. Her breath caught in her throat as a cold metal blade pressed against her neck.

“Well, hello, Avery,” a voice said. She swallowed, hearing Josh.

“Get away from me, Josh,” she snarled. She ducked and kicked Josh’s leg, watching as he fell to the ground. Her body trembled with anger and fear.

“Avery, I swear...” Josh growled, lunging at her. Suddenly Maisie leaped at Josh from behind Avery, her powerful jaws clamping onto

his pant leg. She clawed at him, her razor sharp fangs and claws drawing blood. Josh was shaking his leg frantically, now on the ground. He was swatting at Maisie, his blade just skimming her foreleg. The dog clamped down on his leg harder as blood dripped from her cut. Finally Josh's body gave out, and he stopped lashing at Maisie. Maisie backed away, growling.

Avery reached a hand out and ran it down Maisie's back, the dog finally relaxing. Maisie turned back to the trail. She barked for Avery to follow. Avery shook her head, stomping her foot into Josh's stomach. She kicked the blade away with her other foot. He writhed in pain beneath her.

"Where is my father?" Avery growled, pushing her foot farther into Josh's body as he didn't answer.

"I don't know!" Josh screamed. "Stop, you're hurting me!"

"I'm calling the police, and you're going to pay for hurting my dog." She gestured with her hand toward Maisie, who was licking tenderly at the wound on her leg. Avery lifted herself off of Josh as she rang 911. She wrapped Josh's hands with Cody's lead rope as she listened to the ring of her phone.

"911, what's your emergency?" the dispatcher said.

"I was just attacked by a boy with a blade, and my dog is hurt."

"Are you hurt, Miss?" The dispatcher said.

"I'm fine, yes. My father was kidnapped, and I'm searching for him. My dog has his trail. Please hurry!"

The dispatcher seemed to let out a breath.

"Stay where you are. I'll trace your location, and we'll send a squad to find your dad."

The thought of her mother buzzed in the back of Avery's head, but she forced it away. Avery had to find her dad, regardless of what the dispatcher thought. She slipped up onto Cody's back, and galloped off, following Maisie.

A wind blew through the towering pines of the Rockies and pushed Avery's hair from her face. The sun was hot on her skin as she slowed to a halt. Maisie was stopped a few feet away, flattened to the ground, bristling but quiet.

Avery slid off of Cody's back, landing lightly. She tied the stallion to a branch and crept closer stealthily. Voices could be heard inside as Avery hurried to the door of a shed, her loyal companion close by. She slipped into the shed silently, seeing her dad tied to a chair

and Josh's dad interrogating him.

"It's time for payback, Drew. You left me for dead in the woods on our hunting trip. Now, I leave you for dead."

"Carter, I thought the wolves had gotten you.... I never meant to leave you behind. I wouldn't. You know I don't live that way. I tried to find help!"

"Well, you did, you lying sack of bones! I had to get a leg amputated because of you!"

He has a lot of nerve talking to my father like that, Avery thought with a snarl. Avery lunged at Josh's dad, Carter, and tackled him to the ground. Maisie pounced on him and snapped her jaws as Avery frantically untied her dad's ropes. The dog tussled ferociously with Carter.

"Avery! You're here!" Drew cried, standing up. "Thank god."

"Of course I'm here. We have to—" Avery's voice was drowned out by the sound of a yelp, and then a hard *thud*. She turned to see Maisie struggling on the floor, Carter towering over her.

"No! Leave my dog alone!" Avery screamed, lunging at Carter. She flung him to the ground, throwing punches and kicks to his body. His nails dug into her skin and broke it, causing bleeding, as he held her still enough to throw a well-aimed punch. Black-and-blue bruises covered Avery as Carter was dragged away by her father.

Drew shoved Carter out into the sunlight, where cop cruisers unloaded police. Avery followed behind, staying close to Maisie's side. The dog limped, and her eye was swollen. Cuts showed in her black-and-brown fur.

"I'm Officer Peterson. I'll take him." An officer stepped forward and grabbed Carter.

"Hey, watch it! That hurts!" Carter snapped. Officer Peterson shoved him into the back of a cruiser with Josh, who they had already collected. He then turned to see Maisie, recognizing the battered dog he had once called "Partner."

"Maisie, you okay?" he said, worry filling his gaze as he knelt down with Avery to stroke the dog. "You look pretty beaten..." Maisie nuzzled Officer Peterson before settling her head on Avery's leg.

"She's a fighter. She saved me," Avery murmured. She ran a hand down the dog's body. "But we'll both be okay."

Cody watched from a little ways off. He trotted forward, dipping

his head to touch Avery's head. She patted the stallion and stood up. Officer Peterson helped Avery put Maisie on the stallion's back.

"Avery, we should get home. You look exhausted," Drew commented. Avery turned to look at her father, and opened her mouth to protest. "No. Officer Peterson can take you back, if that's okay," Drew said, turning to Officer Peterson. He nodded. "Thanks, Officer. My daughter can give you the address."

"Yup." Avery watched as the cruiser with Josh and Carter in it drove off. She quietly slid into the back of Officer Peterson's cruiser. He hopped in after her.

"What's the address?" he asked, pulling up the GPS.

"1039 Spruce Drive." Avery could hardly get the words out as she fell asleep.

"Avery, we're at your house." Officer Peterson shook her gently.

"Huh? Oh, thanks, Officer." Avery climbed out of the car. Her dad immediately hugged her.

"Thanks, Officer, but we're fine now. I've already filed a report." Her dad held Avery as she leaned against him. "What took you two so long, anyway?"

"I had to stop a few times to warn some kids and monitor an old parking lot. My apologies, Drew. Avery was sleeping anyway. Someone will send you a court appearance date. Be safe, all right?" Officer Peterson got back in his car, and drove away.

"I'm starving," Avery mumbled to her dad. He sighed, and led her inside. She sat down on the couch, and her dad started rummaging through the cupboards for food.

* * *

Avery was dressed in a black skirt, white blouse, and black leather jacket as she sat in the courtroom. Her dad was sitting at a table with his attorney.

"Case closed. Carter Andrews is sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Joshua Andrews is sentenced to twelve years in prison. Parole time for both men is still to be decided." The judge's voice rang across the room. Josh and Carter were taken away, and Drew returned to his daughter.

"Well, I guess we're done here." Drew smiled at Avery, who just nodded.

“I still don’t understand, though.... Why would Josh try to hurt me?” she asked, her eyes reflecting sadness.

“People make bad choices sometimes, Avery. There’s nothing to explain it.” Drew hugged Avery.

“He was my best friend though, Dad. And he still had zero sympathy. If it weren’t for Maisie, things could’ve turned out much worse.”

“I know, honey. Let’s go home and get some lunch, all right? We should check on Maisie anyway.” Her dad smiled.

“Okay. Let’s go then.” Avery thought of her mom, and what her reaction would’ve been if she had stuck around.

She walked out of the courthouse, a cool breeze hitting her face. She climbed into the car as her dad started it. They drove off, Avery finally lightening up. *Maybe one day I’ll find her*, Avery thought, *and bring her home to Dad*. She listened to the radio with the windows down, the thought slipping out of her mind.

THE MAN IN THE CAGE

*Jail is not in the cards for Harold Le Flau until a crazy cousin, a rubber duck, and an illegal poker game change his life in **THE MAN IN THE CAGE** by Joe Doroan.*

“**M**ommy, why is that man in that cage?” said a little girl curiously. Her mom was trying to get herself seen by the news.

“Today we have a man who was caught stealing and now is stuck in a cage. Take a look,” said the news reporter. The man had dark brown hair, and dark blue eyes and was very short. He was amazed at how many people came to see what happened. Then again, how many people do you see locked up in a cage at the zoo?

Twenty minutes earlier, Harold Le Flau was walking through the Detroit Zoo’s gift shop that was toward the back of the zoo. He was looking for a specific item of some importance to him. Ha, there it is, the rubber ducky that he needed. This rubber duck in particular had a dragon symbol on the bottom. He thought he was very smart because he had hidden the duck in the gift shop with all the other toy animals.

As soon as Harold saw the gift shop employee turn his head, he went for it. He grabbed the duck and ran. Just as he ran out of the store the alarm went off. Unluckily for him, there was a zookeeper just outside the gift shop.

The zookeeper ran after him and was gaining fast. As soon as Harold turned the corner he ran into a janitor named Bill. Harold handed the duck to Bill as fast as he could. Right after he gave the duck to Bill the zookeeper caught him.

“Yer comin’ with me, ya fool,” said the zookeeper. “I’z agonna put ya in a cage.” Harold struggled desperately to get away, but the zookeeper’s grip was too strong. He was taken to the cage. The cage looked cold and lonely. He was tossed into the cage like you see a criminal get tossed into a prison cell. The zookeeper then locked the cage. Soon after people came by and stared. *Man, I should not have stolen that duck just because of the illegal poker game,* Harold thought.

There was an illegal poker game going on at the zoo that a lot of the workers were a part of. Bill was the dealer. It had been going on for six months now. Harold’s cousin Grant, who was the zoo manager,

was the one who organized the poker game because he knew it was a low-security zoo.

Back in the cage Harold thought hard about how he was going to get out of the cage. A little girl passed by him, and he seized his opportunity. He ran up to the bars and grabbed the bobby pin from her hair. The crowd gasped when they saw he grabbed the girl. He sped over to the lock and used the bobby pin to unlock the cage. He bolted from the door to the entrance of the zoo.

Right as Harold reached the entrance, the cops showed up. He was then arrested and sent to jail. Two days later, he was tried for stealing a rubber duck and was sentenced to prison for two years.

Two years later, Harold Le Flau had just gotten out of prison. Figuring that he must have been set up (how else had he been caught so easily?), he was now ready to seek revenge. He realized that the only two people that knew where he hid the duck were Bill and Grant, his cousin. He knew exactly where to find them. He went back to the zoo as fast as he could.

When he got there he found Bill standing outside the zoo, but the gates were closed.

“Bill, what happened here?” asked Harold.

“You know your cousin told us it was a low-security zoo? Well, that was because it was already running out of money. Soon after you got sent off, the owner of the zoo died, and Grant, who was the highest in line at that point, took over. The owner’s family said they didn’t want the zoo, and if Grant wanted it he could have it. A little bit after that we had a rush of people come to see a movie on the lawn. Attracted a lot of people. So we did it a few more times. After that, Grant laid us off, closed the zoo and sold it. The new owners plan to destroy it and make a power plant. And don’t say let’s try to stop them ‘cause I already tried. The animals were shipped away yesterday, the last part of the zoo Grant owned. Walked away with thousands, maybe millions, that little scoundrel,” Bill explained.

“Now I just like to hang around here. We all realized after a while that we too were going to get caught eventually. So we left the poker game. The poker game was probably how Grant got so rich. I mean, the only reason most of us joined was to make a few bucks. I mean, he supplied me with the cards every night of the week. He was running the show anyway, just had me deal. Remember how we only got to have one game a night and had to sit in the seats he chose? Probably scammed us off. Some other guys went looking and they found him.

He moved right before they could confront him. But I stalked him for months and tracked him down.”

“Now how could I find Grant these days?” Harold asked, gritting his teeth.

“I looked. He lives at Apartment 34, West Will Apartments, West Willis Street,” said Bill.

“Thanks, I might just pay him a visit,” Harold said.

Thirty minutes later Harold arrived at Grant’s apartment. He knocked on the door.

“Harold, it’s great to see you. Come in, come in. How have you been?” Grant exclaimed. “Before you answer that, let’s get down to business. I know you probably talked to Bill. Here’s a ginger ale if you want it. You look like you need a drink.” He tossed it to Harold. “Now where was I? Yes, you probably talked to Bill. Am I right?” Harold nodded. “He told you I closed the zoo?” Harold nodded again. “You know what a man can do with that kind of money? A lot of things, Harold, a lot of things. Now, the duck you found was the store’s duck. I took your duck and replaced it with the duck from the store. I figured, if all the other members saw what could happen if they got caught, they would leave. And that would break up the poker game. And then the owner died. Sad. But you know what? It felt good when I poisoned him. And now is the perfect time to try out my new gun.”

Grant pulled out a gun and cocked it. Harold threw the bottle and it hit the top of the gun, pointing it downward. *BANG!* The gun went off. The bullet hit Harold’s leg, and he collapsed. Grant fled from the scene and ran to the top of the building.

An old lady below them had heard the gunshot and dialed 911, telling them there was a gunshot fired in the room above her.

When the police got there they saw Harold on the ground and rushed him to the hospital. Then they split up checking every floor until they got to the top. When the police got to the top they tried to stop Grant. Grant tried to run past the police and tripped. He fell to his death.

When Harold woke up he was told the news. Eventually Harold came to a conclusion about why Grant wanted to kill him, maybe because Harold knew that Grant was the one who set him up. Or maybe to keep Harold from all his money. All the money Grant did have was given to Harold because Harold was Grant’s only living relative. Harold then lived on to be eighty-one and lived a very peaceful life.

THE NAILER

In **THE NAILER** by **Max Kepler**, detective John Karlson learns the hard way how dangerous his adopted town can be.

This story is dedicated to my brother, Cass.

“**W**hoa!” shouted new detective John Karlson, who just moved into town from Illinois. “What is it? Did you finally figure out where Smiter is hiding?” asked Rob Beacher, the Chief Detective for Springfield Police Center (SPC).

“No, I didn’t find out about Smiter, but while I was looking for evidence on that case, I stumbled upon the old case of The Nailer.”

“Oh...I remember him. As soon as people found out how he killed citizens and nailed them to trees they ran out of town like zebras running from a predator. But we took care of him a few years ago, right after he killed 23 innocent people. He always somehow figured out how to cover up all of the evidence for every murder.”

“So how were you able to catch him?” Karlson managed to squeak out because he was trembling with fear. He had never experienced anything as gory as this before and never dealt with a serial murderer in his police career.

“He turned himself in. We think he finally gave up his criminal ways. We immediately put him in solitary confinement.”

“Wow,” Karlson said while looking down at his black Adidas shoes.

“Yeah, I know, son. It was a sad, sad time. Now get back to work, will ya?”

“Aye, aye, sir!”

* * *

“All prisoners to the dining hall! I said NOW! That means you, prisoner #13897!”

All of a sudden someone shouted, “He’s not here!” and the whole Virginia State Extreme Jail and Solitary Confinement Area went berserk. The Nailer has escaped.

* * *

The next day the SPC gets a letter in the mail from The Nailer which says, "Santa Claus is comin' to town." Everyone quickly discovers that he is Santa Claus and he is coming to town...for revenge.

After a week of frustration and impatience the SPC gets a call that there has been a suspected murder. John Karlson is picked to investigate. He heads right to Revolution Park, which is the scene of the crime. Soon after the police are on the scene, he arrives and is ready to investigate.

The first thing he notices is a young girl, about nine or ten, crying on the bench with her father. The police chief tells Detective Karlson that they think the girl's mother got killed and that is all the girl will say. "I will talk to her," says Karlson. He approaches her with ease, slowly moving his finger on his lip saying, "It's okay, you're all right." John is comfortable with kids because he has three children of his own, and Alexis is in his son's class at school.

"No, I'm not! Shut up, you don't know how I feel!" mumbles the girl.

"It's okay, sweetie," says her dad.

"I have a name. It's Alexis. Why don't you ever use it, Dad?"

Alexis's dad puts his arm around her and leans in for a hug. She rejects the hug and throws his arm back at him.

Detective Karlson keeps talking to Alexis about his own kids, trying to calm her down until she is ready to talk. She feels comfortable around him and begins to tell him everything.

"My mom and I were just taking a bike ride, when this guy jumps out of the bushes, right there!" she says as she points to a pile of shrubs about four feet tall with a hole in it. "My mom got frightened, so she fell off of her bike, but I stayed on. The guy told her he wanted to show her something, and right there and then he pulled my mom into the bushes. I tried to run after him and scream for help, but he was too fast. He got deeper and deeper into the forest with my mom on his shoulders. The last thing I heard was a distant scream and then complete silence," Alexis exclaimed while still crying.

"Do you know what he looked like?" asks Karlson, eager to get a quality answer.

“No, he had a mask on. But he did have blue jeans on and a plain white t-shirt.”

“Okay, thank you for your time, Alexis,” Karlson says as he walks away.

After hours on end of searching for evidence, night falls, and the team decides to go home. They could not find one piece of evidence or the mother’s body.

There continues to be suspected murders in Springfield with no explanation or evidence left behind. The detectives only have a few small details: all of the witnesses say that the victims got carried into the woods, and all of the witnesses are children of the victims.

* * *

It’s been three months since The Nailer escaped, and there have been seven missing people. The detective team has searched the entire town, in and out, looking for the killer, which they believe is a 99 percent chance of being The Nailer. They search every inch of the forest that is in the middle of the town at least three times. But, there is still no sign of The Nailer or the missing bodies.

Officer Teagan, one of the older officers on the squad, discovers that everybody who was murdered grew up outside this town. That gives them some sort of clue to help them find the killer.

Chief Beacher walks into the station and gives an announcement to everyone in the SPC. He says to the group, “We know the killer is The Nailer and that he only kills people that didn’t grow up in the town. We need to find out where he is! It seems that The Nailer kills people in a pattern, a pattern that we don’t know.”

This clue was unknown to Detective Karlson because he did not grow up in Springfield. He is from a Springfield, but from the state of Illinois. Karlson goes to the city office and requests to check the resident records of everyone that lives in Springfield. He learns the names of families that have recently moved into town and later thinks about them while having his morning coffee.

John is eating breakfast with his wife and kids, grateful that all of his family members are alive. His wife mentions that their kids’ school is having a fundraiser for the families of the missing people. John asks his sons if they know any of the kids whose parents are missing. The boys name several kids in their grades whose mom or

dad has recently gone missing. John kisses his family goodbye for the day and heads to the station.

While in his office, John and Officer Teagan review the files on the missing people. John searches through the files and reads all about the families, including the names of the kids at his sons' school whose parents are missing.

* * *

It has been almost a year since The Nailer escaped from the state's super secure jail. The Nailer is going for his 15th victim since he escaped and still has yet to be caught. About everyone in town has moved away or is already missing.

"THAT'S IT!" John Karlson shouts as he wakes up. "I figured out the pattern of the killings!" Karlson immediately gets dressed, grabs an apple from the kitchen, and hops in his new 2016 Chevy Camaro. He races to the police station, ready to tell the big breakthrough of the case.

As soon as he gets to the station, he explains the pattern of who The Nailer is killing. "The Nailer is murdering adults that didn't grow up in this town in alphabetical order by the name of their first child. Just think about it: Alexis, Amber, Austin, Bart, Beata, Bella, Cammie, Carson, Dylan, Eddie, Erica, Faith, and so on."

It took a while, but everyone is able to process it. Then someone shouts out, "So who is next? We can find the killer that way." John Karlson thinks about this. The last person to go missing had an oldest kid whose first name was Nicky. So next would be... Nolan, Nolan Karlson. Detective Karlson's kid's name is next in line. That means he is to die next.

Karlson can't sleep that night because he has the feeling someone is watching him. He finally forces himself to sleep, and that night he has a vision in his dream. In this dream, he went into his car and started driving. He had the feeling that someone was following him, so he drove faster and faster and faster. He drove so fast that he lost control and crashed into the woods. And in the woods waiting to hammer him onto a tree was no one else but The Nailer.

This is only a dream of course... until John Karlson gets in his car the next day.

THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND'S TEA TIME ADVENTURE

The Queen of England has her most beloved tea time treasure stolen by Nathan, the brilliant mastermind, in THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND'S TEA TIME ADVENTURE by Jonathan Sheyngauz.

“**H**elp!” The day started out all normally. I had my favorite morning English breakfast tea, in my favorite cup, with my favorite breakfast scones. I put on my fancy dress and my tiara. But at that moment I realized, something didn't seem right. Something felt like I lost something, but I wondered what. I checked my bedroom, my restroom, basically my entire castle. But I still hadn't figured it out.

I decided to then go take a tea break, and that's when I discovered what was missing. I always leave my afternoon teacup in my vault, but when I checked, nothing was there.

Someone had stolen my precious teacup. That teacup is worth billions of dollars and has been handed down in my family ever since tea was invented. The question that was running through my head was, “Why would someone steal my teacup?”

I called all my guards over to find out if they saw anything, but they all replied no. I then remembered that we had installed a film recording system for our Royal House. I had my head guard go check the system.

“Who is this person?” I asked myself. My guard recognized him right away. He told me it was Nathan Thompson. Nathan Thompson is a master British criminal. He had gotten out of jail just seven days before. My guard had seen him in the basement on our film system. He had been arrested for stealing the keys to the Royal House ten years ago. The keys were never found.

Once we knew all the information we called all of the guards to go find this man. We knew he would be in or near the castle because all of the property was left down there.

It had been three days of non-stop work and they still had not found one clue of where he was located. At that moment I decided that I should go help the guards find him.

Three more days passed, and we still hadn't found him.

I rushed to check the attic. The entire attic is completely full with old furniture and equipment. But there is one corner with only a box, a small brown box with nothing printed on it. There was no one in the attic at that time, or so we thought. I went to see if the teacup was inside that box, and there it was, the missing teacup.

Then I heard a loud rattle noise. I quickly took the teacup and I turned around, and I saw someone. It was Nathan. Then I backed away carefully as he followed me very slowly. I didn't know where I was going, but I soon found out.

I felt an obstruction, but just went over it. It turns out that it was the ledge of the balcony that was three floors above the castle floor. I was hanging outside using just my hands to hold onto the ledge, thinking I was going to fall. "Help!" I yelled as loud as I could. At that moment I was pulled up by my best guards.

I asked where Nathan went. They told me he was arrested again when guards sneaked up on him. Another group of guards also got the teacup back, all without a scratch.

I think it's time for a tea break.

RUSTY RED

*A hit-and-run involving a pedestrian is unusual enough. When it happens again to another member of the same family, it is clearly no accident in **RUSTY RED** by **Liliann George**.*

All I remember was running from the headlights and the impact. I imagined that the ambulance came shortly after that. But I don't remember it; I was probably already knocked out by then.

I woke up and was blinded by bright lights; I took a deep breath of a mixture of stale air and rubbing alcohol. A person called my name. I turned around, and it was official: I was in the hospital.

The nurse said I needed to get my blood drawn. I asked her why, but she had already left. I turned my head, and I noticed my best friend Eva was lying there sleeping. All of the sudden I had a flashback...of the rusty, red truck chasing me as I screamed.

A policeman walked into the room and started asking me questions about that night. "Who were you with?" he asked

"Uhhh, just my friend Eva, the girl over there," I responded.

"And what were you two doing at the middle school at 9:30 p.m.?" he questioned.

"Oh, our other friend asked us to meet her there. She said she had something really important to tell us, and that she couldn't tell us with her parents listening. We walked."

"All right, her name, please."

"Vicki Underwood."

"All right, thank you very much," he said, walking toward Eva.

Eva woke up, and it seemed like she had no clue why she was in the hospital. She looked over toward me, and I just stared back at her. The policeman asked her to come with him so she could answer a few questions.

I remember when my dad got hit with the same rusty, old, red truck. My mom cried for months. He stayed in the hospital for a while, and he seemed to be recovering. But one day he started getting worse...and about a week later he died.

That was five years ago. I was only ten, and I barely knew what was going on. Now that I'm fifteen I get it...well, kind of. But why did this red truck want to kill us?

The next day my mom came in crying and apologizing at the same time about not being there sooner. She was in Europe on a business trip. My neighbor checked in every few hours, but my mom says I'm old enough to be home alone. The nurse came in again, and she told my mom about my condition: broken leg, eight staples in my head, and a sprained wrist. Those were just the major injuries beside bruises everywhere, scrapes and cuts, and two broken fingers. On the bright side I would eventually recover...and my mom wouldn't lose another family member.

When I finally got out of the hospital, Eva hung out at my house for a few days. I wasn't allowed to go back to school yet. I asked her to tell me everything that happened that night. I could barely remember getting hit, and I wanted to know every detail. I was bound and determined to find out who was hitting my family with this red truck.

Eva told me that I didn't just stand in front of the truck. I jumped on the hood, but when I rolled off the right side of the hood I crashed onto the cement. That's when I broke my leg. When I fell and crashed into the cement, I hit my head on the curb, and that's why I needed eight staples in my head. Somewhere in between is when I sprained my wrist.

She also told me that the person in the car was alone—at least, nobody was in sight other than him. She said it looked like a man, a man with a stubby beard and a baseball hat. But she was so frightened that she didn't really observe the person...she was too worried about getting hurt and me getting killed. But she noticed when he was driving away that his license plate was from Illinois.

I blurted out that Vicki was from Illinois. Eva gasped and said, "Is that why she didn't show up?"

"She couldn't have driven over me... she can't even reach the pedals."

"True...and the same person ran over your father...she was even shorter back then," she replied.

My mom came upstairs and said that she was going to bring Eva and me some lunch from Panera. After we told her what we wanted she left.

When we knew for sure she was gone, we went into my father's office. My mom just kept the door closed. She didn't have the heart to get rid of everything. Eva was the lookout while I searched for

any clues about who would want to kill my father. I was going through a list of clients when I said, "AH HA!"

"What did you find?" Eva asked.

"This notepad says Todd Underwood and his contact information," I replied.

"Maybe he and your dad had an argument about something business related," Eva said, "And Vicki's Dad has a stubby beard and sometimes he wears baseball caps."

"Should we ask my mom?" I asked Eva.

"Not yet. We need more evidence," she said. I agreed.

My mom's car pulled in the driveway. I rushed to put everything back where it was, even though my mother said she never goes in there. I closed all the drawers and turned off the desk lamp. We heard my mom's heels coming up the steps near the front door. I grabbed my crutches while Eva shut the door behind me. We rushed into the living room and turned on the TV, quickly switching channels to find *America's Next Top Model*.

My mom came in just as we found the show. She set down the to-go bags and started to unpack the food.

"I wrote down all Todd's info on my notepad. Maybe we will find something on his website," I whispered to Eva.

"That sounds good. We can do it tomorrow," she replied.

Later, I couldn't help myself, so I took a peek at his website. All I found was a picture of his family, clarifying that he was Vicki's dad. My mom had just gone off to bed, so I decided to go into my dad's office again.

I slowly opened my bedroom door. I peeked into the hallway to check if my mom had turned her lights off. I tiptoed over to her door and peeked in to see if she was sleeping. Then I went down the stairs as quietly as possible. If my mom woke up I would have to tell her what I was doing in dad's office. And Eva and I agreed we weren't ready to tell her yet.

I was searching through filing cabinets when I found another connection: a folder titled "Hometown Reality." That is the business Todd currently works for. Inside were a few papers and a résumé. I thought about taking the folder, but I decided not to.

The next day Eva came over around three o'clock. We searched the website for a little over an hour and didn't find anything else. Then we took a break and had dinner.

Eva and I assumed that my dad and Todd were competing over the job. My dad was most likely Todd's only competition and Todd really wanted the job. "He'd kill for the job... literally," Eva said.

It was then that I realized: Why weren't we checking to see what kind of car Todd owned? So I asked Eva to drive past their house tomorrow.

"What if he's not home?" Eva said.

"Then just come home," I replied, laughing a little bit.

"All right, I'll drive past it...but what if they have their cars parked in the garage?" she said.

"They don't park their cars in their garage; it's only used for storage."

Eva left shortly after we had the conversation. While she was gone I sat up in my bedroom thinking about why Vicki's dad would want to kill me. All of the sudden I remembered Vicki and I were in a huge argument the week before I got hit. Vicki was over it. I apologized at school, but Vicki's dad probably didn't know that. My thoughts were interrupted by a frantic phone call from Eva.

"It's him! It's him! We need to tell your mom right now. It's the same exact car. I'm sure of it. It's bright red but rusty at the same time. I'll be there soon. Be prepared to tell your mom," she said quickly.

When she arrived we told my mother everything. She put on her coat and told us to put on ours too. We were going to the police station.

When we told them everything they said they would do more investigations, but Todd wouldn't be arrested for my father's murder yet. They didn't have enough evidence to charge him. However, they did put him in jail for attempted murder.

When I went back to school I was fully recovered. Vicki walked around school looking very depressed, but I can't blame her because first her dad ran over my dad and killed him, and he attempted to kill me. In the end they put him in jail.

We finally learned how it all happened. Vicki's mom didn't live with her and her father. She lived in an apartment almost an hour away. Vicki was going to be moving schools because she had to go live with her mom and go to their school district. And apparently Vicki was walking out of the house that night to meet us. Her mom was there and caught her. After that she was forced to go inside. Her phone got taken away, too, so she couldn't text me. That's when

her dad went through her texts and saw our fight. That's when he got the idea to run me over. And that's exactly what he did. I guess we will never know what Vicki needed to tell us.

THE SEARCH

In **THE SEARCH** by **Victoria Blumbergs**, an orphan's search for her mother leads to a surprising conclusion.

When I heard the last shots being fired, I saw her fall on the cold hospital ground. I couldn't breathe. I was speechless.

* * *

I was a thirteen-year-old orphan named April Brigganstone. My adoption chances were zero percent out of one hundred. No one would ever adopt a thirteen-year-old girl, so I decided to take matters into my own hands.

For the past years, I have been researching a lot about my birth mother. I've put years into this research hoping for it to pay off. I've managed to find out that my birth mom lives in New York City, and she is a doctor at Helen Grace Children's Hospital. And tonight I leave for New York City.

My friend Sarah promised she would look out for me. She promised to do my chores and promised to not let Mrs. Daisy find out I was gone. I trusted her.

Around ten o'clock, everyone was sleeping. I snuck into Ms. Brenda's office to borrow some money for a train ticket to New York.

I grabbed ninety-five dollars from her wallet and burst through her office door. Then, I quietly tiptoed into the orphan room and grabbed my suitcase. Most importantly, I grabbed the picture and note my mother left me when she dropped me off at this orphanage. After I grabbed everything, I was on my way to New York.

Walking to the train station was really hard, and once I got there, it was closed. I had to wait until morning to leave for New York City. I had to sleep on a bench the entire night, without a blanket, pillow, or anything. I was freezing cold and very uncomfortable.

I woke up in the middle of the night to someone's face right in mine. I screamed, "Ahhhh!"

She asked, "What are you doing out here all by yourself?"

"I'm an orphan, trying to find my mom," I responded.

She said, "Honey, you can't buy a ticket all by yourself."

I said, "Why?"

She said, "You have to have a parent with you." Then, I turned around and started my journey back to the orphanage. She yelled, "Wait, don't go. I'll help you find your mom."

We talked until dawn. I figured out her name was Reda Laure, and she was going to visit her family. But soon we would have to go two separate ways. Her family lived down Wall Street, and the hospital was on Queens Street. We would go our separate ways when we arrived downtown at our different streets.

Finally, the sun rose, and we bought tickets. We boarded the train. This is the moment I realized I was finally going to find my mom.

It took eleven hours to get to New York, but we finally made it. When we first got off of the train, all we saw were beautiful skies and buildings. We stood there, and it felt like we were standing there forever. Then I told myself, *April we need to go!*

We started for downtown. We met the two separate streets. "Wall Street and Queens Street, I guess this is it."

She said, "I'll see you around."

"Thank you for everything."

She said, "Any time." Then, we went our separate ways.

I walked down Queens Street and asked people for directions to Helen Grace Children's Hospital, but they all said, "Go to the City Office for directions." I finally found the City Office and they gave me a directory.

I walked toward the hospital along the city streets of New York all by myself. It was quite frightening walking by myself in the dark, so I ran. Reaching the front doors of the hospital was re-opening my life.

When I walked through the doors, I first walked to the front desk. "Excuse me, I was wondering if I could speak to Dr. Brigganstone?"

"Yes, and who are you?"

"Her daughter."

She looked at me in a funny way. She said, "Hold on one second."

I waited for about five minutes. Then someone shouted my name, and I turned around. It was my mom! I ran to her.

I couldn't believe my eyes. It was actually her! We hugged for five minutes. It felt like the longest five minutes of my life.

We talked for the next hour! She asked me all these questions about how my life was going at the orphanage, and if I had made some friends there. Most of my responses were "Ehh." I asked her similar questions. I asked her about my family, and we were talking for what felt like forever.

"Mom why di-"

Then I heard a CRASH! The hospital door shattered. There was glass raining onto the ground.

A man stepped out from the hole in the glass. He yelled, "Grace Brigganstone!"

I said, "Mom?"

She said, "It's your father."

"Why is he here?" I asked.

"I'll tell you later. C'mon we have to go!"

All of a sudden, I heard shots. My father was shooting at me and my mom! We ran as fast as we could into a closet.

Once we got there I asked her if she was okay. She responded yes. She said he was here for revenge because she couldn't save his mother during a tumor removal. She said, "I have to risk myself for everyone else. They can't die for something that I did. I'm so sorry, April. I have to go."

"No, Mom, stop!"

She walked out the closet door. I tried to grab her, but I was as stiff as a rock. The closet door shut, and I broke into tears. I looked out the closet window. She was standing right in front of the chaos. My heart sank like the *Titanic*. My brain lost all control. I couldn't feel anything. It was like I disappeared.

When I heard the last shots being fired, I saw her fall on the cold hospital ground. I couldn't breathe. I was speechless. My life had fallen apart again.

THE SLEEP-UNDER

*If you believe that you have had the craziest sleepover, you haven't read **THE SLEEP-UNDER** by **Henry Everett**.*

One day in Beverly Hills, Michigan, Luke, Chase, and Scott were having a sleepover in a tent in the backyard. It was 7:55 at night. The three boys were all super excited for the sleepover in Chase's backyard.

As the three boys started to set up the tent, Chase heard a noise coming from the woods behind his house. He didn't mention it to the others. The noise was soft and mellow. It was mysterious because it fit the foggy and misty night, but Chase continued to set up the tent.

When Luke and Scott were all done they went inside Chase's house to get their bags to bring back outside to the tent. Since Chase lived there he did not have as much stuff to bring outside, so he was outside first.

Chase heard the noise again while Luke and Scott were still inside. He was alarmed by the noise and decided to say something to the others this time. "Guys, I just heard this weird noise for the second time." They thought that Chase was talking nonsense and continued to have fun in the tent.

It was about 9:00 when this time all three boys heard the noise. They all were frightened. Luke, as always the brave one, said, "We should go see where it is coming from."

Scott said, "I don't think that is good idea."

"Scott, you are such a chicken. Come on, let's go," said Chase. As they were getting ready to go, the noise was getting louder and louder. The boys stepped out of the tent. The wet grass tickled their feet; they only had Crocs on.

As they made their way into the woods the noise got louder. They felt like they were the only people who could hear it. Suddenly Luke, who was leading the boys because he was the brave one, fell into a pit.

The pit was eight to ten feet deep, but since it was dark you could not see the bottom. The other two boys were not paying any attention, so they just simply fell into the pit. All three boys were knocked unconscious.

When the three boys woke up, weird green figures were hovering over them in their medical beds. Chase was kind of scared but looked calm, while Luke and Scott were terrified.

Suddenly one green figure took off its mask. He was a tall, masculine man with an insane beard, so they knew they were humans. Chase looked around the room and saw two other green figures. One was short and looked like some kind of computer geek. The other looked like a complete athlete: strong, fast, and agile.

The room was very well lit, and the walls appeared to be solid gold. The tallest man started talking. "My name is Jeff, the short one is Lynx, and the fast one is Falcon. We are known as the most wanted people in the world."

Chase asked why, and Jeff said in return, "We have robbed many different locations."

"Like what?" Luke said.

"Fort Knox, the Monte Carlo casino, and the JP Morgan Chase and Company bank in downtown New York of over one billion dollars."

Scott, who was scared out of his mind, said, "So why are we here?"

"You are here because we want to steal something from a very intense place that only you three can reach," Chase said.

"No, we will not help you."

Jeff said, "Ok another fail" and pulled out his gun.

All three boys yelled, "What do we have to do?"

Jeff said, "There is a slip of paper in a Chuck E. Cheese. I need you guys to go get it."

Scott said, "Why, what is the slip about?"

Jeff said, "It's personal."

Soon enough, Luke, Chase, and Scott were standing in a van in the parking lot of a Chuck E Cheese. Jeff said, "Ok, so the slip is in one of the Sky Tubes."

"Ok, I will be right back."

"No plan, no weapon, no nothing?"

"Nope, just me and my friends," Luke said.

When the three boys walked into Chuck E. Cheese, they saw a kid running with a headless doll, and another with a pair of super sharp scissors. It was weird because the place was abandoned by adults: no parents, workers, nothing. Chase said to the other boys, "This might be a little bit harder than we thought."

Scott was running toward the Sky Tubes when suddenly two kids said, "Come play with us!" Then Scott realized he probably shouldn't be running through a Chuck E. Cheese with a bunch of toddler psychos.

Meanwhile, Chase and Luke were inside the Sky Tubes somehow. Luke had the note in his hand and a bruise from how tight the tubes were. When they got out of the Sky Tube, there was a line of demon toddlers.

All three boys were scared. All of a sudden all the toddlers said in coordination, "Give us the note." The toddlers all walked toward the boys, but the boys did not move. They were petrified.

Suddenly Jeff walked in and shot all the toddlers with a Nerf gun. Since they were toddlers they all lay there crying for their mommies. The three boys and Jeff ran to the van, jumped in, and took off.

On the drive back to the hideout they blindfolded the boys so that they couldn't see where the hideout was. When they got home Scott said with curiosity, "Can we read the note?"

Jeff said, "It's a free pizza at Jet's pizza."

All the boys said at the same time, "What! Why did you make us do that?"

Jeff said, "Because we want you guys to join our criminal team."

"Can we go home sometimes?" said Luke.

"No," said Jeff. "It will blow your cover." But all three boys agreed to the deal because it paid one million dollars per year each, but each of them thought to himself that he didn't want to do it.

That night Chase woke up late and realized that the decision he made that day was wrong. Chase woke up Luke and Scott and told them, "Stay here while I go for help." He got dressed and ran up the stairs to get to the main floor. Then he ran out of the door. He realized that he had just run out of the abandoned house down the road from his house.

Chase ran down the road to his house, ran inside, ran up the stairs, and shook his parents awake. By 4:00 in the morning Chase had told his parents what had happened, and they had called the police.

Luke and Scott woke up to the sound of police cars. By 5:30 the police had Jeff and his gang in custody. Luke and Scott were fine, but Luke did have a bruised leg from how tight the Chuck E. Cheese Sky Tubes were.

As a reward for Chase being so brave, he was awarded a medal of bravery from the police. Luke and Scott were also awarded a medal of courage.

The next weekend the three boys were having another sleepover. This time they decided *not* to sleep outside in the tent.

SNOVESKE'S MYSTERIES

In **SNOVESKE'S MYSTERIES** by *Derrick Cuevas*, a boy learns that his late father has left him a powerful gift.

There once was a kid named Snoveske. He was a dreamer. He always wanted to be like his dad: a fighter. He never got to meet his dad. His dad died two weeks after Snoveske's birth. He got shot, and no one still knows who shot him or when. They just found his body in the back of an abandoned house. His dad had super fire powers, and Snoveske was born with powers, too. He just did not know that yet.

One day Snoveske went up to his mother and asked, "Mom, can I practice *kung fu*?"

His mom, surprised, asked him, "Why do you want to practice *kung fu*? I thought you didn't like fighting."

"I know, Mom, but I just want to be a fighter like my dad."

She had a weird look on her face. Since she had never heard him talk about his dad before, she said, "Sure. Whatever makes you happy."

"Ok, thank you mom. Love you."

"Love you too."

Soon Snoveske found the *kung fu* dojo. He walked to the dojo and said, "Ok, I'm here."

A man who looked about 30 to 40 years old wearing a black belt and white robe with beige socks walked toward him and asked him, "Is your name Snoveske?" in a very deep voice.

"Yeah, that's me."

"Come right here and we can start."

That's where all the magic happened. A few weeks later Snoveske earned a black belt.

He was great at fighting. He was better than the rest of the kids in the class. He learned everything he needed to know: how to defend himself and everything else. He graduated from *kung fu*.

Snoveske was walking down the street when someone pushed him. Snoveske got angry. "Hey, what the heck."

"What...weaking, stupid child."

"Call me stupid one more time..."

"STU...PID."

BOOM! Fire went everywhere! Kevin and his gang got scared and ran away.

Snoveske hurried home. "Mom, Mom! Fire, fire!" he yelled when he arrived.

"Where? Where!"

"No, me! I shot fire!"

"Oh, um...I need to need to tell you something."

"What, Mom?"

"Your father and I have powers. I never told you because I thought you were gonna get scared. Your dad couldn't control his powers when he got mad, and neither can you. But you need to control them."

"How do you know when I get mad I can't control them?"

"I'm your mom, and I know everything. Remember that."

"Ok."

"Anyhow, I need to teach you how to control your powers."

Five years later

Snoveske became a cop. "After a few years of *kung fu*, now I can fight and take care of myself and other people who need my help, so I'm here for that."

PA! There was a gunshot!

Snoveske and his partners ran outside. It was behind a house that looked exactly the same as the house Snoveske's dad died in. The murderer was sprinting until he got into a car and floored it. He zoomed past Snoveske and his partners. The next thing you know, somebody punched Snoveske, knocked him out, and kidnapped him.

They drove to a secret warehouse that no one knew about. It was kind of a bumpy ride. They tied him onto a chair. Then the people started to slap him. The person who might have been the boss or their best fighter said, "Do you know how your father died? I killed him two weeks after your birth." His voice sounded familiar. He took off his hood. It was his sensei! He killed Snoveske's dad!

"Why? Why did you kill him!"

"He stole my one and only girl from high school, and he had to pay."

"Ha, ha, ha, just because my dad stole your girl. Ok, but why did you have to kill him?"

"Because you are as STUPID and OBNOXIOUS as your dad!"

"I DON'T LIKE BEING CALLED STUPID!"

"What—you gonna go cry about it? Cry to your mom."

Snoveske got so angry his eyes turned orange and blue. The colors were moving around his eyes. Then he yelled, and—*BOOM!*—fire burst everywhere, burning everyone. Then he ran away and left. That day he found out who killed his dad and why.

After all that happened, Snoveske went back home with stitches. He tried to make himself feel better and live a great life.

SOCCER SMACK DOWN

An envious sore loser takes out his anger on his greatest rival in
SOCCER SMACK DOWN by *Emily Wyszynski*.

“**W**e’re in the second half of the game, and we are tied at 5 for the Crows and 5 for the Falcons,” Jonny DeWalt called through the microphone. “With only three seconds on the clock, there goes number 5, Jimmy Green for the Crows. He is about to make a goal, and GOAL!” The crowd went wild. “The Crows have won the game!” yelled Jonny DeWalt.

In the locker room for the Falcons: “Man, I am so mad we lost today!” said Joey Classic.

“Yeah, I am too,” said Adam Mode.

“*Oh, Jimmy, sign this. Sign that, Jimmy.* He gets all of the attention! We should do something about it. Something that will ruin the Crows forever!” said Joey.

“Like what?” said Adam.

“Like murder the best player on the team, Jimmy Green,” said Joey with a smirk.

“Sounds great, but when will we do *it*?” said Adam.

“Tonight,” said Joey. “I already know where he lives.”

“Then, let’s do it! There will be no way that anyone will catch us,” said Adam.

Dong! Dong! Dong! The clock had just struck midnight. Joey was just going to get Adam when, *bing*, he got a text from him. It read, “Sorry can’t make it. I got to go to the hospital because my sister had a heart attack.”

Joey replied “Ok, I’ll do *it* by myself.” Joey went alone to Jimmy Green’s house. He wore his black amber ring that only the Falcon team got for winning the World Cup five times in a row. The weapon he chose was a golden pistol. He dressed in all black and finally found Jimmy’s house.

Just as he opened the door he spotted a camera. Luckily it was not looking his way. Joey turned around and picked up a rock about the size of his hand and threw it at the camera. It fell down with a quiet *crash*.

He spent five minutes looking for Jimmy's bedroom. Then he finally found it. He loaded the pistol with a bullet that was engraved with the words "Good Bye." He aimed at what he thought was Jimmy Green and pulled the trigger. What he did not know was that it was wadded up blankets. *Bang!* went the pistol. Then Joey took off running. But he hadn't gotten outside fast enough. Jimmy walked out. He saw Joey drive off.

In Joey's head, he thought, "Yay! Yay! I did it! I killed Jimmy Green, the best Crows player!" As soon as he got home, he went to bed.

In the morning he pulled up the news on his TV, and the first announcement was the attempted murder of Jimmy Green in sports. Then they did an interview with Sara Green, Jimmy's wife. "It was just so scary! I mean I was just sleeping and then—*boom*—went...a gun and...I'm sorry I can't go on like this," said Sara as she wept.

Jimmy Green's wife had hired Lily Calibri, the best detective in the world, to find out who tried to kill her husband. At Jimmy Green's house: "I haven't found anything yet," said Lily Calibri. "Ah ha, I found something! Is this rock yours?"

"No. What do you think it is?" said Sara Green.

"A clue," said Lily.

Later, Lily was examining the rock that she had found. She found that it was a gem from a ring only the Falcons have. The gem of black amber was one of a kind. It had a one-of-a-kind Lotus flower shape. So now she was on the hunt to find all of the players and check out their World Cup rings.

Lily interviewed all the players except for two. Adam Mode and Joey Classic were the last two. First she looked for Adam. Another player told her that Adam was in the hospital looking after his sister who had a heart attack.

"To the hospital I go," said Lily to herself.

When she got there, she now had to find what room he was in. She asked, "Excuse me, but what room is Emma Mode in?"

The man at the desk answered, "Room 379 on the left side, third floor."

"Thanks," said Lily.

And off she went. When she got there she found that the failed killer was not Adam Mode. So that meant it could only be Joey Classic.

Lily learned Joey lived on 2436 Dine Road, but she was not sure if he was home. She went anyway. It took her 25 minutes to get there. She peeked in through the window and saw him sitting in a chair. So she kicked the door down and called the police. They got there in no time.

“I arrest Joey Classic for the attempted killing of Jimmy Green. Take him away, boys!” yelled Lily.

“Nooo!” yelled Joey.

Later at the police station, Sara Green said, “Thank you so much, Lily, for finding who tried to kill my husband.”

“No problem,” said Lily Calibri.

Joey Classic was charged with attempted murder, served time, and was suspended from the team. Justice was served. Jimmy Green and the Crows went on to win the World Cup for the seventh time. As a side note, Adam’s sister, Emma, fully recovered from her heart attack and is happily enjoying her life.

THE TORTURE HOUSE

*When Xavier and Amy fall into the clutches of a psychopathic killer and torturer, they must use all of their wits to escape in **THE TORTURE HOUSE** by **Shelly McFirestick**.*

I see a figure in the distance. It is shaped like a man. “Just ignore him, Xavier,” says my girlfriend, Ami. She kicks the soccer ball to me. She smiles, ignoring the cloaked man slowly getting closer to us.

I kick the ball. It soars through the air, landing a foot away from the figure. He picks up the muddy soccer ball and starts walking away.

“Hey! Give us our ball back!” Ami shouts. She stomps off towards the cloaked man.

I follow her. When Ami is just an arm's reach from the man he turns around and punches her in the nose. Blood streams out of her nose, staining her gray soccer jersey. The man picks her up and walks toward the woods.

“What do you want from us?”

“Your parents beat us in the Olympics last year. We want to make sure you don't beat my kids when you grow up.” He turns around. His name is Daniel Fisher. He was an Olympic skier.

I feel someone breathing on my neck. I turn my head and I see a woman out of the corner of my eye. It is Daniel's sister, Beyoncé. She grips my head with her sharp fingernails and smashes my head on the blacktop. Then everything goes black.

Daniel stares at me with his cold, blue eyes. I try to scream, but my mouth is taped shut. Ami looks scared. Her warm brown hair is drooping over her eyebrows. He pulls us out from the back of his car and shoves us into his house.

The room smells like gasoline. The kitchen is moldy, with a large pile of dirty dishes on the counter. Ami sits next to me on the tattered leather couch in the living room.

“Don't move,” Daniel says. He dashes up the creaky stairs.

I have to escape. I stand up. My hands are bloody from the rope around my wrists, but I make my way toward the door. He comes

back down holding an object that looks kind of like a remote. He flips a switch on the device and walks toward me.

“Stay still.” He pushes it against my shoulder. It shocks me. I fall to the ground.

I try to scream, but I’m in too much pain. He shocks me again. My vision fades. Then everything goes black.

I wake up. There is a cold metal bed frame with a dirty two-inch mattress. A dim lamp sits in the corner. This must be his torture room. I decide that I might as well take a nap. I don’t know when he is going to kill me.

I hear a knock on the other side of my room. I stand up and make my way toward a small slot in the door. I look through it. Ami sits in a room across the hall, mangled hair covering most of her face. Her room has a window instead of a slot. Her wrists are a blood red from the tight cuffs. I whisper, “Hey. Over here.” She turns toward me. “It’s Xavier. We’re getting out of here.”

The man comes down the stairs. “I hear talking! Don’t make me kill you sooner!”

That night I stare at the ceiling. I need to find a way to escape. And if I find a way, I will bring Ami with me.

I sit at the bench outside. The man let us sit outside today for being such good prisoners. He has left to go to the store and said he trusts us enough to leave us alone. Ami sits next to me, and we eat in silence. She stares out at the blue waters that surround the house.

“It’s all my fault. Now we are going to die,” I say.

“We could build a boat. California is not that far from here.”

“No.” I shake my head. “You will surely die.”

“You want to escape, don’t you?”

“I guess.”

“There are supplies in that shed over there.” She points at a stained wood shed in the corner of the courtyard. We walk over. I look through the small glass window. There’s rope, blowup beach balls, and a lot of raincoats.

“I can’t make a boat out of this,” I say.

“Well, I can, but I’m gonna need a while. A week or so.”

“Why?”

“Well, building a boat is really hard, you know, and I don’t know when the man is going to let us outside again.”

“Fine,” I say.

Daniel comes in the morning. He shakes the bars. "Wake up!"

"What? I'm up!"

"Any last meal requests? Execution day is tomorrow."

"Two double cheeseburgers, a milkshake, and French fries."

"As you wish. Someone wanted to say hi before she died today."

He pulls Ami in view. Tears are running down her red face. He unlocks the cell and she runs in. She hugs me and whispers, "The boat is in the shed. He moved my execution to today. You're going to be okay. You have to leave."

The man grabs her hair and pulls her away. "Say bye to your 'boyfriend.'"

"Hey, Daniel. Why don't you just kill us now?"

"If we kill you now, we won't get to enjoy your suffering."

I have to save her, but how? The only way I can get out is if I squeeze through the food slot. It's worth a try.

I climb through, but my arm gets caught. I struggle to pull it out. It won't budge. I pull one last time with all my might. My arm slips free. It throbs as I roll over in pain. I slowly stand up and make my way toward the shed.

The door's locked. I break the window with my knuckles. Pieces of glass rip through my skin. I reach in and pull out the raft. I run inside, go through the metal slot, and hide it under my bed.

I sneak past the guard at the end of the hall. The door to the room is midnight blue, and the knob is rusty. I pull open the door slowly and hide in a shadow. I see Ami on a platform. A man with a handgun stands next to her. He raises his gun and points it toward Ami's temple. I jump out.

"Stop!" The man points his gun towards me and shoots. The bullet whips through the air into my leg. The world spins around me. I see Ami run to me and put her soft hands on my face. She lifts me up and rushes out the door toward the shed. I hear gunshots behind us. I mumble, "This is all my fault. I'm sorry"

"It's fine." She grabs my good arm and flings me behind the shed. I fall on the grass and cover my head. I heard many gunshots, but then everything went silent.

I hear heavy footsteps slowly getting closer to me. I start to shake.

I hear one more shot. A gun falls to the ground. Daniel falls next to me. A pool of blood drains from his head. I uncover my head and see Ami. She stands there with a rifle over her shoulder.

“Come on, Xavier.” She reaches her hand out to me. “Don't worry. Everything is going to be okay.”

She grabs the raft and lays it in the waves. She lays me in the boat and pushes it. Ami runs toward the house. She sprints back out carrying a dark blue bag and two paddles. She jumps in and starts rowing.

Ami reaches in the bag and pulls out a roll bandage. She wraps my arm and leg. My mouth is dry, and my whole body aches, but I've made it so far I can't die now. I can already see the shores of California.

“We're gonna be okay.”

As we get to land she hops out and limps to the pay phone. Ami must've called 911 because soon I hear the sound of sirens coming toward me. A woman lays me onto a stretcher. Ami collapses in pain and falls to the ground.

I unbuckle the tight straps of the stretcher and run toward her. I fall next to her. A paramedic lifts me off of her. I scream out.

“Ami! Ami! Ami!” The paramedic doesn't care. She straps me onto the stretcher and puts me in the ambulance. We drive away.

The hospital is clean and bright, much different than the house. Ami leans over me and runs her fingers through my hair.

“Oh, Xavier. I love you.”

“I love you, too, Ami.”

The next year is terrible. I had suffered a concussion from the woman slamming my head on the ground. I had thirty-two stitches from the gunshot wound and a ligament in my arm had torn.

Ami wasn't so lucky. She had a broken nose, a collapsed lung, pinkeye, a broken collarbone, a dislocated knee, and a sprained ankle.

After I leave the hospital I spend every day with Ami. She saved my life. She is my hero.

TRIPLE THREAT

TRIPLE THREAT by *Aidan Keller* relates the journey of three young men whose mission is to track down one of the most valuable stolen cars in the world.

It was midnight at the mansion. Beyond the secured entrance of the gatehouse was a brick courtyard guarded by surveillance cameras. Why the cameras? Because the owner of the mansion, Mr. Martin, has a rather large car collection and a bad habit of leaving those valuable cars parked in the courtyard. In fact, just two hours ago, he had parked his most prized possession there—an extremely rare, custom-made car called the Hyper-X.

Mr. Martin was sound asleep when the shadowy figure dressed in black made its way through the courtyard to the Hyper-X, got in, and drove away.

Mr. Martin awoke shortly after the robbery and noticed the car was gone. His first instinct was to check the surveillance system, but what he discovered was that the camera at the secured entrance had been disabled!

Mr. Martin knew who he had to contact for help. If anyone could get to the bottom of this robbery, it was Ryan, the smart young man that had set up all the security, telephones, and computers throughout the mansion.

“Hello, Ryan, it’s Stan Martin here.”

Ryan hesitated for a moment, surprised to be getting a call on his mobile phone from Stanley Martin. “Well, hello, Mr. Martin. What can I do for you, Sir?” Ryan was shocked to hear about the robbery, especially because there was no expense spared for the technology installed at the Martin mansion. “Mr. Martin, are you sure you don’t want to turn this matter over to the police?” asked Ryan.

Stan Martin’s reply was “No police. I don’t want this to make it to the newspapers. I’ll pay you a \$500,000 reward if you locate my car.”

As you can imagine, the call ended with Ryan saying, “I’ll get my team right on it, Sir.”

They were a team of three. In addition to his technical skills, Ryan had the ability to blend in anywhere, undetected. Then there

was Luke, the expert hacker. Finally, there was Max, a natural-born leader and the planner of the team. These guys were not only a team, but best friends since middle school. They call themselves “Triple Threat.”

It took about a week for Ryan to set up a meeting with his friends, but it took less than one minute for Luke and Max to agree with the idea to investigate this crime. Of course, the large reward helped to persuade them. Now for the plan... Max instructed Luke to go to his computers and look for any communications regarding the Hyper-X. While Luke got to work, Max and Ryan went to check the surveillance system at the mansion and get a photo of the car from Mr. Martin.

Before they reached the mansion, Ryan’s phone rang. “Ryan, it’s Luke. You won’t believe this, but someone shipped that car on an airplane. It’s headed for Dubai!” Ryan was speechless. Firstly, Luke’s hacking skills never ceased to amaze him, and secondly, why Dubai?

Ryan leaned over to Max and said, “I hope your passport is current, because we’re headed to the UAE!”

It wasn’t until they were halfway through the flight that Max started to worry. What kind of people were they going to encounter when they got to Dubai? Triple Threat weren’t exactly the toughest guys around—they didn’t even have weapons to defend themselves. Mr. Martin’s reward was enticing, but who has the ability to steal a car like that and move it halfway around the world?

Once on the ground, the guys questioned the airport workers about the car and passed around the photo. It was instantly recognized. One of the workers went into an office and came back with paperwork identifying a shipping location. Triple Threat made their way to the rental car counter and secured a Jeep for the desert location printed on the shipping papers.

Luke programmed the GPS on the rental car and announced, “It’s only 30 minutes away!”

They had been on the road for 25 minutes when their destination began to appear in the distance. It was a white marble mansion rising out of the desert. It didn’t look like a dangerous place at all—it looked beautiful.

Triple Threat approached the front door with caution, but they were greeted by a gentle-looking old butler named Benjamin. "Hello, we are looking for this car," Ryan said as he showed the butler the photo. Benjamin made a motion for them to follow him and then led them through the mansion to a pool area. And, who was sitting at the pool? None other than Mr. Martin's ex-wife, Sheila. Ryan recognized her instantly, because she had been the one in charge of all the technology installations at the mansion. "Of course," Ryan said, "you were the one that disabled the camera and stole the car."

Sheila confessed. "I took the car to get revenge against my ex-husband. I knew it was his favorite car. He loved that car more than he loved me!"

Ryan wondered if Mr. Martin knew all along that it was an inside job. He walked a few steps away from the pool area and called his client. "Mr. Martin, it's Ryan Smith. We found your car."

"She has it, doesn't she?" asked Stan Martin.

"Yes, Sir," replied Ryan. "What would you like us to do now?"

"You and your team did a great job. You earned your reward, and you should just come back home," said Mr. Martin.

So that's what Triple Threat did. They came back home and collected their reward.

WANTED

*A criminal is on the loose, and the manhunt is on. In **WANTED** by **Ben Roman**, not everyone is who he seems, and someone is hiding in a surprising location.*

“**H**ands up, everyone! You are going to get me access to every single bank vault or I shoot!” When I hear all the noise, I come running from my filing job in the back of the bank. But when I get there, I receive a huge blow to the head, and the world darkens around me. All I am seeing is red, and all I am thinking is “Who brought the ketchup?”

I wake up while lying on my side in an unfamiliar room with a strange gown on that opens in the back—clearly not something I own. Right away I hear “Thank goodness, Timmy. I was starting to get worried. We haven’t seen you awake for five hours!” Then a few seconds later, I am wrapped in a bear hug by someone whom I figure is my mother because it’s a hug I know well. I open my eyes and see a huge circle of people including my parents surrounding me. I also see a nurse and a nursing assistant smiling down at me and know that I am in a hospital.

I tell everyone that all I remember is working at my job at the bank and then *Wham!* I didn’t know what hit me. Then they tell me that I was hit in the head by a big-time criminal, which was confirmed by witnesses who weren’t knocked out or shot during the robbery. I also learn that the criminal got away. But I can’t talk to my parents because they are too busy saying, “Oh my gosh, Timmy, I am so glad you are okay!” While they are doing this, they are non-stop hugging me. So, I just smile and nod.

The doctors clear me to go home and back to my high school on Monday, four days after the incident. Since I have a concussion, they say that I will be limited in school for awhile. I go back to Ronsfield High School, and I find there is a new student in my science class.

This new kid goes by the name Clark Williamson. It seems he is always in the bathroom during attendance. Clark seems to like to hang around me a bit. I guess I am just that likable. He is really hysterical. He does this thing sometimes where he acts like he forgot his name.

Other students don't admit to having Clark in their class. I don't believe this is true but just assume that he is there but keeps to himself. He tells me that he likes to act like a magician. Other than that and the fact that he doesn't have too much of an interest in anyone but me, there is nothing different about him. What's also kind of crazy is that when you look closely at his face, he kind of looks like my aunt who wears way too much makeup. His voice is quite deep. But, boy, his jokes about being a famous criminal when he grows up sure are funny!

Things are getting pretty weird around here. Everyone seems nervous that the criminal hasn't been caught and could be anywhere. Everyone wonders where he'll turn up even though we have to go through our normal routines, which include going to school.

Then one day the whole school goes on lockdown in the middle of my sixth-hour class, which is on the second floor. It is said to be a Code Red, and everyone is panicking everywhere, trying to get to a safe spot. I hear mutterings that the suspect may be amongst us. We are told not to move until the police arrive.

I look for my friend to make sure he's okay, and I realize he is in the hallway. I see him turn into the bathroom. I follow him to tell him to come back to the group to be safe. Right when I walk in, there is a knife at my throat.

Now I figure everything out. I remember the man's voice that I heard in the bank and realize that it is a perfect match with my new friend's voice. I also realize why nobody seems to know him. My new friend, Clark, the criminal, then whispers in my ear, "Yell and I kill you."

Just then I hear sirens in the distance. I can tell that this criminal is deciding what to do. In the end, he runs off, but not before giving me a look of sheer death.

I walk out of the bathroom kind of dazed. I sort of hear people yelling my name and police arriving in the school. But I just keep walking until I walk right into a wall and sit down.

I stop to think about what just happened when two policemen come by to check on me. I immediately tell them I know who they are looking for and tell them all about Clark. The police tell me they found a makeshift hut in the woods close to Ronsfield High School. Inside it, they found a backpack with a gun in it as well as some paperwork from the school. The fingerprints on the paperwork and

the gun were a match. This is when they questioned if the criminal could be impersonating a student and initiated a lockdown.

From around the school, I hear other police officers directing students where to go while investigating anyone looking suspicious. I see Clark running down the hallway and whisper, “That’s him” to the policemen.

Clark hides in the lunchroom behind a rack up against a wall. He leaves too early, and the police dogs sniff him out. He sprints outside and steals a bike from the rack and begins to ride away until *BANG!* He falls on his face and notices two things—he is still alive, but his tire is now flat.

The police and police dogs corner him, and he finally surrenders. They tug at his face and pull off a mask.

In the newspaper the following morning, I read that “Clark” asked the police how they knew that it was him using high school student status to conceal his true identity. All the policeman said was “I guess your classmate betrayed you.” Feeling kind of good about myself, I relax in my chair and rest my eyes. I suddenly realize I am exhausted, but pleased.

DEADSTOCK

THE BLIND SEEKER

*When a strange girl finds herself in a mysterious man's house, her perspective of life changes completely. In **THE BLIND SEEKER** by Ryan Stottlemyer, everything falls out of place.*

A deep, musty odor traveled through the air as I, Maria, walked through the old streets. Back in Waterlog Street, not much happened. Mrs. Susans was washing the laundry, Mr. Geovanni was marveling over his lawn, and here was I, going home. Everything was too familiar. Those sudden words sparked a thought in my brain, *What if it changed?* like when a TV turns on and goes all fuzzy.

The green, bruised apples on the trees shook violently to the wind as they fell one by one. My house was coming into view. There was a moving van in what used to be the Hawley's house. No one ever really liked that house. It was beaten up. So it wasn't a surprise that the Hawleys moved out.

The new neighbor peered out through the curtains. I turned to see him. His young, pale face was concealed with a black robe, but the sunlight revealed part of his face. His eyes were almost pitch-black. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up.

As I hurried into my house, my mom had already set up lunch. Gavin (my little brother) was stuffing his face while I pulled out a chair. My mom tried to start a conversation with, "Have you seen the new neighbor yet?"

I responded with "More or less...." No matter how much Mom wanted me to go over to the neighbor house to be friends with him, I'm not going an *inch* closer to that house.

After lunch, homework was a breeze. I still had time before dinner: time for a quick nap!

I slipped into bed and tried to fall asleep. I couldn't fall asleep. The kid, his eyes, his hood: he was suspicious indeed, but he had an interesting character. I needed to learn more without him noticing.

I was excitingly scared, or nervous, but whatever I was, I was going to learn about that kid. In the dawn of night, I quickly but quietly snuck out of my room. I knew my parents were asleep because they both snore. They snore quietly, but they still snore.

As I was sneaking through the empty streets, the streetlamps flickered, and I saw him in his room. He was wide awake. Some part of my brain just activated, like I was missing something that I never knew existed. It told me I needed to go closer.

The hinges on the door were broken. The door was leaning against the wall. I sneaked quietly around the askew door. I went inside. I tried to turn around, but I couldn't. An invisible force was holding me back. I was so deeply confused, but I needed to get closer. Something was taking me in. That's when he came out of his bedroom. I looked right into his eyes.

This sent rapid shivers up my spine. I saw death in his eyes. It was pure evil. I knew something bad would happen, but what?

Objects around him went flying all over the place. His pitch-black eyes lit up like his brain just turned on its lamp. It strengthened his power.

His house started crumbling. I felt like I was having a heart attack, and I didn't know what to do. The roof shook vigorously, and cement and plaster rained over us. Shards of glass and bits of the walls were spread across the floor. I looked up to see a mass of stone come out of nowhere. I was frozen in place. Like it was slow motion, I couldn't move an inch. There was silence.

My spirit flew up toward the heavens. I had the feeling I knew this was going to happen. I was dumbstruck. I just floated there, like nothing. I guess I was dead. I *knew* I was dead. It was just me and the sky. It was me. I was the blind seeker, seeking a way...out of here. Wherever here is, wherever I was, I was free.

THE COMET

In THE COMET by Nathan Mueller, a boy has to step up and save the people of Earth from a comet. Why can't they see what he sees?

I woke up to blazing light outside. When I went outside there was a comet coming to Earth. It looked like it had two blazing eyes always staring at me. There was something odd, and that was that nobody seemed to notice the comet.

When I got to school nobody was talking about the comet. I asked my friends, "Hey, have you seen the comet?"

They said that they thought that our galaxy got a new sun. "So you still see it?" I said "You see it coming to Earth?"

One of them said, "It's not falling from the sky. It's just staying there."

After I got home from school I decided to investigate. Sadly I found nothing that could help me, so I quickly did my homework in time for dinner.

In math class I was mumbling about the comet as I grabbed a calculator. My math teacher walked up to me and told me he thought he was the only one who could see the comet. I looked at the calculator, and it had strange symbols. They almost looked Gallifreyan. I pressed a symbol only to be sent to the future just before the comet hit. I left as I saw it start to crush cell towers. When I was back I told him what I found, and that I was trying to solve what happened.

That night we went back to when this first started. I pressed the symbol next to the one I did last time and it sent us to when it happened. As we walked around I spotted a small, green demon thing with horns. We followed it and saw it go into people's houses and curse them. As the sun started to rise it rushed to summon a comet, not realizing that he hadn't cursed some people. I said, "Come on, let's get him."

As I turned back I realized the demon wasn't there.

When we got back I noticed that the comet was significantly closer than yesterday. I promised that we would meet there again tomorrow.

The next day we tried to defeat the demon. We went back to after he started cursing people and started to explore. After hours

of search, we had not prevailed. Finally in the distance I saw a strange lump in the land. After a long time we finally caught him, and all he said was that it was too late.

He disappeared without a trace. Then we went back and it was like *deja vu*; the comet was crushing cell towers and was picking up speed.

I felt hopeless. In fear I dropped the calculator, and it broke. In a last resort I rushed home and lifted up a flimsy cardboard shield as if it would save me. In the last few minutes all I could think of was the calculator breaking and all the people doomed to die. I told myself that it was just a dream, but I knew it was a lie. The last thing I saw was a bright light and then darkness.

THE DARK FIGURE

*A girl walks home and finds all her possessions are gone. Perhaps this is more than just a burglary in **THE DARK FIGURE** by **Jacob Shogan**.*

The nice, cool breeze came through the small glass window as Skylor's dad screamed, "Time to go to school, honey!"

"NO!" Skylor screamed in an agitated voice. She got out of her small bed to lock the door so her dad couldn't run upstairs very angrily and kill her like a deer. Her dad was a hunter, so he was very quick and stealthy, like a ninja. That's what Skylor was afraid of. But she remembered he was her dad and would do nothing to hurt her.

School was boring. As usual, teachers were saying, "Blah, blah, blah," and kids were throwing food in the lunchroom. When she got home from school, Skylor got very confused. Her house was pitch-black, and no one was inside.

"Gulp" was the scared noise she made as she went up to her room.

When she got upstairs, she saw that all of her stuff was gone. Her face started sweating. She went downstairs to see if someone had moved her things there. She didn't find her stuff or the couches!

She wanted to know how this horrible thing happened. She thought and thought, and she remembered how her dad was sneaky. "Could this have been done by Dad?" she wondered. Terrified, she ran upstairs to try to find the phone.

This is all that was left? she thought. *One old cell phone?* She picked it up and dialed 911. "Hello," she said. "Something weird is going on. I need you to get over to my house to investigate." Then she realized no one was on the line, and she turned around.

A dark figure grabbed her....

She was never seen again.

DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

*Jason, a victim of an almost heartstopping car crash, receives a chance to fix his life. But in **DEAL WITH THE DEVIL** by **Drew Weider**, can Jason live with the bargain he has struck?*

My life is flashing before my eyes as metal shrapnel is flung towards me while I am being collided into by another car on a highway. I'm hanging upside-down because of my seat belt, my only possible savior to keep me from locking eyes with death. I gaze at my hip and see a piece of metal jabbed in me. My blood pressure is dropping, interfering with what I'm comprehending right now, and I immediately go into shock.

I lay nearly unconscious on a gurney after I just collided with a pickup truck at a four-lane intersection. With all the strength left in my body, I watch in horror as I ooze out dark crimson red all over my torn clothes. I black out as my blood is being lost by the pint.

I awake to a nurse filling out hospital papers for me with some O.J. and an oatmeal raisin cookie for me. She insists that I hydrate with some orange juice as much as I can to make up for all of my lost blood. My weak fingers spill the carton of juice on my cotton hospital gown. The soaking in of the juice quickly spreads and requires the nurse to clean it up with an itchy linen cloth.

I get a glimpse of my files from my bed. The report shows that my car collided with Jason Zane's pickup truck. Jason and I have had a bad history together. Middle school is when our bad history mostly occurred. I was his friend until he pulled a prank on me which involved a pile of pigs falling on me in front of my crush. Now he manages to destroy my life again, literally. When I do get the chance, though, I will get serious revenge.

I ask the nurse for her name to thank her for all of the assistance she has done for me. "Lacey," she responds in a voice as smooth as pure gold. "My name is Lacey," she says one more time to clarify.

"You have been unconscious for 36 hours in this hospital bed," Lacey says. For the first time, my attention is drawn to the tubes inserted in my skin and transferring fluids into my body. I immediately have a panic attack from my fear of injections. The

tension grows as the rates on my heart monitor and blood pressure monitor drastically increase. I have another blackout.

“Frank Lanrete, I have been waiting for this day for a long time,” this anonymous voice says from all directions. “You have something very special to me, something I need to complete a project with,” the figure said.

“If it's my soul you want, then you can't take it,” I reply.

“Oh, Frank, even though your assumption of me being the devil is right, it doesn't mean I want your soul,” the voice says. Then, almost out of thin air, a stubby fat man appears from the darkness. He wears a wrinkled pair of khakis with a tucked-in dress shirt with green horizontal stripes.

“Ok, Frank,” he says, “let's make a deal. If you give me the oatmeal raisin cookie that the nurse has, I will offer you 1000 years of life with no possible way of your looks getting older and no possible way of death.”

I wondered what he needed that cookie for. *How could a cookie have significance to the devil?* I thought. *Also, why would he need me to get it? Can't he just take it with his devil powers?* I think for a split second. I decide to confront the being with this question.

“The reason why you need to give it to me is because even beings like me can't go into your world. Though I can transfer myself into your dream,” he exclaims. “Get it?” he explained.

“Why would I need to live for 1000 years?” I exclaimed.

“Look, kid, you don't have much time to live. See for yourself if you want to wake up and see yourself. I'm warning you, though, you won't like it.”

Just like that I'm awake. I immediately start to feel pains flooding through my body. My corpuscles are transparent strobe lights flashing through my veins. I know I have to get that cookie from the nurse so I can make my deal with the devil. I'm dying.

I repetitively ring the buzzer to get my nurse to assist me. After about 15 seconds, she is in my room with the cookie in her hand. “Frank,” she said, “you can't be about right now, you can tear your muscle tissue.” Without heeding her words, I swipe the cookie from her hand and slam my head against my bed rail.

I wake up in the same dream as before, surrounded by pitch black. That voice comes back into play. “You did it, boy. Now if you would, give me the cookie. That is, unless you want to die only at sixteen,” he says.

I give him the cookie, and we shake hands.

“Mua ha ha ha ha ha ha,” he chuckles.

“Anything wrong?” I ask. Without any explanation, I awake in my hospital bed, feeling as if I had been souped-up. I feel I can lift a truck. I think to myself, *The devil came through*.

To test out my new abilities, I decide to take the risk of pulling out my life-saving wires inside of me. I wait for hours to see any results. No fatal signs show. I guess this really was a dream come true.

Just as lucky as I am, a fire broke out in my wing of the hospital. This could be the perfect diversion to escape. My thoughts were true that nobody would notice me escaping through the thick fumes. I intentionally put my finger over a developing flame as another test. To me, a stubbed toe would hurt much more than this. My wound sealed up in a matter of seconds, just in time for me to walk out the doors.

Eventually when I evade the fire scene, my greatest plan arose to mind. This will put my abilities to the test. Jason: he has humiliated me enough for a lifetime. I think I should repay the favor.

I go to the public library to find out where Jason is now. “Jason White, Jason List, Jason Krish! No! Why can’t I find my Jason, Jason Zane?” I say. After hours of surfing the internet, I finally find my Jason.

He is currently at the local university. I have established a plan to attack him while he is working the night shift as campus janitor. I need no weapons other than my hands because I have no risk of getting hurt.

When I enter the campus gates, it is pitch-black. After a while, my eyes adjust, and I see Jason inside a building mopping. I approach with bittersweet revenge in my mind.

“Hey, buddy,” I mutter. Jason immediately bounces back on the tip of his toes.

“Wh-wh-who are you?” Jason questions.

“Like you don’t know...” I respond anonymously.

I immediately lunge at his face, the only parts of his body I can see with all of the darkness. I develop a strange feeling of satisfaction as I repeatedly punch him, almost as if I am enjoying killing him.

“I need to do something with him. I can’t just leave him out here like a rag doll,” I think.

I have just disposed of Jason's body in a Dumpster. I can now live for 1000 years freely without any consequences. I locate an overpass to sleep under while I lay low from the cops.

I wake up in the back of a police van. I pretend to stay asleep so I don't get interrogated right away. I'm very bad at keeping myself together under pressure, especially for law enforcers. One of the police in the van says that I could go to jail for life if they find the right evidence for the trial. I immediately crack from that statement and blurt out, “I'm guilty of murdering Jason Zane!”

After pleading guilty for the murder of Jason, I am shipped out to the county prison. It has been two months now, and I am still in the works of an escape plan. I have no outside resources or people to bust me out. You never know, 1000 years could pass by pretty fast.

DEMON DEALERS

*Sometimes you need unlikely allies to save the world. When the Black Diamond is stolen, it's up to the Demon Dealers and the Dimension Devils to save it in **DEMON DEALERS** by Caroline Kondak.*

Alarms are blaring, and Demon Dealers everywhere are yelling, "The Black Diamond has been stolen!" Oh, I'm sorry; are you confused? Let me back up a little.

My name is Katie, and it was a regular day for my partner, Raven, and me. We are both police for demons called Demon Dealers. For instance, we might be preventing a demon from robbing a bank, or we might stop an escaped demon convict. Anyway, we were doing paperwork when an alarm started to wail. We shot to our feet. "That's the alarm for the Black Diamond," Raven says.

"Oh no," I exclaim, "this is bad!" The Black Diamond has a lot of power that demons want to harness, so it's bad news if it's been stolen. We both run for where the diamond is located, getting our whips ready. However, by the time we get there, it's too late. Everyone looks around for clues until one person finds something that looks like a business card. The general comes up to examine it and says, "Caesar Atbash. He wants us to come."

Everyone begins to panic. Caesar Atbash is one of the most notorious demons of all time. Even though most of us have never seen him, anyone who has has gone insane. Plus, from what we know, he's not powerful, but he is a very persuasive speaker. "A mission must be made!" the general calls, "Any volunteers?"

I look at Raven and she nods. "Katie and I will volunteer," Raven yells.

"Very well," the general nods. One of the prime researchers comes up to the general and whispers something in her ear. "We only know some information about where an informant is," the general says. "All we know is that he or they can be found in the bar in Daboya Island." Raven and I nod, and we head to the transportation unit.

As we step inside of the unit, Raven reminds me that the unit has a 24-hour cool-down. "Ugh," I groan, "even though it's good we can get there quick, why does it have to take so long?"

Long time or not, soon we are zooming through space, headed to Daboya Island. Daboya Island is a place where a lot of shady things happen, but even shadier demons hang out. If you want to get “lost,” Daboya Island is the place to go.

We stumble out of the unit and find ourselves a little bit away from a tiny bar that looks like it costs ten interdimensional dollars. As we are walking to the door the sounds of a fight become loud.

“Wait,” a timid voice calls out. “You shouldn’t go in there!” A demon that looks like a light bulb floats over.

“Don’t worry, we’re Demon Dealers,” Raven soothes the demon. We push past the tiny demon and head inside.

When we do, we see how bad the fight really is. Demons everywhere are yelling, scratching, and beating each other up, but most of their anger is pointed toward the center of the crowd. “Demon Dealers!” Raven and I shout together. All the demons turn and quickly sit down.

“All right, we’re here for information about Caesar Atbash. Everyone else leave,” I say firmly, trying to look every demon in the eye.

“We’ve got information,” a voice says, and the demons start to hiss and growl. In the middle of the crowd, we began to realize why the fight we heard was so full of anger. Sitting in front of us are the Dimension Devils. The Devils are humans, like us, and they are a pain in the neck to demons everywhere.

We pull over a sticky table and sit down across from the Devils. I size them up, taking note of the laser guns at their sides. “All right, let me guess, you want to know about where Atbash is?” the leader asks, and Raven and I nod. “Macerate Bay, in an old abandoned warehouse. He’s by himself, the idiot.”

“Well, would you three object to coming as informants?” I ask very slowly.

The Devils exchange looks. “We hate Caesar as much as you, so it would be our pleasure,” one of them says finally.

“Great, can we have some names?” Raven asks.

“I’m Zack,” the leader says, “and this is Drew and Jason.”

“I’m Katie, and this is Raven,” I reply. After that, we get moving,

“I’m sorry that we can’t use the transportation unit, but there’s not enough room, and it has a 24-hour cool-down,” Raven says to us, and I groan. *Then again, I thought, walking would give us the element of surprise.*

So, we head out on foot, trekking across a couple valleys filled with random demons looking like plants until we see Macerate Bay coming up ahead. "Here's the warehouse," Drew says, pointing to a large, boxy shape in the distance. As soon as we come up to the warehouse, a shape floats down in front of us.

"So, let me guess, you've come for the Diamond," a screechy voice fills the air. Right away I felt his words affect my thoughts. Maybe it wasn't such a bad thing he had the diamond after all. I mean, really, how bad could world domination be?

"Snap out of it!" Drew says loudly, and hands out earplugs.

"Caesar Atbash," Jason snaps. However, when I finally see him, I feel a bit underwhelmed. He is a tiny thing, in the shape of a stop sign. It was definitely easier now that I can see how tiny he is.

We advance from every direction, cornering Caesar. Raven and I get out our whips, and the Devils get out their laser guns. We attack, and even though we are much bigger than him, he puts up a good fight. Even so, we manage to tie him up and get out with only a few scratches.

"C'mon, let's get that Diamond," Zach says. We walk into the warehouse and find the Diamond on a pedestal, crackling with energy and ready to blow the whole world up. We grab the diamond and Caesar and get out of there.

As soon as we return the Diamond, Caesar is arrested, and the Devils, Raven, and I all part ways. Raven and I go back to working as Demon Dealers, and the Devils go back to being pains in the neck to Demons. However, every once in a while they call us up, and Raven and I are ready to kick some butt.

THE DEMON OF THE WOODS

In THE DEMON OF THE WOODS by Connor Mueller, there is a price to pay when a friend is injured after the discovery of a mysterious cave.

Adventuring is our thing. Drew and I have been doing it since we were little. Our team of other explorers just found a hidden area. It is heavily wooded and has an eeriness to it.

As I look around I see a cave that you can't see into. I tell the team to stay behind and yell, "Drew, I found a cave!" and we run into it.

Drew is faster than me, so I am behind him. I can't see anything. All I can hear is Drew's footsteps echoing off the walls. All of the sudden I hear Drew scream "Ahhhhhhhhhh!" and hear something hit the ground. I catch up and shine a flashlight on his leg and see a snake slithering away. I carry Drew to the rest of our team and say, "Send him to a hospital." The snake was an unknown species that gives cancer to the victim.

When I walk to Drew in the hospital he tells me a legend. A demon lives in an eerie forest who for the price of a soul gives the person a mushroom that heals anything. But to get to the demon you must pass trials to prove worthiness. Only the person who passes the trials can eat the mushroom. That forest in the legend was the one we discovered.

I ask him, "How do you know this?"

Drew responded, "It was a legend I was told as a kid. That is what got me into adventuring."

I walk into the forest. Something feels wrong. I turn around and there he is, the demon. The demon says, "Your trials begin." And he disappears.

Everything goes fuzzy, and I feel weird. I see a room, and I walk into it. I pick up a sword, and instantly, snakes slither out and try to bite me. I swing the sword at them, but I do not hit them. As they back me into a corner I start hitting them. After that I finish them off quickly.

I see the demon, who snaps his fingers. The room disappears. I am back to the forest.

This time I see a pit with someone just barely hanging onto a vine. I run over to pull her up. She is slipping, and I know I won't

make it in time. I look around for something to throw to her, like another vine, but I find nothing. As I run closer I see it is not her that is slipping. It is the vine that is coming loose. I jump just in time to grab the thing she is holding onto and pull her up.

Again everything is gone, and I am back at the forest. The demon appears and says "Fight me!"

I say, "No, I am too tired," and I start to walk away.

But the demon says, "You pass. You are the only human that has passed. Nothing can stop me, and that is why you should not fight me." Then he says, "A soul for the mushroom."

I say, "I have to think. I will be back."

I walk to the hospital to check up on Drew. When I get there he is almost dead.

I go back and tell the demon, "Come with me." The demon follows me to the hospital, and I say, "His soul for the mushroom. He is practically dead." The demon takes his soul and gives me the mushroom. But before the demon can do anything, I shove the mushroom down his throat, saving him.

The demon is furious and says, "You tricked me. Now I take you."

The demon walks toward me slowly. I back into a corner, terrified. When the demon gets to me, I am shivering. He grabs me and drags me as Drew just stands there, frozen in horror.

THE DEVIL GAMES

In **THE DEVIL GAMES** by **Julien Hamid**, four friends find an adventure awaiting them in a whole new world.

I suddenly found us all trapped.... It was like we were in a different dimension. Before I continue, you should know some background information. Let's just start the whole day over.

It was just like any other summer day. I went to get the groceries like every other Friday, did some daily exercise. Like always, I hung out with my friends Theo, Lila, and Megan. I'm Julien.

Theo is blonde, and I would say average height for a tween. People mistake him for a famous surfer dude on TV. Megan is a brunette, and she's the tallest out of all of us, while Lila, a redhead, is the shortest (I am too). Lila and Theo have very deep dimples. We kind of make fun of them by saying they're the perfect match. At school, Megan and I are considered *mean*. We don't know what we do to make us mean, but we just go with the flow.

We went to the park that day. It was really fun. Someone even dropped ice cream on Theo's pants! We came home at about noon, when the baby blue sky died out.

We wiped our feet on the welcome mat, as always, and then we entered. Theo's jaw dropped, Lila's purse dropped, and Megan fell on the floor. As for me, I almost fainted. There was nothing. Everything was gone. The only things left were bloodstains on the wall that made arrows. "Whoa!" Theo said. "What happened...you didn't do anything illegal, did you?" Megan gave him a look that made him shut up.

Theo, who doesn't really have a conscience, followed the arrows. "Dude! Why in heaven's sake would you follow the arrows made of blood?" I shouted. I hoped no one was outside to hear that.

"It's not blood, Mr. ScaredyPants. I'm always looking for adventure anyways!" Theo responded with sass. He kept on following them. As for us, we followed him.

The arrows led us to the kitchen, where I noticed something strange. Instead of the fridge being there, there was a dumbwaiter, like one from the 20th century. The even stranger thing was that this particular dumbwaiter went only down. Again, Theo, the one with no conscience, decided to go down there. We couldn't stop

him. He's very convincing (he gets it from his dad). We told him to shout something if he saw anything down there, and then we would pull him up.

Five minutes passed with no sign of Theo whatsoever. I pulled the dumbwaiter up. No one was in it. We were worried, and we decided to go down there. "Ladies first?" I said anxiously.

"You wish..." Megan and Lila said in sync.

"Come on, I'm like, I'm like the main person in this squad of ours, therefore making me the most important." Megan just growled and decided to go down.

When we pulled the dumbwaiter up, again there was no one. It felt like a pattern. "Lila, it's your turn." She punched me, not hard, but it hurt. She's special like that.

I pulled the dumbwaiter up; there was no one. It was my turn.

I was the last to go down. I fit in the cramped dumbwaiter and made my way down.

I kept on going, and a pink light started shining on my face. I went down some more. The dumbwaiter rumbled. I didn't know what was going on. There was a light that spread all over me. I woke up. At first, I was stuck in the dumbwaiter. I twisted and turned, and finally, I wiggled my way out to freedom. It felt like I was in the underworld itself. I think it actually was. There was fire everywhere, and lava moats around me.

I was looked around and found the others. It looked like they were paralyzed. They didn't budge, and I didn't either. We saw something: devil red, horns, tall, devilishly tall. We all knew who it was.

There was the devil himself, sitting on his throne, right in front of us. Speechless, we were all speechless. We didn't even know what to say. Around us was fire, and a ten percent chance we couldn't run for it. The Devil, still sitting in his throne made of gold, spoke clearly. "Welcome. You are now forever trapped in the Devil Game; you will fight to the death. You will never try to escape, or I will kill you on the spot. Do I make myself clear?" We all nodded. "You will choose an element from the following: Water, Wind, Fire, or Earth. If you resist to choose an element, I will trap you in the river Styx. When you choose an element, which you will, you will be teleported to the arena. Good luck."

I chose wind, Theo chose earth, Lila chose water, and Megan chose fire. We all said goodbye to each other because we thought this was the last time we would see each other.

We all got teleported to the arena. The arena was not so gloomy, considering it was the Devil's in the underworld. The arena was made of glass in the shape of a sphere. I looked around to observe my surroundings. I knew that there was going to be fire somewhere; it's pretty obvious. Somehow we all had suits on us, with the symbols of our element. The suits were stretchy, definitely not spandex.

We found each other near a dark, deep, creepy lake. We looked around for an exit, but we didn't find one. We were brainstorming ideas, but some people from each of our tribes attacked us. They looked professional, but when someone from the fire tribe attacked us, I noticed he had no pupils.

We found out how to use our powers when someone from Megan's tribe attacked us. We were at the lake when I heard someone running toward us. My reflexes kicked in, and somehow I blew him all the way to the other side of the arena. "JULIEN! HOW IN THE GODS' SAKE DID YOU DO THAT?" Theo exclaimed.

"I-I don't know." Theo and Megan tried too, and they found out how to use their powers. Lila was having trouble.

Many other players attacked us, but they looked like demons, not people. We saw some actual people near the fake forest. They were so scared they ran. I later found out we could use our powers as transportation. That helped a lot. We were battling someone from the water tribe when it hit me: this is the actual underworld, so why not aim high. The underworld is below the surface. Surely we should use our powers to dig up.

At that moment, the girl demon from the water tribe slapped me with a terrifying wave of boiling water. I couldn't breathe; I was shocked. I almost forgot our way out.

"Julien, come on, don't leave us!" Megan screamed. Megan was mad, really mad. When Megan's mad, you don't want to mess with her. She exploded, literally. Flames were everywhere. It even made a hole on the ceiling. Theo took all of us on a gigantic rock, and we escaped.

We made it. Hitting the surface was like coming back home after being drafted to war. And it was home again. It was all there. I had a really bad burn, but everything was here: my parents, my dog, my

furniture, everything. Life was back to normal. Well, you could say that, but we still had the powers. We made sure no one knew about them, though.

It had been five months since everything was back to normal. It was winter break. We felt like going sledding, so we went to get our snow gear. We went to my place, and when I opened the screen door, the other door automatically opened. We were creeped out a bit, but we could protect ourselves with our powers. We went in, and once again were almost paralyzed.

There he was, again, right in front of us. He had a mad look on his face; his eyes were red, and he looked furious. He just made a sign with his fingers, and we followed. This wasn't the dumbwaiter this time. No, it was something much worse. He threw us in. He just threw us. He threw us in a pool. It was a red pool. It looked like a pool of lava. It just came out of nowhere.

We got teleported back to the arena, and I saw that the devil had patched up the hole through which we had left. This time, he put big demons that covered the whole arena to watch us so we wouldn't escape. We were trapped for good. We could never escape. We looked around the arena for shelter. We thought this was how we were going to end, in an endless loop of fighting people with powers.

We were tired, tired of everything. We had to try to escape. I looked up and saw a big box made of tinted black glass. And in the glass, I saw the devil. I swore, but he didn't care. I shot a gust of wind up there and shattered the glass. Something fell. I caught it quickly. The trinket had a label on it that had the word teleporter on it. Who knew the Devil needed labels?

I made everyone huddle and link arms. "What the heck...," Theo said. "I don't want to die like this. I'd rather stay here and live a non-happy life..."

"Oh shut up, Theo. It's going to work," Lila said with a shaky voice.

I pressed the button that was on there. We made it, again. This time we knew we were safe. That teleporter was the only one, and the only way he could come up here. He also had patched the hole through which we busted out the first time.

We returned home and tried to live normally for a while. It worked, but one day when we came home from school....

FARMER'S DEATH

*A rich man offers a fortune to a man who doesn't want to sell his farm. But the would-be buyer is not going to take no for an answer in **FARMER'S DEATH** by *Jackson White*.*

Ben went to check his mail, and inside there was a velvet envelope. Ben never got mail, so he was curious. Ben opened up the letter and read it.

Dear Ben Johnson,

You probably know that your farm is in the middle of my land. I am willing to take it off your hands. I'm willing to pay \$1.6 million. If you didn't realize, that's double the value of your land. I will come by and give you the money.

Sincerely,

Bill Rollins

Ben could not believe what the note said. Ben didn't want to sell his land, but he'd be a fool to turn down the offer.

Just then, Ben heard a car pull up. Four men in suits got out of the Range Rover. They approached Ben. A small man in a white suit shoved his way through the men.

"Here's the money I promised you," the small man said. Then he handed the envelope to Ben.

"I don't want to sell my farm," Ben replied. Ben gave the small man the envelope back.

The small man took the money back. "You are making a big mistake." The small man spat on Ben and got back into the car.

Ben woke up the next morning and went to feed his horse, Ray. When Ben got to the barn, Ray was missing. In Ray's stall Ben found a letter. The letter said, "Meet me at the Number Two warehouse at ten tonight if you want your horse back." Ben smashed the horse food to the ground and stabbed it with a pitchfork. Ben thought to himself,

“You can’t come in here and try to buy my farm! You can’t steal my horse!” Ben was angry. He had to do what the letter said, though, or he might never get his horse back.

Ben went to the Number Two warehouse, as the note said. Nobody seemed to be there. As Ben was about to leave the warehouse, a cage fell on him. The small man appeared out of a box.

“Why are you doing this?” Ben said as he tried to break loose.

“You did not take my offer, so I had to take matters into my own hands,” the man replied.

When Bill left, Ben tried to get out, but got too tired. Ben fell asleep.

When the little man unlocked the cage the next day, Ben attacked him. The little man screamed for help. Two huge guys picked Ben up and threw him into a pick-up truck.

When the truck stopped, Ben knew where he was. The two men picked Ben up again and tied him onto the barn door. The small man came out.

“I will take your offer,” Ben said. Ben was very scared.

“Sorry,” the small man said.

“We can talk about this. You can have the land for free!” Ben pleaded.

“Shut up, you fool! This will only hurt a little,” said the small man.

The small man got into a bulldozer. He headed straight for Ben with no hesitation. The small man rolled over the whole barn and Ben.

Bill made a resort on the land and got lots of money.

THE GHOST OF TIME

In THE GHOST OF TIME by Emily Stebbins, an unsuspecting mortal is plunged into a supernatural realm where everything is unknown to him.

Deep inside a forest there is a time machine, a ghosts' time machine. The thing is, the ghosts are the time machine. On the first Monday evening of every April as soon as the clock hits eight the ghosts come alive.

On this Monday there is a twist. There is a new security guard at the museum that the ghosts visit. All of the security guards before him knew about the ghosts because they are ghosts.

All ghosts have a certain power: they have the power of disguise. They all share that secret and purposely don't tell the human workers, because if they did they would lose their powers. As ghosts with the power of disguise their power takes place in the outside world.

While the security guard is locking down all of the doors of the museum, he hears a noise in one of the rooms. It's a golden ghost. The guard may not know there is a golden ghost in the room, but he knows there is something moving. This ghost's mission is to turn a human into a ghost.

The guard walks over and motions his flashlight across the room, sending a wave of blinding light to the ghost's eyes. The ghost starts to moan. This time the guard throws his body around the enormous pillar and turns on his flashlight, highlighting specks of dust floating in the air.

He keeps walking. As he is walking, it is almost as if something is glaring at him: red, beady eyes and a heart that beats like lightning striking at the ground.

The ghost silently picks up a nearby trashcan and throws it onto the security guard's head. The security guard sprints as hard as he can outside of the building.

He stops for a while and takes the trash can off of his head. He sets it on the dead, yellow grass beside him. The bodies of the enormous oak trees in the forest look like human skeletons.

As he is catching his breath he hears something whispering his name, almost in a soothing way but more in a hypnotizing action.

The voice leads him to the guardian of the ghosts, a rattlesnake about as long as twenty trees. "Step in," the snake hisses and growls. "Trussssssssssst in me." The snake's tail brushes through a time portal, the portal that holds the ghosts' power of time traveling. The time portal holds the ghosts' power of traveling and also contains the silver ghosts in their time eras. The snake's tongue is gliding and slipping back and forth in his mouth.

As the security guard steps into the ghosts' time portal he quickly tries to step back, but it is too late. "I wish I could go back in time," the security guard says.

"Wish granted," replies the snake. Then the snake brushes his tail through the switch, slowly turning it to the Jurassic time period. Every time the switch clicks back the security guard feels more and more helpless, like someone has ripped his soul out of his chest and thrown it away. He has nothing to do but wait, hopelessly, with hands shaking and forehead pouring with sweat. He thinks to himself, "The ghost is unstoppable now and there is nothing I can do about it. He took all of my power...and hope."

The snake whispers as his coiled serpent body glides over him, "No going back."

He meets up with a silver ghost, an enormous *T. rex*. This ghost also has time traveling powers. The security guard is commanded to find the golden key. The golden key unlocks the power to release the golden ghost. The only reason is he needs to prove his capability to summon a human to the time portal first.

If you are a golden ghost you have the capability of going into the outside world. The ghost really wants to go into the outside world. Before he was turned into a ghost he was happy with his father, but one night his father was turned into a ghost, a ghost of disguise. His dad was in a whole other dimension, in the outside world away from his son. The golden key would allow the ghost to go to the outside world and see his father. If the security guard doesn't complete the mission, he, too, will become a ghost.

The ghost told the security guard he only has till sundown to complete his mission. The guard starts down a path lined with dead, yellow grass. As he is searching for the key, he can see a muted glow in the trunk of an old maple tree. He sprints over to the tree and reaches down the tree trunk. He pulls out the golden key!

He starts running back, but stops at a big ocean. This ocean is the liquid power of ghosts and is purposely an obstacle for the

humans trying to retrieve the key and give it back to the ghost. This way, the ghost keeper can multiply the number of ghosts.

Just as he closes his eyes, drained of hope, a golden path parts the ocean, leading to the ghost. As the ghost spots him through the trail he runs over to grab the key. When the silver ghost touches the key, a band of dust drapes over his body, revealing the golden ghost. The security guard turns to silver dust, a ghost...a silver ghost.

THE LAKE

In **THE LAKE** by *Jordon Miree*, a spooky story might be more than just a legend.

“This is just stupid,” complained an irritated Mick who had been perfectly fine spending his spring break in California. Mrs. Jefferson just simply ignored the comment.

“Look,” his sister Melody said quietly from the front seat. “We are going to enjoy this trip for Mom, all of us. So you need to stop acting selfish, and be quiet,” she warned.

“There goes the lake. It had a notorious reputation. A little girl had been beaten and drowned there, who knows? But people still swim in it like they don’t care,” Mrs. Jefferson continued. “Gosh, how long has it been!”

Mick looked to the lake. It looked so inviting that he had to fight the sudden urge to jump out of the car and leap into the water. He suddenly longed to go in the water, which Mick found strange for he didn’t usually like swimming or even water for that matter. He quickly dismissed the thought. “Whatever,” he said. It was probably nothing.

They drove pass shops, stores, the old library, and even Town Hall. The town itself seemed like a whole other world, lost in time.

They reached the old cabin at the edge of town. Mrs. Jefferson quickly looked down at her watch. “It’s already 5 o’clock!” She cried. “I have to start dinner.” She quickly rushed into the house and started to heat.

“Mick, Mick!” Mrs. Jefferson called out as she was cooking dinner. He appeared at the kitchen doorway.

“What?” he complained.

“I’ll act like I didn’t hear that. But could you run through town past the lake and down to the market, and pick up a sack of potatoes? We’re out.”

“Why can’t Kevin or Melody do it! Why do I always have to do it?” Like a 4 year old he whined.

“Kevin is out doing something, God knows where. Melody? I think she went for a run. You’re the only one still in the house,” she answered.

“Ugh, but I’m in the middle of a game. Does no one care about what I’m doing? I don’t even like potatoes!” he cried.

“Just go.” He sighed, for he knew he had no other options. He grabbed his bike and headed down to the market. He biked and biked until he could see the small town in the horizon.

He had the urge to stop. He knew where he was: right near the lake. The desire to jump into the water built up inside of him, tempted as ever he was. The lake reflected back at him as a mirror, calling to Mick.

The temptation was too great. He stepped off his bike. He stepped toward the lake and cast his gaze upon it. It seemed to gaze back, telling him to come in.

No one even had to know. *Just a quick swim*, he told himself, *a quick swim*. The water had already come above his knees when he came to his senses. What was he doing? This made absolutely no sense. Never once had he longed to go into a lake so badly. It wasn’t natural. It was as if the lake itself wanted him to come in. There was something very wrong with this.

There was another presence upon the lake. A pair of eyes peered out at him. Someone was there watching him through the darkness. He quickly jumped on his bike. It was probably nothing. But still, he hurried home, away from the lake.

It was the next day when Mrs. Jefferson told her kids to go outside. “No more!” she cried. “I’m sick of this! We are supposed to be a family! Families spend time together! The point of the vacation was to come together as a family, not to go off into our separate corners! So you guys are going down to the lake for a swim. I will be there shortly to join you. Now go!”

By the time they had set up the chairs and the umbrella and had started a campfire, it was already sunset. The air was so hot, they all decided to go for a quick swim to cool off from the hot night air.

Mick heard footsteps behind him. He looked back to find no one there. Still he heard someone, getting closer with every step. Then the footsteps stopped. Mick swore that for second there was a tall, thin shadow standing next to Kevin. He blinked, and it was gone.

“She’s still there, you know. I still see her,” a man spoke. He was a tall man. His face was older and twisted in sadness. He was so frail and bony. He looked like an accumulation of dust, as if one touch would be enough for him to be blown into nothingness. And

his eyes were sunken in his face, bloodshot from crying. He carried a deep sadness and depression about himself. His skin was pail as snow. As the siblings stared at him, it felt as if something was missing. He was there, but not really. He was so thin that he was almost... transparent.

He spoke. "People go ignoring the legend, and they wind up dead. The police say it is a riptide. But I know what it is. It's her: the lake child, the Dead one. Or we are really dead. Are we all just dead and don't know it?"

Mick stared into those crazed eyes. The man crazily glared at the children. This poor man had been depressed to the point of insanity.

"Those horrible smugglers, they killed her. She saw too much. So they killed her. They beat her to death, drowned her. Then she killed one of them. The other one escaped. She'll keep killing till he's dead. She won't stop!" he cried.

"Who?"

"The lake child! Her! She's mad! She's lures them into the lake, and then she kills them! She pulls them to the lake bottom to die. I was there! I saw it! Ask the police! Ask If Damien Sager was there on the night of the murder." They turned to look upon the lake, and when they turned back, they found themselves alone.

No one uttered a word.

Mick quickly dismissed the thought. "I don't believe it. Sure, a girl could've been murdered here years ago. But people can't come back from dying. Ghosts aren't real."

"Yeah," Melody agreed. Even then, they still avoided entering the lake for the rest of the evening.

But the night heat became too intense. By the time they had settled down, hours had passed, and still no dared to enter the lake. The temptation to go into the lake still was there, haunting them. Mick could not take it any longer!

"This is stupid. Are we just going to sit here until it gets dark?" Just like that he dove into the lake. Melody dove in, too. It was just a stupid legend.

The water felt good. It felt great. They dove under the waves, and came back up for air. Then they dove some more.

The fog came. It became so thick that Melody and Mick became unable to see shore. Which way was shore?

“Help! Someone help me!” Melody cried. “NO, STAY AWAY FROM ME!” she screamed as if talking to someone else. “HELP ME!” Her scream was cut short.

“Melody, where are you?” But it was already too late as a cold bony hand wrapped its self around Mick’s neck. “AHHHHHHHH!” he screamed. He screamed so loud that he hoped he alerted the police. He only had time to shout, “Help!” before his head disappeared under the water.

He kicked, trying to free himself. He opened his eyes to see the rotting face of a dead little girl. “Did you kill me?” she whispered.

Mick blacked out. When he woke up, he found himself on shore with a wet Kevin calling out for Melody. Kevin had seen him shouting as he went under water and saved him. Melody! She had been pulled under! No, no she can’t have gone like this! Wet, rotting fingers wrapped around Mick’s leg. The same little girl spoke again. “Did you kill me?” she whispered.

“No! Leave me alone! I didn’t do it!” he cried. “Kevin, help me!”

But Kevin couldn’t reach him fast enough, for he was on the other end of shore. She pulled him down. Kevin clawed at the ground. He looked for something, anything, that could save him. “No, no, leave me alone! I didn’t do it! Innocent! Innocent!” He grabbed at the wet sand. But it was already too late. He was already under water. And the world went dark.

Kevin cried, “Melody, Mick, please come back! Don’t go away!” No one answered. “Oh, don’t take them away! Please bring them back!” Kevin sobbed.

The police never found the bodies. It was all over the news, the story of two children who mysteriously drowned. Search parties were sent out. A cash reward was even offered. It showed up in the local paper, and then the action died down, just another unsolved case for the police.

“Did you know anyone who wished to do harm to the children?” asked the chief of police at the station.

“N-no,” Mrs. Jefferson croaked. Kevin was still crying. He hadn’t stopped. The Chief sat there, his face devoid of emotion.

“Do you know any potential causes of their drowning?” he asked.

“No.” A tear ran down her cheek.

“Wait,” Kevin said in between tears. “I-it was the lake child.”

“The Lake child—no, that’s just a local legend. Who told you that story?”

“The man at the lake,” Kevin sniffed. “He said his name was Damien? Damien Sager.”

“That’s not possible. It can’t be!” Panic spread across the policeman’s face, He shot up from his chair, to the nearby cabinet. Muttering under his breath, he pulled out a single file.

“Why?” Mrs. Jefferson asked.

“Because Damien Sager was a smuggler who mysteriously drowned at the lake years and years ago.” And he held out the picture of the man at the lake.

MALARIE'S DOLL

In MALARIE'S DOLL by Angelina Toma, a girl receives an heirloom doll for her birthday. But this doll is no one's plaything, and it has plans for Malarie.

“Happy birthday to you!” all of my friends sang to me on a Friday night, that same night my parents gave me an old Raggedy Ann that my great-grandmother had when she was younger. It was old, ripped up, and dirty, but I had to act like I liked it because it's been passed down to me until I have a child. She looked really creepy, but I knew she wasn't Chucky or anything because no one else in my family had been possessed or something. I couldn't stand to look at her, so I put her on a high shelf in my closet.

That night I was awakened to a pair of blood-red eyes and another pair of hands wrapped around my neck, choking me. I wrestled them off to see the doll on the floor next to my bed. I jumped out of my bed, purposely stepping on my doll and running out of the room screaming, “She's alive, she's alive!”

When I reached my parents' room, they calmed me down, and I explained to them what had just happened. They came to check my room, but the old doll was back on the shelf. They told me it was just a nightmare and that I could sleep with them just for that night.

The next day I kept hearing noises coming from my closet but was too scared to open it, so I did the stupid choice and decided to ignore it. That night I set my phone up in the corner of the room to record just in case something fishy was happening, and the same thing happened to me. This time I didn't scream. I just grabbed the phone, ran into the bathroom, and started watching the video. I screamed when I saw a doll hand cover the lens. Then the video ended and suddenly got deleted.

I slowly walked into my room to see what looked like bloodstains on my bed and carpet and something spelled out with the same gooey substance on the wall. It was hard to make it out in the dark, but I'm pretty sure it said, “I'm coming.” I didn't scream like before because I knew it would just disappear when my parents came back. Instead I tiptoed into my parents' room and slept next to my dog. All I was thinking was “Where did that blood

come from? Was it from the doll? Of course it was." I had to try to get rid of her.

That next night I set my alarm to midnight. When the alarm rang, I grabbed the doll and ran out to my neighborhood lake. I threw her as far as possible and returned home.

The next day I woke up to my window being open. I thought it was just a coincidence and closed it. I then turned around and, boom, there she was, sitting in my beanbag chair. "W-what do you w-want from me?" I calmly stuttered when really I was more scared than ever. I waited and waited for a sign until I heard a croaky voice saying "YOU!"

I ran out of my room and sped through my house to my mom who was in the middle of setting the table. "SHE TALKED! Mom, this wasn't a dream, she talked! I threw her in the lake last night but she's back and talking!" I shouted to my astounded mother.

"Slow down, who talked?" she tried to say as calmly as possible.

"The doll!" I shouted.

She groaned and sat down. "Honey, dolls can't walk, talk, or move in any way. If you really don't like her that much then take her out of your room. Just don't do anything to her. She's been passed down for generations. Now I've heard enough of this nonsense. Sit down and eat your breakfast," she commanded.

"She really did," I whispered to myself.

Finally, it was the next morning. Before anyone woke up, I started a fire in the fire pit outside with the help of my best friend from across the street. I hesitantly threw the doll in, praying that she wouldn't reappear. Of course later that day I heard scratching at my closet and slowly opened it. That's when the doll fell on me and I screamed. My parents rushed in but then noticed me staring at the doll and started to groan out of the room.

This was my last chance. I threw the doll into the neighborhood dump, and later that day I saw my six-year-old neighbor dig it up. "What are you doing?" I asked.

"I saw this pretty doll hanging outside the dumpster so I thought I'd take it," she replied in a squeaky voice.

"Don't take it, it's possessed," I warned her.

"I can do whatever I want," she said, being the little brat she always is.

"DON'T TAKE IT! I BEG OF YOU." But she just ran off.

The next night I heard a shriek next door and ran to the house only to find the girl's mother sobbing next to the girl's dead body. Something stood out to me: she was holding the doll.

I don't know what happened to the doll after that. She just never came back to haunt me or anyone else in my city, although the other day I did see something on the news about a murdered child who had a random doll next to her body.

THE MONSTER

*A monster flies down from the sky and attacks a neighborhood in **THE MONSTER** by **Gavin Zacharias**. Someone will have to figure out how to defeat this seemingly invincible creature.*

KABOOM! The sound was as loud as a train. A monster with three heads came from the sky. The monster was getting bigger every second. The monster wouldn't stop growing. The whole house was getting sucked into the monster's mouth till there was nothing left.

The kid went to his parents and said there was a flying monster outside. He said the monster kept getting bigger and the house across the street was gone. The kid said the monster looked like a black circle with three heads hovering above the ground.

At first the kid's parents didn't believe him. They thought the noise was a gunshot. He dragged them outside.

People were running everywhere. They saw a monster sucking up houses and getting bigger. The dad said, "Let's go and pack the bags!"

But the mom said, "There's no time!"

So they left. They rushed to the car. Before they got in, the monster sucked in two cars with families in them. They got in the car and went to the city.

They drove to the city as fast as they could go. They went to the university lab. The dad rushed in to say what he just saw. The scientist didn't believe him until he showed him a picture. The scientist didn't know what to say.

The dad said to the scientist that the monster came out of nowhere. The kid said that it is destroying Earth. The scientist called 911.

The police thought it was a joke and didn't do anything. After the police started getting hundreds of calls the police went. They saw this huge monster destroying everything.

The police pulled out their guns and started shooting. It did nothing. Two minutes later a news truck came and started filming the monster. The monster flew to the truck and destroyed it.

The police called the military to destroy the monster. The military came with a rocket launcher. The first shot missed. They

shot one more time, and it hit the monster right in the face. Nothing happened.

The military tried all non-nuclear weapons known to man, but nothing worked. Then the kid had an idea to help. He had a Nerf gun in the car that he left in the car from their last car ride. He loaded the Nerf gun with one dart. He ran outside and shot at the monster.

Everybody saw the flimsy dart flying through the air. It hit the monster. The dart went right through, and the monster evaporated. To everybody's amazement the Nerf dart destroyed the monster.

After that day scientists researched many times why the Nerf dart destroyed the monster. After testing many times they figured the monster's skin couldn't take foam, so the monster died.

NUMBER THREE CHARITY ROAD

*Louis Steiner's family wins a week at a beach house in a contest they never entered, and now at the beach people are disappearing! In **NUMBER THREE CHARITY ROAD** by **Sophie Schlott-er**, will Louis get out before he vanishes, too?*

As a detective I see things people don't think about. I know nobody ever notices when the first person goes missing. If they do, by the time they realize what happened, it's too late. But when 302 people disappear, it becomes a problem that nobody WANTS to know about. That was how this started. The only thing found after what was possibly the largest disappearance ever was a journal belonging to small boy by the name of Louis Steiner. To keep a running data collection, we will read a section, and then do a report. But this may be hard, considering how odd the first entry is.

Journal #1

How do girls do this stuff all the time? It's exhausting. Well, might as well start here. My name is Louis, and today my mom gave me this 'journal' to 'write about my adventures of summer!' Ugh, gag me. Right, so yesterday we got a weird letter in the mail saying we won a trip from my dad's work to a beach house for a month, and my parents went berserk. It was like a positive version of the world ending. Don't they think it's a bit weird? I mean, did we even know we COULD win this trip? Well, as odd as it is, the letter said to stop by the post office to pick up the keys today, and we're leaving to go as soon as it opens. Wow, that was two pages? Maybe this won't be so bad after all.

We interrogated the employees at the local post office. Everyone there denied the Steiners ever entered the building that day, and all cameras agree. This seemed most odd, considering what the following journal entry stated.

Journal #2

Well, this could be worse. Today is July 30, 2015, and my family and I are packing our bags for a becoming-less-likely-to-be-a-sham trip to a lake house in two days. We picked up the keys yesterday, but the guy at the post office acted all weird as he gave them to us. Oops, Mom's coming. Better finish.

After the previous section, we searched the house, but we came to a conclusion that made less sense than what the boy wrote. In the end, we discovered that the post office the family actually went to has in fact been closed for 13 years. This case is getting weirder.

Journal #3

We left the house at around three o'clock, and arrived at the place at five. The house is the third one down, on Charity Road. There are sixty-two other kids here, and I was immediately invited to scrimmage with a few other boys. From what I gather, there are three sets of twins, and about half of the rest are siblings. The people next to us are old, and we really do have a great view of the lake. It's great, but it's almost as if everyone is programmed to be happy.

Journal #4

Today I noticed something weird, like REALLY weird. So I wake up in the middle of the night,

and I look out the window to see if the sun was up yet. The moon was out, but it was really dark. I spotted moonlight glinting off the windowpane. I looked out at the eerily still lake. And then I realized, **THERE WAS NO LIGHT COMING INTO THE ROOM!** I swear my heart skipped a beat. I'm pretty sure I passed out from fright (is that fainting?), and next thing I knew, I woke up in my bed. It feels weird to write this down, but there's something creepy going on here. Is it coincidence, or does it match up with the fact that there are like, no animals here. **AT ALL.** I didn't realize it at first, but I saw the only squirrels here running out of the opening gates. Maybe I'm just imagining things.

We all pondered this at the station. What could possibly have caused no light to go through the window? The further this investigation goes, the more I realize how serious this is. At first it seemed creepy, yes. But this is something beyond that now. This journal, owned by a boy who should be at home in bed right now, is evidence of one of the greatest disappearances in history. What monster could even have considered this possible?

Journal #5

The thing with the window? It happened again, and this time I know I wasn't imagining it. Gosh, my hands are shaking. I'm starting to freak out. And one pair of twins, the Olsteins—they're gone. And I saw them earlier by the pond! At first this morning, I thought they were sick. So I went to their cottage, and their mom answered the door. I asked if they were OK, and she

started to worry. 'They're not with you kids?' When I got back to our beach house, my mom said she got a call from Mrs. Olstein, asking to keep a lookout for the twins. She said if they don't get home an hour before dinner, she'd call the police. I swear I saw them this morning! I'm losing my mind with worry!

Journal #6

I'm freaking out. It's been a week since I last wrote, and 15 people have gone the way of those twins! Now all the Olsteins, the other sets of twins, their parents, my friend Rudy Moore and his folks, and the old married couple who live next door are gone too! The creepiest part is anyone who tries to leave seems to end up brainwashed! If you talk to them, they look at you like they don't speak English!

Upon hearing those words, a few members of our elite team of detectives simply snapped. They lashed out, saying it was all a ruse, that it was people trying to set us on edge with a haywire prank, case closed. And seeing where this is going, I think we all wish we could agree.

Journal #7

I've been too afraid to write. Half of the original population of our little community has disappeared without a trace. The only person that everyone knows of that actually left was my dad. He had some unnegotiable meetings that

would take place over the rest of summer and left a week into our vacation. I am too fearful now of what will happen if mom and I disappear. My heart is racing thinking about it. Why did we have to be picked to go here?

It has been as bad as it sounds. We have talked to direct relatives of the Olsteins, and it was like we set off a pipe bomb. Everyone in the room froze, and then started screaming and crying. But from what we got out of them, it might have been better not to go. It was as if they disappeared off the face of the Earth. Gone. Poof.

Journal #8

It has escalated so drastically I remembered how to write properly. Dang it, not even a joke could take my mind off of current events. There are three of us left. I am so scared; I now wheeze when I walk. I don't know what's happening. My mom disappeared yesterday. The only thing left of her that I have are memories now. The other refugees and I don't communicate with one another. We're all too frightened to speak. And I'm starting to notice things, strange things. Everything on or near the property of the community has no shadow. It's as if it's a window. And through the actual windows in the buildings, I see dark silhouettes of people. I try to avoid this.

This entire case is slowly driving all of my people crazy, one by one. I fear I too will soon be driven to madness. How do 299 people just walk off the face of the earth? And these shadow theories, they make me wonder: what if they and these missing people are related?

Journal #9

I fear this may be my last entry, as I am all alone. I now know what's going on. Today one of my final companions, Mr. Leopold, a teacher on break, had a shadow today. Except the shadow wasn't attached to him; on the contrary, it stood next to him, mimicking his every move. But every time Mr. Leopold moved, he slowed down a bit. After a while, he collapsed from what seemed to be sheer exhaustion, and slowly withered away to nothingness before my very eyes. The shadows suck out your energy, and cause you to wear yourself to death. Not the most pleasing way to go. My other companion, another boy, simply sat down and stopped moving, and even now I can see the shadows growing stronger. When my journal ends, if this is ever found, tell my dad I said goodbye.

Well, the case just solved itself, I guess. My heart breaks simply thinking about it. Since there's no physical way to catch the murderer, we followed through with the boy's final request. We told his father about his son, and offered him our sincerest condolences. But the man simply stared at us blankly, until finally he was able to say something and sobbed, "Get out." We left, and I guess I should have expected that reaction.

To prevent mass panic, only a select few know about the problem. It is saddening to think that there are hardly any people grieving for them now.

A memorial is being made for the people of the event, who the few people who knew about the incident now call Shade Watchers. I hope this is the finest way for them to be remembered. The area where the event occurred has been quarantined, with no unusual accidents. Then again, nobody ever notices when the first person goes missing....

THE RED EYES IN THE DARK CORNER

Not all dreams are good. In THE RED EYES IN THE DARK CORNER by Lily Reed-Nordwall, nightmares become reality.

Dedicated to Karen and David Reed-Nordwall.

The branches extended their arms toward my face, forcing me to slow down and dodge them. The grass seemed to grow and try to catch my running feet. Leaves fluttered to the forest floor and crunched as I stepped on them. My breath was unbalanced, and my heart felt like it was going to pop out of my chest. My feet felt like they were going to fall off. I looked around making sure nothing was cornering me. I felt tears slipping down my cheeks as twigs cut my face. I heard a voice not far behind chanting something: "Don't find it, don't find it, don't find it!" Don't find what?

Thump thump thump. I heard the sound of feet bouncing off the trees and into my ears. My heart froze, but luckily my feet didn't. I started to run faster, but felt a cold hand grab my right foot. I screamed as I hurtled toward the ground. My stomach slammed into the rocks, dirt, and twigs lying on the floor. I looked back and realized it was a tree root, not a hand. I felt relieved as I started to get back on my feet.

I screamed and crumbled back to the floor. My foot felt twisted or worse. I rolled off my stomach and onto my back. A knife hit the tree next to me.

I lay against the ground, hoping to be unnoticed, to disappear. I felt something cold next to my face. I couldn't make out the object. The footsteps were getting louder and louder. Without thinking, I slipped the object into my sweatshirt pocket. Something dug its nails into my arms. I couldn't see hands, but I felt them on my arms. I looked up and saw two red eyes appear from the darkness.

I screamed as I woke up. I gazed around the area. I was sitting up in a wooden bed with blue sheets. The walls were a dark purple. A white wood desk lay near the closet door, and a wood dresser lay next to the bed with a huge mirror. I relaxed when I realized I was in my room.

“Amanda, you have two days. To return it, go back to the dream and reveal it when the time approaches. If what you have stolen is not returned by midnight on the second day, you will meet your fate where it all began. I warn you this will not be easy. All others who steal my precious end with a not so happy ending,” a raspy voice boomed through the silence.

I looked into the corner of my room and found myself gazing into two glowing, red eyes. There was no body in sight, just two red eyes. I opened my mouth, ready to scream.

“Don’t scream. No one will hear you.”

I backed up to the farthest end of my bed from the eyes.

“Don’t worry. I cannot hurt you while you are awake. It’s when you are asleep I get to hurt you in and through your dreams. I’m a dream, you could say. I may be here in reality, but I can only speak to the dreamer. In your dreams, I can cause you pain that will affect you in reality.”

I quickly rolled up my sleeves of my sweatshirt and stared at the cuts in my skin from the nails of the eyes. Blood started to trickle onto my bed. A laugh emerged from the eyes and echoed through the room. I fell back against my bed and let the darkness swallow me.

I opened my eyes and looked back into the corner where the red eyes had been. There was nothing. I ran my fingers through my long, blond hair. I then stuck my right hand into my sweatshirt pocket that I always wear to sleep. My fingers emerged with a necklace.

It had a pale gray, translucent gem with thin, golden metal wrapped around it like barbed wire. A gold chain connected it all, and it felt cold to the touch.

It hit me: my dream when I was running through the woods. After I fell, I had slipped an object into my pocket. Now, in reality, the necklace sat in my hand. Why had I taken it in the first place? His voice echoed in my ears, “Amanda, you have two days. To return it, go back to the dream and reveal it when the time approaches. If what you have stolen is not returned by midnight on the second day, you will meet your fate where it all began.”

The red eyes wanted me to give it back, and I had every intention of doing just that.

I breathed heavily as I thought over what had happened. I jumped out of my queen bed, scurried to my desk, and pulled out

my writing utensils and paper. I needed to draw; it's how I always calm down.

I let my fingers draw what they wanted. I looked at the picture and stared at what I had created. I had drawn two red eyes with a knife in between them. It was surprisingly life-like. I stood up and left the picture on my desk.

I slipped the necklace back into my pocket to have it when I re-entered the dream.

That night, I quickly jumped into bed. I made sure the necklace was in my pocket and let darkness descend.

I was in a room with a single computer. I shuffled over to the computer and touched the mouse. I was thrown back against a wall, and the computer disappeared. Darkness took me into its arms.

I found myself going for a walk after dark in an unfamiliar neighborhood. The trees rustled, and all the lights in the identical brick houses were off. I wandered around, not sure where to go. Someone tapped my shoulder. I turned around to find a small child.

"Hello," I smiled at him.

"Excuse me." The child's voice was small and shaky. "I don't know where I am."

I looked around at the neighborhood. "I don't know either." I felt pity to be of no help to the boy. Tears slipped down his cheeks. "Oh, don't cry!" I swiped the tears off his face and into the road.

"Do you have it?" he asked through sniffles.

"Have what?"

"My mommy's necklace." I stared down at him. "Do you have it? It's all I have left of her."

I reached into my pocket and held the necklace. "That's it! That's the one! My mommy's necklace!" He jumped for it, and delight filled his eyes until I held it higher. "I want that back."

I looked down at him. "I can't give it to you." I took a step back from him.

"But you stole it from me! I had that when my mommy died and you stole it and won't give it back!"

"I didn't steal," I paused, "from you," I added.

"Yes, you did!" he screamed and looked down at his feet.

He looked up at me. His eyes turned red, "It's mine!"

I woke up and gazed around my room. I put my face into my hands.

“Just a dream, just a dream, just a dream.” I paused. It was the eyes! The eyes had shape-shifted to be a little boy! If I had given it to the boy, would I have returned it? Would it be finished?

“Good job. I felt sure you would give it to me, but you remembered you need to give it to me in the *right* dream. Though your time is running out. It is now the second of the two days. You have tonight to return or you will meet your fate where it all began.”

“Why do you need this necklace?” I squeaked.

“Have you ever had a toy that you could never let go of? Well, that's how it is with me. Except I've had this for all of eternity. I've grown attached. Amanda, it's mine!”

The eyes' voice grew louder, and the eyes turned a darker red when they said my name. I blinked, and the eyes disappeared.

“I only have tonight. I have to return to the dream tonight.” I went back over to my desk. I took my markers and colored my drawing of the eyes in, and I examined it when it was done. The knife's blade was gray, and its handle was black. The eyes were exactly how they looked: blood red.

I dragged my hands over my face. I had to return to the dream. I had to.

That night, I prepared. I drew a picture of the forest where I had met the red eyes, and then taped it above my bed so it would be the last thing I saw before I slept. I lay there staring at the picture and wrapping my fingers around the necklace. The light faded from my eyes.

The familiar trees seemed to smile at me as I ran through the forest. The grass grew longer than the last time I had been there.

“Amanda, you have two days. To return it, go back to the dream and reveal it when the time approaches. If what you have stolen is not returned by midnight on the second day, you will meet your fate where it all began.” The voice seemed to be getting closer by the word. I felt that my courage to return it was growing thin. My breath started to become unbalanced. My feet grew tired. The footsteps became louder and louder.

“Midnight strikes in minutes,” the voice announced. I knew I had to turn around and give it to the eyes, but how could you return it to something that's trying to kill you?

The tree stump grabbed my foot, and I again fell to the ground. I grabbed the necklace and gathered my courage. The knife hit the tree next to me. I had to give it to the eyes. The eyes dug its nails into my skin. I screamed.

“It’s the end of the second day, Amanda. Midnight will strike in seconds.”

“I have it!” I screamed through my pain and threw the necklace toward where I guessed the eyes were. The hands released me, and I opened my eyes. I looked up to see the two red eyes appear from the darkness.

I awoke and screamed at the top of my lungs. I rubbed my hands down my arms and relaxed when I realized I was alive. I looked over at my desk and stared at the sight. My drawing of the eyes had a trail of blood leading to the floor and into a puddle in the dark corner of my room. Instead of the two red eyes watching me, two black eyes lay on the floor in the puddle.

THE RED MOON

After Everly Dazing gets invited to a mysterious party from the most popular girl in school, strange things happen to her on the way there in THE RED MOON, by Draqué Monét.

At school I'm a loner. The kids at my school are mean and cruel. The teachers are self-involved and really just don't care about the kids. The only person who was ever nice to me was my friend Magnolia. Her name basically explains her; she is nice, amazing, caring, and my "only" friend.

My name is Everly Dazing, and I'm 13 years old, stuck in this cruel town of Haven Peak. Now the real thing is that not all the people are cruel; they are just mean, if that really makes a difference. I live with my grandma, whose name is Isla. She seems to be getting older by the day and meaner by the night.

Today is October 23, 2015. The kids at school have been rapidly talking about some party at QuenBurg. QuenBurg is this cottage next to this beautiful lake that the Zarok family own. Their daughter, Hantana Zarok, is probably the one throwing it. In my head I kind of wish someone would walk up to me and ask if I want to come, but in reality that would never happen because no one ever asks me anywhere but Magnolia.

Out of nowhere I see Hantana and her friends walking toward me. Her face looks like she's annoyed or has smelled something unpleasant. Hantana stops and then says, "Hey, I know we haven't spoken since sixth grade, but I want you to come to my party. It's at Kengtung Lake at 10 p.m. sharp tonight."

My jaw drops. I really cannot believe that she, Hantana Lua Zarok, is inviting me to her party. I wait a second to reply, and I see from the corner of my eye that her left shoe is tapping like she had somewhere more important to be. I quietly say, "Okay." Then she whispers to her friends, and they walk away with devious smiles on their faces like they just did something bad.

It's now 9:30 p.m., and Isla is asleep. I know sneaking out sounds bad, but I knew if I asked it would have been an automatic "NO." So this is my only choice.

I feel a vibration in my pocket. It's my phone. Magnolia is calling, wondering if I want to watch a movie at her house. I tell her

maybe next time. But I never told her I was going to the party since Magnolia doesn't like her. Magnolia also said that Hantana and her friends had pranked a girl. Maybe that was why she looked so devious.

It's 9:45, and I'm so excited to go to my first real party. Yes, this is my first real party. The only party I've ever gone to was a birthday party, and it was Magnolia's. I start walking my way out my room door when I notice the kitchen light is still on, so I decide to go through my window instead. It is so hard pushing myself through the small rectangular window. I finally get out of the window, and I wonder if this is a bad idea. I just keep walking anyway.

It really is a beautiful night. The breeze feels so good along my hair and skin. I look up at the sky and see this pinkish, orangish moon, I guess it's some type of new phase the moon goes through every year. I start walking.

The forest is only about 10 minutes away. It is getting cold, and every once in a while I turn around thinking someone is watching me. I even at one point turned around to go back home, but if I did that it would just make me a bigger wimp than what I am.

I get to the woods after a few minutes or so and stop at the public water fountain to grab a drink. I then feel a light tap on my shoulder and turn around. No one is there at all. Am I going crazy, or is this real?

I quickly run into the woods where I trip on a branch. It seems that this branch is hooked onto my leg. It takes me a while to get it off, and once I do I see something strange. There is smoke all around me and weird noises are rising. I then hear a howl, but it isn't the type of howl you hear dogs or wolves make. It is louder and stronger. In my head I am wondering, *Where is this party, and why did they invite me to the woods?*

I grab my phone and try to call Magnolia, but my phone isn't acting right. The signal is perfect, but the phone is going crazy, like beeping and turning the screen off and on. I then try to get out of the forest, but when I do there is a giant tree blocking the gate to the exit.

I hear steps breaking the branches I had walked on a few minutes ago. I turn around, but nothing is there except the giant footprint of a beast. I have never seen or heard of an animal having

three toes and a giant footprint. I get scared and cry, but I know it well not help nor keep me safe.

I then hear more howls, but closer and louder. The howls are so loud that it feels like someone just screamed up close in my ear. I soon see a shadow that looks like some type of wolf. At first I think I am imagining it, but then it walks toward me. I can see the claws for nails and the large teeth. I slowly walk away. The animal just stays there.

I quickly run and I bump into something. It's Hantana and her friends. They are out here! She says that she and a few others have been looking for her cellphone for the past 30 minutes. She also says that I took the wrong path to where the party is. I ask if there are any animals here, leaving out the wolf I just saw. She says no to that, too. I start to think about all the reasons how I could explain what happened to me. Then I remember drinking that water from the fountain. Maybe that water had something in it. Maybe I was hallucinating from something in the water fountain. I ask Hantana if the water is good at the water fountain. She says, "No, the workers are fixing the pipes that connect the water to the fountain, and the water may be old and dirty."

I look up at the sky, and there is a plain, full, red moon. It must have been the water that was making me go so crazy. I ask her one more question: "Why did you invite me here?"

She replies, "You were one of my good friends, and I wanted to see if we could be friends again."

Well, now I know that people aren't so cruel after all because Hantana saved me from my terrible thoughts and the strange things that happen on a red moon.

TORTURE CHAMBER

In **TORTURE CHAMBER** by *Paige Goldberg*, Arnold discovers a startling secret about his teachers. When he finds out his best friend Billy is involved against his will, Arnold takes matters into his own hands.

It was my first year at Lerkshire Middle School. I had been noticing something fishy going on since the second I stepped into the building. And, it was not just the cafeteria. I had been seeing kids disappearing before Social Studies and Language Arts, and then coming back before the end of the day.

I walked into Mr. Fishy's room. There was a faint smell of dead bodies and skunks across the room near the closet with a keypad on the door. I thought, *That's weird*. I cleared my mind and sat down at my seat.

Three teachers were always whispering in the hallways with devilish smirks on their faces. Their names were Mrs. Madbich, Ms. Toadberg, and you know the name, Mr. Fishy.

I had forgotten my coat in Ms. Toadberg's room during homeroom. This was way after hours, and 99 percent of the teachers had left. Her classroom was right next to...Mr. Fishy's. As I walked past I heard the cackles of those three teachers and the whimpers of a child. I didn't want to get into any drama. But, I knew something was going on. I ran home as fast as I could. But when I unlocked my front door, I remembered: I forgot to grab my coat. Dang it! The whole reason I went back to school is because I needed my coat for this weekend. And I most definitely wasn't going back there again.

It was the next Friday. Billy and I have almost every class together except Language Arts with Mr. Fishy and Social Studies with Mrs. Madbich. I went to Social Studies; he went to Language Arts. Then we would switch. I walked into Mr. Fishy's classroom, and he was yelling at Billy because he hadn't turned in his "Verb Practice" homework. I wanted to tell Mr. Fishy to calm down, but if I did he would give us both one of those Teach-To detention things. He noticed me, and stopped talking.

He gave me the evilest eye, and told Billy to come by after school for another talk and to get to his next class. Without talking, Billy walked past me and hurried into Mrs. Madbich's room across the hall. I sat down in my seat, and class began.

Billy was coming home with me, so I told him to meet at Mr. Fishy's room after school, and my mom would pick us up. As I approached the door at the end of the day, I saw it was closed. I looked in the window. I saw Mr. Fishy and Mrs. Madbich carrying some large object into the locked-up closet. I looked closer and saw it was Billy! And he was all tied up! They started down a long hallway, inside the closet, but then the door slammed shut.

I rushed into the classroom and went over to the keypad. I tried several different codes. None of them worked. Then I heard the *click-clack* of high heels. It was Ms. Toadberg. I ran behind a bookshelf.

She walked into the classroom. She went over to the keypad and typed in a password. Thankfully I saw what it was: 2948. Again the closet slammed shut.

I ran over to the keypad and typed in the password. *CREAK!* The door opened. Cautiously, I stepped in.

SWIPE! I ducked. Whoa, what was that! I looked to the right of me. In the wall was an axe. I was guessing there would be more booby traps. I kept an eye out for them.

About another ten feet ahead, *WHACK!* Right in front of me a huge block of steel dropped down. In shock, I hugged the wall, and went around.

One after another, swords fell from the ceiling and arrows shot from the wall. I couldn't believe I hadn't died yet! But then, there was a *thud*. I turned around. There, right there in front of me, was Ms. Toadberg. But she looked very different. She had the face of a frog and the body of a human.

"What are you doing here?" she questioned.

"I'm here for my..."

"SILENCE!"

"But you just asked me what..."

"I SAID 'SILENCE!'"

"Yes ma'am." She raised her hands in front of her, and shot flaming hot lava right out of them. I ducked. She did it again. I grabbed a piece of sheet metal off the floor and used it as a shield. The lava ricocheted off and hit her in the face. She fell to the floor, screaming in pain. I saw she had some rope. I tied her to the floor. Then I thought to myself, *Where are these amazing skills coming from?*

Freaked out, I continued to walk. I knew there was more to come. I kept dodging all the traps. *CLUNK!* A huge boiling pit of lava opened under me. I grabbed onto the side of the pit. I pulled myself up and jumped across. I wiped my forehead, sweating buckets.

I heard another object drop down behind me. I slowly turned around. Huh, there was nothing there.

I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned around. Nothing's there. I reached out in front of me. All of the sudden Mrs. Madbich appeared.

"Oh, hello!" I screamed.

"Hi," she said. "Goodbye." She smirked and pulled out a long sword. Her short, blonde hair was blowing behind her. All I could think is *Where's this draft coming from?* I snapped out of it, and she pushed me down with a long hiss. I scurried back up. She again came running at me. I hooked my arm around her waist and body-slammed her to the ground. Her head hit pretty hard. She seemed sort of knocked out. I took her sword. I wiped my hands on my jeans and continued forward.

More confident, I picked up the pace. But I heard a loud squeaking from behind me. I turned around and saw a humongous mass of rats running after me. I held my ground, ready to kill. I stabbed each and every one of them. Blood gushed all over me. I looked around. Dead rats were everywhere. Now I can cross off "Kill One Thousand Rats" from my bucket list.

I finally reached a set of iron doors. I pushed on the doors as hard as I could, but they wouldn't budge. There was no lock. I looked to the left of me and saw a "Pull" sign. I pulled the door, and they smoothly opened. I'm smart.

I entered a dark room. I walked over next to the door and flipped the light switch on. In the center of the room there was an old wooden chair. But it was facing the opposite way.

Not noticing the millions of torture devices hanging on the wall, I walked over to the chair. As I approached, Mr. Fishy flew up out of the chair. I jumped back. He had dark, black makeup around his eyes, black lips, full black clothes, and a black coat. I slowly backed away.

In his deep voice he said, "You've found me." My mouth fell open. "I'm assuming you're here for your friend?" I nodded. Hovering over me, he grinned, showing his fangs. He shot lasers from his hands. I dodged them. But I knew I couldn't dodge them forever. As I kept backing up, I felt a cold, metal thing behind me: the wall. I looked around for something to protect me. The closest things were some ninja stars. I attempted throwing the ninja stars at him, but he kept flying around them.

"Now I've got you cornered." He smiled. "Say goodbye!" he cackled.

"NO! YOU SAY GOODBYE!" It was Billy!

"BILLY!" I screamed.

Mr. Fishy turned around. “You rascals!”

While he was paying attention to Billy, I threw my last star and hit him in his spine. He fell to the ground.

“OW!” he howled. “What was that for!”

“For almost killing me and all these other kids!” I hissed at Mr. Fishy.

He whimpered, “Kill?”

“Uhm, yes,” I said sassily. “Billy, go find a phone,” I commanded.

“What!” Mr. Fishy yelled. “You think I want to kill them?”

“Well, yeah.” I shrugged. “Sort of.”

“NO!” he said. “All I wanted was to stuff a bunch of Language Arts information into their heads!”

“But what about the other teachers and all the traps?” I exclaimed.

“It’s not like they were going to kill you!”

“It sure seemed like it!” I yelled. He rolled his eyes. “But wait, then why does it smell like rotting bodies in here?”

“That’s the smell that my machine produces.”

“Your machine?” I asked.

“Yes. My language arts machine. It shoves L.A. information into students’ minds.”

I was feeling bad. But he’s still a very bad person. I jumped onto him, and lightly clasped my hands around his neck, so he wouldn’t try to pull anything funny.

“FOUND A PHONE!” Billy called out.

“Call 911, and tell them to get here fast!” I yelled back.

Not even ten minutes later, the FBI came and took Mr. Fishy away. My mom came with the police and freaked out on us. Then our principal frantically came in.

We explained the whole thing. We talked about the situation. Our principal, Mr. Pinckscale, said he always knew something was wrong with Mr. Fishy and them. Then the police took all three teachers away to be executed.

The torture chamber was destroyed. And Billy and I became the Lerkshire Heroes. Well, not actually. We swore to not tell anyone. But that was 30 years ago. Now I’m telling you.

They closed that school for a week. But they told everyone it was for “maintenance.” When we came back we were still losers. But in our hearts we knew we were heroes.

VICTIM OF A WEREWOLF

VICTIM OF A WEREWOLF by *Sydney Taylor* tells about a girl who is stalked by the frightening creature that lurks in the woods.

The werewolf crept through the forest looking for his next victim. He had been watching this girl for weeks from the forest to her doorstep. Then one day he got too close.

I've been getting this weird feeling that I'm being watched by something or someone. Then I saw it in the bush: yellow, catlike eyes looking straight at me. The creature ran at me. It looked like a wolf but much bigger. Next, everything went blank.

The werewolf grabbed her and carried her to his house. He thought she was heavier than she looked. When they got to his house he locked her in a room. It was a while before he heard a sound from the room she was in.

I have to get out, I thought. I pulled on the door, but it was locked from the outside. I ran over to the window, but it was locked, too. I hammered my fist against the window. Footsteps came closer and closer to the door. I began to panic, but the window finally broke, and I jumped out of the window.

The werewolf opened the door to see that she was not there and the window was broken. He jumped out of the window to find her. He followed her scent to find her in a tree. He ran up the tree to get her, but she kicked him. He yelped in pain on the ground.

I hopped out of the tree and ran further into the dark and mysterious forest. Then it hit me, literally hit me, like no other pain I felt before. I looked down to see a werewolf biting my leg.

The werewolf bit her leg. Then a loud scream flooded the forest. She tried to get out of his grasp, but he was glued on tight.

I was finally able to get him off my leg, and I hopped away from the werewolf. He grabbed me by my neck. As I was running out of air my memories played in my head like old movies. Then I felt death creep upon me.

The werewolf could not control himself, and his anger was filling him now. Finally he was able to kill her. But he hadn't wanted to kill her. Now it's time for him to look for another victim.

ZOMBIE DONKEYS

In ZOMBIE DONKEYS by Kelton Carr, it is up to the man who caused a potentially world-ending disaster to bring the human race back from the brink of destruction, with the help of his two loyal friends.

It's been nearly 20 years since I first invented this pill. The intention of the pill was to help grow the donkey population, as they were used for farming and transportation, and they made great protection for the farmers' herds of cattle. The pill could simply be fed to the donkeys, and it would accelerate their breeding. This would increase the population with no risk and very little cost.

Something went terribly wrong with the pill, as what I created was a pill that changed donkeys into zombies. The zombie donkeys had the ability to poison the human race, and quickly the zombie donkey population grew while the human population began to drastically decrease.

Today I sit here on my farm where it all started with my two friends Joey and Bob. These were the only two people I told about what I had done. Because of this they were able to survive with me, and now we are not sure who all is left in this world.

The three of us have to figure out a way to stop the Zombie donkeys from increasing. They have taken over the whole world and turned every human but us into a Zombie donkey. It is up to us to fight back and rule the world. "We need to fight these Zombie donkeys. Gather some supplies from my lab. Does any one of you know how to make a cure for the zombies?" I asked.

"I do," Joey said. "I learned it on a video game. One of the items I need is a potion, and it is with the Zombie donkeys, so it might take a while. We need to make a plan. We all need to surround one Zombie donkey and kill it, and then we need to kill all the other Zombie donkeys. We need to kill the Zombie donkeys when they are sleeping so we can get the item that we need to make the cure."

"Ok, it is time to go! Run, guys, run!"

"Ok, we made it to the first Zombie donkey," said Joey. "Get its legs and tie it up. Let's go to the next Zombie donkey."

"No, Jimmy got infected!" said Joey. "Run!" Joey dragged me with him as he ran. I was suddenly unable to move or talk.

“How did he get infected?” asked Bob.

“A Zombie donkey came up behind him and it bit him on the arm,” said Joey.

“We need to be more careful so a Zombie donkey doesn’t infect us. Do we have a new plan?” asked Joey.

“Nope,” said Bob.

“So we need to hurry up and get what we need,” said Joey.

“Ok,” said Bob.

“Ok, now we need to see if there are any survivors in the area to help us make the cure,” said Joey. “We need to split up. You take Jimmy and go get that helicopter over there. I will go get that boat over there. Then we will look for people. We only have three days to look as far as we can.”

Two days later we met up. I had spent that time in the helicopter, barely understanding where I was. They had found no other healthy people. If they wanted to survive they had to find what they needed to make the cure.

“It is up to us to stop these Zombie donkeys. Let’s go,” said Bob. “We need to go and get that cure fast, or Jimmy is going to turn into a Zombie donkey.”

“Don’t rush me. It will take some time,” said Joey.

“Well, Jimmy can only live for two more days as a real person. Then he will turn into a Zombie donkey,” said Joey. “Right now we need food, water, and a shelter. Once we get all these things, then we need to hurry.”

One day later, Joey and Bob were ready to continue finding the potion for the cure.

“We need to start going to get the items we need. We need a car so we can get there faster,” said Bob.

“Look, over there is a car. It looks fast!” said Joey.

“Great idea, but the car has no gas,” said Bob.

“That is a problem, but there is a gas station over there,” said Joey.

“We are not going to survive if we get over there and get gas,” said Bob. “A bunch of donkeys are over there. We will need to fight them off.”

“We are so close to the item that I need to make the cure,” said Joey.

“Well, that is good. We will try to herd the Zombie donkeys up around something and then go get the items for the cure,” said Bob.

“You go one way, I will go the other way, and then we can wrap the Zombie donkeys up with some thick string so they can't get out.”

“Three, two, one, go! Run, run, run, run! Now, tie the string! Ok, finally we can get that cure,” said Joey. “Now we need to put that piece of grass and a piece of the Zombie donkey's hair together and the cure will be ready for you, Jimmy.”

Once the cure was finished they handed it to me.

“Ok, now drink this,” said Joey.

Gulp! “I feel much better now,” I said. Now we need to go and kill the rest of the donkeys.

HYPEBEAST

COOPER

In **COOPER**, by **Laurel G**, a dog brings both joy and worry—and the girls who love him wouldn't have it any other way.

It was a Saturday night, and my friend Taylor and my mom and I were talking about getting a puppy. Taylor lived with my mom and me because her parents died and we have known each other for the longest time.

We looked up the Petco website, and we saw the cutest puppy. His name was Max. He was eight weeks old. He had the cutest face. He was a golden retriever.

The next day we went to Petco to pick up Max the puppy. We walked into the store, and the clerk went up to us and said, "Do you guys need any help?"

My mom said, "Yes, we are looking for Max the golden retriever puppy."

She said, "Follow me."

We followed her to the dog. We saw him in his pen. He was staring right at us. He was the most adorable puppy I've ever seen.

The clerk took us inside the room where we played with the puppy to see if we really wanted him. We all really loved him. He is the sweetest thing ever. My mom said we could get him. So we did. When we got him we had to buy him some cool toys, of course, and Puppy Chow.

We had everything ready for him, so we took off to our house. Taylor and I played with the puppy in the car. He was so playful it was unbelievable.

Mom, Taylor, and I were trying to think of a new name for him because we didn't like the name Max. My mom said, "How about Thor?"

Taylor giggled. I said, "Nah, that's not a good name for him."

Mom said, "Okay, that's fine. It was just a suggestion anyway."

I said, "Taylor, any suggestions?"

"Um, uh, buddy, I guess," she mumbled.

I thought to myself, *What are good names? I can't come up with anything good.* I liked Max, but they wouldn't agree with me, so I went with the flow.

We got home, and we were still deciding on names, but that didn't matter. My mom told me we would discuss it later. Taylor and I went outside with the puppy while my mom worried about the food and other stuff, like the bed we got for him, the food bowls, and some other stuff.

Taylor and I were outside playing with the puppy. We were running around, and he was trying to bite our feet. We fell on the ground laughing to death because he was being so goofy. After we had our fun, we tried to get him to go potty.

We went inside after that. I went to do my homework I had from Friday, and so did Taylor. We got the homework out, and we left it on the table. THE DOG ATE IT! I told Taylor, and she got furious. We were thinking that the dog jumped on a chair and then jumped on the table.

Later we sat down with Mom, and I said, "So the dog's name?"

"Uh, what do you got?" Mom said.

I laughed. "Nothing."

"Wait," Taylor said, and then shouted out, "COOPER!"

"Yeah!" I said.

Mom said, "Sure."

Taylor and I had bunk beds. Taylor was on the bottom, and I was on the top, so Cooper slept with her.

Taylor's alarm went off and woke me up. I said, "Uh, it's Sunday already. I hate Sunday."

Taylor replied, "I do too."

A few hours later we went outside. I said to my mom, "Mom, Taylor and I are going outside with Cooper."

We went out and played with Cooper. We brought a lot of his toys out. His favorite was a plush squirrel.

Taylor said, "Cooper, here." He ran toward her, but passed her. I was confused. Where was he going? He ran into the forest behind her. We darted after him. Taylor said, "Where is he going?"

I said, "I don't know."

He was gone. We didn't know where he went. All that was left was his puppy prints, and we followed them. We got scared and sad at the same time. We feared for him because coyotes were all over the place.

A few hours later my mom called on my phone and asked where we were. I said,

“In the forest.” She asked why. I didn’t know what to say, so I said, “Because the dog ran away.” After that I hung up because I panicked. I could feel myself getting dizzy. Taylor was sobbing, and so was I.

Suddenly we heard a dog squeal. I stopped then, and I ran toward the sound. We saw Cooper lying on the ground with slobber on his neck. Taylor grabbed him, and we ran home so fast I could hardly breathe.

We got home. I ran to Mom and said, “HELP, HELP, HELP!”

She said, “WHAT!”

I said, “We need to go to the vet now. It’s Cooper.”

We hopped into the car, and I yelled, “Hurry!” I was looking at him, and he was shaking. It looked like he was startled. I grabbed a paper towel and wiped the slobber off. He was bleeding. I started crying. I explained to my mom. She started crying, and Taylor did also.

We got to the vet. We rushed him to a room. They had us sign papers in case he went into cardiac arrest. We were in silence for an hour in the lobby waiting to hear back from the doctors.

I was praying that he would be better. If I had one wish, that’s what it would be: for him to feel better. We had him for two days and look what happens.

The vet said we could go home and that he was fine but had to stay the night.

In the middle of the night we got a call. They said he went into cardiac arrest.

We hurried to the vet. We went in the room, and they said he was fine. He needed to rest a little more, but we could bring him home.

A week later he was feeling good. We bought a fence so he couldn’t run away again. The good thing was that he seemed better than ever. He was active, and whenever we brought him into the store that we got him from him, everyone loved him there.

Taylor and I trained him a little bit. We taught him tricks. He could roll over and jump, and when you said “Stretch” he does it. We entered him in a dog show that happened in a few weeks. Right now he is 12 weeks old.

Our dog is a joy. He makes my life complete. My mom calls him the “miracle dog.” We bring our dog to school because he makes people happy. I know this makes my life. I had never had an animal. I need this in my life.

GORILLA ESCAPE

*Whose idea was it to put three dangerous gorillas in small cages at the zoo? That plan fails mightily in **GORILLA ESCAPE** by **Joey Beatty**.*

As three people were walking through the gorilla exhibit in Central Africa, they stopped and read the little sign in front of the cage. It said, "Three amazingly dangerous and rare species of gorillas." They stopped and thought, *Where is the third gorilla?* They turned around and saw the gorilla right there, and all three boys screamed out "RUN!" with fear in their eyes.

As the three boys were running and panicking in fear screaming "RUN!" everybody joined in. When they turned around to see if there was a gorilla, they saw a huge nineteen-foot gorilla running right behind them. The gorilla caught up, but everyone got away. The huge gorilla, named Joe, helped his buddies, Mighty and Young, escape out of their cages as well. After he got out Mighty and Young, they went to go get every exhibit cleared.

While looking for an escape, they found the food section where they keep the bananas. After they took a banana break, they were still figuring out how to get out of the zoo! The only thing that the gorillas want is to get back to the jungle in Central Africa. They just want to be free, not stuck in cages all day and night.

Once out of the zoo, they were in the middle of the road. When the cars were going up and down the road, the gorillas ran across. Everyone got out of their cars and ran away. The gorillas smelled something down the road, so they headed that way.

The gorillas became completely lost and couldn't find their way to freedom. That's when they saw zookeepers walking with animal catchers. The gorillas kept wandering through the streets, confused and determined to find the hidden forest.

After days of trudging, their tired bodies needed to find food and shelter. They found an open field and rested there for a while. They managed to find a small pond for water to drink with a couple of lamb chops. Afterwards, they ventured on their journey.

In the meantime, the zookeepers had been searching for their gorillas day and night. They wanted these enormous animals back in their cages because they bring in a lot of money.

After many weeks of searching, the gorillas ended up climbing a huge plateau. When they reached the very top, which seemed to take ages, they saw a huge mass of their real home where they belonged! It was exactly the freedom that they deserved.

The gorillas were safe in the wild, the zoo got safer gorillas, and everyone is all right.

HERSEY

Most people are saddened by the idea of animal species going extinct. HERSEY, by Eden Casper, shows the flip side of that!

Ring! Ring! The bell for dismissal from school rang. A breath of relief came out of my mouth. I was so excited that boring math was over. Now I could go bird-watching. It was my favorite hobby besides training German shepherds for my dad's police station. I got on my bike and rode to my house to go in the backyard across the creek and in the forest. Once I got home I ran inside and called my friends to meet me in the forest.

My mom yelled, "Hello, Josh. How was your day?"

Like always I said, "Magnificent." But what I did not know was that today would be even more than that.

Once I spotted Annabeth and Sam, we started deeper in the forest.

"I hope we spot some orioles again," Annabeth squealed. I looked back at her flipping her long golden hair and then looking back at me with her big, beautiful blue eyes.

"Ok, let's stop here," Sam said. Sam was always jealous that Annabeth liked me instead of him.

"Ok, everyone spread out," I whispered. Annabeth obviously followed me. I found a log that we could sit on.

"Do you see anything yet?" Annabeth whispered in my ear.

"No," I replied. Then I stood up, and I couldn't believe my eyes.

"Is that a Malkoha?" I saw a chocolate brown bird with a perfect teal beak on the beach right in front of me. "Hey, look, Annabeth," I whispered. What I did not know was that I was standing in slippery mud. The next second, I was falling down the side of the creek.

The next thing I knew, my mom was asking how old I was and telling me to say my address. I looked around, and I was on the couch with Sam and Annabeth and my mom sitting all around me. After Annabeth's mom came to pick up her and Sam, my mom talked to me.

"Are you ok?" my mom asked.

"Yes, mom, I am ok." Obviously my mom did not believe me because she made me stay home from school the next day. All day I

looked up things about Raffles Malkoha. The most interesting thing about it was that it was EXTINCT.

As soon as I found out, I called Annabeth and Sam and told them. They could not believe it either. I mean, how often do you find an extinct bird? So I set cameras all over the forest. I was going to find that bird!

It had been two weeks with no sign of the bird. Then finally I found it. I was so excited to check if it was really a Malkoha.

"Did I do it?" I thought. This could make me a legendary bird-watcher. I went down there the second I saw it on the webcam. Step two: capture it. That was the hard part.

First I just put a bird cage right next to it and put sunflower seeds in it. An hour later it was in the cage. I could not believe it. Normally catching a bird is a long, hard process.

I called Annabeth and Sam and told them the news. "What should we do with it?" I asked. Annabeth suggested we let it back in the wild. But something was wrong with it. It was a lot skinnier than most pictures of the bird showed. I looked closer and saw the bird was missing a leg. That's why it was flying weirdly.

"We cannot let this bird back in the wild. Look at it. It is so skinny because it is probably having trouble getting food."

We decided to give the Malkoha to the zoo. I mean, it would be safer in the zoo's hands, and it would have all the food it needed. Annabeth agreed because it gave her another excuse to go to the zoo with me. Sam agreed as long as the bird had regular vet checks and he could have 50 percent credit for finding it in the news.

We all decided to call her Hersey. Eventually we all started a bird-watching club and continued to look for another Malkoha. Josh made sure that he could visit Hersey any time he wanted. Josh ended up working in the bird section of the zoo teaching kids the importance of birds like Hersey.

SNEAKY SNICKERS

*Silas has a simple life until Snickers comes along. In **SNEAKY SNICKERS** by **Ryan L Addis**, will Silas be up to the challenge of caring for a pet?*

When is this day going to be over? This is the longest Friday ever, thought Silas. He was not having a bad day. He was just thinking about what he was going to do after school. He could see the leaves turning color outside, and he wanted to go outside too and throw the football. He was hungry, too. He wanted candy. He wanted a Snickers bar. He was also thinking about his upcoming birthday. Silas is an 11-year-old boy about to turn 12.

Then the intercom came on and said, "Can Silas Bell come to the office immediately?"

Silas got scared. *Am I in trouble?* he thought. He tried to think of a reason he could have been called. *Maybe I left my iPad in the hallway and someone found it,* said Silas. He wasn't sure. *Maybe I was talking too much in my classes and my teacher reported me to the principal.* That had happened before, but he didn't think it was the case this time. "Mom and Dad are going to be upset if I did something wrong," he said out loud.

It was a long walk to the office. Silas thought again. *Maybe I forgot my lunch box or I left my coat in the café or, worse, I forgot my homework.* His mind raced. Thankfully, it was none of those things.

Silas was actually called for an early dismissal. The principal said to Silas, "Silas, your parents are taking you to the dentist."

Silas was relieved at first. Then he got worried again. He said, "Mom, I hope I don't have any cavities."

His mom said, "I hope you've been brushing your teeth like we asked you to."

They started driving. At first Silas was not paying attention. Then he looked up and realized that this was not the way to the dentist. "Mom, are we going to the dentist, or are we going to a new dentist?" Silas asked.

His mom said, "No, Silas. We're not going to the dentist at all. We have a surprise for you."

"A surprise? That is much better than the dentist," Silas said. He hoped it was a good surprise.

We have driven this way before, Silas thought.

Silas and his parents pulled into the parking lot. He saw the sign. "It is Fun O Rama!" he exclaimed. Silas got excited.

When he arrived, he jumped out of the car. There were other family members there, too. He saw his sister and his grandparents walking into Fun O Rama. "Wait! Mom and Dad, is this a party?" Silas asked since it was now the end of the school day.

His mom said, "Yes. Happy Birthday!" Silas hoped some friends would come too when they got out of school.

Silas did not have to wait very long. He went inside, and 20 minutes later a van with five of his friends in it parked right in front. His friend Joe's mom brought them all. "Hi, everyone!" Silas exclaimed. This day was getting better and better. Silas told his friends, "Let the fun begin."

The friends and family all had so much fun in the play house. They ate pizza and had a triple-decker cake covered in blue and yellow frosting. The cake was an ice cream cake. There were Snickers bars in it. It was so good that he could not stop eating until his stomach hurt.

When Silas saw the presents, his stomach stopped hurting. Silas's favorite part was opening presents. He got a BB gun and a new Xbox 1 game called NBA 2K which he thought was cool. But the best gift was a new pet. He did not know how Fun O Rama allowed it, but his parents brought in a cute white rabbit with black spots.

"I am going to name him Snickers after my favorite candy," Silas said. "I did not even ask for a pet, but I am so glad I got one. The bunny is so soft," Silas said. His friends all really liked the name since they knew Silas enjoyed his Snickers Bars.

After another hour of fun, it was time to go home. It was getting late after a busy day of school and fun.

Silas had a great time, but he was really tired. "Thank you," he told his mom and dad. Instead of putting Snickers in the cage, he just set him down on the bed and covered him with a blanket. "You're a good boy, Snickers," Silas said. Silas watched Snickers snuggle up next to him, and then he fell asleep on the bed.

The next morning he was surprised when he woke up because Snickers was missing. He remembered his dad saying, "The bunny has to be locked in the cage or he can escape." Silas had been too tired and forgot to lock him up. He didn't think he would sleep through the whole night when he lay on his bed last night.

Silas called to his parents, “Mom and Dad, have you seen Snickers?”

“Why? Is he missing?” his mom questioned.

“Yes. I fell asleep and when I woke up, he was gone,” Silas said.

His parents thought they had made a mistake. They thought this rabbit was too much responsibility for Silas. Then they all went looking for Snickers. Mom was saying to Dad, “I told you he was too young for this.”

Outside in the backyard they saw footprints in the mud. *They are small*, Silas said to himself, and he followed them. A chewed-up carrot and an orange path of crumbs gave further clues. “Dad’s not going to be happy about Snickers messing up the backyard,” Silas said. He knew they would have to patch up the grass.

Silas saw two beady eyes that gave Snickers away. Snickers jumped into a bush, and everyone saw it. Dad had to get Snickers out. “Got him!” exclaimed Dad. He put him under his sweater.

Silas and his parents were going to take the bunny home. “This time I’ll lock the cage so he cannot escape. I’m sorry. I will try to be a better pet owner,” Silas said.

Just then another bunny jumped out from the same bush. This was a wild bunny. “Snickers made a new friend!” Silas said. The wild bunny then scampered away. “Maybe that is why he went outside.” Silas picked Snickers up and said, “You sure are sneaky. I am going to call you Sneaky Snickers.”

It was a long day. Everyone was tired. Silas was glad Snickers was home safe. He was going to remember to put Snickers in his cage every night from now on. He was now a year older so he needed to remember things better. From then on he did.

TAKEN AWAY

When a girl from Arizona goes out to ride her horse, adversity strikes. In **TAKEN AWAY** by **Eve Collon**, a girl and her horse struggle to find their way out of a stressful situation.

WHOOSH! I closed my eyes as I got whipped to the ground. The crashing noise rang in my ears. I tried to get up to save Emma, but it was all a blur. Everything was just a blur.

Earlier that morning

As I hear the singing of the cactus wren, I roll over and slip out of my purple silk sheets. I burrow my feet into my pony slippers and head down the old, creaky stairs. The smell of the bacon takes my attention away from the creaking. It nearly sounds like the house is falling down the way I run down the stairs.

“Mornin’, sweetie,” my mom says.

Gulp, crunch, gulp, crunch.

“I said good morning,” she says again.

“I know,” I reply hastily. *Gulp, crunch, gulp, crunch.*

“How’d you sleep?” she asks.

“I slept great until that stupid bird woke me up... AGAIN.” *Gulp, crunch, gulp, crunch.*

“Good, I’m glad to hear that.”

The quiet desert of Tucson, Arizona catches my eye from out the window, and I want to be outside immediately. “Mom, I really do love you, but I love Emma more, so bye,” I say.

“Love you too! Be careful out there.”

I zoom out of the house as quick as a roadrunner. I pick up my smelly, muddy muck boots, and off I go.

I enter the barn, and I’m so happy to see the white muzzle of Emma down the stable hallway. I skip down the long hallway and hand Emma a fresh, juicy apple. Then I’m off to the tack room. I grab my saddle, and the weight of it almost pulls me over.

I undo the cold metal latch on Emma’s stall door, and I tickle the back of Emma’s soft, fuzzy ears. I gently slip the halter over her ears, and then I lead Emma out of her stall.

As I throw the heavy saddle over Emma's back, I listen to the wind whipping up the dirt. I put my boot into the stirrup, and I sling myself into the saddle. The sound of Emma's feet dragging through the gravel and sand calms me. My mind begins to escape to paradise.

We leave the barn, and we are heading down our favorite trail, the trail that my dad and I made when I was young. Time passes so quickly that I don't realize how far we have travelled. Just then we passed the 6-mile marker, and I think, *We better head back*. We have been heading away from home this whole ride. I kick into Emma's side and turn her around. As we turn, the swish of the sand spooks Emma.

"Whoa girl, it's all right," I say to calm Emma down.

I feel a drop of rain strike my forehead, which is strange because we rarely have storms here. It never rains this time of year. I get anxious and a little nervous. I stab my heel into Emma and make her run. I hadn't realized how much the sky had changed. My mom is probably worried sick about me.

We had run a long way before the clouds started thumping together. The thunder was loud, and it made me worried that I was never going to get home.

BOOM! STRIKE! WHOOSH! The wind of the storm makes me feel off balance. I close my eyes just as the storm whips me to the ground.

The crashing noise rings in my ears. Emma's hooves tumble over my throbbing head. The combination of me hitting the ground, the loud shaking of clouds, and the whistling wind across the desert must have shaken her up to the point where she tripped. My ears were buzzing, and I couldn't tell if I was still falling. I tried to get up to save Emma, but it was just a blur. Everything was just a blur.

I duck under Emma, and I close my eyes tight. Emma turns from wet to sopping wet. I don't try to move because I know that whatever I do is going to hurt. I'm already sore from falling off Emma.

My eyes flutter open to see Emma lying down. At that point I know something is wrong. I look down to her leg and see what looked like cactus. Oh no, Emma must have gotten cactus in her leg when I fell off and lost consciousness. I realize that when I fell, I hit my head on a rock. Fortunately, I am wearing a helmet.

I immediately start thinking about what is going to happen next. I remember that aloe plant can heal open wounds. I roll over and pinch the end of an aloe plant off. The juice that comes out of it feels cold. Emma paws her leg at me, and I apply the aloe. I help her up to a standing position.

As the clouds roll away I realize that this is just the first wave of the storm. I hop onto Emma's back and once again, we're off. I dig into Emma's side and make her go, fast. The rain dies down, but it is still drizzling.

RUMBLE. POP. My eyes shut quickly, and I hold my breath. I get whipped off of Emma's back again. Before I even know what happens, I look down to see a huge drop-off. In my confusion, I've veered off the trail. Rushing water is just below my feet, and I am hanging from Emma's reins. *This is it*, I think to myself.

CRUMBLE, SWISH, CRACK. I start feeling strange, and as I look up I see that the sand under Emma's hooves is collapsing. I look down, then up. There is absolutely no way I am going to let go of the reins and drop into the rushing water. But there is also no way that Emma can pull me up. I am too heavy to be hanging off of her neck.

Emma knows that the sand is collapsing and frantically backs up, pulling me away from trouble. As I am focusing on the rushing water below me, I realize that I am getting farther and farther away from the water. Emma is slowly pulling me up.

I lie on the wet ground of the Arizona desert to try to process what has just happened. I can't think long, though. I need to get home. I sling myself up onto Emma's back, and we are quickly heading home.

The storm is finally over. It's the first moment that I can see my ripped shirt and blood from my head. I slow Emma down to gather my senses. I cannot believe what we have just been through, and I'm not even home yet.

I learned when I was a little girl that the barrel cactus always point south. We travel south to the main path, and then I start Emma on a trot. My heart races with excitement when I see the barn in the distance. Once again I dig my heels into Emma and make her run.

When we arrive home, Emma has barely stopped before I jump off. I quickly tie her reins to the rusted pole in the front of the house. The front door bursts open, and I wait for something to

happen. I try to erase my mind from everything that has just happened. My mom's warm embrace takes all my fears away, and I can't contain my joy of being with her.

"I missed you so much, Mom," I say.

"Never leave me again," she says.

THE TALE OF DIAMOND BACK ROAD

In THE TALE OF DIAMOND BACK ROAD by Christopher Rivera, Logan and his dog enjoy roaming the wild areas of their neighborhood. But nature isn't always friendly.

Logan, an eleven-year-old boy with green eyes and dark hair, was average in height but very fit from the many adventures he and his best friend had in the woods near his Northern home. He and his best friend named Dozer, a ten-year-old loyal black lab, were inseparable. They shared summers fishing in their pond off of a tiny island that had room for just one small picnic table and a stump of an old evergreen tree. Dozer was a far better fisherman than Logan. He could smell the fish in the water, or at least that's what Logan believed. Everybody else could smell Dozer because he smelled like the pond.

One day, they were on a walk through the woods when Dozer ran off after a squirrel. Although Dozer had caught lots of things, a squirrel was never one of them. Logan remembered the time Dozer came across a porcupine late at night after Logan had let him outside. When Dozer had returned, his face was covered in long quills, and Logan's dad spent the night wrestling them out of Dozer's face.

Logan chased after Dozer, partly tracking his paw prints and partly following the smell. He was worried for Dozer but could hear him running up ahead.

It seemed like he had been running for ten minutes after Dozer. It may have been more. When Logan finally caught up to his loyal companion, he was shocked to see him just lying on the ground whimpering.

As Logan carefully approached Dozer, he heard a rattling sound that he had never heard in real life, but Logan knew what made that dreadful noise. It was a rattlesnake! He jumped back.

Logan was not a stranger to danger. He would never forget the time when he and Dozer were visiting the Hobo House, an odd-shaped structure in the woods. Logan figured a lonely, homeless man had built the ratty, old tree house with torn cloth for a roof and rusty, old, metal scraps for walls and then abandoned it.

Logan climbed up to the top, and Dozer started barking. That's when Logan spotted the black bear. He yelled for Dozer to "leave it" and, surprisingly, Dozer did. But the bear was not about to leave Dozer alone, and it stood up on its hind legs like a human.

Logan jumped down, without thinking. He knew he couldn't outrun the bear, but if he could get Dozer up onto the platform where he had been, they might be able to keep away from the bear.

Logan yanked Dozer up over his head and climbed up the ladder, and threw Dozer onto the steps that led to the platform. The bear ran toward them. Logan just made it onto the platform when the bear tried to climb up the old ladder, but it was too weak to hold the bear, and the ladder broke. The bear fell to the ground.

It hung around at the bottom of Hobo House for a few hours and then must have got bored and left. When Logan tried to climb down with Dozer in his arms, Logan lost his balance and fell hard. He broke his arm.

Logan hadn't ever seen a rattlesnake in all of his adventures in the woods with Dozer over the years. He had never even seen a snake like this before even in a book. Logan wanted to trap the snake to take it with him, but there just wasn't enough time, and that might be too risky. If the snake bit Logan, they would both be doomed. Logan had to find a way to kill that snake. If he could safely bring it back to identify it, they might have the right anti-venom, which could save his best friend's life.

Desperately looking around, Logan spotted the Hobo House. He must have chased Dozer nearly to the neighbor's road that everybody called DBR. He ran toward the Hobo House and grabbed part of the scrap metal tied to the wall. The old string easily broke, and he raced back towards the snake.

He hurled that metal toward the snake like one of his fastest baseball pitches. It stuck into the ground, but not before it chopped through the snake's neck. Normally, Logan would have rejoiced and celebrated, but this was not a time for that. Logan had to save his dear friend, Dozer the dog, his best friend!

It was too far back to his own house. Logan ran to Old Man Hagelthorn's cottage and ran into the neatly organized garage to borrow his golf cart. The keys were in it. Old Man Hagelthorn chased after Logan, who had no time to discuss or negotiate a deal to use his souped-up golf cart with the custom decals and racked up suspension. He drove as far into the woods as the cart could handle

and somehow found the strength to pick up Dozer just enough to put him on the seat. Dozer was weak and didn't move.

Logan had to act fast! He hesitated just for a split second and then reluctantly grabbed the two parts that made up the snake. He dropped them onto the floor of the back seat. He had to drive fast. Logan drove down DBR and turned onto the highway for just a few minutes.

When Logan arrived at the hospital, he pulled right into the emergency entrance in the front where he had been before when he broke his arm. The nurse ran to him to ask him what was wrong. Logan pointed to Dozer and then the snake. The nurse ran into the hospital and returned with a frown.

"I am so sorry. Our hospital does not have anyone who can help your dog. We are a people hospital only."

Logan couldn't believe it. He wouldn't take no for an answer and ran into the hospital yelling, "Someone has to save my dog!" He made such a ruckus that the security guard had to remove him. He was so discouraged and upset. He sat next to Dozer in the golf cart and cried, "If only you were a person, they could help us."

Half hoping for a miracle, Logan looked at Dozer's still body, but nothing happened. Dozer just lay there, slowly breathing. He had to get the anti-venom himself, but where to look? "Ah-ha, I got it!" he announced out loud.

Logan grabbed the head of the snake and impaled himself with the venomous snake's fangs. He ran into the hospital yelling, "I've been bitten by the snake! Help!" The same nurse that had turned him away was running around, trying to get him help. "Funny," he thought, "the way people do things around here."

They put Logan in a wheelchair and ran, pushing him into the nearest room. The nurse grabbed a vial and a syringe. She quickly sucked up the anti-venom into it. She told Logan that he was lucky they had anti-venom for a diamondback rattler.

With not a moment to spare, Logan grabbed the vial and the syringe right out of the nurse's hand and ran out of the room, and then, out the front doors. He hopped on the golf cart and drove away. He looked back and saw the nurse and the security guard as they were angrily shaking their fists at Logan.

When he thought he was out of sight, Logan pulled over and gave Dozer the shot.

Just then, a police car pulled up, and lots of people jumped out. A doctor, a nurse, and two policemen came at him. They grabbed Logan and held out his arm and gave him a shot, too. They told him that he was going to be in “big trouble,” but he was also going to be okay. Logan was happy that they were BOTH going to be okay.

After a few phone calls and a lot more lectures from the nurse, the doctor, and the policemen, Logan learned that Dozer had been bitten by a diamondback rattler.

When Logan returned home, he had to return Old Man Hagelthorn’s golf cart with an apology note. As he turned onto DBR, he realized what DBR stood for: Diamond Back Road.

INFRARED

THE 2D PEOPLE

*They are violent and almost invisible, so you might not see them until it is too late. In **THE 2D PEOPLE** by **Owen Peake**, you will face the threat from another dimension.*

Bill was late getting out the door again for school. It seemed like he was always late.

“Bill, you are going to be late!” his mom yelled. He could not find his homework and then remembered that he had left it in the family room, but then the television caught his attention. The newscast was broadcasting news about six more mysteriously murdered people in Niska alone! Niska is not a famous or particularly large town, but was getting a lot of attention lately due to the unsolved murders. Now there were more people dead!

At Niska High School, Bill was happy to find out there was an assembly he had completely forgotten. That meant that he could get out of his Math class. “Yes!” Bill said as he high-fived his friend Dave.

“Anything to miss Math,” David agreed.

Bill and Dave headed down to the school auditorium. First there was the usual introduction about rules and notices from the principal. Then there was a geeky guest speaker, Dr. Gilbert, who is a scientist who apparently had a theory about two-dimensional people. “Is this guy a freak or what?” Dave whispered.

Bill nodded in agreement, but he was semi-interested in such a strange idea. Dr. Gilbert believed that there are other dimensions where actual two-dimensional people exist. The scientist went on to say that if they ever come to our world we would be forced to battle for dominance. According to Dr. Gilbert, these two-dimensional people are running out of space to live within their dimension.

Bill looked at Dave, shook his head, and said, “So now we are going to defend the world against aliens from another dimension?” Both boys cracked up, laughing with the rest of the crowd until the principal ordered silence.

Bill was walking home from school listening to music and thinking about what snack he would eat when he got home. It was cold, so he wanted to get home quick, but then he noticed his neighbor’s front door was open. Mr. Fredericks would never just leave his door wide open in the winter time because he is older. Bill took his earbuds out and was

walking toward the house when he heard screams. He ran inside and saw Mr. Fredericks sliced across his stomach as he fell down.

Bill panicked because he was afraid, but at the same time he wanted to save Mr. Fredericks. As he moved toward him, he saw human-like shadows on the floor and thought he would need to fight off a knife-wielding bandit. But then he realized they were flat, almost 2D-like. Then they seemed to disappear. He thought maybe this was what Dr. Gilbert was talking about earlier at school. Bill was freaked out and immediately ran out of the house and called 911 on his cell phone.

The authorities came and questioned Bill, but they did not believe him. “So tell me again son what you *think* you saw?” the officer said.

“I told you, when I walked into the house, Mr. Fredericks was on the floor and I saw a flat person—I swear they were two-dimensional—just like Dr. Gilbert said.” Bill was really shaken up and was getting frustrated with the officer. It was clear that they assumed that Bill was in shock and was associating the school guest speaker’s 2D people topic to the killing of his neighbor.

The next day at school, he walked into the bathroom and saw things moving on the floor that looked like shapes of people even though no one was in the bathroom with him. He ran out very upset back to class and tried to explain what happened to his teacher and friends. “Mr. Stevens, there are 2D people in the bathroom. I swear they are trying to get me. We need to call for help.” Bill was shaking as he interrupted his English teacher. He really felt that the 2D people were trying to kill him.

Mr. Stevens shook his head, feeling sorry for Bill. He did not believe him, and neither did the kids who overheard him. Instead, Mr. Stevens sent Bill to the office. He was sent home because they thought he was stressed and traumatized from his neighbor’s murder.

Over the weekend Bill was taking out the garbage and saw his neighbor who lives two streets down from him. Everyone thinks Mr. Bo is a little crazy. He owns a pawnshop in town. He was actually coming to find Bill and stopped to give him a gun for protection. Bill was shocked, but Mr. Bo insisted. He told Bill that it was not a coincidence that Bill saw the murder. He added that the murders had to be stopped.

It all happened so fast. He left as quick as he came, and Bill was standing there with a loaded gun in his hand. Somehow, even though he was afraid, it made him feel safer against the mysterious 2D people.

Later that night, Bill decided to walk to Dave’s house. He knew he could not talk to his mom, but he had to talk to someone. On the way he saw shadows on the street and realized that the 2D people were making

another attempt on his life. He tried to shoot them in self-defense. But the shots didn't harm the 2D people at all! The bullets just left holes in the ground.

Bill took off and managed to escape and hide in the bushes. He was scared. He was confused as to why the bullets did nothing to harm the 2D people.

Bill had to figure out what weapon could kill the 2D people. He finally decided that paper, because of its two-dimensional nature, could kill them.

He also decided that he needed to prove to the world that the 2D people existed. Bill found his old video camera. He made a paper sword and then went to the most public place he could think of—the park. He set up the video camera in a tree he used to climb when he was young. It had the perfect lower branches in a “V” shape to hold the camera pointed at his location. Bill sat in his spot and waited for them to come.

When they found Bill, he attacked them with his paper sword. They swarmed in on Bill. They had sword-like weapons. Bill slashed at them. They were fighting harder. Finally, Bill wounded some, and they retreated. He was lucky that he got out alive. There were many people who witnessed the 2D people trying to kill Bill.

The police finally believed him. They had the video and the witnesses. They hunted down all the 2D people, and the town of Niska was free from the strange murderers.

APOCALYPTIC SURVIVAL

*It's 2431, and the world has been ravaged by nuclear war. In **APOCALYPTIC SURVIVAL** by Amiri, a man named Marty must survive on the razed planet and try finding other survivors.*

Marty got up out of bed and was ready for a brand new day. The year was 2431 in the post-apocalyptic world. In his location, there was sand as far as the eye could see. The world had been ruined five years ago due to nuclear wars.

Marty was low on food. He would have to travel out of his miniature fortress. Marty ate his remaining slice of toast from the day before. His stomach sounded like the imaginary basement monsters he feared as a child. He needed food fast, and regretted that there was no more fast food.

He knew that he would need a plan to get food. He settled on the thought that he would only attack mutants if needed. Otherwise he would avoid them. When he was ready, Marty lugged himself and his gatherings and left.

After walking for miles, Marty realized that he was traveling across the barren wasteland that was once Detroit. He then started to think about life before the apocalypse. Marty wondered, *Are there any survivors nearby?* He knew that they could be hostile, but he hoped that there would be someone.

He noticed a crumpled building with a broken sign. Marty found it convenient that it turned out to be a grocery store. A large majority of the food had been stolen or had become poisoned. He found a couple of waters. He kept searching for more scraps of food.

He heard a faint clang of cans in the background, and a mumbled groan came after. Marty knew that it could have been an injured survivor. He walked toward the noise.

As Marty walked toward the back of the collapsed building, he noticed small drops of green ooze on the warped floor. He started to tremble. The groan came again along with a small squishing sound. Marty turned the corner and made eye contact with a monster.

Marty recoiled as the mutant lurched out to snatch him. Marty quickly ran as the monster chased after him.

Marty saw a gun behind a cash register. He immediately bolted toward it. The moment Marty grabbed it, he directly shot the mutant in the forehead. The gun shot a plasma bolt instead of a bullet, but it still did the job. The mutant doubled over.

Marty had a good amount of food, and wanted to leave. So he gathered his things and sprinted out of the grocery store.

As Marty traveled, he noticed that the area began to get more and more rocky. Eventually, the ground became so lumpy that Marty tripped over a rock and tumbled down toward a sandy valley. He kept rolling down the hill. When he came to a halt, he was in great agony. He was wounded badly.

He was in a valley with individual trees and a numerous mutants scattered everywhere. He knew he could not fight them in the current condition. He needed help.

While Marty was searching for help, a group of mutated squirrels noticed him wandering. They began to hunt him. Marty was unaware of these mutants, until he felt one bite him in his leg. He shot up in pain. He quickly tried to pull out his plasma gun, but there were too many mutants to fight off. He fell to the ground and thought that he was going to die.

He was saved by a blackened figure. The person shot the mutant squirrels with a P90 gun. She said, "You need some help?"

"Well, of course!"

"Okay, then follow me."

He was excited that there was another survivor. She and Marty ran to what looked like a titanium outpost. He thought to himself, *Why is it so fortified?*

"Thank you," said Marty.

Marty told her his name, and Rook told him her name. "Where are you from, Marty?"

"I'm from a couple miles down south. I think it used to be called... Ohio?"

"Must've been quite a journey then."

"Yeah. Also, I've never actually met another survivor."

"It would make sense. Most people died in the nuclear explosion, or turned into mutants," Rook said.

Marty sat on the ground and started to eat the food he collected at the store.

They discussed what they would do if there was a mutant attack. Rook said that they should have automated turrets for

protection. But Marty said it was too dangerous. He said they could go haywire and shoot them or other coming survivors. They decided they would talk more about it later.

Eventually, Rook left the outpost. When Marty saw her open the door, he got up and followed behind her. When he got out, he tripped over a rock and hit the ground hard. The only bad part about the drop was he had his gun in his hand. He accidentally shot into the air. This bright plasma blast was like a beacon to the mutants. They became attracted to it like a moth to a flame.

Half of all the mutants in the valley began to travel in that direction. The two knew this when they heard groans come from all over the valley. Marty warmed his gun and shot one of the mutants. Rook and Marty decided to team up and kill the rest. As a group of mutants got close, Marty and Rook shot almost at the same time. Marty's plasma shots burned parts of flesh of each mutant. Rook's bullets pierced through the bodies easier because of the burns. They did this technique to all of the mutants.

A long while after the brawling with the mutants, Marty noticed a helicopter soaring through the sky. He shot into the air to be noticed. He did this five more times before being seen. The helicopter plummeted out of the sky and picked up Marty and Rook.

On the helicopter, the pilot explained how relieved he was to see other survivors. He said that he had been traveling for days looking for survivors. He told the two that he knew that there were multiple groups of people. Marty then got excited, but kept it to himself. The pilot also said that as he flew, the only figures he saw on the ground were mutants, trees, and crumpled structures.

As he continued talking, the helicopter started to fall out of the sky. Luckily, they had enough fuel to slow down.

When they landed, they ended up landing in a safe haven for survivors. When they met the new survivors, they decided to stay put until the area got too small to support all of the people. Marty hoped that they all could soon conquer the mutants, and finally repopulate.

BFB: BEST FRIEND BROTHER

*When Sophia's mother remarries, Sophia gains a stepbrother who she doesn't think she likes very much. But when Carlos is threatened, Sophia has a realization in **BFB: BEST FRIEND BROTHER**, by **Mia Frank**.*

Sophia Budatchee was having a bad day. Not only did she have to hang out with her new brother, Carlos, but she also had to walk home with him. Little did she know that her day was about to get worse.

Sophia was not a big fan of her new stepbrother, and he did not like her either. It had been two months since their parents had gotten married. They were both the only child in their separate families. When their parents decided to get married, both children were not happy.

Carlos and his dad moved to Bolivia from Brazil so that he could marry Sophia's mother. Since then, Sophia and Carlos had not gotten along. Sophia made fun of Carlos for not fitting in. And Carlos makes fun of Sophia for being so serious. Lately in Bolivia, there have been children disappearing. So to make things even worse, Sophia and Carlos were forced by their parents to walk home from school together.

On this day, Sophia was again making fun of Carlos because he didn't fit in. Carlos had enough, so he ran away from Sophia. It was a foggy day, so she couldn't see him. Sophia was fine with it; she just kept on walking along the street. Then she heard Carlos scream, and immediately began sprinting toward him in the fog.

As she got closer and closer, she heard the sound of a rocket taking off, becoming louder and louder. Finally, she saw a tree hovering above the ground with smoke and fire squirting out of its root.

"A fly..i..ng tr...ee?" she stuttered to herself. "Where's Carlos? What do I do? A flying tree?" Sophia was so confused that her legs slowed down to a walk.

There was a big bag attached to the tree's trunk, with an arm sticking out of the bag. The body struggling within the bag was screaming. It was Carlos. Before she could get close enough to do anything, the tree took off like an airplane heading toward the

mountains. Sophia started jogging in the direction of the tree's path.

* * *

Suddenly, it went dark. Carlos tried to run, but a hard grip on his legs kept him still. Then, whatever was holding him shoved him into a ball, and a floor of rubber pushed against him from below.

It got stuffy and dark. Carlos didn't know where he was. He knew he was in some sort of bag. He smelled wood burning, and heard a rocket launching. He kicked and screamed. It was no use.

All of a sudden, he felt airborne. "Help! Help!" Carlos screamed. He started to shake and shiver. He had no idea where he was going, but five minutes later, he ended up in some sort of a cave in the mountains.

He looked around. He saw all the missing children and these things that looked sort of human, sort of alien, and maybe a bit robot. The robots had human hair and bodies shaped like humans, but they were made out of metal. They spoke with a British accent and used large vocabulary words. The kids were tied up to some poles, and some of the robot thingies were tying up kids. Other robots appeared to be working on some sort of metal-looking new technology.

Carlos was tied up next to a boy who he recognized from school. "Hey, aren't you in Mrs. Bib's class? What the heck is going on? I'm scared and freaked out," said Carlos.

"I've been in here for like three days. I've only eaten one apple. I'm starving and scared too," said the boy with a shaky voice. The boy continued to tell him what he had learned. The robots are called Hunans (pronounced hoo-nans) and are from a planet called Wondrous Bloob. They came to Earth in order to turn humans into Hunans. All the kids' necks had been implanted with metallic chips that looked like mini flash drives. Carlos was up next. The chips were not activated but would be soon.

* * *

Sophia slowed down to catch her breath, but she kept walking. Sophia started talking out loud, almost crying. "Carlos, where are you? Are you okay? I am so worried about you. I am so freaked out!" She was lost, tired, and hungry.

She heard a rumbling sound and became even more scared, but she kept on going for Carlos. She thought maybe an earthquake was coming. Just then, she saw another flying tree. Despite feeling scared, she smiled because she knew she was going in the right direction.

* * *

Carlos was dizzy. He must have fallen asleep, but he did not know for how long. Then he realized there was something in his neck. It was a chip. Hunans put it in while he was sleeping, and it was only a matter of time now until he became one of them.

Sophia was just about to give up when she saw a cave up a few hundred feet in the mountains. She saw flickering lights in the cave and trees flying into the cave nearby. She felt a rush of excitement and fear that she was onto something. She ran to the other side away from the cave in order to crawl up the mountain without being noticed.

She was almost there when something tightly wrapped around her waist. It picked her up and shoved her in some sort of container or bag. Everything was dark all around her.

She felt like she was in the air for about five seconds, and then she landed on the ground. She was immediately tied to something on the ground. She wiped her eyes, looked, and saw Carlos. She was really happy, so she hugged him with her legs. "Carlos, what is going on? What's happening to us?" Sophia said.

Carlos began to answer Sophia when suddenly, the ground began to shake. Rocks were falling off the mountain past the opening of the cave. All of the Hunans shook uncontrollably. The earthquake stopped, and all the Hunans were lying down as if they were dead. "The earthquake must have caused an electromagnetic wave that shorted out all of their circuits," said Sophia.

After everyone got out of the ropes, Carlos and Sophia started walking home with all of the other dozens of kids. When they got back to the town, mothers and fathers ran out of their houses to find their children. Carlos and Sophia's parents never came outside because they thought their children were still on their way home from school. Carlos and Sophia walked past everyone to get to their house. By the time they arrived home, they were holding hands.

COLOR BLIND

*A girl who can't see colors looks to her brother in **COLOR BLIND** by Clare Llope.*

Can you describe the color blue for me? Can you tell me what green looks like? I ask these questions all the time. No one I have come across has been able to answer them in a way I understand. They will always say, "Oh, yes, that is what water looks like," or "Oh, that's the color of the grass." It's not very helpful, but thank you for trying.

Imagine a life without color. As I lie in my colorless world I think about if I was born and could see color, what it would be like.

I woke up and put on a plain t-shirt and jeans. As I went outside to go on the bus with my brother, I realized it was my favorite type of weather: a foggy but warm spring morning.

Jack said, "Wow, the fog is really thick today." He asks, "Is this what it's like to be color blind?"

I respond after a while, saying, "Imagine that the world was black, grey, and white."

"Kind of like an old movie?" Jack asked.

"Yes, exactly," I said.

As the years went on my brother and I were getting smarter, and sadly my vision was staying the same. In high school my brother was in collage getting a medical degree. Little did I know when he graduated he was going to focus on finding a way for me to see color.

After my brother graduated college, he got a job as a doctor and worked on a cure. A couple years later I graduated high school. After my graduation ceremony, my brother found me in the crowd. "I fear you might explode, so I'll hold you down," Jack laughed. "I found a cure."

He was right to hold me down because I felt like I was going to explode! As I jumped into his arms I thought I should have been nicer and less rude when we were kids. (Just because I can't see color doesn't mean we don't argue.) I could never ask for a better brother. He explained that this involved surgery, and he understood if I didn't want it to be done. I immediately responded, saying, "Only if you do it."

He said, "Deal!"

My hands were shaking. I couldn't believe this was happening!

Thankfully for the surgery I was knocked out and didn't feel a thing. When I woke up I saw the most amazing thing. I...saw...color!

My favorite color, I almost immediately decided, was blue. I finally understand why no one has been able to explain it. You just need to be lucky enough to see it.

ESCAPING SCHOOL

*The leaders of a world that seems like a possible future of our own control citizens almost completely. Two girls decide to challenge the way things are in **ESCAPING SCHOOL** by **Josephine Izydorek**.*

I wake up feeling cold. I look at my watch, and it reads 3:43 a.m. I look over at my friend, Ruth, who is in a ball shivering like I am. She's not awake, though. I try to get warmer by getting deeper into my sleeping bag, but I'm too big. This sleeping bag was meant for a second-grader. I'm in sixth grade. I'm 12 years old. I'm one of the oldest in my grade.

I miss my parents a lot. I am the only one who really thinks about them. (All my other friends' parents are dead.)

At our school, everybody is forced to be the same. We're forced to sit at a certain table with certain people. The Watchers control us. At least, that's how we kids feel.

In the morning, we go to our assigned homes with the Watchers. They teach us all kinds of things. (Most of them bore me so badly that I get a headache!) My favorite lesson was when they taught us about our parents. I never knew that I had parents until fifth grade! For a school assignment, everybody in my home did research on their parents. I learned that my parents work at a toothpaste company. What a job. I'm going to do that when I'm grown up? Ugh. We are required to do what the rest of our family does.

After our lesson on our parents, I ask a Watcher, "Will I ever be able to meet my parents?"

"No one is allowed to see their parents after birth," he responds.

"What happens if we do?" I ask.

"You will die."

"Why?"

There's a long pause before he answers, "No more questions, or I'll have to report you." All I can feel is emptiness.

When class is done, I go to the library, and I find Ruth inside using a computer. "Hi, Ruth. What are you doing?"

"Looking at my family's history. Looks like all my family members were killed. Whatever. I was never going to see them anyway." I see her green eyes tear up. "Let's look at your family's history." In a click of a button, a boatload of information pops up.

"Your mom is still alive. Your dad is also doing well." I look deep into Ruth's eyes. She knows what I'm thinking. Instantly, we are forming a plan to leave.

At night, I ask a Watcher if I could use the bathroom. A few minutes later, Ruth pops up. "Let's get out of here before someone comes in here," I say, prying open the window.

"Let's go," says Ruth. She hops out and gives a big smile.

After we are both outside, we put our sleeping bags over our heads (they have two circles cut out so we can see) and crawl past the fence. Luckily, the factory is only 2.1 miles away.

"I'm scared," Ruth says.

"It's ok."

"We might die, though."

"I doubt it. Who would kill two twelve-year-old kids?" Then she gives me a stern face. I think I'll just stop talking.

When we arrive at the factory, we locate my parents by seeing them through a window. Everyone is going to lunch except my mom and dad, who are being held back. A Watcher shows them pictures of me and Ruth. After that, my mom gets all teary.

"Ok, Ruth, when we get inside the building we need to fight for our lives, because if we don't, we will probably die. So let's jump through the window." As I jump in with my sleeping bag covering my face, I land right on top of the Watcher and feel excruciating pain when a fist hits my eye.

Someone grabs me by my arms and pulls me away from the Watcher who was punching me. When I take off the bag, I see my dad knocking him out and my mom on a computer, hacking into something that makes all the doors lock.

When the Watcher is unconscious, my mom and dad rush over to me and give me a hug. It feels so good. I no longer feel empty, but warm and safe.

"We need to leave now. The Watchers are getting the doors open. Follow me, guys," Mom says.

Dad looks at my eye and says, "Looks like you have a black eye. I'll fix that up when we get to a safer place."

"Okay," I say. My mom gets us in what I think is a car. We drive out of the garage and ride away.

When we arrive, it's been nearly ten hours of driving. It looks like we're in the middle of nowhere when we see a door that leads underground. When we get down there, it's dusty. There are six

beds and a whole storage area of food. As I sit on the bed, I ask, "Will we ever go back for the others?"

"We won't. We can't," my mom says. Then she shows me a video of the burning school.

THE FALLOUT SHELTER

In THE FALLOUT SHELTER by Keegan Reed, one man awakens to a devastated world. Can the group of survivors known as the Cosmochu save the planet from total annihilation?

You wake up with no memories at all in a cryogenic chamber. You look around. “What’s happening?” you say. You can’t remember your name or what happened. “This door won’t budge!” You keep yanking on the handle trying to get out of the confined space. You look up and see an “Eject” button. “No wonder I can’t open this door. I have to press the button and then yank the handle.” You try to lift up your arm, but it’s so cold that your arm can barely move. Once your arm can move, you press the button. It makes a high-pitched noise for a second and then opens.

“Brrrrr. It’s cold in here!” The temperature seems like 10 degrees Fahrenheit. You start walking around the mysterious place and see people frozen in other cryogenic chambers. “Why were we frozen?” you say in your head. You walk down this big hallway to a vault door. “Whoa, that’s a huge door. I wonder how it opens?” You walk around, looking for a lever or button. You spot a button to your left that’s flashing red. The button says “EMERGENCY EXIT.” You decide to press the button. PHSSSSSSSSSSSS! Steam starts pouring out of vents. The door creaks open just enough for you to slip right out into the lifeless, new world.

Your eyes are still getting used to the blinding lights. “Whoa. What happened here?” you say, staring off into the destroyed neighborhood of what used to be “Woodsville” according to the destroyed sign in the distance.

You start walking downhill into the neighborhood when you see a helicopter. “People are still alive?” you say, looking at the helicopter that is getting closer. “Wait, there are more helicopters.” You see about five or six now coming closer and closer.

The helicopters broadcast something from their loudspeakers. “DO NOT RESIST! DO NOT MOVE OR YOU WILL BE SHOT!” Your mind starts racing with ideas on what’s happening right now. “Maybe I did something in the past, maybe I crossed territory,

maybe they are just going to kill me, maybe I should book it." You decide not to move and wait for the strangers to come.

The men are holding a strange pistol. They land in a circle around you, pull out tranquilizers, and shoot you in the back. "Wwwhaaat..." you say, drowsy. You're knocked out immediately.

You wake up in a cell surrounded by guards with batons. "Excuse me. What is happening?"

One guard turns around fiercely and says "Ahhh... you are awake! Follow me. NOW." The guard picks you up and throws you out of the cell. "KEEP WALKING!" the guard says pointing down the hallway.

You quickly stand up and start walking toward the hallway. You see a sign that says "CAPTAIN'S ROOM." The guard points down toward the captain's room. You reach the room, and the door opens automatically.

"Welcome, Newcomer! You're probably wondering why you're here and what is happening. Right?" You nod your head up and down. "Good! Ok, first, I brought you here for special reasons we will talk about later. Second, the reason you see the demolished world is because of a nuclear accident."

The captain nods at the guard, telling him he can go. The guard leaves you and the captain in his 80's styled room. There are arcade machines, blocky floors, preppy style, and easels. "Sooooo, do you know your name?" You shake your head left and right. "Ok. What vault did you come from?"

You say, "Vault 115. So far I'm the only one out of the cryogenic chambers."

"Ok. Hang on a second while I look up who you are. Just a second." While the captain is searching your name you look around at the triangle-shaped windows behind his desk. "Done! Your name is... JOHN CENA from what the vault is telling me!" You now remember your name but still don't remember anything from before. "Also, I have one more question. Would you like to join our clan? The Cosmochu!"

You and the captain have a talk for a while about joining. He explains that joining this group is the only option right now. If not, you could be killed out in the wild.

The captain sends you to your new room across from the cells. You look around the new room of yours and spot something shining from the glare of the sun on the birch desk. "Hey, it's those

pins the guards were wearing.” You pick up the pin and put it on your plain blue shirt.

KrRrrAaCkle... “ATTENTION ALL COSMOCHU. REPORT TO THE CAPTAIN’S ROOM! HURRY, AND TAKE YOUR EQUIPMENT.” You look around your room only to find a 66 Magnum and a leather tunic. “Well it’s better than nothing.” You grab the tunic and 66 Magnum and rush toward the captain’s room.

You see other comrades walking down the hallway. “You new here?” one of the Cosmochu says.

“Yes, I am. How did you know?”

KrRrrAaCkle... “Hurry to the Captain’s Room NOW.” You and your fellow comrade rush toward the captain’s room with the other 70 Cosmochu.

You walk into the captain’s room. “Welcome! I have something important to tell all of you. We have found a new weapon of mass destruction. This weapon is missing one piece. But there are two possible pieces that can equip it. One piece is a nuclear attachment, and the other is a time travel attachment. The time travel piece works by ripping a hole in the time-space continuum by charging up a big ball of light and sending the user to whatever time they want to. Also it will transfer your soul into the other body. It will erase your memories except the one memory you want to keep. We all know we don’t want this nuclear accident to ever happen, right?” People are mumbling yes. “Ok. Get ready to fly in a month. In that month you all will be training in your rooms. The only social time is at lunch. There will be equipment in your rooms already, so no need to worry about how to get your equipment. You are dismissed.”

In the period of that month many things happen. You gain more respect from the captain by doing missions. But you still don’t know the comrade’s name that you walked with to the meeting. Most of the month you are kept in your room with training equipment. You don’t get to know anyone besides the captain because of your confinement in your room. You also train a bunch in shooting, knowing what gear/weapons are the best, and how some missions should be played out.

One Month Later

You and your fellow clan members are flying toward the enemy’s base south of the Cosmochu’s base. The Cosmochu reach

the base at the crack of dawn. All of you, including the enemies, start firing, and you start deploying the troops into the rain of bullets. You and that fellow comrade are deployed into the middle of the base.

Your comrade has the piece for the weapon of mass destruction, and you are covering him. "Come on! We need to get to the bottom of the base." You rush into the main tower.

The swirly staircase is the entrance to the basement. You and your comrade rush down it. "Get behind that brick wall, hurry!" you say. Your comrade dives behind the wall undetected, and you follow, also undetected. "There is a whole bunch of baddies back there. You got a grenade?" you say quietly.

"Yep!" your comrade says, pulling the pin. He chucks it across the room, and it explodes, leaving no one behind.

"Nice throw! Now hurry and go attach it!" you say while running to the weapon of mass destruction with your comrade following.

You hear a robotic sound. CLUNK, CLUNK, CLUNK.... Then you hear a sound of a minigun getting ready to fire. FFFFFFFF. "DUCK!" you say while diving behind a wall. You see your comrade get shot in the head in front of the weapon by the rain of a thousand bullets coming from a power suit.

There is nobody in the power suit. So it must be remote controlled! "How am I going to get the piece now. It is in the middle of the room!" you say with frustration. You look right and see an EMP grenade. "Wait, that power suit is powered by electricity. But the EMP only lasts 60 seconds. That will be enough time! Probably."

You pull the pin and chuck it right under the power suit's legs. CHHCUNK! The suit collapses onto the hard ground. You rush over to your comrade, grab the piece, and run toward the weapon, getting ready to place the piece down. "Thirty seconds to go! I have to hurry!"

You place the piece down and charge the weapon up. You set the date to when the nuclear accident was about to happen, which was the first day of 2025. "FIRE!" The weapon fires a blinding light, destroying everything.

You wake up in a regular bed, in a regular house, in a regular neighborhood. "Ahhhh. Time to go to work at the nuclear factory!" you say while walking to the kitchen to get breakfast. You finish your daily routine and walk to your car to go to work. But you

remember that you need to stop the nuclear bombs from launching. When the nuclear bombs launched, one malfunctioned and blew up.

You rush to your station at the nuclear factory. Your station is the gate controls for the nuclear bomb. The president of the factory gives you the signal to let it launch. But you shake your head at the president, telling him that there is an error with the launching device. He tells the fixing crew to fix the launch pad and to hold off the nuclear bomb for a couple of months.

THE FOREST

*Leo and Jason brave the forest that holds many secrets, none of them good. In **THE FOREST** by **Evan Meinel**, they will need to be smart and brave to face down the otherworldly threat that inhabits the woods.*

Jason and Leo were sprinting down the rough terrain that is the White Forest's path. They hid behind trees right next to each other. They both were out of breath, and they couldn't run any more. If the truck stopped, they would be sitting ducks. The truck slowed down, and very slowly it passed by the trees. Leo and Jason waited about three minutes after the truck passed.

"I am really scared right now," Leo said fearfully.

"Me too," Jason replied. Then they started to walk in the opposite direction of the truck, deeper into the forest.

"I could eat a cow," Jason said hungrily.

"Let's see if we have anything left in our bags," Leo suggested. They looked through their bags, staring at the contents with hungry eyes.

"Do you have any food? Cause I have none," Jason said sadly.

"I got nothing," Leo said even more sadly than Jason.

Something caught Leo's eye. It was an old campsite. Leo and Jason went over to investigate. They found nothing except a can of soup surrounded by trash. Jason went over to pick it up.

"Jason, wait, it could be a trap," Leo said.

"It can't be a trap," Jason said confidently. But Leo pushed him aside and pointed out that there was a wire attached to the soup can.

"Did you hear that?" Jason said in a scared voice. The truck had stopped, and the doors slammed shut with a *BANG*.

"It's the truck. Run!" Leo shouted. They ran as fast as they could for as long as they could.

After about 15 minutes of non-stop running Leo tripped on a branch. Jason pulled him behind a tree. They both heard, "Come out, come out, wherever you are."

"That voice sounded like a thing I never heard before," Jason whispered to Leo. Then they realized it was an alien being.

"Hello," said the creature. When Jason saw it he could hardly believe his eyes. It had a slimy face, multi-colored skin, and three

fingers on its hands. It was about six feet tall. Its body and shoulders were huge. It was terrifying to look at and smelled horrible.

Jason tried to protect Leo, but it threw Jason aside. The creature grabbed Leo. Jason tried to hit it, but it grabbed Jason, too. "Wow, you guys are heavy," the alien said. He carried Jason and Leo one on each of his shoulders. When he got back to the truck, the creature put them on the ground and opened the truck's left-hand side door. He picked them up and threw them in the back seat of the truck. They both tried to get out before the alien shut the truck door. That didn't end well for Leo and Jason. It ended in Jason and Leo knocked out cold.

The truck sped off. It was around a 35-minute drive to get to the thing's lair.

When Jason and Leo woke from their unconscious state they were locked up in what seemed to be a prison cell. Leo woke up before Jason.

"Where are we?" Jason said in a sleepy voice.

"We are in some sort of cave," Leo said sadly.

"Why was it us instead of other campers or hikers?" Jason said, confused.

"I guess we were the lucky winners," Leo said sarcastically.

"We are going to get experimented on because I see some weird tools lying on the tables," Jason said fearfully. "We need to find a way out of this place before the alien actually does something to us."

"I already know that," Leo said. Jason pointed out that the key on a table outside the cell, but the keys were too far to reach. They both tried reaching the keys.

"Could we try to trick one of the aliens?" Jason wondered.

"The aliens are probably too smart for tricks," Leo pointed out. But Leo thought, *We could drag the table over here. Then again the aliens would hear us drag the table over.*

"We could set a trap for him," Jason said in an enthusiastic voice.

"Sure, but we need to start planning and getting to work, before the aliens suspect something," Leo said. They needed to set up a trap where one of the table's leg would break. Then the table would fall toward the cell, allowing Leo or Jason to grab the key and unlock the door.

“How are we going to make the table leg snap?” Jason asked.

“The alien is going to trip over our shirts that we tie to the table and the cell door,” Leo explained even more. Leo told Jason that they also needed to create a distraction that would lead the aliens to the table and cell door. With the aliens being so big and tall, they would not notice the trap the two were setting. Now they just had to set up the trap.

It only took them 25 minutes to set up the trap with stopping because of the alien’s check-ins.

“Ow!” Jason screamed as loud as he could.

“Help!” Leo screamed. The alien waltzed over to the cell. The alien didn’t notice the shirts because Jason had the alien’s attention. The alien tripped over the shirts. The leg of the table snapped, and the keys were flung toward the cell. Jason grabbed the keys and opened the door as quick as he could. They sprinted out of the cell like they were shot out of a cannon.

Other aliens heard the table leg snap and rushed over. When the aliens saw their prisoners escaping, they chased after them. The cave was pretty long, and Jason and Leo had to jump over and run around a lot of obstacles.

When Leo and Jason got out of the cave, they both tripped on a big tree trunk. They tumbled down the hillside. Finally they hit the bottom of the hill. They both were in a lot of pain. Jason’s hand was in a weird shape for landing on it, and Leo’s finger bent completely backwards. But the adrenaline kept them going. Jason and Leo looked up to the top of the hill. They saw aircraft shoot out of the cave.

Leo screamed, “Run!” They were running like they had never run before. The alien aircraft were chasing them. The aircraft tried more than once to pick them up in a tractor beam. Also the aircraft shot what seemed to be lasers after they failed to pick them up in the tractor beams.

Eventually the boys got to the nearest town, which was their hometown. “Help!” Jason and Leo screamed while running by the citizens. The citizens were giving them a weird look. It was a “What are you running from?” look. Jason and Leo stopped and looked behind them. There was nothing there.

One of the citizens said, “You need to get some medical help; both of you look shaken up.” That is what Leo and Jason did. They went to the local hospital and got a check-up.

When they were done with the check-up, Leo learned he had a broken finger and bruised ribs. Jason had a broken hand and bruised collarbone. When Jason and Leo left the hospital they thought to themselves, *I will never forget what happened today.*

Nowadays they both tell the story of how they were kidnapped by aliens. The story is so old now people just call it “The Legend of the White Forest.” Jason and Leo never went back into the White Forest. They still had questions: Where did the aliens come from? How many more aliens are there? And where are the aliens now? But, all Leo and Jason know is that the aliens seemed to be after test subjects due to the fact there were weird tools on the tables in the cave. When Leo and Jason told their grandchildren, they wanted to investigate. “The-oh-so-dangerous White Forest” is what they said.

THE HIDEAWAYS

Danger is everywhere in THE HIDEAWAYS by Zach Kaechle. A few brave souls resist the powerful ruler and his army, hoping for a better life.

When I was a kid I had no worries, no cares...at least until they came. When they come they hurt people badly. Notice how I said "Come." Yeah, they come a lot, and these guys are jerks. They kill and enslave people. Me, I am hiding with my crew FAR away from them. One thing I know for sure: you stay with your friends, or you're dead. Enough of this scary stuff; here is my crew: Elmer and Henry. There isn't much left here anymore besides evil. In this world the one goal is to survive.

Every day we scout to see if any troops are looking for hideaways. Supplies are running a little low, and the other safe houses are far away from here, so we might be in trouble. We have a map that locates all of the safe houses, storage units, and their base.

When we originally started our little group we used one of the old military bases in the mountains. One day when we returned the place was trashed, and we had to move to a new one. On the wall was written WE WILL FIND YOU in blood red.

Now and then we try and make a trade with rebel soldiers. We normally don't see them after that.

We decided today is a good day to move out of the old base. We can't stay in the same place for too long. Elmer, Henry, and I say goodbye to the old base and pack it all up.

We heard that they are scouting the east today at 12:00. We know this because we have a rebel soldier named Paul. He tells us where they are scouting each day. We decide to find a base on the west side. There is a small amount of people there and few soldiers.

We have walked 20 miles in the scorching, blazing heat when we find these strange people with masks. We run as soon as we see them in the opposite direction. These people are not soldiers or hideaways. They're these weirdos that come from an evil scientist who brainwashes these people. It makes them crazy, and they

always wear masks. If they see you or you stand still or even talk, like a lightning strike they will attack.

Thankfully they don't see us. But to our luck we find a small cave. We spend the night in there. With our small fire we all tell stories. Elmer is telling us how he would love some steak or pork chops around now, and Henry is lookout. I go up to Henry and we just talk about how we wish things could go back to the way they were. He says, "I wish we didn't need to hide like this."

I say, "I know; just things change." Sadly, it is true what I said. If they did not come, we could all have a normal life without living on the edge.

"Rise and shine. We need to move. They're moving to the south side," said Henry. So we need to move to get to our new base.

We get up, and to our surprise we see three horses, which we look at for a minute but they seem to be normal, not soldier horses. We decide to tame them, and they're fine with it. We all get one horse to ourselves.

We make it to our new base in half the time it would have taken on foot. But just after we take off, we hear screaming and shouting that sounds like "WE WILL FIND YOU." They seem not too smart and don't get on their horses to chase us. What we didn't know was that we were on their horses.

We make it to our new base and wreck it. The reason we do this is so the soldiers and the chief think we aren't there. We also release the horses, and they go running off.

Today they are supposed to come to the west side, where our base is. Around 2:00, we hear horses and German shepherds sniffing the area for people that are alive. Before we hear them we cover ourselves in mud and dirt and other junk so the dogs don't smell us. At least, that's what we thought would happen.

We hear some dogs, and I hear barking like they found something. It is somewhat far away from where we are, and in the area where the dogs bark, they get in the tank and blow the area up.

We're there in the rubble of the explosion. We are almost crushed by the walls. Then they come near us, and we can't do anything, crushed and not within reach of our weapons.

They find...me. All the other people have their weapons loaded. Then the soldiers get Elmer and Henry. They don't hurt them because we are wanted by him.

After a few days we are at their main base where their boss is. The soldiers drop only me off at the front door of the leader. They say they won't hurt my friends if I just go in. At this point I'm desperate for my friends' safety. I go in and he says, "Hello, *brother...*"

He says, "It is nice to see you." Of course he doesn't mean it. He hates seeing me or mentioning my name. He just wants me dead. He says, "For the many crimes you have committed, you shall be killed." My brother says to me, "I am a god, and all others trying to stop me will be eliminated." We were one of the only groups left, and we were taken captive.

These two muscular guards are walking me to the Mad Man. They drop me off and give me to him. The room is full of traps and skeletons. Then I see a sign. It says "For Bruce." The Mad Man is saying, "How nice it is to have visitors again." He actually seems honest about it. He hasn't seen a human in forever.

He looks like a weird scientist with swirling goggles on and a white lab coat. I think to myself that my friends at least will be safe. I gave them a small bomb that should not hurt them if they are careful with it. They know I'm not coming back.

He tells me how it will not hurt. Before I sit in the chair I remember rumors on how it works. There is a small lever, and when he pulls it, you're dead. He says, "Nice knowing you." He turns it on, and it just flashes.

I just don't know what to say about it. I'm just dead. It is a lot nicer up here. I can still see my friends, and they are doing well. They found this nice guy. He has a boat, which they plan to use to get out of the capital to an area that has fewer soldiers. But with the boat it will take a few days to get them there.

My friends will be fine, but me, I hung up my hideaway coat and am done.

THE INVASION

THE INVASION, by *Alexis Bassey*, Miriam and Ezekiel stumble upon a wonder of the universe that is more than they bargained for.

It was an average day for Ezekiel and Miriam: the same as always, which was “wake up, go to school, do homework, and go to bed.” Then suddenly on their way home from school they saw a burst of light through the sky, heading for the forest, followed by a big boom. Ezekiel said, “Look, Miriam, let's go check it out.”

Miriam said, “Let's go tell Mom first and then we can go.” So Ezekiel and Miriam went to go tell their mom. Their mom thought it was just a game, so she said it was fine to go check out the light.

When Ezekiel and Miriam found the ball of light, they realized it wasn't what they had thought it was. It was an aircraft made out of material they had never seen before, but could guess what it was by the shape. Ezekiel said, “Whoa! It is an alien spaceship. Let's go inside.”

“I doubt that,” Miriam said.

Miriam and Ezekiel went inside the spaceship. The spaceship was full of jars of green glop, control buttons of all sizes, and loud beeping noises that filled the ship. They found what looked like the driver's seat and pretended to drive the spaceship for fun. Ezekiel accidentally slipped and pushed Miriam, causing her elbow to push a small orange and green button.

All of a sudden they heard the ship begin to blast off. “Fasten your seat belt!” Ezekiel screamed, getting into a seat quickly.

“Wow, look outside, Ezekiel.” They were so captivated by the scenery they forgot that they were about to enter space. Ezekiel and Miriam had no idea how they were going to get home.

Back on Earth the aliens began to terrorize the citizens and multiply by the hour. You could hear the citizens' horrifying screams for miles. Ezekiel and Miriam's mother realized that the light they asked to see was real, and she was scared she might not ever see her kids again.

The aliens were getting hungry, so they headed back to their ship to eat their alien slop. They were surprised to find that their ship was missing. They got very angry because they had no food to

eat, which meant they couldn't multiply. The food on Earth just was not good enough for them.

Up in space Ezekiel and Miriam kept arguing about how to get home. Ezekiel said, "It's all your fault, Miriam."

But then Miriam said, "No, it's all your fault, Ezekiel. If you wouldn't have pushed me, then I would never have pushed that button."

Ezekiel said, "But you are the one who actually pushed the button."

"We should stop fighting so we can figure out how we are going to get home," Miriam said.

"Yes, we need to work together—but it was still your fault," Ezekiel agreed with a smile. Miriam just rolled her eyes at him.

Ezekiel and Miriam buckled up and decided to push the same button that blasted them off the first time. "It worked!" screamed Ezekiel. Off they went heading back home to Earth.

They were about to land when suddenly an alarm went off somewhere in the spaceship. A blue light started to flash, and the spaceship spiraled out of control towards the ground at high speed. Ezekiel and Miriam frantically looked around for something to save them, and saw what looked like an escape pod. They quickly jumped in and pushed a few random buttons that somehow detached them from the ship. The pod slowly lowered them to the ground.

Surprisingly, they landed only a mile away from their house. At the same time, the spaceship crashed to the ground, and there was a button that made all the suits explode that were on the aliens. They saved the world.

As a reward for destroying the aliens, Miriam and Ezekiel were given lots of sugary treats and gifts from people all over the world. Everyone was happy—well, except for the aliens.

THE ISLAND

*Sid awakens on an island with no memory of how he arrived. In **THE ISLAND** by **Nicholas Mason**, Sid must adapt to his new surroundings...or else.*

Subject 12 is the last remaining person of the tests. “Wh...wh...where am I?” Subject 12, otherwise known as Sid, asks as he looks at the palm trees around him. A vast, turquoise-blue ocean surrounds him with no sign of other people or civilized life anywhere in sight. With a headache he scans the horizon. He wonders what he will do to survive.

Thump! Before he can answer this question he hears a loud roar like something has fallen from a really high place. While he surveys the lush green forest for a clue as to what the noise was, his space grows eerily quiet. Then he hears a loud roar, not too far from where he is standing. Looking in that direction he makes out a faint brown object and large animal with big teeth. His first instinct is to evaluate how much space is between him and “it.” Either way, Sid doesn’t want to get involved. He runs in fear for his life, with certain questions like where he was going.

Then out of nowhere he notices a towering mountain. Above all the other thoughts he wonders how he hadn’t noticed it. He decides there must be a place to hide there.

As he’s running he hears rustling and then the top of his head starts to throb. He stops and looks down. To his surprise there is a sloth at his feet, and it’s alive at that. Sid realizes he must’ve broken that sloth’s fall.

As he is running his stomach is gurgling, and he knows he needs food. He stops at the beach, thinking he got away from the beast. He picks up a crab and turns it on its back, making it fall asleep. While it is sleeping he bashes it with rocks at the beachside. This was a humane way to quickly put it out of its misery.

He hesitates while eating when he hears a large rustling sound like something is creeping up. It sounds like it is seconds away from him. He looks into the deep jungle, and he sees two great, orange eyes within what looks like black fur staring right at him. He responds immediately by climbing a tree as fast as he can.

He looks at it, knowing what “it” is. It is a panther. And it is waiting at the bottom of the tree for him.

Nighttime falls, and the panther is still there with one eye open. Sid thinks to himself, “I have to find a way to traverse this ground without him hearing or seeing me.” Acting on instinct he jumps off the tree and sprints to the ocean below. The panther wakes, not following into the ocean. Finally the panther walks away, giving one more deadly look.

The next day Sid thinks about what else he needs to survive. He needs to build and make tools to help him prepare food, shelter and defend himself. He begins by grabbing a large rock and smashing a little rock against it to make it sharper. He is able to rest, plan out his next moves, and even work out a little fear while he spends time at this task. His plan is to find a shelter.

All of that tool-making made Sid really hungry and thirsty. Looking around he sees a coconut tree and cuts it down to drink the milk. Intertwining wood, his rock, and the leaves, he makes a spear. Then he continues to go for the crabs.

He sees a school of fish and tries to spear them. He catches one of the fish off guard. All the other fish are swimming away with their lives. He decides to move on from that spot because the panther would surely be staying in that area.

He finds a cave, but it is too big for a good shelter. Sid then finds a small mouth at the foot of the cave. He goes in it and blocks it up with a boulder. He makes a fire. That night he hears scratches at the boulder and can hear it moving.

He wakes up the next morning and sees the broken pieces of rocks on the ground and knows it was the giant cat but is not sure why.

He’s exhausted. He knows he has to get off the island, but he doesn’t know how. He has to figure it out. There are whirlpools in the near distance that could be used as a fast current, but they are too far, so that isn’t an option.

He runs into the forest once more with a torch in his left hand and his knife in his right. He stops walking when he sees the panther and runs in the opposite direction. Then he continues to head in that direction, coming upon another cave.

He looks behind him, and the panther is there. Terrified, he sprints into the cave. Running past minerals and rocks, he finally reaches a dead end. With the panther right behind him he backs

away, and the rock behind him moves back. Instantly the panther disappears.

Frantically he looks around and heads to the surface above the cave. The tops of trees are beginning to digitize away. He blinks to make sure he is seeing everything correctly. Soon there is only the white burst of memories to remind him what has just happened. He remembers the subjects were put into survival tests, and he had survived.

He wakes up in a lab. Many people clap about how he survived. One said he was the only survivor of the tests. And he is proud!

MR. MADDLY'S SECRET

Hannah and James, students at Northridge High, have a crazy science teacher. They accidentally become involved in what he is hiding in MR. MADDLY'S SECRET by Riley Sauter.

Mr. Maddly, a science teacher at Northridge High, stood in front of an unruly sixth-hour class. To Hannah, a straight-A student, the clock in the room couldn't have been ticking slower. The class had just been assigned a project where they had to build a replica of the molecular structure of an atom. He paired up students that would be working together for the project. Of course none of the class was happy about this assignment, but Hannah was especially upset. She was paired up with James, who is the kind of student that is just "ok" in school. He was barely passing his sophomore year of high school, and she had the sort of feeling that she was going to be doing all of the work.

There was a frantic rush for the hallway as the bell rang. School was out, and now it was time for Hannah to head to the library with James to start on their project. She was just imagining James sitting next to her with his headphones on, tuning everyone out like normal.

Hannah, who was particularly short for her age, lugged her heavy-duty backpack to her locker that felt like a million miles away. After she nearly tipped over when dumping her books at her locker, she trudged on to the library to meet James. And there he was sitting at the round table in the corner with his headphones on just like she had pictured. She was just shocked that he bothered to show up.

When she approached him he glanced up slightly and then went back to burying his face in his iPhone. Hannah unloaded the supplies that she had brought for the project and started to work. She didn't even bother trying to get his attention, and he didn't seem to want any part of it. *Let's see here*, she thought to herself, *I need to glue this to this and then tape this here with this.*

She trailed off and then noticed James emerging from his world of punk rock and The Beatles. He looked up at her and said, "So, do you need any help?"

“Actually,” she said, “I do.” He looked surprised for a moment like he was not expecting her to say yes. She said, “How about you start gluing these together?”

“Sure,” he replied. Then something else happened. James turned to Hannah and said, “You know, Hannah, science has always interested me, and I’m glad that you’re my partner for this assignment.”

“Really? You are? I just always thought that you didn’t like or care about school because you are always listening to music in class.”

“Really? Is that what people think of me?” he asked.

“Yes, mostly,” Hannah said.

“Um, ok, let’s just get back to work,” he responded.

“Ok,” said Hannah. There was a slightly crumpled piece of paper in front of her with the directions for the project on it. Hannah started pointing at the directions to show James what he needed to do.

After working for about an hour they came across a problem. They weren’t sure if they needed to include colors on the replica. Hannah and James decided to take a walk to Mr. Maddly’s room to ask him about their issue.

As they approached the door to his classroom they noticed that the door was slightly open but there was no sign of their teacher. Hannah peered into his classroom and discovered an eerie glow coming from under a door to a room that was off-limits to the students. That puzzled them. There was also a small pile of booger-colored gummy bears on the counter.

James, without asking, barged into the room and headed straight for the gummy bears. As a rule-follower, Hannah knows that they shouldn’t go into his room like that without asking first. James, on the other hand, had obviously forgotten to bring a snack and was feasting on the gummy bears, which, according to his slight squealing, were quite yummy.

Hannah cautiously stepped into the room. James was waving her over to try the gummy bears that were, again, booger-colored. He said that they were pear-flavored, and seeing that pears were Hannah’s favorite fruit, she decided to try one. They had a pear-flavor at first, and then a vomit-booger aftertaste.

Just then Mr. Maddly stepped out of the secret room in the back with a test tube containing liquid the color of the steam emerging

from under the door and a flamethrower. When he saw the children he was surprised at first and jumped a little.

He approached them in a secretive kind of way, trying to keep the flamethrower hidden under his stark, white lab coat out of view from the students. Both Hannah and James looked at each other with suspicion. Mr. Maddly stepped out and asked what they were doing in a nonchalant way.

“Oh, um, we just had a question for the science project but... that isn’t important.”

Mr. Maddly paused for a second and then, keeping on with the suspicious manner, asked, “You didn’t eat those gummy bears, did you?”

“Uuuuuuh no,” they both replied at the same time.

“Good, good,” Mr. Maddly said. “Those were part of the experiment.” A worried expression struck both James’s and Hannah’s faces.

They walked out of the room pondering what had just happened. As they walked back to the library Hannah couldn’t help but wonder what was going to happen to her. *I mean, I could get seriously sick or something.* She also couldn’t help but notice that James wasn’t worried at all. Hannah started in the direction of the library and then nearly fainted.

“What just happened?” said James.

“Um, I just got a little light-headed for a minute, but I’m all right.” Just then James fainted too.

“Whoa! The same thing just happened to me, too.”

“That’s weird,” remarked Hannah. “Let’s just head to the library and work on the project.”

“Sounds good,” said James.

They walked toward the entrance to the library and entered. Hannah walked over to the table and sat down to wait for James, who had stopped for a very long drink of water. While she was waiting she stared at a handheld pencil sharpener by the book drop. She stared at it for like five minutes before James walked in the door. At that very moment the pencil sharpener began to levitate. At first Hannah didn’t notice, but when she did notice she broke concentration, and the pencil sharpener fell to the floor.

James stood in awe looking at her like she was the inventor of headphones or something. Even Hannah herself stood in disbelief. James was like, “Whoa! How did you do that?”

“I don’t really know. I just was staring at it and it started to float.”

“That’s crazy!” said James. They made sure nobody was around. Then he started to stare at a dictionary on the book return desk and concentrated really hard on it. It started to levitate, too, but it didn’t take as long this time.

“Maybe that’s it!” exclaimed Hannah. “If we concentrate like really hard on something it will levitate, or float, or something.”

“Wait, I’ve heard of this before,” said James. “I read it in a science fiction magazine once! It’s called, like, telekinesis or something.”

“Oh yeah!” said Hannah, almost yelling. “I’ve heard of that too.” Now the two of them had totally forgotten about their project that, thankfully, wasn’t due for another week. They were just practicing their newly-found powers. Hannah realized that the powers were probably from the gummy bears! *That makes so much sense now!* she thought to herself.

Hannah and James were also really puzzled about how their high school science teacher could make gummy bears that could cause telekinesis. After talking they both realized that he was a little funky, and he was holding a flamethrower earlier. The two sat together thinking, wondering, and trying to solve this mystery of the high school teacher who can make gummy bears that cause superpowers. After thinking about it for what felt like two million hours, they couldn’t think of any solutions, and they realized that they had to figure out bigger problems.

Hannah woke up the next day, ate breakfast, caught the bus, arrived at school, and headed straight for James’s locker. They both said at the same time, “I still have the powers! Really?”

“Ok, that was weird,” answered Hannah,

“Yeah,” agreed James.

“Did you think of anything about our cray cray science teacher?”

“No.”

“I do want to know how he did it, but maybe we should just forget about it and enjoy that we have— ” Hannah lowered her voice to a hushed tone so that no one could hear, “—superpowers.” James nodded in agreement, and they went their separate ways.

In Hannah’s first-hour class, which was band, she decided to try out her new super powers. Her first move was to concentrate on the baton that was sitting on the stand up in front of the classroom.

This time she could move it in different directions too. She started to conduct the class, so everybody freaked out and left the room. She freaked out with them to blend in.

In her next hour, art, she was going to give herself a bit of a challenge. The challenge was to be able to pick up a paintbrush and paint a picture. She did it, and everyone in the class thought that it was a magic trick and started to clap, which made her laugh.

Third hour is math. This time she levitated her teacher off of the ground. One of the best things about this power is that nobody knows that it is her doing the pranks.

Fourth hour is social studies, which is the class with one of the strictest teachers in the whole school. Hannah decided to take a break for this one. Her next hour after lunch is language arts. She levitated a chair in this class.

Her last hour of the day was science.

Hannah and James met up in the back of the room before class and planned an epic prank after they had talked all about all of the pranks they pulled off in other classes. The prank was to tie a rope around Mr. Maddly while drawing a moustache on his face with a permanent marker. The class at first was surprised, but soon they went crazy because nothing had ever been pulled off like this before. After the prank was done Mr. Maddly said to them, "Hannah, James, meet me after class."

Once the bell rang they did as they were told and stayed after class. He turned to them and said, "I know you ate the gummy bears. You may exit now." They once again did as they were told.

The next morning Hannah woke up to a nice and warm day. She instantly tried to move her alarm clock next to her bed. It wouldn't budge no matter how hard she tried. When she got to school she again went straight to James's locker. It turned out neither of them could use their powers.

Mr. Maddly's room was just down the hall, and that was their destination. They both barged into the room, disobeying his rule about not entering when he is not there, and they waited about seven minutes for him to walk in his room.

"Ah," he said, "I was expecting you to show up."

"What?" they responded simultaneously.

"You didn't know that there is a time limit to the powers."

"No, we didn't know," said Hannah.

“Well, you should have. Nothing lasts long when you take advantage of it.”

“You’re right,” admitted James, “we were wrong and shouldn’t have mistreated such a powerful ability. How did you know we were mistreating the powers other than in your class?”

“I could just sense it!” Mr. Maddly exclaimed. “With great power comes great responsibility!”

“Why did you do this to us?” James asked.

“Oh, well, I am a mad scientist, and I do this every year with kids. I like to see which ones use it responsibly.” He grinned at them and escaped back into his secret room. With that they left the room, living a normal, gummy-bear-free life.

MYSTERIES OF GARRAID

*You may have had weird teacher or two, but none compare to the odd character at the front of the room In **MYSTERIES OF GARRAID** by Logan Edelheit.*

Ring, ring, ring! School is over for the day at Eastwood Academy. This is always the best part of the day for me, Joey, a typical sixth-grade student. Our math teacher had a baby, so she is out for the rest of the year. Our new teacher taking her place is Mr. Garraid. He has brown, fuzzy hair, a neck like a giraffe, and the height of an ape. Yes, he looks really weird!

The first morning as Mr. Garraid is teaching math, he starts to speak in a different language! “Today we will learn ###. Sorry, I meant equations.” My friends and I stare at each other suspiciously. We are thinking, *Who is this guy and where did he come from?* Everyone else in our class seems to be oblivious to our strange substitute, but I know for sure that he is wacko!

Zack and Jonah are my best friends, and every day after school we have swim practice together for two hours. One day swim practice ends early and the three of us decide to spy on our new teacher because we are so suspicious of him. We see Mr. Garraid go into the janitor’s closet. We wait to see if he comes out. He doesn’t.

I lead the way to the closet, but he isn’t in there. Our heads start turning while we frantically look all around the small closet. All of a sudden, we see a little handle sticking out. Jonah pulls the handle, and it opens up into a small tunnel! We are curious sixth-graders, so why wouldn’t we want to go in it?

The tunnel is dark, narrow, and long. Zack uses his phone as a source of light. We follow a path to an open room with lights. There we see Mr. Garraid talking to a bunch of unknown creatures in his weird, foreign voice! These creatures have one, two, or three eyes, are green and blue, and hop on one foot. Their eyes make me shivery. They are all bloodshot. Everywhere they go they leave a trail of green slime.

We try to get a better view of Mr. Garraid. That’s when Jonah makes a noise, the creatures hear us, and our teacher stops talking. The next thing we know is that these creepy creatures are chasing us.

We run across the room with Mr. Garraid and his creatures close behind. We find an empty bathroom to hide in, but the creatures open the door. We back up against the wall and fall. The wall is just an image, like a projection.

We run through the wall back to the open room. Next, we run through a different corridor and into another big room. Wait, it's the same room we came in from. We know this because of the green slime trail.

It seems every way we go leads to this same room. We look for a place to run.... They corner us.

I see Mr. Garraid, and he says something in his unknown language. The creatures go away.

Mr. Garraid is now glaring at us. He says, "How did you get here?"

Zack says, "We saw you go into the janitor's closet and you didn't come out. We went in and found a secret latch."

I say, "Why are you in here?"

He says, "I am on a secret mission to learn as much as I can about your planet. I set cameras across your school, and my creatures watch what happens here every day."

"So you're saying you are from another planet?"

"Yes! I have special powers. I am immortal and immune to pain. I can also travel through time to different places. The one problem with my time travel is I can go into the future or the past but can only observe and not change anything. You guys should NOT know any of this. I am only telling you this so you don't get suspicious about why I am in this remote location. I'm not going to fight you, because you will die. Then, your parents will get the police and ask me and everyone else who works here questions about your disappearance. My mission is to learn about your planet and not to get involved in anything. Killing you will compromise my mission."

The whole time he is talking, I am thinking about a plan to run away. I hold my fingers up, and on three, we run! Sprinting through the small tunnel with Mr. Garraid hot on our heels, we open the latch and push open the janitor's door.

He grabs us and says, "Let's make a deal. I can vanish and time-travel with my creatures back to where I came from. Then you can go about your normal lives. Don't tell anyone about my powers or my creatures. If anyone asks where I am, say I moved upstate. If you tell anyone, I will take you back to my planet. "

We all leave and go back home.

The next day we have a substitute in math class because Mr. Garraid is gone. Everyone just thinks he moved. But Jonah, Zack, and I know the real truth.

SPACE JUMPING

*Astronauts Clara Evans and Jack Shaw must rely on each other when catastrophe strikes in **SPACE JUMPING** by Karen Austin.*

NASA figured out how to send people through space using teleportation. At NASA headquarters, two very committed astronauts, Jack Shaw and Clara Evans, were about to embark on the experience of a lifetime. They had been training for this day for two solid years.

Jack asked, "Are you sure you are ready?"

Clara replied excitedly, "Well, I guess I'd better be!"

Only three days remained until they would be launched toward the moon. The final days flew by. They had so much to do before T-minus zero on Friday, February 27, 2259.

Jack and Clara climbed into the enormous machine called the Matter Mover. The NASA command center finished the countdown to making the space jump: "Three, two, one...." The machine made a series of loud noises—*beep, beep, beep, whir, pop*. "Ah! This is it!" yelled Jack.

Kaboom! With a final bang and brilliant flash of blue light, Jack and Clara suddenly found themselves in deep outer space near the sun. Jack exclaimed, "Uh oh! Something went wrong with the jump. We went way too far." Don't worry, though. Their teleportation pod was specially designed and built to handle extreme temperature and pressure.

Before they even had a chance to report back to NASA, something unusual happened. They were being pulled toward a black hole! *Boom!* A piece of space junk slammed into the pod. Alarms sounded, and warning lights flashed. Jack could not get the power booster to fire.

Clara prepared to go outside the pod to investigate the problem. As she was carefully leaving the pod, Jack said, "Are you sure this will be safe?"

"I'm pretty sure it will be," Clara said.

She quickly discovered a piece of debris wedged into the exhaust port and removed it. As she attempted to re-enter the pod, her lifeline to the ship snapped. Her tether couldn't take the force of the black hole any longer. She instantly lost contact with Jack.

She was slowly getting closer to the black hole. Jack tried to think fast, but there was nothing he could do. Everything around him started to disappear in fragments. Strange, otherworldly things flashed past as he faded in and out of consciousness: flashes of blue, green and red flew by him like the speed of light. He was in a dreamlike state, but he was aware that Clara had vanished.

Jack's face turned pale as he realized that he was lost in space. His last thoughts before entering hyper-sleep were *I hope to be free from this madness someday.*

A couple of days later, Jack woke up in a dark place. Somehow, the mysterious black hole had deposited the pod near the moon, and it crashed into a crater. He had been awakened by loud static from the radio. *What is that noise?* Jack thought to himself.

It seemed as if someone was out there. Maybe, just maybe, it was Clara. He listened very carefully to the noise and strained to hear a familiar voice – Clara! He could barely make out what her faint voice was saying: “Stuck on moon. Come help!”

Jack was overjoyed that his friend was still alive. “This is perfect. There is new hope for me and Clara.” Jack maneuvered the pod out of the crater and started searching on the moon's surface.

He was able to lock onto her tracking beacon. He found her! “CLARA!” She had been severely injured by flying chunks of rock. It did not look good at all.

He exited the pod and knelt at her side. She grabbed his hand and faintly whispered her last words: “Friendship never dies.”

STUCK IN A MIRROR WORLD

In **STUCK IN A MIRROR WORLD** by *Sophia Chung*, Alex, his grandpa, and a work partner have to save the world from total domination. Will an unexpected hero step up, or will an anti-hero ruin everything?

Ring! Ring! Alex was sound asleep until his alarm woke him up. He realized that he had been asleep for an extra hour. He rushed to get ready for school, brushing his teeth at the same time as he put on his shirt, and putting on his pants at the same time he was packing his backpack. He was eating breakfast while putting on his shoes.

Racing outside to get to school, he realized nobody was in the streets, nobody was in the houses, and nobody was heading to work. Even his rude Grandpa Mike was not home, but Alex was rushing so fast that he did not even realize that his own house was empty.

Alex questioned where everyone was but still went to school with curiosity. Then he thought that it might be a ditch day, but he went to school just in case.

Nobody was at school. He headed back home. On his way, he saw nobody except this old dude on a Moped scooter, and a lonely boy next door. He made his way to the old man and asked what was going on.

The man looked familiar. He had a leather coat, leather gloves, goggles, and a helmet. He looked almost like he was part of a motorcycle gang. Then he realized that this was his Grandpa Mike.

“Wow! Grandpa, I didn’t know that you rode a Moped!”

“I told you I was cooler than you thought.” Grandpa Mike immediately got on the phone with some lady and repeated, “I told you so! I told you so!” and then hung up.

The same lady on the phone came on another Moped scooter that looked almost exactly the same as Grandpa Mike’s. She looked like she just came from work. She had black high heels, a tight skirt, a white buttoned shirt, and a small blazer over that. She also had a small bracelet and a dragon tattoo on her arm. She greeted Alex with a polite, smart, yet sassy smile, and softly said, “Hello, Alex. I have been meaning to meet you. Your grandpa has told me a lot about you.”

Alex was confused. "Grandpa, I have a few questions. Number one: who is this?"

"This is my co-worker."

"Okay," Alex said. "Second question: where am I?"

"Alex, time stopped and only a few people got through the door."

"What door?"

"There is a door that separates the mirror world from the original world. The mirror world stopped our time and transferred the most important people to the mirror world. The people that are here are supposed to help the mirror world take over the original world."

"Wait, where is everyone that did not get transferred to the mirror world?"

"They are in jail being guarded by most of the mirror people. The jail is made up by two lasers. There are no walls, just lasers. Everybody is very cramped though. Anyway, the few people that are here are really here to protect the people in the original world from the mirror world. If they don't, then the mirror world will rule both worlds, and we will become their slaves."

Alex stuck with his grandpa and the lady, whose name was still unknown. Alex asked about the lonely boy next door. Alex's grandpa turned around and put his hand on Alex's shoulders and looked him in the eye. He said, "Alex, never mess with him. He is not to be trusted. It is bad enough that we are stuck here for a while, and with him here we could be in real danger."

"What is so bad about him then?"

"Nobody really knows, but all the incidents that have happened with the mirror world and the original world's relations all revolve around him. So promise me that you will stay away from there, okay?"

"Okay, Grandpa, I promise."

"Okay. Our plan is to get to the control center and shut down all entries between doors. Then we have to rush to the door before the controls upload. In the mirror world the directions are the exact opposite, so if you do the opposite of something the opposite will happen. Oh, and the exact layout of this world is the exact opposite layout of the mirror world, so we will enter the forest when we go through the door."

"Okay, so what do we have to do first?"

“First we have to find somebody that lives in the mirror world. Then we have to say that we are here to start shutting down the original world. So since we are protecting the original world we have to do the opposite. That should reverse everything that they want to do.”

“What do we have to do after we finish that?”

“After that we have to get to the door as fast as we can. We will exit and enter the original world again. Ready?”

“We are doing this now?”

“Yes. The longer that it takes to stop the mirror world, the faster that the mirror world will take over the original world. Okay, break!” Alex walked away. “Alex, where are you going?”

“To find the mirror person. That is what we are supposed to do, right?”

“They are this way.”

“Oh, okay.”

“Come on then! Oh, oh, I found someone.”

“Well, that was easy,” said Alex.

“It was not supposed to be the hard part. The hard part is going to be getting to the door on time.”

“What is that sound?”

“I don’t know.”

“Hey, come back here!” the lady said as a mirror world person stole Grandpa’s Moped. “Hey, dude, we are here for the elimination of the original world.”

“Okay, come over here,” said the would-be thief.

They followed the man, and he showed them what to do. They paid attention carefully because if they messed up one thing everything could go wrong, and everyone could notice that they were trying to do the opposite.

The man finally finished, and he confirmed that they had been paying attention by having them repeat what he had just said. They explained what he said, and then he left them alone to finish up the work. Before he left, he said, “Don’t mess this up, or we are going to eliminate you!”

They did the exact opposite perfectly until Grandpa asked Alex, “What is the last button?”

“I don’t know. I thought you knew.”

“No. What about you?”

“Nope. Oh yeah, is it this button?”

“Yes! You are a lifesaver, Rebecca (which was the women’s name). “Okay, get ready to run.”

“Which way?”

“Straight. Follow me, and we should be fine. Okay, go!”

They entered a forest that was dark and had a collection of sopping leaves that covered the floor. There were skinny sticks surrounding the leaves that were not as visible as the leaves. The trees felt taller than redwood trees. The trees had no more leaves or small branches dangling from the tall trees.

They made lots of sharp turns that Alex did not even recognize. Alex heard his grandpa say, “Ten more minutes until we can see the door.”

By now Alex was exhausted. They had been running for what felt like hours. Grandpa screamed, “Any second now and we should see the door!”

Seconds and minutes went by and they could still not see the door. They all stopped to rest.

Grandpa realized that if the instructions on what to do were backwards, then the route to the door must be backwards. They headed back.

When they got to the other side they noticed that the other side of the world had more sunshine and was more green. They could see the hills and valleys that sat farther out. Fifteen minutes later Grandpa shouted, “We’re six minutes away.” Then they saw the door.

The door reminded Alex of the big, heavy stone door in the *Maze Runner*.

They all started sprinting for the last stretch. They had two minutes left and two minutes to go. “Run! We are so close!” Grandpa shouted.

With one minute to go, they could see the door as they heard it screech. They knew it was starting to close. *Clump*. Grandpa fell. He claimed that he had broken a bone.

The door was going to close in fifteen seconds. Grandpa had gotten up limping. Alex ran ahead to keep the door open for Grandpa.

They had all almost entered when they heard, “What do you think you are doing?” They turned around to see a mirror person with not a blade but a gun pointed right toward them.

They quickly ran through the door and were safe in the original world, or so they thought. There were still all of the guards guarding the jail. They had to think fast because the mirror person was after them all. "There is only one thing that we can do," Alex said, "but it is risky."

"Say it. Anything. We have no choice."

"Okay, follow me." Alex led them right to the lonely boy's house. Everyone was doubtful but took the risk. As Grandpa limped up the stairs on the porch, the lonely boy was waiting at the front door. He had made it back to the original world, too. He had set up all of the bombs that destroyed land features.

Now he could blow up anything. This meant that the mirror people stayed in the mirror world and could never return, and even if you were in the original world you would still return to the mirror world. Everyone returned to the original world if that is where they came from. With the door destroyed everyone would stay in their own world forever.

THE THIRSTY GAMES

*You may think you know the story of the champions who stood together to survive and win for their district. Read the real version in **THE THIRSTY GAMES** by *John Wilson Milia*.*

If you didn't already know, The Thirsty Games are where you pick twelve tributes to fight for the games. The Thirsty Games was a tradition that started in 1867. Whoever wins the games gets to live in a castle and have a lifetime supply of fresh drinks. Cactus had been one of those special people.

Tributes are kind of like warriors. They are also known for the people who fight for their district to win and be glorious throughout all the districts.

It all started off when Cactus Neverspleen was born. Well, it wasn't exactly when she was born, but, you know, like maybe when she was two or something. Anyway, Cactus had a dream as a toddler that she was stung by a flapper cracker! A flapper cracker is somewhat similar to a hornet but venomous and super dangerous. In the dream, she was stung by a flapper cracker and then, next thing she knew, she was shot by a bow and arrow! She woke up crying. And that's when she knew...Cactus Neverspleen was the hawking-jay!

A hawking-jay is a term used for when a warrior not only wins the games, but is picked to be very special. They are special because they maybe had done some remarkable thing in the games that no one could or would forget.

Cactus had met Male at a young age. Male was Cactus's crush. Male thought Cactus was perfect. He would die without her! They were also best friends. However, soon Peeta Chip came along, and Cactus had feelings for Peeta Chip. Male got jealous.

Peeta Chip and Cactus started to date, and Male had to do something. Male got bored and decided to kill Cactus and Peeta Chip. So when everyone in district 1738 had to put their name in for the tributes, Male put Cactus's and Peeta Chip's name in each 40 times! He thought that if he put their names in more, they would get picked for a tribute, fight, and die.

Jeffy hopped onto the stage in their district and announced, "Everyone please give me your attention!" She screamed, "I will

announce the 2016 Thirsty Game tributes now. For the girls...Kim Nose!"

Kim Nose is Cactus's sister. She did not want to be picked.

Cactus cracked up. "Ha, ha. You have to fight in the games," Cactus sang to Kim.

Cactus and Kim's mother smacked Cactus upside the head and screamed, "You better volunteer for your sister, or you're going to be grounded for life!" Cactus was so annoyed.

"I VOLUNTEER AS A TRIBUTE! I VOLUNTEER AS A TRIBUTE!" Cactus yells.

No one has ever volunteered before. Everyone was shocked. Then Jeffy picked the boy tribute. What do you know. It was Peeta Chip. Peeta Chip and Cactus ran on stage together. They were ready.

They get on a bus and meet their mentor/trainer. Their mentor's name was Sandwich. They rode the bus for about three hours. It was painful.

They then met their dresser. His name was Dinna. He made their clothes for the games and interviews. Dinna made them dresses for the games.

They were about to get ready to start the games. Dinna said, "Hey, Cactus. Don't kill yourself, kid."

Cactus was confused, but she just moved on. She went into a tube and flew up on to the games platform. The clock went "3, 2, 1, GO!" Cactus ran off and shot three people and screamed, "Ha, you thought you was gonna kill me!"

About fourteen out of eighteen deaths later, Cactus got stung by a flapper cracker. She started having hallucinations. She sees her dad who is dead and also sees her mom. She thinks that they're real, but when the hallucinations wear off, it was Boo and Peeta Chip. She screamed because she thought that they were going to kill her. They covered her mouth and said, "It's okay."

They found out themselves and one person were left. They saw a teen boy running off trying to shoot at Cactus. Cactus screamed, "Boy, I know you're not about to shoot me!"

Right when Cactus shot at the other boy from a different district, she found out he wasn't trying to shoot Cactus. He was trying to shoot Boo. Boo was one of Cactus's best friends from district 679.

When Cactus finds out Boo was dead, she got so mad that she went up to that other last boy and smacked him so hard he just fell to the ground and died. Cactus did not know why he didn't kill her, but killed Boo.

Cactus and Peeta Chip were the last people standing. Someone had to die. They didn't want to kill each other, so they had a plan. They were both at the same time going to eat Brussels sprouts. To them it was poison, so they were going to eat them at the same time and die at the same time because of the "poison" impact.

Right before they ate them, they heard an announcement saying that if there were any two people from the same exact district, they could win together. Cactus was so excited. She and Peeta Chip could both win!

Cactus and Peeta Chip hugged so tight. They could both win and live with the title of the winners of The Thirsty Games! They felt so proud. Their families would be proud too. They ran off into the night, and they will never forget that day.

UFOs

In UFOs by Ava C., a brother and sister are abducted because of their interest in UFOs. You may be surprised by who takes them.

Whoosh! A UFO went zooming across the sky. This UFO was circular and shone flashing lights down on the ground.

“Hurry up!” yelled Zack.

“I’m going as fast as I can,” Mattye said. Mattye and Zack were trying to hack the government’s site to see if they knew anything about the UFO sightings. They knew they had a chance because their dad was governor.

“I got in!” Mattye screamed.

“What does it say?” asked Zack.

“Sign up for your free tour today,” she complained.

“It’s the home site,” Zack complained back. They had to find out a way to get to the website.

The only computer that could get them into the top secret site was the governor’s computer or the computers in the capitol’s office. They decided to break into their dad’s office because it would be way easier. The office is across from their parents’ bedroom, so they had to be careful.

At midnight you can hear tons of UFOs flying through the sky like always. It sounded like lasers shooting by. Mattye’s alarm clock had gone off and rung like a hummingbird. She had flung her sheets off and tiptoed to Zack’s room.

Once Zack was up, they slowly and quietly crept up the stairs. Right outside their parents’ door they could hear the slight sound of their dad snoring. When they got to the door Mattye grabbed a hair clip out of her hair and slowly unlocked the door.

They both tiptoed over to the computer. The room was pitch-black, and there were pictures of them and their dad’s best friends that worked with him (Ben and Will) on the walls.

Mattye logged onto the computer. She knew the password because it was Zack’s birthday. Her dad told them that. She went to the internet and typed in her dad’s building. Her fingers were flying across the keyboard.

Finally they got to the page where it asked for the password. She typed in their mom’s birthday. Then it asked for name and I.D.

Mattye typed "Governor Spencer," and all of a sudden the screen fuzzed and then made a screeching noise. It sounded like a bunch of monkeys screaming.

Their dad burst in. "What is happening in here?" he asked. Then he looked at Mattye and Zack covering their ears by his computer. "What are you guys looking at?" he asked.

"You have to see this," Mattye said. Their dad came over and looked at the screen. His mouth opened when he saw the screen. The title was "UFOs," and the website had all these plans with pictures of UFOs.

"Kids, go to bed," their dad told them. The tone of his voice made it sound like there was a huge problem.

In that same night two people snuck into their house. They snuck into the children's room and carried them down to their van. They did this without anyone waking up.

When Mattye woke up she was in the back of a van. She looked around and saw two men in suits. One was a plump man who was eating a jelly doughnut and laughing, and the other one was a man who had a very stern look on his face like nothing made him happy. Then she saw her brother sitting next to her. He was crying.

She quietly whispered to her brother, "What is happening?"

"We're being kidnapped," whispered Zack. After that Mattye was silent.

All of a sudden Zack asked who they were and why they were being kidnapped. They said that they were their dad's friends, and they didn't want their dad to know about the UFOs.

"What do you plan on doing with us?" Mattye asked.

"We plan on giving a ransom note saying they can't tell anybody about what you saw," said the guy who laughed every time they asked a question.

"Why are you building UFOs?" asked Zack.

"My wife disappeared when she went up into space in Mission 2013. She was never heard from until we got an email saying 'HELP, HELP!'" said the plump man.

"Stop answering their questions!" yelled the stern one.

When the parents woke up after a short night of rest, Spencer went to check on the kids. When he went into their rooms they weren't there. Instead of his kids on their beds there was a ransom note. The ransom note said that he must pay them two million

dollars or he would never get his kids back. Spencer quickly dialed the FBI and the police.

They had been driving for a really long time. Mattye and Luke didn't know where they were, or how long they had been driving. That's when they could start to here sirens behind them.

The car went faster and faster. The men tried to throw the police off their tail by turning random corners. Finally they thought they had thrown the police off their tail, but then they saw the police coming around the corner. They sped up. The sirens kept getting closer and louder. The car went screeching around the corner into an alleyway. The alleyway was a dead end, and the car came to a halt. The police pulled up to the car and opened the doors. The kids hopped out. The police grabbed the kidnappers out of the car and arrested them.

When the kids got to the police department their dad and mom were waiting there. They ran up to them and gave them a big hug. Then their dad explained to them what happened and what the FBI knew.

The FBI found out that there was a glitch, and all the government computers could access their top-secret website. When that happened it sent out a warning to the owners of the website that people could access it. The workers that worked on the UFOs were actually not aware that what they were doing was illegal. They thought that it was the president who ordered them to do it. When anyone sent an email to the government asking why they weren't investigating the UFOs, they would get an email saying it's not a problem. That's how the UFOs were being made for this long.

Their dad was very surprised because his best friends that worked right beside him were behind this.

The UFOs were put to a good use. They were used for a show for all the people of the city. Mattye and Zack are now safe. UFOs are no longer allowed in any state or country.

THE UNDERGROUND CITY

*Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it also led Emily to the discovery of a lifetime in **THE UNDERGROUND CITY** by **Raquel Rosenfeld**.*

It was a beautiful, cool, but sunny spring Sunday afternoon. Olivia, who was 11 years old, decided to walk one nearby nature trail with her dog, Rover, and her 13-year-old friend Emily.

Thirty minutes into their walk, the girls saw a sign to the right of the trail path that said “Forbidden Zone—Do Not Enter.” Both girls had been warned by their parents in the past to never wander off the marked trail. However, today the girls could not resist their urge to explore. Despite their parents’ warning, they decided to enter the forbidden zone.

As the girls went deeper into the forbidden zone, Emily became afraid and asked Olivia to walk Rover ahead of her within sight. Olivia agreed, but soon after decided to let Rover lead her by sniffing around for any danger.

Soon Rover found a minor opening in the ground. He started furiously digging up the dirt and disappeared. It was as if the ground suddenly opened up like a giant sinkhole. Olivia leaned over the edge of the hole to look for Rover. All she saw was darkness and no Rover. Suddenly, the hole opened up and swallowed Olivia. She tumbled headfirst down the hole.

Emily became even more frightened when she lost sight of Olivia and Rover. She decided to go back to the marked nature trail to look for help.

Olivia opened her eyes at the bottom of the hole. She lay on a sidewalk. Confused, she thought she was near her home. She then turned her head and saw a three-eyed creature with an angry look on his face standing over her. Rover appeared and started licking the creature legs, which made the creature’s angry frown turn into a smile. They appeared to get along.

Olivia looked away from the creature and saw similar-looking creatures nearby talking to each other in English. They yelled at Olivia, “Go home or you will be punished!” At that point, Olivia became extremely nervous that the creature might harm her.

While Olivia appeared trapped and surrounded by the creature, Emily went to Olivia's home and found Olivia's 16-year-old sister, Sandy, to help search for Olivia and Rover. Emily and Sandy found the large hole in the Forbidden Zone. Just like Olivia had done, they looked down, and all they could see was darkness. As they were leaning over the edge of the hole, it suddenly opened up. They both went tumbling down to the bottom.

When they woke up they found themselves on a sidewalk. They looked across the street and could see Olivia and Rover on the sidewalk surrounded by frightening three-eyed creatures.

Sandy and Emily found large towels at the edge of the sidewalk. They covered their faces with them. The creatures momentarily looked toward the two towel-covered humans and away from Olivia and Rover. With the creatures distracted, Olivia and Rover made a mad dash for Sandy and Emily.

They all looked up and saw the hole was made of rock with small steps carved into the side. With Rover leading, the three girls quickly scampered up the small steps with the creatures in hot pursuit.

It seemed like an eternity, but Rover and the girls finally made it out of the hole. The creatures that were afraid of the unknown world above stopped their pursuit just below the ground's edge.

THE UNSUSPECTED DEATH

In **THE UNEXPECTED DEATH** by *Destiny Rodney*, the main character faces the menacing Destroyers, who are trying to brainwash the entire human race.

My heart was beating as fast as it could. I was lying on the cold, damp floor with sweat trickling down my face. I had nasty cuts and bruises all over my face, but none of this mattered now. I was locked up behind steel bars that I knew I could never escape from. I would have probably died before I even left the prison. “Come and get your chum, boy,” the guard said while taunting me with a fresh cup of water and half-eaten loaf of bread. I haven’t eaten for three days and have been given just enough water to live.

They say they want to keep me alive so they can execute me, but I doubt I will stay alive for much longer. I’ve been running from the Destroyers for the past year, and they finally caught me. Now they’ve got me locked up here where it’s like a madhouse with the most dangerous criminals of my time. These people mean business, while I more or less am innocent.

I hear a loud rolling noise and realize that the guard is opening up my cell. He told me to get up off the floor and come with him. “Over my dead body,” I said trying to stay alive as long as possible.

“That can be arranged,” the guard said while coming in and picking me up off the floor. I had so little energy left I decided not to fight him. Besides, the worst thing that can happen is I die. He lifted me up onto his shoulder and started down the hallway toward the questioning room.

The room was dark, and the only light was the illumination coming from a window curtain. The man sat me onto a chair next to a small table with a dim lamp on it. I knew exactly what was going to happen, but that wouldn’t stop me from not giving in. “So, just tell us. All you have to do is open your mouth and say three simple words: ‘She did it,’” the mysterious man whispered.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said exasperatedly.

“Cut the act. We all know what you’re up to,” he said.

Before I go any further, let me explain a little bit of why I’m here, and who Hazel is. Last year my friend Hazel learned a little bit

too much about me that she shouldn't have known. She found out that I wasn't a punk teenager who didn't care about life. She now knows that I am a supporter of Humans Against Destroyers "club," otherwise known as H.A.D. We fight against the alien masterminds known as the Destroyers. At this point, though, everyone has been captured and the Destroyers have taken over. It's November 4th now, but this has been going on for over a year. Ever since the beginning all that has happened is war, death, illness, and depression. All I can say is I wish I wasn't part of this at all, but if I said that then I would be lying.

You see, all my life I've known that there was something wrong, something that was happening behind our backs. There was something we couldn't stop, and I was right. As long as I can remember the Destroyers were plotting to take over the world. But now they have finally succeeded, and half of the population has been brainwashed into thinking that nothing is wrong and everything is as it should be. The other half are probably being brainwashed at this very second. For now this is all you need to know, so I'll get back to this later.

"I'll ask you one more time: Hazel did it?" he asked, more sternly this time.

"Technically that's not a question." I regretted these words as soon as they came out of my mouth.

He scowled at me menacingly. He seemed slightly annoyed but soon after broke into a sly grin and started to laugh. "Look kid, I like you, you got spunk. But, you know, for me to let you live—"

"Maybe I don't want to live, have you ever thought of that?" I said, trying to keep the conversation going as long as possible, but I seemed to be failing at that.

Just then the ground began to vibrate, and I could hear a faint hum in the background. Close afterward, a large machine busted a hole in the wall. The ceiling around the machine fell apart, and I saw that none other than Hazel herself was driving.

The guard immediately took action and ran toward me, but I mustered as much strength as I could and ran outside through the hole Hazel made. I ran to the nearest motorcycle that there was, and as I started it, Hazel jumped onto it as well.

I rode away until we reached an alleyway about a mile from there. We were finally able to take a break in the alleyway there, but not for long. Immediately after I sat down to take a break Hazel

actually said something to me, and that was “What are you trying to do, get us all killed?” Even though what she said was extremely offensive, it was the best thing I’d heard for over a year now. I was so shocked that I couldn’t say anything. All I did was shrug my shoulders. “Look, we need to get away from here as soon as possible, and you not moving isn’t really helping. Now get up, and let’s go.” She got up, briefly brushed herself off, and I did the same.

She was about to start running. At that moment, though, I could feel the fatigue coming on. “Wait...now!” she whispered, and off we went, barreling down the street without being noticed. It was pretty ridiculous really, two young people dashing across the sidewalk running from evil, power-hungry maniacs. But, hey, that’s how life works out sometimes.

At this point I was out of breath from running, and she still hadn’t broken a sweat. “C’mon, would you rather stop to catch your breath and die, or keep running and have better chances of living?” She had a point, so without answering, I continued on running with her until we reached an abandoned house on the outskirts of town.

The door creaked as we entered, and the floorboards creaked when we walked. Along with the creakiness of the house, the air was also musty and unpleasant. Overall, though, I liked this place. Hazel and I would come over here on our bikes after school—you know, before the Destroyers took over. “You got any food?” I asked while scanning the area around us.

“Um...yeah,” she answered while fiddling with her bag. “Here.” She gave me a sandwich, an apple and a canteen filled with water.

I immediately started to chug the water and eat the apple. The freshness of the apple tasted amazing, and the water trickling down my throat was just the same. “So, why did you come back for me?” I asked hesitantly.

“I came back because you are the only person I know who hasn’t been brainwashed yet. But don’t go thinking that I forgive you yet. You still did a dumb thing and didn’t trust me, when if you had, this all probably wouldn’t have happened.”

I didn’t want to argue, so I just whispered “OK” quietly.

Suddenly, out of nowhere I heard the faintest noise of an engine veering toward us. The noise quickly loudened, and over the horizon came the Destroyers.

Hazel and I got up, and we ran as fast as we could, even though we both knew it was too late. The Destroyers gained on us and

blocked us off from running any more. We looked at each other and agreed silently that this was the only way.

There was a trench behind us, and, almost in slow-mo, we jumped backwards into the ditch. It may seem suicidal, but it was either that or die a slow, excruciatingly painful death. And that...was the end of me.

THE WAR THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

*When aliens threaten, the Earth responds, thanks to the efforts of an observant soldier in **THE WAR THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING** by Zaheer.*

There was a war that changed everything. This happened in 2050 during the kind of advanced age. We were making advanced technology. However, they all were failures. Okay, let's talk about the war.

I was in the cafe drinking some coffee. I work for the army, but I took a break. I was sitting there taking a sip of coffee and eating my bagel, looking all tired like I hadn't slept for three days. I didn't look like Gandalf; I was your ordinary, bored man, watching *The Amazing World of Blue Cat and Orange Fish*. I don't get how they are brothers. People were looking at me like I was a rap god. I started to drink my coffee again, and then *BOOM!*

I saw a huge number of buildings gone. And I was angry because it spilled my coffee! Even if I'm in the army I'm not Batman where I have to help people 24/7. I have a life!

But duty calls. I got my AK-47 out and went to see the site of the explosion. It was pretty bad since most of the place is now gone. Luckily I saw a camera! I went to the place operating the camera. I got the last file and played it, and this is what it showed.

FILE OPEN.

VIDEO ON.

PLEASE WAIT FOR 3 SECONDS. (I'll be skipping some of this.)

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ.

Loaded!

"We see some UFOs! This is reporter Bill Dwyer, and they're coming our way! Everyone take pictures! Look, it dropped a circle! AHHHHH!"

BOOM!

So the UFO dropped a bomb. Hmm, well, this footage at least proves there's extraterrestrial life. However, I don't get why it's against us. I told the government this and now they're rebuilding the area where it got bombed and putting some of the army there just for protection.

Okay, I woke up from sleeping in the camera area. I heard a voice, so I went under the desk. This is what I heard.

Alien: We need to remove the footage so no one knows we exist.

Alien 2: How is that?

Alien: We go to the camera, get our hardware, and put it in our hardware and then delete it.

Alien 3: WHAT IF THEY SURVIVE? WHAT IF THEY KNOW? WHAT IF...?

(I heard a huge *smack*, and then I saw a body fall with green slime all over it.)

Alien: We don't need idiots. I'll just say that a human killed him. Hah!

Alien 4: It's time we go.

Unknown: SIR, SIR, SIR! DON'T EXPLODE THIS BASE. PLEASE, I'M A HUMAN THAT WANTS TO LIVE!

(Blood appeared everywhere.)

Alien 10: Ha, ha, ha, ha. Another fool dead. He was a disgrace to us as he let us leave without the file.

Alien 2: Oh, yeah, let's get it.

Alien 10: NO WAY! IT'S NOT HERE! WHERE DID YOU FOOLS PUT IT?

All Other Aliens: We didn't do anything!

(It sounded like Alien 10 killed all the other aliens.)

Alien 10: Fools, you cannot lie to me!

(It seemed that Alien 10 was checking the file history himself.)

Alien 10: NO WAY! IT'S NOT HERE!

With that, he left the area, somehow taking the bodies with him. I shared the info with the government. They want me to kill the aliens.

I hacked their location and found they're right under the government building. They must be hearing our plans, but luckily they couldn't read texts. I wonder how they found out there was a file showing footage. Oh wait, they probably have their own computer that shows the computers with the files they need to remove.

I'm in the base shooting aliens! I've got my machine gun. It's time we kill the leader!

I'm shooting him down, but he's still somehow alive! Eventually he died....

This is the war. I hope nothing like this happens again.

THE ZEUS PROJECT

*A group of brave men and women travel to Mars to bring back an energy source for the people on Earth in **THE ZEUS PROJECT** by **Conor Healey**.*

September 20, 2050. “Hi, this is Beth O’Conor, from Channel 7 news. We are speaking with Commander Brian Hubba. Commander Hubba, why are you starting on this mission?”

“Well, it’s 2050, and we need a new source of energy. Coal has almost run out and has been very bad for the environment, so we found a new, clean source of energy,” says Brian.

“How did you find this new source of energy?” asks Beth.

“The W.R.S.I. Rover K1-2 discovered a new mineral on Mars. We called it Zeus.” replies the Commander.

Beth informs the audience, “As you know, NASA was shut down in 2025, so the W.R.S.I., or the World Rocket Science Industry, became the new space program. It started the Mars Mining Mission.” Beth turns to Commander Hubba and says, “How are you bringing back the clean fuel to Earth?”

Commander Hubba responds, “We can’t bring back Zeus because it is too radioactive. So, we have to do it on Mars. Then we turn it into clean fuel, meaning it is not bad for the environment, and put it in canisters aboard the ship. Then we blast off for home with the safe and clean fuel.”

Commander Brian Hubba leaves the press conference and heads up to scientist Rick Morning’s laboratory. Brian scans his ID card and walks into the laboratory. “Do you have the blueprints?” says Brian.

After some moaning, Rick wakes up and says, “I was up all night doing them. Better like them.” Brian looks at the blueprints and sees very detailed writing. Impressed, he folds them up and heads back to his hotel. Once he’s back at the hotel he schedules a meeting with his crewmates to discuss the blueprints at 3:00 p.m. the next day.

“Good afternoon, Samantha and Dave,” says Brian as the crewmates walk into the room for the meeting. Brian introduces

the blueprints and the plan for the rockets. Samantha and Dave are also impressed by the blueprints.

Dave is wicked smart and says, "How did they fit all this stuff on three rockets? That's almost impossible to have a light rocket full of people, fuel, equipment, and food. The rockets need to be big and have a big payload to carry all the supplies."

Samantha agrees and says, "Wow, how did he fit the big drills and a small factory that is needed to turn Zeus into clean fuel on Mars?"

"He's just that crazy good. He better get it right, too, because we are risking our lives going to Mars playing with super radioactive minerals."

There will be three rockets going to Mars: Moonlord, Crystal, and God. The first rocket (Moonlord) will have a year's worth of food and factory things for Mars. The second rocket (Crystal) will carry 40 people going to Mars and three new rovers being put on Mars. The third rocket (God) has all the fuel to power things and the homes that the people will live in.

May 13, 2053. "This is Beth O'Connor from Channel 7 news. Two months ago, the three rockets from the Mars Mining Mission had a successful launch. But in the middle of their trip their communications with Houston broke down. So, Commanders Samantha Draft, Brian Hubba and Dave Hay had no help landing the rockets. We didn't get the news of the trip's landing until a couple hours ago. It turns out they had to land the rockets on Mars without Houston's computer to help. Orbit, the Mars satellite, snapped a picture of them landing safely. Here it is on your screen. That is all the information we have at the moment. As more questions arrive about whether they are going to survive, fewer answers are being shown."

Brian sends people to try to fix the communications and all others to start building the homes and assembling drills. "How's it going with the coms fix?" says Brian.

Commander Hay says, "The communications are completely fried. Something blew up in it and we can't just fix it." Disappointed, Brian goes outside and checks on how the homes and drill assembly are going. All of the homes are finished, and the drills are charging up to mine. It is time to start mining Zeus and use the machines to turn it into clean fuel.

April 13, 2054. “This is Beth O’Conor reporting for Channel 7 news. Orbit has passed by Mars again and snapped many pictures, which are being shown on your screen. All is well on Mars, and they’ve collected enough Zeus. It has been 11 months of mining, and we have seen no physical damage to the homes or drills, so we are assuming everything is good because the communications were never able to be fixed by the crew.”

Meanwhile on Mars...they are packing up to go home, but Samantha has an important job to do. She has to take the radioactive waste from Zeus and put it away from the rocket, because if the rocket damages the canisters of radioactive waste it could contaminate the site. This is bad because if they want to come back or if the rocket has a delayed launch, they could die from the radioactive waste.

She is driving away from the rocket in a rover, with the radioactive canisters in a trailer behind her. Suddenly her trailer gets hit by a meteor. This is a very rare occurrence that a meteor could hit the trailer. The W.R.S.I. didn’t even plan for this because it’s such a rare occurrence that nobody thought it could happen. The meteor hits the trailer and smashes most of the canisters. The rover is completely disabled. “My rover is shut down, and I can’t get out of my rover. All power is lost as something hit behind me,” Samantha reports.

Brian radios back and says, “Are you okay? Can you tell if the canisters are cracked?”

Samantha replies, “I’m okay, but the canisters are cracked, and my radioactive gauge is saying I have about 30 minutes before I die from radioactive poisoning. That is not enough time for you to get here. I know it may be hard, but I won’t make it out of here. I want you to tell my parents that this is what I wanted to do as a little girl. This is what I signed up for. I knew the risks I was taking. You are going to have to leave without me. I know this is hard, but I want you to get everyone else off here safely.” After a long conversation with her he agrees and says goodbye one more time and prepares for the launch to Earth.

February 16, 2055. A day after landing safely on Earth, they go to a press conference in Florida. Commanders Brian Hubba and Dave Hay are speaking. Brian informs Earth about Samantha.

“Unfortunately, when Samantha Draft was taking the waste from Zeus away from the rocket, a meteor hit her trailer, and she died from radioactive poisoning. She will always be remembered as my partner and my friend on the mission. The casualty was unfortunate, but the overall mission was essential in solving Earth’s power crisis.”

KICKS

BETRAYAL

In **BETRAYAL** by *DaeQuan Barbee*, Tony and Tod are not as similar as they look. When one twin is good and the other is bad, there is bound to be trouble.

“**T**ony! It’s not my fault that you sit around all day and play video games instead of getting an education!” said Tod, one of two twins.

“Well at least everyone supports you!” said the other twin named Tony. Tod and Tony looked and sounded insanely alike.

Tod had been going to law school to become a lawyer. He got all the attention because he was actually going places someday. Tony became jealous and hatched a plan. *I have a plan!* Tony said to himself. *If I could ruin Tod’s career, maybe he’ll have nothing better to do than play video games with me!*

Just that instant the telephone rang. It was the district court, who were considering hiring Tod. Tony posed as Tod on the phone and set up an interview the next week at 6:30. This whole time he didn’t tell Tod a single thing.

Later that week, the court called again to confirm. This time Tod answered. They told him 6:45.

Tony went to the interview. During the interview Tony answered the questions with “Yeah whatever,” or “I know the answer but I’m not telling you.” He was acting very childishly, and he even said, “I bet if I actually wanted this job, I’d get it.”

The interviewer became upset and said, “Well, if you don’t want this job, then I guess we won’t give it to you!” And at that moment, Tod walked in.

Tod was shocked to see Tony. “What are you doing here?”

But the interviewer interrupted, “Umm, sir, who are you?”

“I am Tod Johnson. I’m here for my interview.”

“Well, if you’re Tod Johnson, who is this?”

“That’s my twin brother, Tony Johnson.” Tony looked shocked and scared at the same time. “Tony, you came to the interview and sabotaged it? Why would you do that to me?”

Tony was in complete shock. He was nearly speechless. “I’m sorry, Tod!” Tony then ran out of the room.

“May I please explain this?” Tod asked. “My brother has been upset because he doesn’t have a bright future. And he misses the old days when we used to always be together. Can you please forgive me and give me a second chance?” The interviewer had enough sympathy to agree to redo the interview.

After the interview Tod went home to talk to Tony. “Tony, why would you stab me in the back like that?”

“Tod, I’m sorry. It’s just that ever since you started school, you haven’t had any time for me.”

“Tony, I am truly sorry.”

A few days later, Tod got a letter in the mail. It was his acceptance letter! Tod was now an official attorney. Tod was happy, but he didn't want to leave Tony hanging. “Hey Tony. I think you have real talent. Bro, I’ve seen you play those games. Why not design your own?”

“You really think so?”

“Yeah, you could even go back to college for it!”

And that’s exactly what he did. Tony worked non-stop until he got a few references to some professional people. A few years later he got a professional job as an Xbox game designer. After all, Tony was happy where he was, thanks to Tod!

BLIND DATE

*In **BLIND DATE** by Jewel Reece, two teenagers who have never met find love on line. Will their relationship survive once they learn each other's secret?*

Kaitlyn is a high school girl who is paralyzed from the waist down. She was in a terrible accident when she was in the sixth grade that left her paralyzed. She has always had a hard time with her disability and thinking that she doesn't fit in. Kaitlyn is the only girl who does not have a boyfriend and feels left out because all of her friends are getting boyfriends and she is not. Boys at Kaitlyn's high school are not an option in Kaitlyn's mind because she thinks they are going to judge her since they already know that she can't walk. In her mind no one will want to be with her.

There are flyers all over the school about the big school dance for the end of the year. When Kaitlyn looks at these flyers she daydreams about walking into the party with her Prince Charming.

As the dance gets closer, Kaitlyn gets sad because all of her friends have a date for the dance. Kaitlyn goes home one day and says, "Since all my friends all have boyfriends I need one. But how?" Kaitlyn keeps thinking about this and says, "What about a social media site for teens?"

Kaitlyn finds a site that is just right for her called therightone.com. Kaitlyn scrolls through hundreds of boys that are too old or who she thinks might judge her.

Then she comes across a boy named Jason Love. Kaitlyn thinks, "Should I request to skype him and talk?" After thinking long and hard, she finally gets the courage to skype him.

Jason accepts the request, and then they skype for several months every day. Things get serious, and she starts to fall in love with Jason.

Finally Jason sends a message saying, "Hey, Kaitlyn, I really like talking to you, but I would really love to meet you in person." After feeling nervous and scared about meeting him, Kaitlyn finally replies after hours of thinking, "Sure I can't wait to meet you too."

Meeting Jason in person was a really big deal for Kaitlyn because Jason still didn't know about Kaitlyn being paralyzed. She

wanted to tell him that she was paralyzed just to save herself any pain, but she knows that her mother always told her that her disability does not define her.

Kaitlyn takes days to think about when she is going to meet Jason. She finally decides that the date should be the dance. She skypes Jason and invites him to her school dance. Jason is honored and accepts her invitation.

“Kaitlyn, today is your big day. Are you ready, baby?” Kaitlyn’s mom says. When Kaitlyn’s mom sees Kaitlyn just sitting there she says, “Oh no, baby, you need to be happy today. This is going to be your first dance with someone.”

Kaitlyn sits there and says, “Mom, I never told Jason that I was paralyzed. What if he judges me?”

“Baby, that is fine. He loves your personality, and that is all that matters. So now you get ready before you make me start crying.”

The dance starts at 7:30. Kaitlyn is already ready at 6:30 to take pictures. Kaitlyn and Jason decided to wear royal blue.

When Kaitlyn arrives at the dance she sees her friends and decides not to go in until Jason arrives. All of Kaitlyn’s friends walk out and see her and say, “I knew there was never a boy” and then walk back into the dance room. Kaitlyn starts slowly grabbing her dress tightly because of stress and being embarrassed.

Finally Jason arrives at the dance. Kaitlyn notices that a lady that appears to be Jason’s mother is assisting him getting out of the car.

Kaitlyn is very surprised to learn that Jason needs assistance because he is blind. Kaitlyn immediately greets him and leads the way in her wheelchair into the dance.

THE CRASH THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

*Two kids survive a tragic accident in **THE CRASH THAT CHANGED MY LIFE** by **Abbie C.** They learn the importance of friendship in getting through this tough time.*

BOOM! was the first sound I heard of a new life. My family and I were flying to Florida for our annual family vacation. We were on the plane for about an hour when the plane started to bump and thump. We all looked at each other, scared and worried, wondering what was going on. Thankfully the ride smoothed out, and it was smooth sailing once again. Unfortunately, our relief didn't last long.

The plane started to nosedive! We were surrounded by shrieks and screams. My family was hugging each other tight. They made an announcement saying the radios went out. We fell through the air for what seemed like hours, and then we hit the trees as we smashed onto the ground. I was knocked out cold.

I woke up to the sound of myself screaming. I realized that all I saw around me was dead bodies. I was crying for so long until I realized I was the only one alive...at least I thought so. I was surrounded by trees the size of skyscrapers, lush green grass, loud birds, and a beautiful sky.

All of a sudden a boy jumped out of nowhere. I immediately asked, "Who are you?"

The boy replied, "My name is Harrison." Unsure of what to do next, we just sat there and cried and worried. Then we gathered as many bags, phones, and other items from the wreckage we thought would be useful and considered what to do. We didn't know if we should stay there and wait for help, or go looking for help. Then I just sat and cried for what seemed like hours upon hours. We chose to leave and look for help. It was the hardest choice I ever made.

Harrison asked me, "Do you know where we are?"

I replied with a big fat "No."

We both decided that the first thing we needed to do was figure out where we were. Harrison's first thought was to use the phones. I said, "Absolutely not." He asked me why, and I answered, "We need to save the battery for when we know where we are and need to call for help. Anyway, I bet we can't get a signal."

All we knew was that we were in the middle of the woods. We walked the rest of the day, and we still had no clue where we were.

We had to find a safe spot to sleep. Harrison burst out saying, "This is just like one of those survival shows I always watch."

Harrison said it is best to make a fire and find a safe spot to sleep. So that is exactly what we did. We found an empty cave. Harrison built the fire, and I tried to build beds out of twigs and leaves. I asked Harrison why he wasn't sad because our families just died. He just then told me he was an unaccompanied minor.

The first night was a success. We woke up and continued our journey.

As we walked, we talked and really got to know each other. But we had to keep our guard up, because we were still in the forest with threats all around us, and it wasn't long before we were running for our lives again. We heard something loud behind us. We ran right up a tree.

Out of nowhere a truck came rolling toward us. We hid until we could see who was in the truck.

The guys got out of the truck with guns! I observed the truck and noticed it was marked with the words "Georgia State Park," and their shirts said it. We didn't ask for help because we didn't want to scare anyone with guns. Finally, after the men found nothing, they got back in their truck and left.

I screamed with joy. Harrison asked me why I was screaming. All I told him was to get out a phone. I looked up Georgia State Park and called the number. I started crying and said, "We've found our way home." I told the operator everything. He said they would send out a search team immediately.

Harrison and I were crying with mixed emotions (mostly happy.) We had to wait thirty minutes, and then we were found. We were sent to the hospital immediately. Harrison and I were all cleaned up, and I called the family I had left (my Nanna, Pappa, aunts and uncles) and Harrison called his parents in our home state, Michigan.

They came straight to Georgia. Harrison and I had to sleep at the hospital. The next morning our families met, and we stayed in Georgia for another day. Our families got to know each other as well as we had over the last two days. They decided we would still go to Florida because everybody had heard our story, and

magazines and a handful of news stations wanted to interview us, and it was our original destination!

Harrison and I knew our lives had changed forever. But we knew this new life would be another crazy adventure with ups and downs.

THE DEBT

*The founder of a million-dollar company loses it all. He must find a way to repay what he owes in **THE DEBT** by **Morgan Taylor**.*

Kevin loved technology. He was fascinated by it, so one day he made a phone. It was amazing.

He took it everywhere, and one day he decided to make a business out of it. He pitched the idea to investors, and they loved it.

Kevin was now the owner of a big company called K-Tech, the biggest technology business in the country. Kevin was also a big gambler and not a very good one, but it did not matter because he was a millionaire; he could lose money every once in a while.

He was doing well until the day his company came out with their newest phone. There was a big ceremony for this new piece of technology. It was to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of K-tech. Everyone who attended the ceremony received one.

They had sold over a million phones. Then...each and every phone started to zap people. This caused physical injuries, and people were horribly upset. People even sued them. It was a total disaster.

The company lost everything, and everyone lost their jobs, as there was no money left for the company. Kevin was devastated. He had no money left except for the money in his saving accounts. Sadly, this would last him about two months.

Now he did not realize it at the time, but he had one debt to pay, and that was to Johnny D. He was one the most dangerous people in town along with his gang. A week ago he had made a bet with Johnny D. that a basketball team would win. They had been losing all season and Kevin thought that they would be victorious. This was really bad, and with the little money he had, he realized he needed to get a job.

It's really hard to get a job when you don't have a high school degree. He never finished high school, and never really thought about how it could affect him in the future. The problem with going back to high school was that he needed the money now. So he went to places that needed hiring.

He first went to a technology repair store. He was perfect for the job, but always ordered people around. This is from when he was an owner of a company. He was fired.

He wanted to start another company, but with the little money he had it just wasn't possible. The next day he decided to go and find a new job.

Later that evening the doorbell rang. It was Johnny D. Kevin had to pay the consequences, and he had till June 22nd at midnight. That was two weeks away. How was he going to get the money? He made the decision of using his savings account.

He still had to get a job. Lying there in bed, he was wondering how he was going to pay rent.

When he woke up he went straight to Johnny D. and gave him the money. Johnny closely counted it all to make sure it was all there.

Now that Kevin was officially broke, he tried to figure out what kind of job to get. He thought about it for a long time while sitting on a park bench. The morning turned into the afternoon, and then it was the the evening, and he was heading home.

He knew that nobody ever wins the lottery, but with the money he had left he bought a ticket. He scratched it, and the winning numbers were not there.

Walking home slowly, he ran into Johnny D. Mocking him, Johnny D. threw him a dollar because now Kevin is broke.

Kevin ran back to the gas station to buy a ticket, but then stopped because he might just be wasting the only dollar he had. With some doubt he bought a ticket anyway, and then with much disappointment he walked back home.

The next day, sad and alone, he made time to get a new job and a smaller house.

Even though his business had failed, it was fun while it lasted.

THE DISASTER

Despite storm warnings, two friends keep their plans to go fishing in THE DISASTER by Jackson Monczka. They have braved storms before; what's the worst that could happen?

The disaster happened when we went out to sea. The storm arrived out of nowhere. Some winds felt like a hurricane was happening. Many of the townsfolk told us not to go out. We went out to sea anyway. We thought it wouldn't be as bad as it was.

Once we were out at sea we couldn't come back to shore. The sky turned a greenish color like the northern lights were above us.

We were going out to fish. It was the perfect time to fish. The storm was making all the fish go to the bottom of the sea. This was good for the way Jason and I fished. We would let our bait and hooks go to the floor of the sea.

I told Jason we should go back into shore, but Jason didn't want to go back. The waves were pounding against the side of the boat. It felt like a heart was thumping right next to the boat. The waves were too much for us. They sent us overboard.

I wake up on the side of a beach. I don't recognize where I am. I can't find Jason anywhere. I am thinking he is dead. *Well, the first thing, I think to myself, is I should find food and water.* So I go off searching for food and water.

Suddenly I see something run by me. It looks like a furry animal like a squirrel. I chase after it. I finally catch it, and I don't actually know what the animal is, but I am very happy that I have some food.

Next I search for some clean fresh water to drink so I can actually stay alive and have a chance of getting back home. I hear something. I think it might be an animal thinking I'm food. I really hope not. I run in a direction that I think isn't toward the animal.

Hours later I find clean water after running away from what I thought was an animal. I drink a lot of the water. Now that I have some water I get some wood. I start to pull off some of the bark. I try to make a case or a bottle to store water in. After a while I make some sort of container to store water in.

I see a hole in the wall. So I go to the hole in the wall to stay the night.

When I wake up I feel wet and soggy. I look around me and see that there is water all around me. I grab all my things that I have and start to get to a tree to climb up. Then the ground starts to break away around me. So I have to get to a tree fast. I get to a tree and start to climb.

I realize that it isn't just some random water from a lake or something. The water was from a flood because the water is rising a lot faster. I can see some of the leaves floating around in the water. Some of the fish even came all this way up shore not knowing when the flood would leave.

Once the water lowers I get more wood that isn't that wet. I finally am able to find a supply of dry wood, so I gather that.

I start to build a boat with the supplies that I gathered. Suddenly I see a strange creature walking toward me. When it gets closer I see it's the friend that took me out to fish that one day. Once he gets to me he crashes on the ground and says that there is no escape and dies.

Once I build my boat I go to bed.

The next day I get up early. I go to the sea and use my boat to get to a city or some sort of place that has people. As soon I get on the water, waves start to crash against my boat, almost forcing me to go overboard. These waves are very high. I cling onto my makeshift boat and hold on for my life, hoping that I won't be swept away into the ocean. I black out.

I wake up in a hospital, and I see a bunch of nurses around me. One of them is telling me to go back to sleep, so I set my head back and let myself fall back asleep.

THE DREADFUL PLAYGROUND INCIDENT

*Evann didn't know she had allergies until she had a life-threatening reaction. In **THE DREADFUL PLAYGROUND INCIDENT** by **Evann Oleshansky**, read her true experience and learn how you can make things easier for people with similar conditions.*

It was a pretty spring day. The flowers were in full bloom, the grass was freshly cut, and it was the perfect day to play outside. My friends and I had just finished our snacks, and we raced out the door for recess; playing on the playground was my favorite part of the school day.

We were playing four square, running across the wooden bridge, pushing each other on the swings, and gliding down the slide. We were all giggling and smiling until suddenly...my throat began to itch. My left eye started to swell. My lips were tingling. Hives appeared all over my left arm and leg.

None of my friends noticed any of these symptoms. My teacher did not even hear me coughing, or recognize any of these reactions. My body did not feel like my own. I hardly felt like myself, but no one knew this but me.

I was particularly lucky that my aunt was picking up my cousin early from school. The moment she saw me she knew something was wrong. She called my mom immediately, who thankfully worked close to the school.

My mom looked like a ghost when she shouted, "Evann, oh my, what happened!"

"My throat is tingly and my eyes are itchy," I cried as she picked me up and raced me to the car.

"It will be ok," she said with tears in her eyes. "The doctors will make you all better."

I remember driving to the hospital with the window rolled down because the wind felt so good on my itchy face.

"Evie, did you have music today? What about art? I loved music class when I was a kid!" My mom was full of stories as we drove to the hospital. I could tell she was nervous, too.

I was immediately admitted to Henry Ford Hospital. The doctors and nurses gave me steroid injections to stop the reaction. I was under observation for six hours to make sure the reaction did not come back.

While my mom spoke to the doctors, I cried hysterically. I was horrified because I could not understand what the doctors were saying. Most of the words out of the doctor's mouth did not make any sense to me.

"We do not want Evann to become avoidant or restrictive to her food intake. This will result in a food aversion and anxiety disorder. After an allergic reaction, please model positive coping for Evann. She needs her friends and family members to be empathetic listeners, and to provide her with reliable and unconditional support. Having a food allergy is just one part of who Evann is. It should not stop her from having a happy childhood and a full life."

I did not comprehend the doctor, and I never wanted to feel these symptoms again. My life flashed before my eyes. I thought I was going to die.

The doctors and nurses reassured me that I was going to be fine. They explained to me the different severities of food reactions. Even though my reaction seemed to be catastrophic and life-threatening, the doctor said it was under control, but that the next 12 hours were critical in order to make sure the reaction did not reoccur.

There are eight different categories of foods allergies: peanut, tree nut, milk, eggs, wheat, soy, shellfish, and seeds. I am allergic to peanuts, tree nuts, and sesame seeds. I have been allergic to these foods for 11 years, since I was 10 months old. I do not know what a peanut butter and jelly sandwich tastes like, nor do I know what an m & m tastes like. I can't just walk off the street into Five Guys Burgers or Dairy Queen and order something; there is a great chance for cross contamination. Some people can't believe I have never had any of these foods. But I really don't know what I am missing. Instead my mom and I find substitutions, and I am assured that they taste the same, sometimes even better.

The first thing the next morning, my mom was at my school. She became my advocate to create a more "peanut aware" school. We began to teach my teachers, friends, and our extended relatives about food allergies. We talked about the dangers and signs of an allergic reaction: hives, coughing, sniffing, itching, swelling,

sneezing, and gasping for air. We discussed the important steps to take when an allergic reaction transpires: going to the office and taking antihistamine, washing hands and face, and calling 911. We also chatted about safe and unsafe foods: homemade baked goods are not safe if you do not know where they came from. Only prepackaged ingredient-listed foods are the safest. I am truly lucky the food industry passed laws regulating food labels, but sometimes these labels can be wrong. I always check and read all the food labels.

I am also lucky there are many support groups that educate the public about food allergies. Did you know that Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE) states 1 in every 13 kids has a food allergy? Most allergic kids carry epinephrine injections. Everyone who knows me knows I do not leave home without my medical bag. I carry my epi-pens and Benadryl wherever I go.

Luckily, my reaction was not from something I ate that day, or else it could have been much worse. But it was from touching something that contained peanuts, tree nuts, or sesame seeds. A classmate may have enjoyed a peanut butter sandwich, or hummus and pretzels, or a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup in their lunch. In any case, either the ball, the handlebars on the slide, the poles on the bridge, or the ropes on the swing were contaminated with these proteins. Allergies can be very dangerous and severe. So please try to read labels, watch for reactions, and always ask kids if they have a food allergy.

On this specific beautiful spring day, when I was five years old, my allergy became a real-life threat. It changed my life. My once-favorite activity at school, recess, now became my most dreaded time of the day. My name is Evann Oleshansky, and I am allergic to peanuts, tree nuts, and sesame seeds.

THE END

In **THE END** by *Darla Pennywell*, a boy must leave his family to a tragic fate if is to have a chance to survive.

Rrrriinnnggg! Finally. This school year took forever to finish. “Tom, do you want to come over to my house to celebrate?” my friend asks.

“No, my family is coming over tonight,” I reply.

“All right. Well, see you later,” he says back.

“Bye,” I say back to him.

As I’m walking home I see my grandparents hopping out of the car. I run over to them to say hi, but as I’m running up the driveway I trip on a pebble and scrape my knee. It feels like a thousand porcupines ran right into me.

After I put on a Band-Aid I go outside to play for a while. I play catch with my Grandpa, and I go on the swings with my Grandma. My knee is ok while I am playing outside. About an hour later dinner is ready.

While we are having grace my little sister, Sarah, spills her milk twice, and my Grandma accidentally pushes her out of her seat. The food is great. We have sloppy joes with green beans and lamb stew, but overall this summer has not had a good start.

“Tom, wake up,” my mom says in a loud whisper. I look at my clock. It’s two o’clock in the morning! I hear people crying and screaming outside. I get up to look out my window. I see soldiers pulling people out of their homes. Then I see two of them coming for our house!

Knock knock knock! Someone’s at our door. This feels like a nightmare. I must be dreaming. Two seconds later they kick down the door.

They grab my mom and Sarah first, and then me. They bring us to the center of the village where all the other people are gathered. “Why are you doing this!” my mom yells.

“Since you destroyed us, we are going to destroy you!” the leader shouts.

The soldiers are now on the outside of the village. "I think they are going to set the village on fire and bring us down, too," I say.

"Go," Mom says. "Sarah and I won't be able to escape," she says as she starts to cry. I give her a big hug, and I sneak away. I see another person in the woods who's trying to escape, too. It's just dark enough for me to slip away. Quietly I slip into the woods.

It's been two days now, and I have not gotten any food nor one drop of water. I think it's best to stay up in the trees just in case someone spots me from down below.

All of a sudden I see someone in a tree just looking at me. "Hello?" I say.

She swings to a tree closer. She gets closer until she's on my tree. She puts her hand out in front of me. I assume she wants me to shake it. So I put my hand out and we shake. "Hi, my name is Ella," she says like we have known each other forever.

"Tom," I say.

"So are you from that village?" she asks, sounding sad. I nod.

It has been a few weeks now. We have been traveling from the treetops. We are less visible up here. We found a little pond once. I did not want to leave because I did not want to starve again. We have been getting our food from the little creatures in the woods.

It feels like we are actually close to being somewhere. I see a glimpse of a tower! "Ella, look!" I scream. She is so excited that she starts running. When I catch up to her we are standing in front of a burnt village.

We take a deep look at the place. Everything is burnt to bits. Ella has turned around and walked away. "Where are you going?" I ask.

She stops. She stands there for a minute or two. She finally replies. "To find a new home."

EVERY LITTLE THING

If it's not one thing, it's another. In EVERY LITTLE THING by Riley Bell, a series of small annoyances add up to make Steve's day a tough one to get through.

One crisp, chilly, fall day, a twelve-year-old boy named Steve Phillips had the state championship soccer game. Steve played center midfield for the Birmingham Express. The Birmingham Express made the state championship against the Lansing Warriors.

Steve's game is at 3:00 p.m. in Birmingham. Steve is lucky that he doesn't have to travel one hour and ten minutes like the other team. Steve has to be at the field for warm-ups at 2:30. The field is about twenty minutes away from Steve's house. At 1:45 Steve started to look for his soccer uniform.

Steve found his socks, shin guards, and shorts right away. Steve thought to himself, *Where is my jersey? I swear I just saw it ten minutes ago.* So Steve went to ask his mom if she had seen his jersey, but Steve was still holding his shorts in his hand. "Have you seen my soccer jersey anywhere?" Steve asked his mom.

"I think I saw it in the laundry room," she replied.

"Thanks, Mom," said Steve, and he was off to the laundry room.

His jersey was in the dryer. He went back to his room. Then Steve noticed that he hadn't seen his dog, Freddy, in a long time. The last time he saw Freddy was when he was in his room. Earlier, Steve had gone to the car to get his water bottle, and he remembered that he had left the front door open. "MOM!" said Steve.

"Hold on, I'm doing something very important for work!" said Mrs. Phillips.

"But I think Freddy ran away!" Steve yelled.

"Hold on!" Mrs. Phillips yelled back.

I have to get all my stuff together. Then I might be able to look for Freddy, Steve thought. He looked at the supplies that he had. He noticed he was missing his shorts. He looked at the clock, and saw that it was already 2:00. Steve thought to himself, *I really need to hurry up.*

“Paul, did you move my soccer shorts?” Then Steve noticed that his socks were gone. He thought to himself, *Where are my socks? I thought I set them right here.* “Paul!” yelled Steve.

“What do you want?” screamed Paul.

“Have you been moving my socks?” asked Steve.

“Are they the orange and white ones?” asked Paul.

“Yep, those are it,” said Steve.

“They are in the laundry basket,” said Paul.

“Thanks,” said Steve. Steve put all of his stuff on after he got his socks.

Steve began to worry about being late or even missing his game. He didn’t want to let his coach and team down. What if he was late and his coach didn’t let him play? Steve had thoughts bouncing around in his head. He could hear a clock ticking in his head, and it sounded like *tick tock, tick tock.*

Steve jumped in the car with his mom. It was 2:05 when Steve finally left his house. The hair on his arms started to rise. Steve was nervous about three things. One was that he made the state championship, two was that if he was late he wouldn’t be able to start the game, and three was that he wondered if he would find Freddy.

On the way to the field there was a traffic jam. “There must have been a car crash,” Steve thought.

Steve was only five minutes away from the field, but traffic was held up for ten minutes. He started to panic about being late. Steve asked, “Can I just walk to the field?”

“Since traffic is this bad, go ahead,” Mrs. Phillips said.

Steve jumped out of his car and started racing to the field. He noticed that his bag was heavier than he had thought.

He thought, *I have to keep going to get to the game.*

When Steve got there at 2:35 he told his coach what happened. He was too tired to start the game, so he asked if he could sit out for about five minutes.

His coach said, “Ok, I will still let you sit for five minutes, but you have to play after that.”

“Ok, Coach,” said Steve.

Steve had all his stuff and got to play most of the game, but was still concerned that they wouldn’t be able to find Freddy.

The final score of the game was 3-2. Steve’s team lost because they didn’t play good defense for the last five minutes, and the

other team outhustled them. Steve was really mad. He was so mad that he felt like his head was going to explode.

He just wanted to lock himself in his room. When he got home Freddy was waiting for him at the door.

“Freddy came in through the doggy door!” yelled Steve.

Even though Steve lost the state championship, he still found his dog Freddy.

THE FOREST

In **THE FOREST** by *Elsie Meilinger*, a boy and a girl are surprised by unexpected events, both good and bad.

I was going to do the lamest thing. I had to go hiking with my mom's work. It's like a retreat for all of the employees and their families. I knew that it was going to be boring. Just then my mom shouted, "Tess! Come on! We're going to be late!"

"Coming, Mom!" I replied.

After I got downstairs and scarfed down my breakfast, my family and I loaded our car and left for the forest. According to my mom, a forest is one of "nature's journeys."

The car ride was long and boring. My mom said the ride was only two hours, but with my brother nagging at me the whole way there, it felt like five hours. Mom said we had to go so that she could stay on the good side of her boss. Our family is pretty poor, and our dad left us when we were little. So it's just me, my mom, and my little brother. I'm now ten, and my brother is five. My mom said she would be watching my little brother very carefully, and she said I would kind of be on my own. My little brother has a very eager mind, and he gets lost a lot.

We finally reached the campsite. I know that I said the retreat would be lame, but the campsite and the forest were pretty cool. I also like to camp, so it looked like maybe, just maybe, the weekend wouldn't be so bad. But my opinion wouldn't be final until after the long hike.

It was almost time for the hike. The people who were running the retreat, or the "counselors," you could say, paired up six families with one hiking guide. The families we got paired up with seemed decent. My mood was pretty good until my mom made me "pair up" with one of the kids in another family. She thinks I need to bond with people my age. I just hope this boy is someone who I can stand during the hike.

Finally, it was time for the hike. Once we left, my mom forced me to talk to the boy. "Hey, my name's Tess. What's yours?" I asked.

He replied, "Sup, Tess, my name is Calvin. I don't want to ruin your mood or anything, but I don't want to be here. My parents forced me to come." I couldn't believe what I was hearing!

“That’s great!” I said. “We actually have something in common! I never wanted to come here either! I was so mad when my mom made me pair up with someone. But now, I think this hike might not be bad after all. Plus, we’re pretty much on our own because my mom is taking care of my brother.”

“My mom trusts me on my own, too. So we are pretty much on our own.”

When we were halfway through the hike, Calvin and I became really good friends. Also by the halfway mark of the hike, I got so tired I sat down to rest. Calvin sat with me. Eventually, we both fell asleep.

I woke up to the sound of Calvin shouting my name. “What is it, Calvin?” I asked sleepily.

“We’re abandoned, Tess. The others continued without us. We’re lost in the woods,” said Calvin, with his voice shaking.

“We should call someone,” I suggested.

“My phone’s dead, and so is yours,” Calvin replied. “I checked your coat pocket and found your phone, and I checked the battery. It’s dead. Plus, we don’t have any service in the woods.”

“True, but let me check,” I said. “You’re right, it is dead. But can’t we just retrace our steps?” I said.

“That’s just it, I don’t remember which way we came from,” said Calvin.

“Now that I think of it, neither can I. So maybe we should at least gather up some food, like they do on all those shows and movies on TV,” I said.

All we could find were some berries and nuts. But while I was looking for food, I found a map of some sort in the bushes.

“Hey Calvin! I think I found some sort of map!” I exclaimed. “It could be the way out of the forest! I have no idea why it would be here, but this could be our way out!”

Calvin and I followed the map for about an hour before I realized the map was probably a map to treasure. I thought that because there was an X on the destination. There were symbols instead of pictures and other map-like things. It looked pretty new like it had just been put there not too long ago. It looked like the map was drawn or painted. I didn’t tell Calvin this because I needed to find the treasure. As I said earlier, I’m very poor.

“Hey, Tess? Do you feel like someone is following us?”

“No, why?” I answered.

“I don’t know. I just had a feeling...” mumbled Calvin.

“Ok, let’s keep going,” I said.

Once we had traveled for another hour and a half, I saw a glint of reflected light off of something shiny. I did not hear the rustling of leaves in the background. I ran up to the light. I pushed back the leaves that were in front of the light, and I found about fifty coins! Then Calvin asked, “Isn’t a bunch of coins lying out in the open suspicious to you?” But before I could answer, a giant creature leaped out from behind the plants and took both Calvin and I by surprise.

“RUN!” Calvin screamed.

Once I saw the look on Calvin’s face, I sprinted as fast as I could. We ran and ran and ran. The bear was pretty big, so it didn’t catch up to us very easily.

To our surprise, we ran to the edge of the forest where the camp was. But I realized my mistake too late. I just led a bear to a campsite full of people. People were screaming and running. But then one of the hiking guides pulled out a tranquilizer gun and shot the bear. The bear fell asleep almost instantly.

But I thought, why would someone have a tranquilizer gun handy? So I asked. She replied, “We had a bear find the campsite and attack us a few years back. So we keep them handy in case something like that happened again, like now.”

After that disaster, I looked for my mom and then ran straight to her. I told her everything. I told her about the nap, the bear, and the coins. I told her I found the coins but didn’t get them. She said she didn’t care as long as I was safe.

The retreat was fun with a little thrill and a lot of scare. It made me realize the trip was to bring our family closer together. It worked.

THE INVASION

*An elite team of six men must save the world—again—in **THE INVASION** by **Jacob Pasco**.*

In Alaska, fifty miles from the Arctic Circle, troop by troop, Russia invades with extreme force and power. The National Guard comes in, thinking that it's a terrorist group. Then they see full military equipment with Russian emblems on it. They call the U. S. Military.

"The military was unsuccessful in stopping Russia," said the President in a press conference at the Pentagon.

"Why were they unsuccessful?" said the head of defense.

The President said, "They were severely outnumbered. I am calling in Seal Team Six."

The head of defense says, "Are you sure?"

The President tells Seal Team Six to go on a reconnaissance mission in Russia. "Once you get the info, share it with me. Then you are going to blow things up."

Seal Team Six is made up of six men. The highest ranking officer's code name is Echo 3, and the second-highest officer is Fox 5. Their sniper's code name is Rich 6. The demolition guy is named Demo 7. The tech guy is Bravo 4, and the weapons specialist is W.E.P.9. Seal Team Six is disguised as immigrants moving to Russia from Canada. Their equipment arrives via five Apache helicopters in five different random intervals. The fifth helicopter comes at 1200 hours as a diversion.

The Russian military is thrown off guard. The border defenses are concrete walls and towers at intervals with three to seven guards in each tower.

The Apache helicopter guns down small armed vehicles that are patrolling the wall. Three F22 Raptors come and destroy defenses in just fifteen minutes, completely destroying the border defenses by firing missiles. Seal Team Six went to the weapons cache while the air strike was happening and got all of the weapons.

Then they started moving in on Russia. They invade Vladimir Putin's home. They find him in a special conference room discussing things with his general.

Echo 3 said, "Okay, Rich 6, get up on that hill and have your sights trained on Vladimir Putin and his general. Demo 7, watch my back. W.E.P.9 and Bravo 4, go to the east hall on the other side of the room."

"I will watch your back," Demo 7 replied.

"Fox 5, I want you to go take out the guards stealthily. Listen to them from the next room and turn on your radios so that I can hear them talking," said Echo 3. They wait awhile and then hear their plans. "Their goal is to assassinate the American President," Echo 3 said. "Okay guys, we are heading home."

The whole team was worried. They still had to sneak out of Vladimir Putin's house. "Bravo 4, hack their surveillance feed," said Echo 3.

Bravo 4 said, "Already on it."

They went to the border, back to the weapons cache. They had to take out eighteen guards at the wall. Bravo 4 hacked the surveillance and enemy missiles at the weapons cache. There was a humongous gap in the wall from where the air strike hit it. They returned all their gear to the weapons cache.

Halfway through the night a cargo helicopter picked them up. They were flown to the Mediterranean Sea. Then they took jobs on a freighter and arrived in New York. They flew over to Washington, D.C. from New York.

Echo 3 said, "Mr. President, Sir, were we successful on our mission?"

"No, you weren't," he said.

Rich 6 said, "What?"

The President said, "Russia caught word of our plan through some terrorists, but they don't know that we know that Vladimir Putin is currently being shipped out of Russia for a secret meeting in Pakistan. We are going to have to send you to Pakistan," said the President. "We already got you guys jobs on another freighter to Madagascar. Your weapons will be buried under the beach. You have to walk twelve miles north. When you find the door, you have to go down the stairs back one half mile south. You will have the same equipment you previously had," said the President.

"You guys will have to make a small boat. The supplies are already in the weapons cache," said Echo 3.

Fox 5 said, "How do you know that?"

"I read the mission brief. The President didn't tell us everything. I guess he didn't want people to find out if they were eavesdropping. At the end of the mission brief, it said 'by the President.'"

They got all of their materials and launched off of the beach. The boat they had was a blow-up dinghy with cavalier panels on the sides so that if they are shot they won't die or sink. The journey over was rough. The waves were big. Then about two-thirds of the way through, the sun came out, and the water was as calm as can be. "The President gave us a route that no freighters use," said Echo 3.

W.E.P.9 said, "I wonder why." Finally, they made it over to Pakistan.

Echo 3 said, "We have to act fast. Vladimir Putin won't be there long. He is going to be in an underground bunker in the desert 53 miles away from the military base in Pakistan."

Demo 7 asked, "Are we walking or are we going to be driven?"

Echo 3 said, "We are rappelling out of a cargo chopper."

W.E.P.9 yelled, "YES! I LOVE RAPELLING OUT OF CHOPPERS!"

Rich 6 said, "Me too!"

Bravo 4 said, "Ahh, I hate rappelling out of choppers."

Fox 5 asked, "When are we rappelling out of the choppers?"

Echo 3 answered, "Right now."

Burburburbur burburburbur. "This chopper is really loud," said, Rich 6.

Bravo 4 asked, "When are we going to be there?"

W.E.P.9 answered, "I am going to ask the pilots how much longer we have until we rappel out this bird."

The copilot said, "Two minutes."

W.E.P.9 relayed, "TWO MINUTES."

Bravo 4 said "Am I staying at the base, Echo?"

Echo 3 answered, "No, you will be watching us, Vladimir Putin, and his general on the security feed."

Bravo 4 said, "Yes, this is going to be cool."

The pilot said, "Ok, boys, we're here."

Echo 3 said, "Be as stealthy as possible. Maintain radio silence."

The whole team rappelled out of the chopper.

Echo 3 said, "Bravo 4, hack their doors and open them."

Bravo 4 answered, "Ok, got it, boss."

Echo 3 said, "Fox 5, watch my back. Rich 6, get a good vantage point and place a mic where they are."

Bravo 4 said, "They are in the east room on the bottom level two halls over."

Echo 3 said, "Ok, Demo 7. If they try to escape, shoot them with a bean bag round. Then we will have them extracted and send them to America for interrogation."

Echo 3 and Fox 5 go down the eastern hall. They descend the stairs. Demo 7 follows them. Rich 6 is also with them. Bravo 4 is looking at all the hallways up ahead to make sure that they don't run into any guards.

Demo 7 splits off and gets a good vantage point. Rich 6 gets a good vantage point. He places a mic at the door so that they can listen to them talking. *Bang!* Echo 3 says, "Shots fired, shots fired, fall back!"

Bravo 4 leads them out of the base. The chopper was not there for their extraction. But they did see some armored personnel carriers, which drove them back to base.

Bravo 4 was looking over the surveillance footage. Rich 6 was going over what he heard. Bravo 4 said, "Vladimir Putin shot his general!"

Rich 6 said, "They are planning to take over Canada, America, and Mexico and assassinate all the presidents. He is sending twelve ICBMs. Four to Canada, four to Mexico, and four to America."

It was a quiet ride back to base. Then they walked back to shore. They thought they were going to be riding that dinghy back to Madagascar, but the President was there with his chopper. They discussed what had happened.

Bravo 4 said, "Well, Vladimir Putin shot his general."

The President choked on his soda. He said, "What? Why?"

Echo 3 said, "He knew we were there."

Fox 5 said, "No, he didn't."

Bravo 4 said, "There is no way of knowing, but maybe that's why he shot his general."

Echo 3 said, "Ok, he probably didn't know who we were."

The President said, "You boys are going to be sent on a mission to destroy the Russian factories."

Demo 7 said, "YES! LET'S LIGHT IT UP! LET'S BLOW THIS POPSICLE STAND!"

The president said, "Well, farewell, boys," and they all dove out of the chopper.

Bravo 4 said, "I LOVE THIS: THE WIND RUSHING THROUGH MY HAIR."

Rich 6 said, "YEAH, WHAT'S LEFT OF IT."

Bravo 4 said, "HA, HA. VERY FUNNY."

Echo 3 said, "GUYS, STOP. WE ALLEED TO BE FOCUSED ON THE MISSION, AND BESIDES, WE ALL KNOW WHO HAS THE BEST SHOT: ME."

Rich 6 said, "NO, YOU DON'T. I DO."

DEMO 7 said, "THE GROUND IS COMING UP FAST. PULL THE CHUTES NOW!" Then they all swiftly glided to the first factory. It was during the night, but there were guards patrolling the factory.

Echo 3 said, "Maintain radio silence." They all huddled on a hill far away from the target. Echo 3 said, "Rich 6, get to a sniper's nest and clear us a path by shooting them."

Rich 6 said, "Aok, got it." One by one he picked them off: *pew... pew... pew...*

Rich 6 said, "Yes, shoot to kill." *Tur tur tur tur tur tur.* Rich 6 said, "What was that?" Rich 6 ran down the hill to get a closer look.

Echo 3 asked, "Are the charges set?"

Demo 7 answered, "Yes they are."

Echo 3 ordered, "Evacuate the area."

Fox 5 answered, "Roger."

Demo 7 answered, "Roger."

Bravo 4 answered, "Roger."

Echo 3 said, "Whoa!"

Tuuuuurrrr pow pow pow!

Demo 7 said, "Back up!"

Clunk POWWW! "AH!" said the bad guy.

Echo 3 said, "The hallway is clear. Mission complete."

Demo 7 said, "Not yet. Ok, let's move."

Fox 5 said, "The facility is clear. Bravo 4, blow it."

Bravo 4 answered, "Got it."

Kaboom!

Demo 7 said, "Look at that mushroom cloud." Then they were extracted by a stealth chopper.

The next mission was to destroy a tank and weapons cache in Alaska that the Russians had taken over. From the White House they were escorted to the weapons cache by a warship, but not just any ship. They were escorted by the *U.S.S. Independence*. It is the fastest warship ever created.

Echo 3 said, "Ok, boys, roll out."

Bravo 4 said, "Well we're here. Demo 7, plant the explosives."

Demo 7 said, "Already on it."

Echo 3 said, "Rich 6, how are we looking?"

Rich 6 said, "You're looking good. Bogie! Wait. Don't move!"

Pew. Rich 6 continued, "You're clear."

Demo 7 said, "Let's go, Bravo 4. Blow it."

Kaboom!

Echo 3 asked, "Let's move."

Tur tur tur tur tur.

Echo 3 said, "We got heavy fire. Rich 6, take a shot. Advance, everybody. I am staying back here."

Tur pow pow pow pow.

Echo 3 shot three men.

Pew, pew, pew, pew, pew.

Rich 6 shot five men. Seal Team Six all escaped. Russia fell back. They got weaker.

"There were ICBMs sent out. America, Canada, and Mexico are safe," said the President at an announcement at the White House.

Meanwhile at Area 51 in an interrogation room, Echo 3 asked, "Why did you do it?"

Punch! Smack!

"You'll find out. Get ready for another war," said Vladimir Putin.

Echo 3 said, "Nope. We got it covered."

ISLAND OF NO MEMORY

In ISLAND OF NO MEMORY by Stefan Falinski, a man awakes alone on an island with no idea who or where he is. And then there's that creature....

A fresh breath of salty air blows on my face. Water comes up to my hair, letting it flow around my head like it's alive. My eyes open, and I look up at blue sky and white clouds.

I struggle to pull myself out of the salty water. I find myself in wreckage—tons of it. I can't make out what the writing on the wreckage says. I also can't remember how I got here or where here is.

I am lucky. I find some rope amongst the wreckage. Quickly I try to build a shelter out of the wreckage and nearby bamboo and plants.

While walking through the woods I stumble upon a river. The river is right on the edge of the forest. It's a small and narrow river. The water is cold yet unpurified and not good to drink.

I make a makeshift bucket to carry the water to my shelter in which I have started to add things like a fire pit. While the fire is burning, I take a look at the island. It's too big to see most of it, but it's on a beach that leads to a tropical forest.

Starting the fire is hard. I burn my hand trying to use bamboo. Luckily I am able to start it and purify the water.

That night is the worst night of my life, or so I think. I still have no memory.

The morning is calm and quiet, yet when I go to all of my supplies, they're gone! There is little to nothing left.

I jog out to the river, gather water, and try to go spearfishing. There aren't many fish, and when I find one and take a stab at it I miss. I head back to camp, which is what I call my newfound home.

After two more days of trying to catch fish and restless nights, I finally get a fish, and a big one, too. On the downside, my fingers are blueish purple and I'm sore all over. The fact that I had fish and a little bit of food and water was the only thing that kept me sane.

I had some leftover rope, so I tried to build a raft. The raft worked out better than I thought it would. I was able to float and use a makeshift paddle to get around in the water.

I wake up to a screeching noise. It was still dark out, and I can see the stars clearly. The noises stop, and I take a second to check around the camp. Once again my stuff is gone.

A rage overcomes me, and I yell and punch the sand as hard as I can. There are claw marks all over my stuff and triangular footprints that lead into the jungle.

Five days pass, and I'm covered in bug bites. I'm all worn out, and I'm weaker than ever. Yet, I have a hope to escape the island. One of the major reasons I'm weaker than ever is that I have built a S.O.S sign in massive rocks. It takes up more space than my camp does. Also, I have a steel trap that I made from the wreckage.

After waiting for two days I hear a clang, just like how metal against metal sounds. I run to the cage. I see a creature that I have never seen before. It has dark red eyes, black scales, and a dragon-like face. It is about as big as a giant raccoon. I have no idea what to do with it, so I hold on to it. The creature acts aggressively toward me and angrily. It growls, hisses, scratches, claws, and bites at the cage, trying to attack me.

After messing around with the creature I go back to my everyday, boring routine: get water, keep the fire going, get food, don't die due to poisonous creatures. Around the end of the day I take another good look at the creature. It has less hatred towards me than it did before.

About a day later I hear a *chop, chop, chop*, like a knife slicing through air and cutting it into small pieces. It's a helicopter there to pick me up and save me from my pain....

The man flying the helicopter asks me where I'm from and how I got here. My answer is plain and simple: I don't know. The only way the pilot can talk to me is to yell.

The aircraft lets down a ladder. I grab on. It is raised up, and we are flying as I climb. But I am weak...there is... a light...splash.... The coldness surrounds me, and then I black out.

I wake up in a bed surrounded by other people. Men and women in white cloaks walk around along with people in light blue scrubs. A man walks over to me and says, "So you're up." Then he says, "So do you remember the incident?"

"What incident?"

After a period of time I find out what happened, and that I have a brain injury from a plane crash five months before. I can only remember parts of what have happened due to a bad concussion. After that, I was never the same. I experienced *deja vu* and flashbacks of crazy experiences.

LIVE, LOVE AND STAY STRONG

*Tragedy befalls a family more than once in **LIVE, LOVE AND STAY STRONG** by **Erica Alexander**. Family members will need each other to lean on, but will that be enough?*

I love how happy Maya is when Mom wakes her up in the morning to take her bath. Maya is my little sister who is two years old and loves to take baths. I don't know why, but she does. Oh, and by the way, I'm Jenny.

Hmm. Usually after school, Kimi picks me up from class, we meet mom in in the car loop, and we go home. But today something's different. Mom's not here. Then they call us into the office. I hope nothing is wrong.

It's Ms. Tyler, my teacher. I think we're ok. I know I didn't do anything wrong.

"Kimi, Jenny, your mom asked me to drop you guys off at the hospital."

"Ok, here we are the Henry Ford Hospital. Your mom is in room 124A. And don't forget to put your phones on silent and be silent. There are lots and lots of sick people here, and they need to get their rest."

"Ok, Ms. Tyler."

My sister is panicking as we go higher and higher in the elevator. With every floor we pass I have to tell her to calm down and that it's going to be ok. But all I see is sweat rolling down her brow.

We finally make it to Mom's room. We meet dad outside of her room, and he tells us that Mom has been sick for a very long time now and that they think she has cancer. "From now on, girls, I will be taking care of you and trying to be the best dad I can be." Then I hear a loud scream from Kimi—so loud New York could hear it. She busts into tears, and I start to cry a little as well. I'm just happy that Maya isn't here do hear the news.

We stay there for four hours, and then visiting hours are over. We have to leave, and my sister cries her heart out.

For some reason Maya has been sick. She has been losing hair and throwing up for weeks and weeks. My dad finally decides to take her to the hospital. They said that she had esinon, a really bad case that has been going on for years. It only happens to two in ten people, and Maya is one of them. There is a cure for it, but it's illegal in Michigan.

"I can't believe that the cure is illegal in Michigan. What if it wasn't rare in Michigan and almost everyone had it—then what?" asked Jenny.

"It's ok, Jenny. We're just gonna take a little trip to New York to get the cure. All we have to do is check Maya out of the hospital, and we will be on our way," answered Dad.

"Here we are the New York Science Institute. Come on so we can get the cure," Dad says.

Three days go by.

"Ok, Mr. Hickerson. The surgery went well, and your daughter will live happily," the doctor says.

"Yes, yes, yes! Happily!" we all say. We are happily rejoicing over our baby sister getting to live the life she deserves.

Every day after when I see the smile on my sister's face, it gives me a single ray of sunshine to get me going throughout the day.

LIVING A LITTLE

Carson learns that to live life to the fullest she has to push her limits.

LIVING A LITTLE by **Neely Allen** takes you into the mind of a competitive swimmer.

I've been a swimmer for five years now, and you'd think that I was used to certain things, like the rush of cold water, or that fear before an event. Yet here I stand with my heart beating like a drum and my body shaking like a leaf in the wind. On any normal day I would step up to the block without a single worry, but today is different. It's different because today is the day college scouts come to find the perfect addition to their all-star team.

Even though I'm only sixteen this would make my life so much easier. I live in a small town, and scholarships are like exotic plants. Nobody gets one. I know that I'm lucky just to be on their radar, so today I've given every event everything I have. Sadly, I made the mistake of deciding to swim the two-hundred butterfly. The two-hundred fly is a killer, but I guess I live for the moments when you feel like dying. My coach, Gary, always says that the moments when you think you're dying are really the ones when you're living. Today I'll be testing that.

"Are you Carson Hunt?" a timer asks as I move up in line.

"Yes. Heat nine, girls two-hundred fly," I inform. It's heat eight, and I don't really like talking to people before a big race.

"Okay, good luck," she says before writing something down on her clipboard. I nod in response as I stretch and jump around.

"Girls two-hundred fly, heat nine of nine," the announcer calls out before blowing his whistle. I step up onto the block along with the other swimmers.

"Swimmers, take your mark." *Beep!* The buzzer goes off, and I dive into the pool. I take six quick, but powerful, butterfly kicks before breaking the surface of the water. After a few strokes I can tell that Gary's plan for this event isn't going to work. He wanted me to gradually build speed, but I can still see other swimmers next to me. If I want a chance to even be considered for this scholarship I am going to have to do more than swimming and winning. I have to race not against the swimmers, but against myself.

I start to pay more attention to what I do. I'm on the third fifty. There are only four fifties, and a fifty is a there-and-back. If I sprint the rest of this I'll beat everyone and my best time by at least half a minute.

I manage to find the confidence and strength to sprint a one-hundred butterfly. After every stroke I take I make sure that the next is faster. I continue to go faster and faster until I've fallen into a rhythm.

Once I have one fifty left I decide to take fewer breaths, so instead of breathing every other stroke I breathe every two, then four, then six. I keep going until I don't bother breathing altogether.

My eyes are glued to the black line at the bottom of the pool. I'm so focused on that line that I don't realize that the wall is right in front of me. I quickly manage to slow down before hitting the wall.

My hands grab the bottom part of the gutter before pulling my body up a little bit. Well, I thought it was a little bit, but it must have been more because I feel something slam into the side of my head. I drop back into the water and push off of the wall. *I'm determined to win this race*, I think to myself.

I keep swimming, and the closer I get to the wall the further the world around me slips away. The sounds of the loud crowd of people fade as my body grows weaker. It feels as if the water has turned into quicksand, and I'm no longer swimming, but struggling. Somehow in the middle of all that struggling my hands find the wall.

My vision is too blurry for me to see my time, but I'm guessing that thanks to my big lead I still won by ten seconds. I'm resting my head in my arms, licking the faint metallic taste of blood off my lips, when I hear the same timer from before tell me that I have to get out.

I sigh as my fingers wrap around the cool metal of the starting block. I slowly pull my body out of the water, but the second my foot hits the ground my legs give out from under me. I find myself falling into the pool and struggling once again to find the wall. This time my hands don't find the comfort of the wall, but only the emptiness of the water.

* * *

I found myself thinking about swimming for the third time today. All of a sudden I can't stop thinking about it. I can't get any

school work done, or get any sleep. Every time I close my eyes the pool shows up. Math problems look like swim sets, and my mind always ends up in the place I once called home. This has to be some sort of sign, right?

* * *

The sound of forks against plates fills the air as my parents and I eat dinner.

“So I was thinking about swimming again,” I say. My eyes are glued to my empty plate as I avoid eye contact.

“Carson...,” my mom starts, but I cut her off.

“Please, it’s been eight months and I’m perfectly fine,” I say.

“Carson, you almost drowned, not to mention your serious head injury. You’re lucky to be able to walk right now, and you want to swim again?” she questions.

“Yeah. My physical therapist said I’m fine. The doctors said that I’m fine. Why don’t you trust them?” I ask.

“Because there are just some things you can’t forget,” she says in a hushed voice.

“Like what?” I ask. I instantly regret saying that because her eyes start to water. My injury has always been a...sensitive subject for her. I remember when I woke up in the hospital with doctors in my face and tubes sticking out of my arms as they tried to save me. I was paralyzed, and the only thing I was worried about was my mother. I remember wanting to hold her hand and tell her everything was okay, but I also didn’t want to lie because at the moment nothing seemed okay.

“Like my daughter being dragged out of a pool unconscious,” she says with something behind her voice. I can’t tell what it is, but it’s enough to make me stop...for now. I decide to try my dad.

“Dad, help me out here,” I beg.

“Sorry, but what your mom says goes,” he says, not even looking up from his book.

“One week. Just let me try it for one week, and if you don’t like it I’ll stop,” I promise.

“Even if we said yes, what team would you be on?” she asks as if she wants to say yes, but is looking for a reason to say no.

“Coach Gary always said that if I needed a pool just ask, and I can join the school team,” I remind.

There's no response. I know that I have them thinking about it at least. "I'll let you think about it while I do the dishes like the good child I am," I narrate as I pick up the empty plates and make my way to the sink.

"Thank you," my mother says before kissing my forehead and walking to her room.

"Carson," says Dad, "you know that we want you to be happy, and if swimming makes you happy, then swim. Don't worry about your mom. I'll take care of that. You just enjoy yourself, but if anyone asks, I never told you to swim, only to be happy," he whispers.

I give him a hug. "Thanks, Dad."

"No problem," he says as I pull away. With that said I do the dishes with a smile.

* * *

"Okay, guys, today we are going to do fifteen one-hundred freestyles three seconds off your best time," Coach Gary starts as he walks over to the white board. He writes different names on the board. The last name on the board is my name.

"Carson, you have to swim the fifteen one-hundreds on the fifty-eight seconds," he informs. The smile I once had is now gone. Gary isn't the type to go easy on you no matter what the circumstance is. "We leave in thirty seconds," he says before disappearing into his office.

A one-hundred is only there and back twice. How hard could it be? I have my own lane, which means that I can go at my own pace. Sadly, my pace has to be faster than everybody else because my interval is faster. I still have forty-five minutes left of practice, and ten seconds until we have to swim. All I can do is hope for the best.

Three, two, one. I push off the wall and start to sprint. I make it about halfway through the one hundred before running out of energy, and everything goes downhill from there. Between getting yelled at for breathing, being slow, and choking on water, I didn't think I would make it. Somehow I do. I survive Gary's yelling. I end up needing help to get out of the pool, but over the weeks getting help turns into crawling, and crawling to climbing. Before I know it I am able to jump out of the pool with energy and ease.

Over time I had gotten better, and Gary decided that I should swim the one-hundred butterfly in a meet. So that's how I end up here, at the block. Everything feels so familiar: the buzz of energy; extremely tight, fast suits clinging to my body like a second layer of skin; and the scent of chlorine. This is the familiar feeling of home.

"Girl's one-hundred fly, heat four of six." I take a deep breath as I step onto the block.

"Take your mark." I get into starting position.

Beep! I dive into the pool, and the water immediately chills me to the bone. I ignore the cold, and continue to swim. I go along with Gary's plan to gradually build. I take long, strong strokes for the first twenty-five. Then I start to go faster on the second twenty-five. By the third twenty-five I'm sprinting, and I can feel the rush. I feel invincible, like I could race forever. So I race for the rest of the one hundred.

I race as if my entire life depends on it, and for the last twenty-five I know what Gary means. My lungs are burning, and my body is aching, but at the same time I feel amazing. The feeling of gliding through the water makes me realize how much I love swimming. My passion for this sport is impossibly stronger than the pain. When I touch the wall I feel tired, but a good tired. Feeling tired is my way of knowing that I gave that race everything.

I look up at my time and see that I gained a second or two from my previous time. I'm not first, but that doesn't matter. This swim meet is only a step in my long journey to the top.

LOST AND FOUND

*In **LOST AND FOUND** by **Anabelle Saunders**, two girls want to leave their orphanage because of the terrible conditions there. Will they find the family that they need so desperately?*

“Stay close to me, Lily,” said Emma.

In the middle of a dense forest, two 11-year-old girls tried to make their way to a clearing to sleep.

Emma and her twin sister Lily lived in an orphanage. They were just weeks old when their parents were killed in an accident. The orphanage was all they ever knew. Eating, sleeping, chores, and school all took place in the oversized farm that held eight other kids.

Emma and Lily were thinking of running away because it's horrible at the orphanage. They are always hungry, and the adults make up stories with hurtful words, and it's usually dark by the time all the chores are finished. Getting away from there was all the two girls could think about anymore.

One day they had their chance to escape into the forest. But it meant leaving without any food or the supplies they thought they would bring. They saw an opening and took it. They ran with only the clothes that they had on and a tiny locket that Lily always wore.

When they got deeper into the forest they saw an abandoned house. They opened the door and slowly went inside.

The wind was blowing through the cracks in the window. An old TV with a rock through the screen sat in the middle of the room. The few pieces of furniture were torn and dusty. They saw photos on the wall. Many were so covered in dirt that they looked blurred. It wasn't home (actually, no place was like home), but they knew they could at least sleep there for the night.

They woke the next morning with stomachs growling and searched the kitchen for any kind of food. Cans of corn and soup would have to do.

They were almost finished eating when they thought they heard a noise outside. They stopped eating and peered out toward the front porch. They could see a man making his way to the front door.

They hid in the pantry. They could see the man walk into the kitchen, but they couldn't see what he was doing. They could tell he wasn't happy.

He was mumbling something and then the two girls realized that they had left their plates of food on the table. How long would it take him to see that food, too?

"How did this get here?" he said.

They were so scared that at first they did nothing.

The man looked around. He walked to the pantry and opened the doors.

Emma and Lily screamed—they were freaked out, and they felt trapped. The man screamed, too. They could tell they startled him, and they were frozen in their tracks.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. "What are you doing in my house?"

The girls didn't say much at first, and then they both started talking. "We needed a place to stay," said Emma.

"We're sorry. We didn't know anyone lived here," said Lily.

"This is my house. I didn't say I lived here," said the man.

"I'm sorry. We'll leave," said Emma.

"You should at least finish your meal," he said.

The three sat at the table for a long time and didn't say much for a while. The man finally asked them their names and where they lived. The girls said they didn't have a home and wouldn't be missed. Emma began telling him stories from the orphanage and that the only thing they had to remember their parents was an old photo that was in Lily's locket.

They talked for a while and the man told the girls that he had been lonely for a long time. He told them that he never had any family of his own and lost track of his only sister over 20 years ago. They asked him his sister's name.

"Elizabeth," he said sadly.

"Our mom's name was Elizabeth," said Lily, and she opened her locket to show him the photo.

His eyes filled with tears as he looked at the photo and stood up. He walked over to one of the photos and pulled it off the wall. He blew the dust from the photo and wiped it off with his sleeve. He showed the girls the photo of him and his sister from years ago sitting on the porch.

The girls were shocked and amazed at the same time. They realized they were looking at a photo of their mother and their uncle.

He told them stories about their mom they never knew, and for the first time they felt at home.

THE MISSING MARSHMALLOW

*All that two boys want are marshmallows for their hot chocolate. In **THE MISSING MARSHMALLOW** by **Evan P. Taras**, the quest for this simple treat turns into something far more serious.*

Just as the last day of school was ending, the teacher gave the students a present. “Kids, I would like to thank you all for this wonderful year with a bag of hot chocolate,” said the calm teacher.

“Wow!” said the ecstatic Meek who was talking to Lyrion.

Ring, ring, ring goes the school bell as kids are rushing through the halls with an excited purpose. “Finally we’re out, and we have hot chocolate. But we’re missing one component,” says Meek.

Together they respond “MARSHMALLOWS!” so together they search for marshmallows.

Meek and Lyrion are pondering where to get marshmallows. The very first thing that pops in their head is Walmart. Now they are frolicking their way down there, thinking about the delicious taste of their favorite treat.

Once Meek and Lyrion arrive at Walmart they politely ask the manager, “May we have a delightful bag of marshmallows?”

The manager gasps and says, “Wait, you didn’t know... well, Mayor Tanashka banned marshmallows for health concerns.”

“Gosh darn it,” said Lyrion angrily while Meek is pouting. Soon enough both of them were doubting themselves.

Suddenly Meek came up with an amazing idea. “Why don’t we just leave out of town?”

“Hey, Meek, don’t you think our parents could be a little mad?” Lyrion said with exaggeration.

“Forget about our parents. We don’t need them in this situation,” said Meek.

After more arguing on who was right, they finally made an agreement. Lyrion agreed and Meek was totally ecstatic about finding his marshmallow. Eventually Lyrion and Meek got on the city bus to take them to their destination.

On the bus they had a very interesting conversation. “Lyrion, was it the right choice to just leave?”

“Well, sometimes if you want something you have to determine it yourself,” responded Lyrion.

“So you’re saying this is something we can learn from.”

“I guess this is a learning experience,” said Lyrion.

They soon recognized that their conversation had taken up all the time in the bus ride. They had arrived at Bloomington, Indiana.

“Sweet! They dropped us off right in the heart of Bloomington,” said Meek.

Soon both of them saw the Bloomington Marshmallow Palace, and Meek went running. “Wait, Meek, STOP NOW!” said Lyrion urgently. A Red Velvet truck was coming at full speed. Suddenly Meek was on the ground unconscious. Meek was just part of a hit and run. As he got hit Lyrion could see the expression on his face change from ecstatic to painful. It was like the car hit him at 200 miles per hour. It almost felt like Lyrion got hit, too.

Lyrion was in total shock. The car accident lasted for a century to him. “WHY!” Lyrion said in frustration. “This is because we wanted marshmallows. Just why!” Lyrion said, very confused.

Lyrion wanted to help Meek, but the paramedic wouldn’t allow him. After that, Lyrion went to Timofey’s Dine and Dash Diner. Lyrion was beating up the table thinking this was all his fault. Instead of the waitress kicking him out, she said, “What’s wrong, young lad?”

Lyrion responded, “I hurt my friend for a stupid marshmallow.”

“Well, here you go, lad,” said the old waitress lady. Right then and there Lyrion received a great gift: Four delicious marshmallows handed to him. Instead of using them for himself, he wanted to give them to Meek.

Lyrion ran down to Bloomington Hospital to give them to Meek. Once Lyrion ran up to the Emergency floor he saw Meek. The meter was no longer beeping.

Lyrion could have made a dramatic scene, but it wasn’t worth it. It was basically over for Lyrion and Meek.

NOT HER PERFECT YEAR

In **NOT HER PERFECT YEAR** by *Macy West*, Jacklyn may have finally found what she has been looking for. But will it last?

Jacklyn has dyslexia, and has had it all her life. She wasn't exactly the popular girl in fifth grade, at least not until Molly showed up. *Beep, beep, beep.* That was her alarm clock going off on a Monday, Jacklyn's least favorite day of the week. She rolled over and thought to herself, *I am not in the mood for school and this is not going to be a good day for me.*

As she walked up the unbearable steps of the bus, she prepared herself for the usual teasing everyone gave her. It came as usual, but by now she was like a professional ignorer. She just hauled herself to her seat and stared out the window as the bus sped away.

At school Jacklyn only liked Mr. Perry; he was her favorite teacher and the only person who actually liked her, instead of thinking of her as a disabled student. Mr. Perry taught Jacklyn how to overcome her dyslexia. He had been working with her for years, and that is why they were so close. Jacklyn was starting to read and write almost as well as the other students and was determined to reach her goal. The only friends she had were nice, but they didn't ask her to come over or go out of their way to stand up for her. The big reason they weren't close was because she never told them about her dyslexia and she was very secretive. No one in the whole school knew about her disability except the teachers.

She was on her way to the gym for an assembly that was not planned. The school had made an announcement before the first bell to go to the gym after the second bell rang. She had just assumed that this was one of those educational things, where people just keep talking when no one is listening. She always thought those kind of assemblies were useless.

When she finally got there, there was this very depressing vibe that the teachers were sending. There was a look of confusion on everyone's faces like they were in a foreign country.

Mr. Beanstalk came up to the podium and cleared his throat. "Excuse me, everyone. I have some news that some of you may find upsetting. Does everyone know Mr. Perry? Well last night he wasn't feeling well." He paused, looking around as a tear slowly tumbled

down his face. “Mr. Perry had a heart attack, and he was rushed to the hospital.”

Her heart was pounding faster than she ever thought it could. She knew nothing good happens when someone goes to the hospital. In those few seconds she was preparing for the worst.

“Unfortunately Mr. Perry didn’t make it. This morning we found out. We will certainly miss him.”

At that very moment she ran out of the room, uncontrollably sobbing. If she had cried any more than she did, she would’ve left a trail of puddles.

She went home early because of her depression, lack of attention, and tears that wouldn’t stop going, like a waterfall.

The next few weeks of school Jacklyn felt alone, like no one in the entire world cared about her. The only thing worse than feeling alone was being teased for something she couldn’t fix. Now she couldn’t fix her disability, not without Mr. Perry. Her grades kept dropping. Now everyone could see that she had dyslexia. Her grades were just another way for people to make fun of her. Since she had to work ten times harder to improve them, she figured, *Why even try?* Once her friends saw how careless she was about school and witnessed her emotional outburst, they started to hang out with her less.

She and her friends eventually drifted apart, and they casually made fun of her. They were like all the other kids. Jacklyn had no choice but to sit alone and be silent. Jacklyn hardly ever talked unless it was a teacher who was talking to her. It was like she had lost her voice.

The next month Jacklyn was like a deer being cornered by a pack of lions every day of her life.

She went to her first-hour class with Mrs. Ruben. A few minutes after the bell a new student walked through the door.

The teacher kindly introduced her. “It seems we have a new student, class. Her name is Molly, and you should treat her as you treat everyone else in class. The reason she has come here in the middle of the year is because her father is serving our country,” she said in an almost fake voice.

Molly is the kind of person where when you see her you think, *Stay away from her.* She wore all black and slammed her books down when she sat down. Normally the teacher would yell or do something, but maybe she was slightly frightened or just curious.

Jacklyn had a good feeling about this girl even though Molly wasn't giving off a good vibe. Maybe that was the reason that what happened next happened.

In her next hour Molly showed up again, but this time she sat at Jacklyn's table. This frightened her, but at the same time she felt relieved because maybe Molly could be the person who liked her for who she was.

They got to talking and could not stop. Molly likes a lot of the things Jacklyn likes, except for reading. Reading calms her down, and it takes Molly into a different world. She loves it. Jacklyn, on the other hand, won't touch a book unless she has to.

It might have been that they got along because they were alike and so different. Jacklyn wasn't the only one excited about a new friendship; Molly hadn't had any really close friends since second grade.

In fourth hour they have assigned seats, and of course the mean old teacher put Molly in the opposite corner of the room. When she did this Jacklyn's heart sank. It was like she was her worst enemy for that very moment.

Now as you know, no one was very fond of Jacklyn, but Molly hadn't figured it out just yet. Cindy and Bindy are the kind of people who think that if they make fun of you they will feel better. The worst part about them is that they are twins and are always together. Jacklyn liked to call them The Terrible Two.

The Terrible Two must've seen that Jacklyn was in a rather unpleasant mood, because they decided to pounce. They kept poking, and shoving, and they passed her notes I shouldn't say aloud. Jacklyn was about to lose it. She was full of anger, and she was extremely annoyed.

Somehow she didn't explode, probably because she didn't want to look bad in front of Molly. The only problem with that was Molly had already noticed. In fact, it was obvious. Molly tried to talk about it, but all Jacklyn decided to tell her was that they did this all the time and she shouldn't worry about it.

Molly was eyeing Cindy and Bindy, and she planned exactly what she was going to do. It took all she had to hold back until the end of class. Before this school Molly was known for standing up for people. The only problem with that was she used force.

After class Molly confronted Cindy and Bindy, but Jacklyn wasn't there to see. She threatened the two and kept a close eye on

them for a while. When Molly was confronting people after class she made sure Jacklyn wasn't there. She thought if Jacklyn didn't know she was confronting them it would make her feel better. Molly was very bright, and despite her last friendship fails, she seemed to be doing well this time.

For the longest time Jacklyn never knew why people were starting to be kind and treat her like a normal person for the first time. She was happy at first, but after a while it just seemed like people were acting unnatural. Things don't suddenly change without any explanation. At some point she had to find out, and she was suspecting something when Molly kept coming late to class.

One day Jacklyn decided to stay after class and hide after someone had been bullying her. To her surprise Molly, of all people, was shoving the bullies and giving them a taste of their own medicine. Jacklyn couldn't control herself. She was furious. She couldn't stand people who bully people. Immediately she stomped away from the class.

For the next week she was broken and wouldn't speak to anyone. She was just like she was before Molly came, but now instead of being depressed she was furious.

Molly was incomplete without Jacklyn. She tried everything to get Jacklyn to talk to her. By now she had figured out Jacklyn had seen what she was doing. But she understood why she might be mad; I mean, anyone would if their life was a big lie. Molly finally got Jacklyn to talk when she used her strength to corner her in the lunch room.

"Jacklyn, talk to me, now! Please, I'm nothing without you. I was only protecting you. You never stand up for yourself, and if you won't, I will. I'm your friend, and as a friend I couldn't live with myself if I just let you be bullied all the time," Molly said in an anxious voice.

"I'm sorry you feel that way, but I can fight for myself. It is just hard when no one likes you. Now everyone is nice to me, which is nice, but I thought it was because of my personality. It turns out you are the real bully. Violence is not the answer. I can't believe you would do that. Why don't you stop focusing on fixing them and start fixing yourself. Now stop and let me go!" Jacklyn said as tears rolled down her face.

They didn't talk for a week. Now other people were nice to Jacklyn, so she didn't have much of a problem although she felt bad

because Molly was the reason she had these new friends. No one made fun of her, or even brought up her dyslexia. Her grades were going up again, and she didn't need a special teacher to help her anymore.

Molly met up with her one last time, and it was not what Jacklyn expected. "Hey, I know we don't really talk anymore, but I just want to..." Molly began.

Jacklyn interrupted, "I'm really sorry, I didn't mean to yell. I know you care about me a lot."

But Molly said something that didn't exactly leave the conversation on a high note. "Me too, but we can't hang out anymore because, well, I'm moving and I don't think I'm coming back. My father is in the army, and he was the reason we moved here. He is the reason we always move. Sorry it had to be like this. I hope you enjoy your new friends." And then she just walked away and went to her last hour.

Jacklyn didn't know what to say. She needed more time to process everything. Molly was already gone, and so she never said anything.

Molly didn't show up the next day, and Jacklyn's heart sank. Ever since that day she pondered, *Did she really forgive me, or did I make a terrible mistake?* From then on she was always careful what she said and did, because she never wanted to make another mistake that big.

NUCLEAR TRAPPING

In **NUCLEAR TRAPPING** by *Victor Iyer*, a careless boy disobeys his parents in a way that just might cost him his life.

Kyle became very scared, and the only thing that he wanted to do was to escape. Kyle heard a loud countdown: “10, 9, 8, 7...”

Early in the morning of that day, Kyle and his mom were in the car on their way to the Mohave Desert Nuclear Testing Area (MDNTA), where his father worked over the summer. Kyle was very interested in the topic of nuclear energy and bombs because his father was a nuclear engineer.

A week ago Kyle asked his mom, “Could we go and visit Dad and the nuclear testing area where he works?”

It took Kyle’s mom a couple of days before she said, “Well, we have nothing else to do, so why not?”

Kyle was very happy to hear that, and he jumped in the air with joy. Kyle was looking forward to seeing his dad again after a couple of months. Kyle’s mom told him that his dad arranged for them to visit his workplace, and Kyle could hardly wait to get there.

It took them about three days of driving to get there. They met his dad at the entrance to the facility. Kyle was happy to see his dad, and he gave him a hug. Kyle’s dad told them, “I got passes for you, and I can take you around to see the testing area.” Kyle and his parents walked inside the testing area.

The nuclear testing area was a platform the size of a football field with house models and lots of mannequins scattered within the testing area. Kyle wanted to see everything, but they didn’t have a lot of time for their visit. After visiting for an hour, Kyle’s dad told them, “We need to go because they are going to test a bomb.” Kyle got upset because he wanted to spend more time looking around.

He exited the testing area with his mom, while his dad stayed behind to talk to an associate. Then he told his mom that he was going back to talk to his dad, but instead he decided to sneak away when his mom wasn’t looking. He hid in the bed of a truck with “Mannequins Setup” written on it. Kyle hid under some plastic sheets near a bunch of mannequins. The truck drove inside the

testing area. When the truck stopped, Kyle jumped out of the truck bed without being noticed, and went back to looking around.

He was walking around when he saw a helicopter hovering a couple of thousand feet above him. The helicopter had a large object strapped under it. Kyle guessed that the thing strapped under the helicopter was a nuclear bomb. Kyle became very scared, and the only thing that he wanted to do was to escape. Kyle heard a loud countdown: "10, 9, 8, 7..." He ran toward the exit of the testing area, frantically waving at the helicopter. Luckily, they saw him. The people in the helicopter told their leader to halt the countdown.

A few minutes later, Kyle saw trucks coming in his direction, and soon they stopped right next to him. His mom came running out of the first truck, and his dad came running out of the second truck. Kyle's mom said to his dad, "I thought he was with you."

His dad replied, "I thought he was with you."

They both hugged him very tightly. Kyle's mom was upset and told him, "I was so worried about you. Why did you go back inside the testing area?" Kyle's dad was worried, too.

Kyle realized that his adventure was a mistake. Kyle apologized to his parents for the trouble that he caused. After that Kyle and his mom had to leave. On the way home he could tell that his mom was still very mad.

When Kyle got home, he told his friends about his adventures at the nuclear testing area. Kyle decided that he would never want to go visit another nuclear testing area again. The consequences of Kyle's actions were that he wasn't allowed to watch TV for the rest of the summer.

OH, THAT CHRIS

*For Chris, things may not always go his way, but he rolls with the punches. He's the star in the story of an everyday life in **OH, THAT CHRIS** by **Christopher Cammon**.*

Chris had always been curious. You could say he had an inquiring mind. His fifth-grade teacher said he was the “most inquisitive” kid in the class. He did a lot of science experiments at home just to see what would happen. For example, he made a non-toxic, environmentally friendly glue using flour and water. He used a spoon to mix it in a jar, and a brush to glue newspaper pages together into shapes. The glue turned out pretty well. He had no idea what he was making, but at least it would be well-glued. The bad part was that while he was working, little scraps of paper got glued to the table. When his mom saw this she shook her head and said, “Oh, that Chris.”

Another time Chris did an experiment to compare the cleaning action of vinegar and water to a window cleaning spray bought from the store. First he mixed half water and half vinegar in a spray bottle. He used crumbled newspaper to clean one half of a mirror. Then he used the cleaning spray from the store with a cloth to clean the other half. The side cleaned with the vinegar spray was so spotless that he used it to clean all the glass surfaces in the house. When his mom saw it she smiled and said, “Ahh, just beautiful, absolutely beautiful, Oh, that Chris.” So that's how it was. Sometimes he had good results, and sometimes he didn't.

Chris had never, ever had something in school to excite him before, but the science project assignment had him fired up. Last year he had put off doing his project until the day before it was due. But this year he was all in because he had a really cool science teacher. He was looking forward to using his detective skills to do the research, and his imagination to make his display board. This year was going to be different—no stress and all fun.

First he had to come up with a good idea for his project. Next he had to make a to-do list. Then he had to make sure his idea was okay with his parents because he would need money for the materials and a place to put all of the stuff.

Although Chris liked chemistry, he decided to do his project on astronomy. He was curious about the location and the orbit of the new Planet Nine in the solar system. He finished the project on time and was proud of how it turned out. Everything looked good, and he didn't want anything to go wrong. So he got to school early.

When he turned the corner to go to the science room, he didn't see the pile of Hi-Liters and Ticonderoga pencils someone had dropped, but he felt them roll under his feet as he began to slip and stumble. He lost his balance and couldn't stop falling because the heavy weight of his backpack pushed him forward. He heard the crunch, rip, and tear of his display board as he went down.

He looked at the mess on the floor, smiled, and thought, "Oh, that Chris."

THE ROAD TO HEALTH

THE ROAD TO HEALTH by *Kathleen Sovran*, a girl's life is turned upside down in the blink of an eye. It will take much longer to come back from a sudden tragedy.

I wake up in an ambulance. Strangers in the ambulance are taking my blood pressure. They are even asking me questions. I try to jumble out words. But no words come out. I have no clue what is going on. I feel like half my body is gone. I'm like a puppet with no strings. I soon discover that I can't move the right side of my body.

The ambulance stops. The doors fly open. Even more strangers come outside and help me. I watch this all happen, but I can't seem to do anything about it. They rush me into the hospital.

Doors fly open left and right. People are getting pushed out of the way. This screams out chaos. I get into the hospital room.

There is blood-taking and more questions. None of the questions are answered. After all that chaos, the doctors put me in a surgery room. It looks like I need surgery. They put me under anesthesia.

I wake up after the surgery all loopy and sore. I still feel half my body. I try to move, but I can't. I just knew it was pointless.

I soon learn that I had a stroke. I also learn that I can't move my whole right side. I have to relearn how to move, talk, see, read, and hear. I was even right-handed.

After three months of surgeries, tests, hospitalization, and medicine, I finally get to go home. I still need medicine, physical therapy, a wheelchair, and a hearing aid. The doctor said I need a hearing aid because I will never be able to hear out of my right ear ever again. Also the doctor said I might not recover fully.

We pull into the driveway, and there is a huge sign across the garage saying "Welcome Home Penny!" It is colorful and pretty.

I wheel inside, and I go straight to the futon. That looks like my new room for a while.

The next day I go to the hospital for physical therapy. "We are starting off with talking. Then we will work our way up," says the therapist lady.

My mom says, "Penny can make noises but no words." The lady says words, and then we sound it out. "Penny, your first word is 'see.'" She sounds like "sseeee," but my "see" comes out like "sa."

“Sa, sa, sa, sa, sa, sa, se, se, se, se, see, see, see.”

“Keep going. You got this.”

“See, see, see, see, see, see.”

“Now our next word is ‘she.’”

“Sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, sha.”

“Try moving your mouth differently.”

“Sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, sha, she, she, she, she.”

“Keep trying.”

“Sha, sha, she, she, she, she, she.”

“That’s all for today. Penny, you did an amazing job.”

I come back the next day to physical therapy with my mom. There are even more words for me to learn. I learned more than 30 short, everyday words. The therapist says once I get comfortable with the words I have learned that many words will just flow out, and I will talk normally again. “When you come back tomorrow we will work on reading,” says the therapist lady.

“Welcome back, Penny. Are you ready to start reading?” says the therapist rhetorically. She picks up a book, and we start sounding out words. “My name is Olivia. I rode my bike. It was fun.” I haven’t totally lost my reading skills, but I need to practice for one day just to wake up my brain.

The books get harder and harder as we go. “Flowers bloom. Grass grows. Smells like a perfect summer to me.” It was all pretty easy.

“That’s enough reading for today. Looks like you get the concept. Next week we are going to work on moving around. You did a great job, Penny,” says the therapist.

One week passes. I get a little break from therapy. “Today we are going to work on tilting your head back and forth and moving motions with your arm. I am aware that you have some moving motions for your head and your arm. We are starting off with head motions,” says the therapist.

First she tilts my head one way, and my job is to tilt it back in that same direction. We switch sides after 30 minutes. This is really easy. Next I roll my head in circles. That is quite easy, and after a while it became very relaxing. I get the concept of moving my head. It is quite simple.

Now I am starting arm movement. She moves my arm up. She lets go. I drop it down. All my arm does is flop. After 40 to 50 times I just stop. I get very frustrated.

I finally decide to start again, but my therapist says it is about time to go. My mom packs up everything, and we go straight home.

The next day we arrive. We get straight to the arm motions. My mom and I worked on arm motions last night. I do not work as much on my arms today. Up, down, sideways is my arm workout. I do that workout about 100 to 120 times. Then we do a test if I really can move my arm. I pass.

Now we move on to the whole body workout: Arm up, down, sideways, turn my body both ways, and tilt my head in all different directions. I do that about 200 times as my workout. I can move everything now but my legs. I have an appointment for my legs tomorrow.

My mom and I arrive at the hospital. We sit in the waiting room. After about a half hour my name gets called. I get my height checked, my blood pressure checked, and my weight checked before I see the doctor. The nurse takes me into a room to wait for the doctor to come.

The doctor finally arrives. He takes me straight to the x-ray room. When the x-rays have been finished, the nurse takes me to an actual hospital room.

The doctor walks out of the room and says something to my mom, and I just see her there crying. After that I know something is up.

After my mom settles down she comes in and tells me that my right leg is paralyzed for the rest of my life. I start bawling my eyes out.

After a week in the hospital I finally come home. What the doctor said was true. You don't always heal fully. That's what had happened to me.

I wheel over to the futon. My mom helps me on. I fall asleep very quickly.

I wake up the next morning, and I think about how some people are in way worse situations than me. I should be grateful that it's just one leg that's paralyzed and not both. I have an appointment for a new wheelchair. So, I have something to look forward to.

THE SECRET OF JOSH'S NEW HOUSE

For Josh, the thing that goes “bump” in the night is far from what he expected In THE SECRET OF JOSH'S NEW HOUSE by Thomas Denuelle.

Once upon a time, during summer vacation, there was a doctor with his kid who sold their house in Boston and were moving out. His wife had passed away years before, and he wanted to leave Boston with his son to go to New York. His kid was called Johnny, and was not very nice with his father this day.

Johnny was a little tired and did not listen to his dad. The dad said, “Johnny, can you please go get me a pen?”

Johnny answered no because he was playing a video game on his phone. To punish him, the father locked him in the attic for about ten minutes and took his phone away. You could unlock the attic from the outside but not from the inside.

His dad fell down the stairs and had a lot of broken bones. He just had time to call 911 before he died (he had too many major injuries).

The firemen came to rescue him, and Johnny was knocking really hard on the doors. But the firemen's alarm was too loud to hear the loud knocking, so nobody found him. He was left alone and locked in the attic.

The family who bought the house moved in. They all loved the new house except for Josh, their kid. He had a bad feeling about this house.

Their first night went great for everyone except for Joshua, who was hearing knocks coming from the attic. He told his parents, but they did not believe him. Actually, his room was right beneath the attic, and this is why he was the only one hearing these sounds.

He could not sleep anymore. He was so scared he started sleeping with his mom with the lights on. Unfortunately for Josh, there was no noise that night.

The following day, he decided he could try to sleep alone with the lights turned off. He was still hearing knocks. He left his room silently and went to the attic.

He slowly went up and heard the knocks better. He was totally frightened but wanted to understand what was happening. He

thought maybe there was an owl sometimes in the attic who made that noise, but he was afraid to find a ghost or a zombie....

He unlocked the door and heard something in a big wooden box. He stopped breathing, and slowly opened the box. He could not believe it: It was not a zombie, not a ghost, and not even an owl.... It was a boy, just like him. Josh screamed as loud as if it was a ghost or a zombie.

“Who are you? What are you doing in my attic?” Josh said.

“My name is Johnny. My dad locked me in this attic a couple days ago. I don’t know if he forgot me or if something happened to him. I did not get out of the attic because you could only unlock it from the outside and the door was impossible for me to break. I had to eat bugs and rats to survive because I was hungry.”

“Do not worry. First, I am gonna let my parents know you are here,” Josh said.

“Ok, thank you,” Johnny said with a tired voice.

Finally, Josh went with his new friend to his parents’ bedroom. He woke his parents up and explained to them Johnny’s situation and that he had been knocking. They were very astonished. They had not checked the attic yet! “Right now, he is sick because he ate rats and bugs to survive.”

Josh’s parents were very surprised, and did not perfectly understand the situation. Josh’s family brought Johnny to Boston Hospital. Johnny was soon feeling better. He just had a treatment to take for his body.

Johnny learned from Josh’s dad about the death of his father. (Josh’s dad learned this news from the police who investigated Johnny’s situation.)

Josh and Johnny became such good friends that his parents decided to adopt Johnny because he had no other family able to take care of him. They became best brothers forever. Still, Johnny was so sad about his father's death that he did not eat for five days and even decided to go to sleep one night in the attic with rats.

Finally, Joshua’s dad called an exterminator to get rid of the rats. He also bought a great bed for Johnny. This way, Joshua and Johnny could sleep in the same room.

THE STRANGE NIGHT

*Is it just their imagination, or is something strange going on? A group of friends finds sleep hard to come by in **THE STRANGE NIGHT** by Logan Reynolds.*

My seven friends and I were scared, trying to sleep. We were all still awake even though we shouldn't have been. Either we were all going insane, or this house was cursed, because it was a strange night. Here are a few reasons why it was a very scary night.

We first saw stuff from outside. We saw bright, neon red dots glaring. We thought someone had a red flashlight that was aiming directly at us, so we were traumatized. When the light disappeared we turned our heads and saw a tall scarecrow-like figure in the other yard.

We all watched it, and it didn't move. We thought we were being stalked. By then we were all scared. When the dot was back with the scarecrow figure, we thought some weirdo had a flashlight ready to whip out. At this point we barricaded the door with boxes and chairs, and we were all sitting at the edge of my couch not saying a word to each other.

Secondly, we heard noises in the night. We were all whispering in the dark, which added a scary and dramatic effect to the room. We were trying to stay quiet, but the wind was blowing so hard we didn't know what to do. Everybody went on their phones to try to calm down by watching videos, but it didn't work.

Finally, everyone else in the house was asleep. My friend Colin was asleep, which made it hard not to freak out. The adults were also sleeping all the way upstairs, which was a little scary. We all tried to keep everyone awake to help make everyone less vulnerable to what was outside, but it was no use. We couldn't wake them up. We also didn't want to freak out, which was hard for some people, including me and my friends, because we didn't want to wake up the other people like we were being hunted. So we stayed silent.

After everybody was done being scared due to it getting bright out, we made a decision. We wanted to stay in the basement, but we decided to go upstairs. We went upstairs and sat on the

recliners with the hallway light on. We all relaxed when we saw a little bit of light. We fell asleep and realized we were all acting overdramatically.

We had heard scary noises, and we were alone and saw things outside that were confusing and terrifying. We were on edge at first, but we came up with a plan to calm down together. We all went upstairs and realized we had survived the night. We still laugh about that memory, but at the time it was happening we were all scared and freaked out.

THE SUBWAY

When Lucy decides to finish the bucket list that her father wasn't able to complete, she finds out that she's not the only one that has troubles in THE SUBWAY by Margie Mitchem.

The day my dad died was the saddest day of my life.

My mom died when I was three, so it was just my dad and me. We got along very well. I didn't have many friends, so my dad and I hung out every weekend. I could tell my dad everything, including all my girl problems. I knew my life would never be the same, but him passing away marked my new beginning.

A few days after my dad's funeral, I went to his house to go clean up his belongings. As I was going through his nightstand I found a little book with initials "B.C." on it. I thought it was the initials to some random famous writer, but once I started reading it I realized that the initials stood for "Bucket List."

The first page had one item written on it—"1. Visit the pink beaches in the Bahamas"—and was accompanied by a map and two plane tickets. On the next page, there was "2. Travel to Cenotes of Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico." This page had a picture of a beach and with it were two other plane tickets. On the third page was "3. The Swing at the End of the World, Banos, Ecuador." This one had a picture of a wood swing built at the end of a cliff, and with it were another two plane tickets. This wasn't exactly the smartest idea, but what if I just went away for a little? I decided I was going to leave for a while.

I woke up early the next morning to the sunlight peeking through my window. As I drove to the airport, I saw my cold breath fog up the window, knowing in a couple of hours my fingers wouldn't be shivering cold.

The plane ride was scary: looking out of the window and seeing how high we were was pretty scary.

As soon as I got off the plane I signed into a hotel.

I woke up to room service knocking on my door. I guess when you live in a tiny shoebox apartment you're not used to room service knocking at your door at 10:00.

I got dressed and took a cab to the beach. It was amazing! The sun was just rising, and the blue water looked like it was meant to

blend with the pink sand! There weren't too many people since it was early, and that made it even better!

I left early the next morning for Cenotes, Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico. The first thing I did when I arrived was sign into a hotel and sleep! I guess when you're on a plane for five hours you get cranky, because for some reason the room service tried to keep their distance from me like I was some type of bomb soon to go off any second.

When I got to the Cenotes, there were only about three people. It looked gorgeous. The way the moon hit the water and made it glimmer was amazing. I could see the moon's reflection perfectly.

I left at about 2:00 and got to Banos, Ecuador at 6:00. I rented a room and decided that I would leave in the morning. I had to take a subway to go the place, but I really didn't mind it.

I got in the train and left. Midway there, the train suddenly stopped. At first it was kind of scary, but it was just that the train stopped and nothing else. The man right next to me must have noticed I was worried. He talked to me to reassure me everything was going to be okay. "When I was about twelve I found out my father was not my biological father. I was adopted by my stepfather who was a great dad in every single way. I made the mistake of thinking I was not loved by my real dad and not wanted by him. So at age 14 I fought against who really loved me and ended up destroying my own life. I have been looking for my real dad all my life by way of every phone book and social security office, and by questioning my mom all the time, only to get answers that couldn't help because she herself didn't know or she didn't feel like telling me. I have finally found him and now I am going to see him." If I found out my dad wasn't my actual dad I would freak out!

The train hadn't started to work, so I decided to talk to a woman next to me and ask why she was there. She told me, "Today, my richest friend growing up filed for bankruptcy, and one of my poorest friends growing up purchased his second vacation home. So I'm going to go see him."

"That's really cool," I replied. Suddenly the train started working, everyone clapped, and some people even yelled!

When I got to the swing, it was about 6:00, the sun was setting, and it was quiet and peaceful. I swung and took a deep breath. I exhaled and thought to myself, *I feel complete.*

TERROR AT SEA

In TERROR AT SEA by Angelica Callaghan, events conspire to turn an afternoon's outing into a nightmarish ordeal.

The wind made the boat sway back and forth. The waves crashed into the boat with barely a sound. The clouds just covered the sun. And tiny sprinkles of raindrops pattered on the boat. "We should head in soon. Don't wanna catch the storm," Bob told Susie.

"Oh, you are such a worrier," exclaimed Susie. "It's barely sprinkling." Bob and Susie were a retired married couple. They spent most of their days on the water. They had been out on the water for an hour. They were in an old pontoon boat that they had owned for more than 20 years.

In the forecast it explained that there would be a storm this evening. The storm would be very big and produce lots of wind and rain. "Besides," said Susie, "it ain't even the evening yet."

"Okay," said Bob with a sigh. Bob was getting very worried and almost scared. The wind was definitely picking up. And the rain was getting stronger.

After 30 minutes the dark, grey clouds rolled in. Rumbles of thunder grew in the distance. "Maybe we should go now," said Susie, now worried. Bob nodded and went to start the boat back up. He turned the key. Nothing happened. He turned it again, but there was no sound. "What are you doing back there?" called Susie.

"The motor must be stuck or out of fuel," he said with a crack in his voice. Susie didn't respond. "Don't worry, I'll just call in a rescue boat," said Bob. Bob pressed the button on the radio. It made a fuzzy and buzzy sound. "There's no signal," said Bob.

"What do you mean?" said Susie.

"Either the storm has already hit somewhere near the rescue station and they lost signal or power, or we drifted too far away from land to pick up a signal." After that Susie didn't say anything.

The storm was growing. The boat now was smashing into waves. Little by little, water was gathering in their boat. Bob and Susie were huddled next to each other with only a tarp ceiling to protect them.

"What are we going to do?" yelled Susie.

“I don’t know,” Bob said. *Boom!* The boat slammed into something again and again. The boat was halfway in the water.

“We need the life jackets!” yelled Susie. Bob struggled to get up. The water splashed in his face, making him blind. The wind was so powerful it almost made him fall. Lightning struck all around him.

The life jackets were in a small cabin underneath the deck. Water covered the cabin floor to ceiling. Bob dove under, trying to find the life jackets by feeling around. It was pitch-black. He knocked into everything. The water, so cold, made him out of breath immediately.

Rushing up for air, he found that the latch had closed and locked. Susie was the only one who could open it. He pounded it with his fists. Suddenly his ears popped and his lungs shook and stung for air. It was the worst feeling he had ever felt. His eyes suddenly opened straight, not blinking and not moving. Bob was no longer making a sound.

Up on deck the water was sinking the boat. Susie was now worried about Bob. She started up to find him. The wind was too strong for her to walk. She crawled, moving an inch every 30 seconds. The water was up to her elbows, and she struggled to move. The current was strong, and she wasn’t even fully in the water.

She lifted up the latch with struggle. She gasped and felt silent tears fall down her cheek. Bob lay in the water, not moving a muscle. “No, no, no, no!” she yelled. “Please, no!”

She pulled him out, crying and sobbing. She rested her head on his chest. She performed CPR on him. Nothing happened. He still didn’t move. She finally stopped and lay in the water, crying, coughing, and choking.

The water had nearly covered the boat by morning. Overnight Susie managed to move Bob up to the top of the boat where she sat. Susie couldn’t bear to look at him, to see him breathless and pale, non-living. It must’ve taken her ten tries until she had the courage to actual touch him and move him.

Susie couldn’t sleep at any time during the night. The storm still went on, hard. Susie even thought it was her time.

Two hours from when Bob drowned, the storm started to calm down. The waves calmed, and the rain turned into sprinkles. The boat finally stopped swaying, and no more thunder or lightning

could be heard or seen. Throughout the whole night, she screamed and cried.

Later in the morning, she had bags under her eyes and was shaking very fast. Her hair was puffy, and her clothes were ripped and drenched. The water was calm, and there wasn't even a breeze in the air.

She couldn't bear to look at Bob. She hadn't even said goodbye. She didn't even tell him, "I love you." All she said was "We need life jackets." It will haunt her for the rest of her life.

She was hungry and thirsty and cold. She thought to herself, *This is my fault. If I hadn't wanted to stay longer none of this would've happened.*

There it was, the thing she had been waiting for. A rescue boat was just in the distance. If she had been there any longer the boat would have sunk. And she would have been exposed to sharks. She couldn't yell or scream. She just prayed they would see her. The boat's lights suddenly went on, and it headed toward her.

THE TRIP TO GRENADA CREEK

*A boy and his father have a history of turning conversations into arguments. What a way to start a camping trip in **THE TRIP TO GRENADA CREEK**, by **Fluffy Tubkins**.*

Beep. Beep. Beep. My alarm clock blares, it's three in the morning, and I'm having second thoughts about going on the camping trip. I would rather sleep in instead. Just before I can get to sleep, Dad hauls me out of bed. Realizing I wasn't getting back to sleep as long as he was around, I got ready and met him outside in the car.

Twenty-seven minutes into the trip...

As we sped down the highway, I found it was much easier to count how many animals we passed instead of having an awkward, drawn-out conversation or full-on argument with Dad. This is because whenever I talk with my dad I always seem to say things in exactly the wrong way to get the most offensive point across. I finally had decided it was much easier to stay quiet than put my right to light the fire at risk.

One hour and forty-six minutes later...

"But that wouldn't work, Dad!" I screamed in retort.

"Don't use that tone!" Dad screeched back.

"Make me," I sneered.

Suddenly the car screamed to a stop. "Do you want me to?" Dad warned.

"No," I grumbled. "Your idea about where to set up camp wouldn't work!" We had just been arguing about how I wanted to set up in a clearing in between the Lake and The Old Oak, while Dad wanted to set up right next to the lake because he didn't want to hike farther to get to the clearing when the lake was on the way there.

Four hours, an argument, and thirty-eight minutes later...

We arrived at the clearing in the camping grounds of Grenada Creek. I was wearing a smirk on my face since I had won the battle of where to set up camp. We had pretty much everything set up

except the tent, which was a strange contraption that always seemed to take a minimum of an hour to erect. Rather than partake in that grueling activity, we decided to take a short hike down to the lake.

A reasonably long hike and a scraped knee later...

The scenery was beautiful when we got to the lake. The sun was directly overhead, which made the water glisten like millions of precious gems. Contrary to the hike to the lake, the hike back was terrible. The sun was beating down like crazy, and my scrape was starting to really wear on me.

“When did it get so hot?” I asked my dad.

“It was like this the whole time. You just haven’t noticed because you were so focused on getting there. You didn’t even realize you scraped your knee until I pointed it out,” Dad replied.

“Wait. When did I scrape my knee again?” I asked.

“About halfway here. Remember? Right past that big tree,” Dad informed me.

“Oh yeah. That root came out of nowhere,” I said through the last of what I had in my water bottle.

“Hey! You didn’t save any for me?” Dad asked.

“Sorry. I thought you were all done,” I apologized.

That evening...

We finally got the tent up and had just finished with the blow-up mattress. All we had left to do was have dinner.

“Cheeseburgers or hot dogs!” Dad yelled to me.

“Cheeseburgers, please!” I hollered back.

Three minutes later...

I grumpily ate a hot dog instead of a cheeseburger, all because Dad didn’t want to dig through the cooler. “You know I would have gotten them, right?” I whined to Dad.

“Well, sorry. I thought it was better to have hot dogs than get all the food dirty.”

“Not all of it would have gotten dirty,” I grumbled under my breath.

Thirty minutes later...

After the hot dog and cheeseburger fiasco, we had finally settled down inside the tent. Dad was reading *The Dragon Riders of Pern* by Anne and Todd McCaffrey while I was enjoying my autographed copy of Nick Matthew's *Sweating Blood*.

After about chapter three, I rolled over and thought about the annoying, exhausting but incredible day I had just experienced. I was surprised to realize that I was looking forward to tomorrow, before the inky blackness of sleep claimed me.

I awoke to the sound of my dad letting out a snore that I swear kept any campers within a mile radius from having even a wink of sleep. I finally gathered up the courage to step over him to get outside, and to my horror I woke him with a swift, hard kick to the face just as I was unzipping the door. He woke up much faster than I thought possible and sent me tumbling out of the tent into a picnic table.

"What was that for?" Dad groaned from inside the tent.

"I could ask you the same thing," I said, untangling myself from the picnic table.

"Well, you started it, Dad," Dad teased.

"Yeah, but you kept it going," I replied.

"Well, while you're out there, you can start loading up the car, because we're going to take a hike up to the Old Oak and then we have to get home for your swim meet," Dad instructed.

"Awww. Do I have to go?" I whined, hefting the cooler.

"Yes. This is your final shot to make Junior Olympics," Dad said.

"Well, I guess I don't have a choice," I sighed.

Another scraped knee and a visit to a tree later...

We finally got on the road. It had taken forever since I spilled the water to put out the fire, which meant I had to do another ten-minute walk to get some more. Finally, we got on the road, and I endured the awkward and risky conversations with Dad until we reached home.

Four hours and fifty-eight minutes later because of rush hour...

I finally got to feel the warm comfort of my bed as the inky blackness of sleep claimed me once again.

WAR

In **WAR** by **Joey Hess**, JP's life is turned upside down when kids are forced to become soldiers in World War III.

Beginning (noun): *The start of something or someone*

This stinks. I was losing, 2-15. I was up to bat, in the bottom of the sixth with two outs. I was just waiting to get this over with so I could go home and play some *Call of Duty*.

First pitch: Strike! Second: Strike! Third pitch: "Ouch!" Of course, I was hit by a fifty-mile-per-hour fastball right in the noggin.

I walked down to first base looking at the pitcher: not just looking at him, but sneering at him. He struck the next kid out in three pitches. I rushed to the bench to get my stuff and get out of that dreaded place. I mean, who would want to do this? Wasting two hours in your life just to hope for the anticipation of losing? I especially don't. I'd rather be playing some *COD (Call of Duty)* and beating the final boss, again.

As my thoughts roll on I hear someone calling my name. "JP, JP! Oh honey, I was worried sick there. Are you okay?"

No, I thought. "Yeah, I'm fine, Mom." Sometimes lies are good things.

B-52 Bomber Plane (noun): long-range, subsonic, jet-powered strategic bomber

Governments are great, just great. I guess the United States decided to say something about Iraq and create a lot of distress. Now we're in a war with Iraq. Well, that's what Tom says, my best friend, my only friend. And since that happened, a dozen other countries decided to butt in. Alliances were formed and alliances were broken. "My brother said that it's gonna turn into a nuclear war, just like *COD*, right?" Tom is a master at video games. He relates everything to them.

"Yeah, I don't know." Let's just say I'm rather... stupid.

I have math class now. We're getting our tests back. You know how I said I was stupid? I guess I'm not. I got a B+, eighty-eight percent.

When I got home my mom was crying. I and millions of others 13-year-olds are getting sent over to enemy territory to get killed.

Despair (verb): to no longer have any hope or belief that a situation will improve or change

Sadness, no hope, madness, despair: Think of all of those mashed into one and that's me, but mostly my mom. It's crazy how things go so fast in this dreadful world. Two weeks ago today I was playing a baseball game with my friends. Now I'm going into a war with a real gun, and with only two days of training. I mean, I shot a 22-gauge at my camp back when I was twelve. Other than that, nothing.

The day of departure was the saddest day of mine and my mom's life. When I walked on the truck right next to Tom, my whole life flashed before my eyes, from when I was zero until now.

My mom did all she could to stop this, but she was overruled by the government. I really wished I'd done more before this death sentence.

When I got to the military base they gave me my new suit and the first badge that will stand proudly on it.

Impossible (adjective): Unable to be done or to happen; not possible

I wish superheroes were alive right about now. They could just swoop down and save the day. But that's not how things go. People get killed, people get captured, and people lose family. That's almost as bad as this stupid camp. It's like getting tortured in the waiting line for hell! It's nearly impossible. The first day is all tactical planning and how to shoot a gun. The second day is training on how to attack on foot. Then, it's battle. You would think the government wouldn't do that.

After those two days we were put on patrol. We would wait for days without any sleep. That's how it goes, though. There are four of us. The leader was seventeen. The rest of us were fourteen or thirteen. The talking was at minimum; I know I didn't say a word. Someone might say, "Can I have the water" or "Pass the food." It was all just nothing, until a gunshot went off—just one, but one followed by dozens. The four of us were getting fired at!

Sprint (verb): To run as fast as humanly possible

We were cornered, with nowhere to go. So, we surrendered. We were captured and put in a large building with many other captured

souls. They took our weapons. We were put into separate cages. They were small, but not so small that we couldn't breathe. I think I could live in here for a while if I had to.

Three months went by without a rescue plan. I'm fed up with this: three months? Come on! At least attempt to save us. I've always had an escape plan in mind but never thought of pursuing it. I think now's the time. Thinking of my mom really clogged up my head. I am more worried for her than she for me.

My roommate Jamo and I decided that we were going to escape. Jamo is 37. Jamo was an experienced war veteran. He's been active in the military for 15 years. His dad and grandfather both died in the military. I hope it's not his turn.

Strategy (noun): A plan of action or policy designed to achieve a major or overall aim

The plan was simple. We would befriend the guards and earn their trust. While earning their trust we would do work for them. We would serve the food once a day. We would also get small access to communication with other enemy bases and outside access twice a day.

After that month of earning their trust we decided to truly start the escape. It was only Jamo and me. While readying the radio for the guards Jamo made the transmission very weak to nothing. Since the guards could not get any back-up now, we would strike.

At 6:00 p.m. I put my food for the day in the corner of the yard. You might wonder why I did that. It's because it would drive the K-9s nuts. While the dogs were confused and distracted, the guards ran over to help. Jamo and I ran under the usually-guarded deck.

When the K-9s settled down the guards were ordered to lock the dogs away. We hid under the deck until 8:00 p.m. With most of the guards off our backs we could pursue getting out of the jail. At 9:00 p.m. the prisoners would be checked off. We only had an hour.

There were two guards inside the yard and eight on the west outpost where we were heading. Jamo was planning to engage the guards with his homemade knife. Jamo crawled in and ambushed one from behind, but as he did so he was spotted. The second guard took aim at him. I quickly ran over and knocked that guard out with a rock. The guards could not contact anyone because of the communication block.

"You good?" He probably wasn't.

“Yeah, just banged my elbow.” We picked up their guns and grabbed their ID’s. We got out easily, but there were more guards than we expected blocking the way to our rides out of here. Instead of eight guards there were twenty!

Brave (adjective): Ready to face and endure danger or pain; showing courage

“I can shoot the engine of the copter. If I hit on my first shot it will explode and catch fire. We can then run and take cover in that ditch over there. Then we would make our way down to one of the cars and get away. Sound good?”

Jamo is crazy. “You better hit it or were done for.”

“Get ready on my mark, three...two...one....” *POW!* The helicopter immediately burst into flames. I was already in the ditch ducking.

Half the men went to stop the fire and seven came to search for us. Three of the guards died in the explosion.

It was 8:40. We only had twenty minutes till they would know we were gone. We headed for the car. When we were nearly there we got spotted!

Jamo stood up and started shooting. I was too scared to even look up. The next thing I know I’m in the car speeding away from five other cars pursuing us. Jamo is driving.

We sped into the roads of the city. Jamo told me to fire at the enemy car’s wheels. Without even thinking I started shooting at their wheels. It took me a whole magazine of ammo, but I hit the front left wheel, which made it crash into another enemy car. I know, I’m awesome.

As we were ahead of them almost getting away Jamo suddenly collapsed. He had gotten shot right in the top left chest. The car started to go crazy. I didn’t know how to drive!

End (noun): The final moments of something or someone

Without thinking I sat on Jamo’s limp body and started driving. We were coming up on the edge of a pier. When I hit the water I completely blacked out, not from collision, but from the freezing cold water.

Awakened by gunfire, I immediately dove underwater. As I ducked under the water I saw that Jamo was sinking to the bottom. I dove down under and grabbed him.

I threw him on top of an enemy boat docked on the shore and

started paddling forward. As we were far out and luckily unseen I lay down. While I was lying down on the boat next to Jamo's body I started thinking. I was thinking about how Tom was holding up, thinking of how Mom was holding up, and thinking about how Jamo was holding up. As my thoughts went on, I dozed off, and before I knew it, I was asleep.

Waking up on a military landing was the biggest surprise of all. Well, there also was the surprise of seeing Jamo open his eyes and breathe! He was barely alive, but I still walked over to him. He looked at my face and hands. He handed me a medal. It was not just any medal, but the Medal of Honor. I guess Jamo won it a while back. Cool, right?

When I landed home my mom hugged me and kissed me for thirty minutes straight. It ended up that Tom returned home safely but with a mechanical leg. How cool is that! I guess he stepped on a mine and they rushed him to medical right away. That's usually not how war works. People usually die. But look at Tom and Jamo. They survived a mine and a bullet five centimeters away from the heart.

I realized that if you have a lot of luck, good friends, a loaded gun, and a huge will to live, even a 13-year-old baseball player can survive war (barely).

PLAYER EXCLUSIVE

BBUTTER

In **BBUTTER** by *Cameron S. Cranford*, Brandon is smooth like butter. But things can change without warning for anyone.

There was a basketball player named Brandon Smith, but people called him “BButter.” They called him that because all his friends said “Butter” every time he shot the basketball. It fits in the rim smoothly like butter.

People thought he was amazing, but he always was humble. He never gave up, and he got good grades. If he ever had bad grades, he got those grades up as fast as he could. He loved his family; he always said, “Family first.” He had five sisters. He was the only boy because his dad passed away three years before when he was shot in the chest three times. Brandon always wanted to make his family proud. He was in the 12th grade, and he got a scholarship to Michigan State University.

He was in the state championship for his high school team named the Falcons. He averaged about 35 points, 10 assists, and 9 rebounds, so he was really good. But that day he averaged only 10 points, 2 assists, and 5 rebounds. He really was not feeling it this game. Still, everybody depended on him.

There were 25 seconds on the clock, and the score was 65 to 65. Mostly every player had been passing the ball to him all game. They gave him the ball again, and he missed a three-point shot. The other team got the ball, shot it, and made a three-pointer. There were 10 seconds left, and the score was 68 to 65. A teammate passed to Brandon. He was very tired, and the clock was counting down: “5, 4, 3, 2....” He shot and missed, and they lost and he lost the game.

Brandon went home and thought about the game all night. He realized he hadn’t played well because he felt sick. He asked to go to the doctor

The doctor said he had the flu, and mind you, it was in the winter. He stopped playing basketball for two months, but he got worse and worse every day. He went back to the doctor. The doctor said his heart was too big for his body, and he would have to get surgery on this heart.

He had the surgery, and he recovered. That’s how strong he was. He never gave up on his dream, and his dream was to be in the NBA.

BLACK ICE

*Jack Norman is in the fight of his life when a snowboarding trip goes wrong in a big way in **BLACK ICE** by **Josh Ziegele**.*

Outside it was freezing cold at Keystone National Park during the winter. I, Jack Norman, was finding kindling for my fire using my new Gerber pocketknife I had gotten for Christmas. My watch said it was -4 degrees outside and seven o'clock at night so I had to use my new glow-in-the-dark flashlight to see.

After five minutes, I had enough firewood, so I headed inside. I was greeted by my two friends Alex Peterson and Sam Jones. At nine o'clock, Alex's dad said, "I think we're going to get some snow tonight, so we all better head to bed so we have enough energy to go skiing tomorrow."

I woke up at seven o'clock in the morning and turned on the news. The newscaster said, "Keystone National Park received anywhere from 11 inches to 13 inches of snow. The high will be 23 degrees with a high wind advisory." Mr. Peterson, Alex, and Sam weren't up yet, so I left a note saying I was going snowboarding and that I would be back at 8:30. Looking out the window, I saw new powder ready for me to snowboard on. I got on all my gear, grabbed my snowboard and went up to the mountain.

For first run I started off on the chairlift and hit a black diamond called Gorge. I did that run to get to the gondola. A gondola is a chairlift that is enclosed. It only took me about three minutes to go down. There was a little kid that was staring at me like I was the best snowboarder in the world. He must have liked the smooth way I was cutting through the snow.

Since nobody was skiing or snowboarding, the line for a gondola was about one minute, and it took 30 minutes to get to the top. By the time I got to the top, it was eight o'clock. I knew I had to be fast so I didn't scare Mr. Peterson.

The spot I was going down had no tracks yet and was full of fluffy white powder. Halfway down the hill I saw ice—black ice. Black ice is super bad for snowboarders. It is the slipperiest ice and the hardest to get an edge on. I tried to slow down, but all the powder was hiding a huge mogul in the snow. I slammed into it,

sending me six feet in the air and landing me right on the black ice. I slid down about 15 feet and got back up, discovering that my right leg was in torture.

I took it easy going down the hill to get back to our place. When I got inside I yelled, "Hello, hello?"

Mr. Peterson called back, "Hey Jack. Alex and Sam went out already."

I responded with my usual, "Ok, thanks Mr. P." Then I looked at the clock. It said 10:38. I texted Alex and Sam saying that I was late because I fell down on the mountain and was now back inside.

At 3:52 pm, Alex and Sam got back. I told them what happened and that I needed to rest my leg. We all stayed inside watching movies and snacking.

After my leg was feeling a little bit better we went night skiing. We went down the same run where I had fallen earlier that day. Going down the hill again was easy because I knew where I could go, but it was hard directing Alex and Sam. Alex and Sam were ahead of me, and I yelled to them both, "Yo, stay over to the right."

A little bit down I heard a weird cracking sound. Sam stopped and said, "Did you guys hear that?"

Alex responded, "It's nothing. Let's keep going."

When we were about to reach the black ice, we went right to avoid it. All of a sudden, I heard a sound like an airplane was right on top of us, so I looked back. The snow had broken above and looked like a white wave coming toward us. I knew this was bad. There was an avalanche coming right toward us!

I screamed, "Avalanche!" and looked back to see both Alex and Sam staring up hill with huge eyes. Alex and Sam stopped with fear like they were frozen in an ice cube. I tried to hide behind a tree, but I was too late and got covered up by the snow. I was in the greatest shock of my life. That's all I remember until I woke up from my deep slumber in the snow.

I woke up from my unconscious sleep, and my head was sticking out of the snow. I felt worse pain than before, and I thought my leg was broken because it hurt to climb on it to get out. Through a lot of pain, I finally got out of the snow. I didn't see Sam's skis or Alex's snowboard lying on the ground or them either. I looked at my watch. It was 11:30 p.m. I started to crawl over to a tree and then passed out.

I woke up and didn't see any signs of other people or anything that I recognized. My watch said it was 18 degrees and 11:03 a.m. The only people that knew where I was were Alex and Sam, but no one probably knew where they were either. One of the only things I knew was that if I started to walk I would have the hardest time of my life surviving.

It got colder. I crawled to search for dry sticks on the snow, but could only find like seven or eight because of the avalanche. I tried as hard as I could to start a fire with my matches from two nights ago. The fire didn't catch because I didn't have small enough sticks. I used the Gerber pocketknife to carve up some bark. After an hour I finally got the fire to catch.

The date was 11-28-2027, one day after we were supposed to leave and go back to Ohio. At around 3:00 p.m. I started to get very hungry. The hunger wasn't as bad as the temperatures outside, which was making me freeze.

All of a sudden I heard a buzzing sound. I looked up and I saw a helicopter. I thought that maybe someone skiing saw my smoke or Alex or Sam reported it. Maybe they were actually ok. I was thinking more about my second idea, that my best friends were ok. I then crawled out of the woods into the open so that the helicopter could see me.

The helicopter turned away and flew out of sight. By this time it was 3:23 p.m., and I was about to die of hunger. I slid back to the tree to get comfortable. I built a little seat indented into the snow next to my fire. It looked like the fire was about to run out of fuel, so I went to go find more. Just then I heard a loud scraping sound and thought it might be ski patrol.

I was too weak to yell. I tried to crawl as fast as I could to go over to the spot where the black ice was. I saw a person skiing down the same spot where I fell when I hit the hidden mogul. Since I couldn't yell I pulled out my flashlight and shone it into the skier's face. The skier fell down, and he couldn't see because I blinded him with my handy-dandy glow-in-the-dark flashlight.

I crawled toward the man. The man said, "Hello, are you Jack Norman? My name is Mike Winston."

I replied, "Yes, I am." Mike pulled out his phone and called ski patrol. I knew this nightmare was about to end.

About five minutes later, a helicopter came by to pick me up. The helicopter didn't have enough room for Mike. On the way back

I had the best view of the mountain ever. They dropped me off at the hospital.

In the hospital, Sam came to visit me in the room. I was relieved that he was safe. He came in and introduced some people whose names were Ben and Joe. They had found Alex and told me all about what happened to him. Ben and Joe said that he was at the bottom of the hill and probably slid down with the white wave. (Alex woke up in a hospital bed the next morning. He had been unconscious the whole time until then.) Sam said that he found his skis and wasn't injured, so he was able to get ski patrol and say where our location was.

Luckily, we all survived the dark nightmare of the black ice.

CHAMPIONSHIP

In CHAMPIONSHIP by Rocco Schwartz, a college basketball player may not be able to carry his team one final time, unless there is a miracle....

Today was a very big game for college basketball. It was MSU vs. Ohio State in the championship game. All the 1000-plus people in the stands, including most of James's friends, were so hyped! It was as loud as 100 people on a giant roller coaster. I feel like the players were distracted by the loudness. That is how loud it was. I doubt anyone could hear themselves.

Anyway, most people were expecting MSU to win because they had the best player in college basketball, at least that year. People called him Steph Curry Jr. He had dribble moves like Kyrie Irving, he had the range like Steph Curry, and he had the dunks like LeBron James. His name was James Crawford.

People had signs for him, and people were wearing his jerseys. Tip-off was about to happen, so everyone made sure to go to their seats.

As the referee tossed the ball in the air, the two centers jumped up as high as they possibly could. The center for MSU slapped the ball with his right hand to the back of him toward his teammates. It went right to James Crawford. He got the ball and dribbled it up the court. On the first play of the game he splashed in a three-pointer. It did not even touch the net. The arena got louder and louder with every basket.

Time flew. The fourth quarter started, and James Crawford had 46 points, 7 rebounds, and 9 assists. MSU was winning 85-81. It was a close game the whole game. Basket after basket, James Crawford got more points and stats.

But when there were three minutes and five seconds left in the game, it was 92-90 MSU. James Crawford was running to the three-point line to catch a ball and shoot it, but he got tripped by an Ohio State player. He fell down harder than you can imagine.

He heard a bad crack in his right knee. "OOOOUUUCCCHHHH!" James screamed in pain. A timeout was called. All the players and staff came over to make sure he was okay.

It turned out he was not. He was taken back to the locker room. There were people in there who tried to do different things with

James's knee to make it heal. They mostly tried stretches, but James was still in pain.

As the game went on, everyone found out that James Crawford had a torn ACL. All the MSU fans were devastated. The game went on, and with one minute left, the score was 103-98, Ohio State with the lead. MSU was for sure going to lose. Then all the MSU fans started to cheer. They were cheering louder than they did all game. It was because James Crawford came back to the court with his limping leg.

He was limping and complaining, but he wanted to win so badly. He didn't care what the issues were. He ran back on the court in more pain than he had ever been in. It felt like a giant knife stabbing him right in the knee while others were hitting it while he was running. He yelled out, "Let's WIN!"

With 20 seconds left, the score was 106-101, Ohio State leading. James Crawford had the ball and ran up the court with a bad leg. He didn't care that he had a torn ACL. He wanted to win. He ran up the court and shot a three and made it. It was now 106-104 Ohio State.

With 12 seconds left, Ohio State had the ball. The point guard of Ohio State (Deangelo Russel) had the ball and tried to run to the hoop, but the ball slipped out of his hands and out of bounds. It was now MSU's ball.

With 6 seconds left, MSU was passing the ball in. They passed it to James Crawford, and he ran with the ball to the three-point line doing a behind-the-back move to make his defender fall to the ground. "5... 4... 3..."—he shot it—"2...1...!" As the buzzer went off, the ball went right through the hoop! MSU were officially champions!

FIST UP FEET OUT

*Michael had good intentions when he jumped in to help a teammate. However, it seems like everyone else in sight has a different idea of what to do in **FIST UP FEET OUT** by Tyler Giles.*

His heart was pounding faster than Jesse Owens running. It looked like somebody dumped water on him, but it was just sweat. Michael laced up his shoes, ready for his first basketball game. He imagined making a game-winning play or having to break up a fight. He was super excited to play his first NBA game. Michael was also nervous that he wouldn't get any playing time.

Michael's team walked in. The crowd was going crazy. The players all went to the sideline and sat down. The other team came, and they got the same reaction. Then they sat down in their seats.

Michael looked around. The stadium was huge and packed with people, and the huge Jumbotron was showing the crowd. After singing the national anthem the starters went out. Michael was number 25 and patiently waited on the bench.

It was the second quarter of the game with four minutes left when Coach put Michael in the game. With three seconds left in the quarter, Michael's team was winning 38 to 29. Number 86, who is Billy, went to block James Roy on the other team from shooting, but he accidentally tripped and knocked the guy over. This guy was furious and kept shoving him. Michael saw this and ran over there to break it up before it got ugly.

When Michael got over there, James had Billy by his collar. Michael put his arms out between the both of them like a double stiff-arm. James wanted to get to Billy so badly he punched Michael.

Michael's first reaction along with Billy was to tackle the other guy. Now here is where it got ugly. People from both teams and referees took off to the scene. Teammates got there first, which only made it worse, because while trying to stop the fight they would get hit or pushed, which started another fight. The referees came rushing in, trying to stop it.

Everybody was fighting. Just as soon as you think everything was bad, it got worse. Fans got into a fight over who was going to

win. Fans started throwing food and drinks at them. Not only did fans throw food, but so did the guy selling hot dogs. Eventually he set down his case and joined the fight. One basketball player got hit hard, and he attacked the crowd. The referees thought they could stop this one, but the fans charged the court. Parents were protecting the kids to stop them from being trampled.

There was a big, uncontrollable glob of coaches, referees, players, fans, and workers. The fight was big, but there were also a lot of people hiding from the fight: moms protecting their kids; people trying to escape but getting caught in the fight; and finally people falling down the stairs or over chairs as they ran to keep from being trampled.

Now that all the people are in the game, some people are smashing cameras because they don't want to be on camera. Then they take the smashed pieces and throw them at people. Two guys were fighting over which team was better. Eventually it became "find the people on the opposite team that you don't like and hit them." People on the same team accidentally hit each other, so then they started fighting. Now it's "hit whoever you can find."

Referees didn't know what to do until one referee had a brilliant idea. While all the jabs, hooks, kicks, and pushes were being thrown, he grabbed a piece of paper, lit it on fire, and then threw it at the sprinkler. Water shot down rapidly, and everybody was slipping. Some of the water was red from bloody noses and teeth.

The medics eventually healed everybody, and they were all good to go. They had to end the game due to the wetness. This was a fight that ended the game.

The next week all over news was the fight that ended the game, and it was all because of one punch. That was truly the fight of a lifetime. As Michael sat in his house, he thought about how he tried to break up a fight but couldn't. He realized that in his first game, he was in a fight that ended the game.

Eight years later, Michael was in a great position. He had just got selected to play in the Olympics. He also was an amazing player.

Michael had an interview. In that interview, Bill Dwyer asked, "Now that you have such a successful life, we all remember the fight. Do you remember what your thoughts were during that fight?"

Michael responded, "It's kind of funny, because as I was lacing up my shoes I thought about making a game-winning play or separating a fight, but I ended up starting a fight. During the fight, I just wanted to stop and stare at what I had done, but if I stopped I would still get hurt, and if I tried to break it up I would get more hurt, so, yeah."

Bill replied, "Well, thank you for your time, and I hope to see you soon."

THE MISSING PIECE

In **THE MISSING PIECE** by **JP Steele**, a member of the Detroit Red Wings goes from being a good player to an even better person.

I had everything in life that I thought was supposed to make people happy. I had a successful career as an NHL hockey player, a big house, an amazing car, lots of friends, and a loving family. Even though I had all this, I had never really been happy. I had always felt that something important was missing from my life. I just did not know what that something was, and I had stopped searching for it.

Just as the tenth season of my career was beginning, a player on our team was seriously injured and hospitalized. My teammates and I went to the hospital to visit him. When we got to the floor our teammate was on, we walked through a room with several small children. I immediately saw a boy lying in a hospital bed away from all of the other children. This boy seemed to be in very bad condition. He was very pale and did not seem to be moving much. I then learned that he had cancer.

When the boy looked at me, I had this strange but amazing connection with him. I felt so compassionate for him, and wanted to do something for him. Yet, I left to go see my teammate.

That night I just could not get the boy out of my head. After practice the next day, I decided to go see the boy in the hospital. Even though I did not know the boy, I walked over to where he was lying. He had no idea who I was, so I introduced myself to him. "Hi, my name is Scott. I play hockey for the Detroit Red Wings. I heard that you have cancer."

"Yeah, they told me I had cancer a couple weeks ago. It is hard," he said.

"Well, you must be a very tough boy," I said. "Sorry, I never got your name."

"My name is Jeremy," he said. "Boy, you must be very tough to play hockey."

I responded by saying, "Yeah, but nowhere near as tough as it is to fight cancer."

Jeremy and I started talking about all kinds of things: his life before being diagnosed with cancer; how scared he was; how his

family felt sad; and about my life and career as a hockey player. The time flew by as we talked. I had been with Jeremy for over an hour when I realized I had to go to a team event. Before I left, I said, “Hey, would you want to skate with my team tomorrow?”

Jeremy exclaimed, “Yes! But I have never skated before.”

“That is okay,” I said. “I will teach you.”

The next day, I asked the doctors and Jeremy's parents if I could take Jeremy skating. “Sure,” they said, “as long as you're careful.” That day, I picked Jeremy and his parents up at the hospital and took Jeremy skating.

Jeremy did not know how to skate, and was probably physically incapable of skating, anyway. So, I put Jeremy on the ice while he was standing and lightly pulled him across the ice surface. After about an hour, he said to me, “This was the best time I've ever had in my whole life.” I felt somewhat better about myself, like I was doing something, well, wonderful.

We skated for a little while longer. I was having so much fun with Jeremy that I decided to invite Jeremy and his dad to one of my games.

After I dropped Jeremy back at the hospital, I called my coach and arranged for Jeremy and his family to have VIP seats at the game. I also arranged for Jeremy to come to the locker room after the game to meet my teammates. I then called Jeremy's parents to arrange the whole evening.

During the game, I looked up at Jeremy and his family a couple times. They seemed to be having a very good time, and Jeremy seemed excited and full of life. I felt good to see him and his family happy, and their happiness seemed more important than the game.

After the game, Jeremy and his family came into the locker room to see my teammates and me. Jeremy didn't seem to know what to say, but my teammates did a great job of asking him questions, giving him signed pucks, and making him feel comfortable. Pretty soon, Jeremy was talking to my teammates like old friends. He was asking questions about hockey, and my teammates were telling all kinds of interesting stories. We then gave Jeremy a great surprise. We gave him a team jersey signed by all the players, and a stick that I used in the game. Jeremy seemed to have a terrific time that night.

Later on that night, I couldn't stop thinking about Jeremy and how happy he seemed to be that night. It seemed a little empty, though, because I knew he was still sick.

I became really alarmed the next day when Jeremy's parents told me that Jeremy had only a limited time to live. I asked if there was anything that could save him. Jeremy's dad responded, "Well, there is an experimental operation that we could try, but it costs a lot of money and we can't afford it."

I thought for a long time that night what I should do to help. It came down to what was pretty obvious. I decided to donate money for the operation so Jeremy could live. So, I did.

After the operation, the doctors said that Jeremy had a good chance to live. I felt so good by this action, and realized that treating sick and disabled kids was the missing piece in my life.

I was so happy with myself by doing this, I decided that helping sick and disabled children was going to be my life commitment, as well as playing hockey. I donated lots of money to hospitals to make the children better. I also went to hospitals to visit the sick and disabled children.

I realized that it is important to help people that are in need, and I continued to help and comfort sick and disabled children by talking to them and taking them places to have the time of their lives, which made me happy. I also felt that by helping others instead of just living for myself, I had a beautiful, colorful life instead of a selfish one that is blank with no happiness.

WHEN LAX IS LIFE

WHEN LAX IS LIFE by *Sam Silcox* tells the journey of a lacrosse player in his quest to help his team win a national tournament.

“GOALLL!” the announcer screamed into the microphone as the crowd went wild. The Birmingham Bisons had just won the semi-finals to get into the championship round of this huge worldwide tournament.

As the players were shaking the other team’s hands, one guy from the other team, number 23, came up and threw our two best players on the ground. He kicked them, saying that they cheated as they yelped out with pain.

The other team’s coach did not notice, as he just simply looked out on the field. However, our coach came running as the two best players on our lacrosse team were being crushed. That made us angry, and some of us tried to go after 23, but the assistant coach held them back. He would not let us near him.

We were happy to hear the next day at practice that 23 had been suspended from playing lacrosse and was kicked off the team until next year, but were crushed to hear our two best players would not be playing anytime soon. We played in the championship game and lost badly to the Spartans because we did not have our best players

Next Season

Man, I wonder how we made it to this tournament, the whole team was thinking one day at practice when Coach told us we had been invited to play at this worldwide tournament in Maryland. It was the same tournament as last year, but this year it was a big deal because we were not as good. Last year we had lost our two best players due to injuries, and this year they were too old to play for our team.

We were on our way to Maryland for the first game, and I was ready. I had been working hard during practice and gotten much better at lacrosse. We landed in Maryland, and soon we were on our way to the hotel.

The next morning it was game time. I had slept well and was ready to win. We won the first game 13-7 against 2D Carolina. I played a little bit and scored two goals.

After the game the coach congratulated me on scoring my first goal. That made me happy. Soon after players came up and were saying stuff like “Nice goal” and “That was awesome.” It made me feel good when they did this.

Success came in the second game against the Maryland Chiefs. The final score was 21-17. We had another win! The game went by quickly. I scored five goals and played a decent game. The goalie also had a goal. At the end of the game, I saw my parents coming up to congratulate our team and me because I scored five goals. They were so excited that I finally got to play more.

It was now the championship game. We had just beaten the Bulldogs in the semi-finals 20-19. We were worried because our two best players on the team had gotten badly injured and could not play. Coach said to me when the game came around, “JP, this is your time. You will be playing the entire game because of these injuries.” I was nervous and excited. I had never played a full game before!

The game started, and my team won the face-off and got the ball at midfield. We took it down to x, which is the area behind the net, and passed it around for a few seconds. I was screaming, “Ball, ball, ball!” and then I got the ball. Since I was open, I drove and took a shot.

“Goal!” the announcer said as I scored the first goal of the game.

Many times we took it back and scored, and so did they. The game was tied up at 13-13 at the end of the game, so we had to play sudden-death overtime. It was intense and nerve-racking because I had never been in sudden-death, where the first team that scores wins the game.

The other team had the ball first and took a bad shot. Our goalie made the easy save and threw it down the field to me. I wound up and took a hard shot, but it hit the post and bounded into a player’s stick on the other team. I trucked him so hard he went flying to the ground, knocking the ball out of bounds. Unfortunately, the Wolves kept the ball because my play was called for a penalty.

Being man-up, they got in a few shots, but one of their players was called for a crease violation, giving us the ball back. Our team

drove it down the field and got a good shot, but their goalie made the save.

My penalty was over. The other team's coach put in their best players. We had the ball and passed it around, looking for a good shot. I received a pass and took a shot that missed, but I was able to win the chase for it out of bounds. It was our ball.

Next, we tried a lob pass to a player in front of the net, but the other team intercepted it and moved down the field toward our goal on a fast break. Our defense couldn't stop them, and the player shot and scored.

All the fans and players from the other team stormed the field to celebrate their championship. The final score was Bison's 13 and Wolves 14.

We were all disappointed as we left the field and went back to Michigan. After a few days, we started practicing again. One day, Coach told us we were invited to play in another tournament.

"I am so pumped up for this tournament," said Joey, one of my best friends on the team.

I replied, "Well, let's focus on the regular season first." So that's what we did. We practiced hard every day until our first game. We made the game go quick for the other team. The final score was 34-2. It was a good start to our winning season.

The second game came, and we crushed the other team by 30 with a score of 40-10. I played the entire game and scored 20 of our goals with 10 assists.

The next game was a bit tougher because we were playing the second-best team in the league. They scored right away after winning the opening face-off. We got the ball next, took it down, and scored. We scored again, making it 2 to 1. The score stayed close throughout the game, and we won in the end. The final score was 13-12.

We won the rest of our regular-season games. At the end of the season, before our tournament, I got a letter that said "MVP"! Everyone was so happy for me. They all said, "Wow, that's awesome!" And I was named MVP for our league.

The tournament soon came around, and we were ready. Our team had been waiting three months for this tournament. We made it to the semi-finals and won that game. Next up was the championship game. We were ready, and we proved it, beating the

other team by five goals. It was very intense. It was close the whole game, but at the end we pulled it off.

All of us ran out onto the field and jumped on the goalie. I could see the other team's players looked sad and kind of annoyed when we had to shake hands. We got a huge trophy to put in our trophy case back at home and also received free t-shirts with the tournament logo on it.

The very next season, I was recruited by Notre Dame to play on their lacrosse team. I went to Notre Dame on a scholarship and played midfield on their lacrosse team.

WHAT ARE THOSE?

THE AMULET

*Life and death aren't always what they seem for one girl and the women in her family in **THE AMULET** by Sophie Konkal.*

One day in the town of Colberry Hills, a baby girl was born. Her name was Livia. Now, Livia wasn't an ordinary baby. Livia was a baby who could tell the future, but nobody knew except her mother and grandma.

When Livia was born, she was given an amulet just like every woman in her family was given. These amulets were very special. Someone had to walk to the underground cave in the city of Ellora and mine the gems from a special Serendibite rock. Since Livia's grandma was the queen, she could afford to pay someone to mine the gem and bring it to them.

When Livia turned 17, her powers had gotten as strong as they could. A week before her special college started, her mother got a call from Belmont Hospital. Her mother knew this would happen but never this soon. The doctors said that Livia's grandma had died from what could be a rare disease called Morpheus. Since Livia's mother also had powers to see the future, she had already planned a funeral for her on the first day Livia started school.

Livia had an early exam that morning, so she had to take the exam and go straight to the funeral. Livia's mother had already set up all the flowers and the casket. Since Livia's mom already knew about her mom's death, she decided to have people come and set up all the chairs before everyone came.

When Livia arrived at the funeral home, she immediately started to help set up the chairs. As time passed, more people began to show up, mostly family and friends.

Livia's mother went up to the altar to speak. She asked Livia to come up with her and speak. As Livia walked up to her mother on the altar, she realized that her grandma wasn't wearing her amulet, which was the source of her life. Since Livia's grandma was the queen, she had hired someone to make sure that she wore her amulet every day. But one day, her helper never showed up and Livia's grandma slowly started to get ill.

“Honey, how could you let this happen?” Livia’s dad said, as if his wife could hear him. “Livia, go look for your grandma’s amulet. Now!”

Livia raced to her grandma’s house to look for the amulet. Livia had heard about her grandma’s secret safe behind her wall, so she banged against the wall until it broke. She rummaged through old jewelry, coins, and pictures. She grabbed the amulet, and ran back to the funeral home. Livia quickly ran to the casket to put the amulet around her grandma’s neck. As soon as the amulet was on her neck, she came back to life.

Everyone praised Livia for saving her grandma. Her grandma crowned her as the new queen. Now everybody knew about their powers, and were grateful for them.

As the new queen, Livia made sure that everyone in the town who had powers was recognized. These people were very special. But maybe there was a reason for this special bunch of handpicked people.

ANIMAL CRIMES

*Two FBI teams compete to solve a difficult case in a world where animals rule in **ANIMAL CRIMES** by Kayla Gailliard.*

Today is the day my team starts the investigation of the “World’s Most Unsolvible Crime” that is supposed to be solved within 24 hours, and, yes, this is a real crime. This year’s crime is about a wolf. His name is Jimmy Planington, and he dognapped this poodle whose name is Audrey Reed. He took her out of the city. Since the crime was based here in the city of Shortsville, and there are two FBI stations in the city, we are going against the other FBI station to see who can solve the crime first, but it’s not fun-and-games. Every time this occasion comes around, my boss, Angela, who may I add is an oversized bunny rabbit, tends to overexaggerate maybe just a little too much.

But, since I introduced you to `my boss, why don’t I just introduce you to my squad? There’s Tommy, my best bud, who is a bulldog; my future girlfriend, Candace, who is a golden retriever; the jokester of the squad, Johnny, who is a fat chipmunk; and then there’s the one who’s always being serious about every little thing: yeah, that guy is Frank. He is one of those guys who never shows any expression whatsoever. Anyway, last but not least there’s me. My name is Albert, and I’m a fox, and yeah, that’s my team.

“Okay, everyone, I need you guys to listen up...” Angela says, trying to get everyone’s attention. “We need to plan out how we’re going to solve this crime properly without making any mistakes, but still taking down the other station. Any ideas?”

“We can try tracking the dog-cell of Audrey Reed and see what area she could be in,” Candace says. That’s actually not a bad idea.

“You know, Candace, that might just work. Can I get someone on that pronto!” Angela demands kindly of one of the officers. While the officers are tracking the dog-cell, Angela announces who’s going to the investigation and who’s staying. “Candace and Tommy, I want you guys in the tracking control room. Frank and Johnny, I want you guys on the line,” Angela says. “Albert, you’re coming with me.”

“Got ya!” we all say at the same time.

Now here I am, two hours later, with Angela in the car on our way to the crime scene, at a grocery store parking lot. We are trying to find evidence that shows where he could've possibly taken Audrey.

As we arrive at the crime scene, Angela gets a call from one of the officers back at the station. "Hello, Ben, tell me something good," she says. As she is on the phone, she is doing all these hand movements. "Yes, I understand. Oh, really, that's great," she then says, sounding sarcastic.

Then she hangs up, and tells us the updates. "It turns out that Jimmy took Audrey's car, and hid all the evidence that was in his car that could've possibly helped us," she says disappointedly.

I look to the ground, trying to think of something that can help us. I then put my head up, looking around the parking lot. Out of nowhere, something catches my attention. Being my curious self, I walk up to what turns out to be a rolled-up map, and carefully unroll it.

When I look at the map, I see these circles on it. One is in Shortsville and has an arrow going toward the other circle, which is around the city of Frankfurt, only a few miles away. This then gives me the idea of where Jimmy would have possibly taken Audrey.

I run up to Angela, showing her the map. "Look, I found this map that could possibly show where Audrey is. Maybe we could drive down to Frankfurt and see if she is possibly there. It's only like an hour away. What do you say, can we?" I ask, beggingly.

"I guess we could drive down there. It gives us a chance of finding her," Angela replies, sounding very sure about this.

We finally arrive in Frankfurt. Now we just have to go to a direct place. We obviously can't just roam around the city. I did see on the map there was a smaller circle around a certain area of the city, so we're going to look in that vicinity. Once we get into the general area that we are supposed to be in, we can start tracking Audrey's dog-phone since we will be in the closer area to where she supposedly is.

"Where on the map is the smaller circle located, like what exact area is it in?" Angela asks.

"Well, it looks like it is more in the eastern side of Frankfurt, so if we go to that area we could start tracking Audrey's dog-phone," I reply.

“Okay then.”

Once we get to the eastern side of Frankfurt, Angela tells me we can start tracking Audrey’s dog-phone. It takes about five minutes to track the phone, so in the meantime we stop at Petaway to get some food, considering we haven’t eaten in, like, forever. I decide to order the Fox-a-burger, and Angela orders the bunny-o-soup.

As we get done ordering our food, I see that the tracking has finished, and it says that she is located in a building on 9705 Terrell Street. We then kind of throw our food in the back and rush to the building.

Angela turn the sirens on and literally speeds down the road. She seems pretty determined to solve this crime, but I would understand why. She then gets the police on the line and tells them to get down here to the scene now.

As we pull up to the building, Angela and I both hop out of the car with our harmful squirt guns packed and loaded. I then notice the other cops pulling up. I walk up to the door and bang on it.

“FBI, open up, now!” I demand.

After saying that, I hear no motion inside the building. I then kick the door open with my foot paw. Now Angela and the police are following me into the building. I walk upstairs, and come to find Audrey tied up with rope in the corner of the room, but Jimmy nowhere to be found.

“Guys, over here. I found her!” I yell to the other officers.

“Good job, Albert. Now we just have to untie her, and get her to the station,” Angela cheers.

“What about Jimmy? We can’t just have him on the loose,” I say while untying Audrey.

“The police downstairs are on the lookout,” she replies.

I just nod.

I feel awesome to be the one who finds Audrey. I take the tape off of her little mouth.

“Th-thank you for saving me!” she says in a small, high-pitched voice.

“It’s my job, so it’s my pleasure.”

As we walk downstairs, I see that the cops have found Jimmy. It turns out he was out back of the building on the run so he would not be caught, but thanks to our wonderful FBI team, the police

now have him in handcuffs. Now we don't have to worry, because we are the ones who solved this crime.

Once we arrive back at the station, Angela tells us that at the time we got to the building where Audrey was being held, the other FBI team was still trying to track either Jimmy or Audrey's cell, so they wouldn't have had a chance. We all feel successful.

THE BATTLE

*A trained fighter for the Space Unicorns is eager to do his part in the war against the Evil Space Monkeys. He is not content to wait for his order in **THE BATTLE** by **Eric Paluda**.*

My name is Brandon. This story starts when I am twelve years old and my brother, Peter, is eight years old.

We live with our parents on our planet Space Unicorn Landia. Our planet is being attacked by the Evil Space Monkeys. The war started out with just a little disagreement. Then some shots were exchanged, and the next thing you know, every kid was being trained for the army.

I'm not worried that we will lose this war because the Space Unicorns have the most advanced weapons, like nuclear fuzz balls, bubble gum guns, and marshmallow lasers. Plus we can fly. The Evil Space Monkeys have the same weapons, but they can't fly. The unicorns also can't die from a laser. That gives us an advantage.

When I graduated army training I didn't go out the very next day and start fighting. I had to get called. I didn't think I would have to go into war. I was ready to go to war, though, because I thought I could win this for us and we could all go home.

A few years passed, and my younger brother was in training. Eventually he graduated, and still, there was no call.

After his graduation my family and I had lunch at a fancy restaurant. My mom was talking all about how both of her boys were men and could go protect our world and fight for us. By then I had enough of my mom's talk, and all I could think about was how I was never going to be called to go and fight.

"May I be excused from the table?" I asked. Since I left lunch early I had to do the dishes. Well, I was washing the disgusting hamburger off my brother's plate when the phone rang.

Rrrrrr rrrrrr rrrrrr. I answered it. On the phone was the Office of War Administration. Then I started listening really close. As soon as I heard the name Peter, I stopped and gave the phone to my mom. "Mom, it's for you."

Peter was called up. I was mad I wasn't called up, but real soldiers don't cry. So I was there for my family when they were sad,

and I was at Peter's goodbye party to make sure he knew that I wished him luck at war.

A long time passed since his goodbye party, and the war was still going on. But every now and then we would get these letters from Peter. They were basically the same: "I love you all. Hope you all are safe. From your loving son, Peter."

One Saturday I was playing with my new box X I had gotten from my grandma. Then the mail came. The mail guy put it through the slot on our door and left. When I was looking through it, I saw a letter from the Office of War Administration.

"Oh great," I thought, "another letter from Peter." I opened it and started reading it. It wasn't a letter from my brother. It was from the War General. It said that my brother had been promoted. I was so angry because the war had gone nowhere over the last ten years and I knew I could end it.

A year later we got another letter from the Office of War Administration. This time it said Peter had been captured by the Evil Space Monkeys. After that letter my dad was angry and was yelling about how he shouldn't have ever joined the army.

Probably about a day after that we were getting flowers like crazy. We also got cards from some family members. But when that was all over my home was usually quiet. My mom didn't like to talk much, and my dad spent most of his time in his workshop. Days were starting to feel like years, so I don't know how long it took, but eventually we had to leave our home for safety reasons. The Evil Space Monkeys were starting to take over a lot. Along with other families we had to leave and go to a safe house in a war safe-zone building.

Day and night, warriors were coming out with lasers and all sorts of weapons. One night I snuck out and grabbed a few lasers and a secret shoe laser. I flew to the closest monkey base I could find. I flew as fast as I could. I flew to where the Space Monkey king's house would be, but I didn't stop because I saw a bunch of Evil Space Monkeys. I got through because I lasered everything in my way.

I landed behind the house. I put the laser on silent mode and snuck up and zapped a few guys. There was a truck full of space unicorns that had been taken prisoner by the Evil Space Monkeys. I zapped the driver and drove to a safe place. I freed them. They all

thanked me. We did that to a couple more bases, but I still didn't find Peter.

We attacked one of their bases, and we threw a couple fuzz balls in and blew the place up. I sent half the guys to get more, and the other half to attack more bases. In the morning we had a lot more guys, and we attacked a lot of bases.

There was one more important base I knew about, and that was the king of Space Monkeys' base. If we killed the king, then the rest of the Space Monkeys would surrender.

All of us flew in and shot the cannons so they couldn't fire. We dropped a couple of fuzz balls and blew this whole base up, too. I knew it couldn't have been that easy.

There were a group of monkeys escaping. We were right on them. They know the land better than we do, but we are faster. They flew, zig-zagging, and every now and then one monkey would stop and fire. The king of Evil Space Monkeys flew right into a forest. We lost them right away. We were on guard looking everywhere and being careful of where we flew.

"Hey, Russell, go right!" I said. Russell had fought with Peter. He wanted to find Peter as much as I did.

Right then I heard a laser fire. *Zaaaaap!* It was Russell. The warriors and I all flew back the way we came and hid behind a tall building. The monkeys scattered away, and we lost them. I sent some of the warriors home to get care. The rest of us hunted the monkeys.

One unicorn spotted them, and they saw us. They led us into a dark cave on top of a mountain. The monkeys disappeared, and lights came on. I saw a cage and some unicorns. Peter was in the cage!

A bright light came out of a bottle. I was distracted and the next thing I knew we were surrounded by the monkeys.

"Surrender, or we'll kill your brother!" shouted the monkeys.

"Fine," I said.

I dropped all my weapons except my secret shoe laser. They took my weapons, and the monkeys zapped Peter with a laser. Peter fell over and hit his head really hard.

I shot my shoe laser at the king but I missed. He fell backwards and rolled out the cave. He fell down the mountain and died.

Peter had a virus—a really severe virus. We rushed him back home.

We flew back to the base, and my parents grounded me for leaving them. But the governor did the opposite: he gave me a big cash reward.

Everyone was ok including Peter. He got some pills and was healthy again. My parents didn't keep me grounded for that long, probably because I saved them, Peter, and everyone else.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOUR WISH FOR

A girl's birthday wish could change her family forever in **BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR** *by* **Ellie Kroll**.

People have always told me that magic was a powerful thing, but I never believed them. I do now.

My household is crazy! I live with my mother, Michelle, my father, Jonathan, and worst of all my two brothers. My younger brother, Josh, is nine, and my older brother, Jacob, is fourteen. So, that means that I'm the middle child, and I'm the only girl. My brothers are the worst! They are pigs, they don't clean up, and they yell at me all of the time. They are just typical mean, rude, nasty brothers.

My family and friends always questioned why I wanted a sister. They warned me that we would fight, and she would annoy me. But, on the other hand, my mom has three sisters and they are her best friends. I always wanted a connection like that to one of my siblings. My brothers always hang out, and I'm just there watching. But I wanted to change that.

Today is April 18, which is my birthday! My immediate family, along with my friends, all of my cousins, my uncles, and my aunts were at my grandparents celebrating. We had a phenomenal dinner. My grandma made chicken noodle soup, with soft slippery noodles. The vegetables had the perfect amount of mouthwatering flavor. The broth was something you could never forget. It was hot and went down my throat so smoothly.

After everyone finished the marvelous dinner, my mom came out with a huge ice cream cake. The bottom layer was Oreo cookie crust. The second layer was vanilla ice cream. The third layer was a thin layer of rainbow sprinkles. The layers repeated once more. The frosting was pink, and there was a chewy fondant that was made to look like the social media apps Instagram and Snapchat. There were twelve blue candles, and one extra candle for good luck.

I didn't really believe in good or bad luck, but I kind of went along with the whole "magic" thing. As my mom lit one candle at a time, I decided to think of a wish just to make a point and show that magic is fake. "Ready to make your wish, Ellie?" my mom said. As I thought of my wish, I was thinking about family, and, friends and

one more fictional character. As I blew out my candles, I wished for a sister.

I fell asleep sick to my stomach.

I woke up, and the house was surprisingly quiet. I walked around the house, and my parents were there. I also saw Barbie Dolls, dresses, makeup, and nail polish. I was very confused, but then I remembered my wish, a sister!

My mom called my sister over to come eat pancakes for breakfast. My sister was on the other side of the table. This was awkward for me. This four-year-old girl was related to me. It was like she was always here. She asked me if I like chocolate chips in my pancakes. I said, "Yes," very hesitantly. Then I asked what her name was. She thought I was playing, so I pretended to play along with her.

My mom said, "Come here, Emerson, your pancakes are ready." Then my mom said, "Emmy, will you go get Ellie for her pancakes?" She said yes in a high, squeaky voice. I couldn't believe it, my own sister.

But wait. "Where's Jacob and Josh?" I ask my mom and dad.

They both said, "What are you talking about?" I was freaking out, but I could get used to this.

After breakfast, I went in my room to get dressed. I took off my pajamas, and right at that moment Emmy walked in. I kind of yelled at her and said, "I'm changing, get out!" She started to cry and then I felt bad, so I put on my robe and gave her a hug and a kiss. This was the special connection I always wanted.

I walked downstairs to watch *Pretty Little Liars* season finale, but I couldn't because Emmy was watching *Sesame Street*. I tried to turn the television off, and she threw a huge tantrum. She was out of control. She yelled at me and said, "'Elmo's World' is about to come on. I need to see my Elmo." So yes, I turned the TV back on. But, everything was ok because I decided to cuddle right next to her and watch "Elmo's World" on *Sesame Street*.

My friend Sydney came over to hang out. Emerson was being so annoying that we were yelling at each other. Sydney knew what it was like because she had a sister of her own, so she was not surprised. Emmy said that we had to play with her. I said, "Stop following me. You have been bugging me all day. I have done everything your way! I love you with all my heart, but I can't take you much longer. I wish I never had a sister!"

After Sydney left that night, Emmy and I both walked up the stairs to get ready for bed. Emmy was crying, and I was annoyed. I went to bed and must have slept in.

When I looked at the clock the next morning it said 11:30 a.m. I rushed out of bed and ran downstairs. I saw Nerf guns, Xboxes, and video games everywhere. I ran right up to my two brothers and gave them kisses and so many hugs. The funny thing was how confused and annoyed they were that I was hugging and kissing them.

To be honest, I didn't like having an annoying sister. My annoying brothers will do just fine. I now know that my brothers are my best friends, and magic is real.

THE BLASTER BLADE

In THE BLASTER BLADE by Kyle Maynard, it is the job of an untested young warrior to turn back an evil force with the ancient power of a special sword.

My name is Ahmes. Ever since I heard the stories I wanted to become “The Blaster Blade.” The Blaster Blade is a warrior selected every 10 years after completing intensive training taught by Alfred, the king of knights.

“Hey, Ahmes,” said my brother Riki, “want to go by the training grounds and watch the warriors train?”

“Maybe, but I don’t want to spoil what kind of training we’re going to go through next year.” I said, “Let’s just head home. Mom is probably waiti—”

Just then a thunderstorm appeared out of nowhere, and a weird dragon came out of the sky. “Ahmes, what is that?” Riki said. Without warning, Riki was struck by purple lightning

“RIKI!” I yelled as he fell to the ground. I went over to him. His armor had turned black.

Riki woke up, and at the same time, our mother came over to us. “What are you guys still doing here? You need to run! That dragon is destroying everything!”

Riki then grabs Mom’s arm and says, “Long live the Shadow Paladins!” Then Riki and Mom transport away with that dragon.

The next day, I was wondering about everything that had happened yesterday with Riki, my mom, and that dragon we saw. Most of the town was destroyed, but Alfred called a town meeting to give a speech about what happened. “Now I know that things seem tough right now. But right now the only thing we need is hope. A new Blaster Blade is going to arrive and save us from that evil dragon. We need as many warriors to help us as possible, so think about which one of you believes you can rise up to the challenge.” Nobody wanted to volunteer because they were scared, and the warriors Alfred was training ran away.

“I do,” I say as I raise my hand.

“What? You?” Alfred said. “What makes you think you can become the Blaster Blade? You don’t even have armor.”

“I need to save my mother and my brother,” I said. “I’m willing to do anything to see them again. Anything at all.”

“Fine,” Alfred said, “I will train you, but you will need armor and a weapon.”

Alfred takes me to the armory to get some armor while I’m still thinking about Riki. “Hey, Alfred, who are the Shadow Paladins anyway?” I say.

“Why do you ask?” he asked me. I told him about what Riki said before. “So that’s what happened,” he said. “Okay, I’ll tell you. The Shadow Paladins are like us, the Royal Paladins, but more evil. Legend says that the Shadow and Royal Paladins were all part of the same clan, but no one knows what that clan was called or knew what happened to split them apart. After what I saw yesterday, I’m sure it was that dragon who did the same thing to those people back then as it did to your brother.”

When we arrive at the armor and weapons, Alfred tells me to take a look. For the armor there were two choices: heavy-looking armor, which would make me slower in battle, was the first choice. After seeing that weird dragon, I wouldn’t survive that long with this.

The second choice was regular armor with a cool-looking sword. “I’ll take this armor, and this sword, too,” I told Alfred.

“Good. Now you need to go fight the dragon and your brother,” he said.

“WHAT!” I said.

“Listen, that armor you’re wearing is meant for the Blaster Blade. It gives people hope and a feeling of protection. Think of it as another you, Ahmes. That armor will give you power and protect you. So do you still want to this?” Alfred said.

I thought about what Alfred was saying, and how I wanted to save Riki and Mom. Then I answered, “Yes, I want to do this.”

“Okay, then let me teach you something every Blaster Blade has learned.”

After Alfred taught me the move he was talking about, we went outside to see the same light in the sky as we did yesterday. “They’re back,” I said as Riki, the dragon, and Mom—who’s in a giant cage—appeared. “Mom! I’ll get you out of there, don’t worry!” I yelled.

“Ahmes is that you? Why are you in a suit of ar-” she says before she’s cut off.

"It's okay, Mom. I'll talk now," Riki says.

"Riki, is that you? You look different," I say.

"Nope," he says. "I'm not Riki anymore. My name is now Blaster Dark, and while we're doing intros, my master's name is not 'That dragon.' It's Phantom Blaster Dragon. I also see you have become The Blaster Blade, now have you?" he says as he punches me in the face extremely hard.

"Alfred?" I ask him. "Take care of the dragon. I need to save my brother."

"You got it!" Alfred tells me.

"Riki, please don't do this. Release Mom, and everyone else in town," I tell him, but he doesn't listen, and we just clash our swords as I realize how I can save Riki. *I need to break that gem on Riki's head*, I thought.

"I know what you're thinking, Ahmes. You know a way to save me, but I won't let you."

Riki was right. I can't hit his head because I don't want to hurt him. *I have to try that move Alfred taught me*, I thought. "Taste my 'Phantom Slash!'" I said as I swung my sword at him, but as he tried to block it, the sword he blocked was an afterimage. I then swung my real sword at the gem on Riki's head. "NO!" Riki screamed.

"Ahmes! Thank you for saving me," Riki said.

"We're not done yet. We still need to destroy Phantom Blaster Dragon," I said.

"Correction," a voice said behind us. Phantom Blaster Dragon was transforming. "I absorbed your friend. Now I have evolved into Phantom Blaster Overlord!" he said as he roared powerfully.

Just then, my and Riki's swords started glowing. "Whoa!" I said as our bodies started fusing together.

"What's going on?" Phantom Blaster Overlord asked.

"I'll tell you what's going on," someone says. "We combined together, and we are going to show you the power of Majesty Lord Blaster."

"Really. And how are you going to stop me?" Phantom Blaster Overlord says.

"With this. Phantom Slash Deluxe!" Majesty Lord Blaster said as his sword grew to be giant and swung at Phantom Blaster Overlord ten thousand times.

"NO!" Phantom Blaster Overlord screamed as he exploded.

“Boys, you did it. You saved everyone,” Mom said as she hugged me and Riki.

“Everyone except Alfred,” I said.

“Yeah. I’m sorry for all of this, guys,” Riki said.

“It’s not your fault, Riki,” I said. “Alfred fought till the very end, and we have to remember him for that.”

The townspeople rejoiced. Riki’s armor never went back to normal, but everyone was okay with that. Now, every 10 years, instead of becoming just Blaster Blade, someone will become Blaster Dark, and fight alongside Blaster Blade as his partner.

BOY SCOUT ADVENTURE GOES WRONG

*Two Boy Scouts are marooned on an island where strange things happen. They put their survival skills to the test in **BOY SCOUT ADVENTURE GOES WRONG** by John Daley.*

It was a nice, hot, sunny day out in the Bahamas. The Boy Scouts of America Pack 1029 was out to find the perfect spot for the night. They found it right by the river so in the morning they could go on a boat trip to one of the other islands. They made camp for the night.

The sky was as clear as it could be. They could see all the stars up there in the sky.

They went to sleep after a nicely cooked meal of hot dogs over the fire. In the night it was as quiet as the eagle hunting its prey.

In the morning they got up, packed, ate food, and then left. They all got into their boats with their partners. It would be a long ride. They would have to go through the edge of Death Lake to get to the island beyond. Death Lake was known for people getting lost in it. It was like a Bermuda Triangle.

Out in the middle of the lake, they saw something. John and Logan went to see what it was, but the current shot them into Death Lake. They screamed to the leader to help them, and John said, "Row faster! We need to get out of this lake!"

The waves were in the boat, and they were hitting rocks. At one point, a rock put a hole in the boat.

They saw an island, so they went for it while the boat was sinking. They almost made it to shallow water, but the boat dropped. They had to swim in water with crocodiles, piranhas, and other deadly creatures. They made it with a couple bites. But they did not care. They were just happy they made it out alive.

They looked around to see if anyone else had come, but the others had been shot a different way. They were stranded with just four days' worth of camping supplies and each other.

They used their skills to find camp and to make their dinner, but they had a problem: at night they had a monkey attack. While they tried to call someone, the monkeys took their phones before the call got through.

They ran after the monkeys and were led to a cave. John yelled over to Logan, "Get a flashlight!"

They went into the cave. In the cave they found diamonds, gold, shoes, and phones. "These monkeys are thieves," said Logan.

The scouts tried to fight the monkeys, but they were outnumbered by a lot. They failed to stop them that time. What scared the boys was the monkeys' 44-caliber revolver. But as the boys left, one grabbed a flare gun to signal the rest. They went to camp and shot the flare gun in the air and went to sleep.

In the morning, Logan went to the water and tried to cross it. He got into a fight with a snake, and it almost killed him. John came over and got the snake off, but Logan lost a finger in the process.

John said he would hunt. They got a bird and cooked it, and then went to sleep in the trees. In the morning the ground was flooded, so they stayed there until the water was gone.

When the water left, the rest of the pack was there! John and Logan were dehydrated. But the pack took care of them. They took them back and gave them a ceremony.

THE CAT WHO GOT AWAY WITH MURDER

In THE CAT WHO GOT AWAY WITH MURDER by Jasmine Sanders, Citrus the cat plans a murder that he hopes will be blamed on his owner.

It was around 11 a.m. on a Saturday morning when Chad woke up. Chad thought it was time to get a companion in his life, so he went to the animal shelter to get a cat. He got an orange cat with a few grey hairs on his face forming a heart, and named him Citrus. Citrus was two years old at the time.

After more than seven years of living with Chad, Citrus had gotten tired of him. Citrus decided to sneak out the window to murder Chad's neighbor, Jessica. If he murdered Chad, he might get put into cat prison because he was the only one in the house living with him. Cat prison was a place for cats who did bad things, like murder.

Citrus walked outside, not waking up Chad. Chad was used to Citrus not being there since most of the time Citrus slept in the cat room.

Citrus sharpened his claws on the side of the brick house before going in. He went through the window that led to the hallway. Citrus went up the stairs and looked around. He walked into a faint purple room with black trimming. He looked around and saw a dark purple and white queen bed with a tall, short-haired blonde. There were chairs with an Xbox 1 Elite on a shelf on the left wall. Jessica's bed was on the back of the right wall.

Citrus jumped onto the chair and then onto the TV stand. He looked around until he found a windowsill. He jumped on there and then onto the bed. Jessica must have felt him because she rolled over, mumbling something about rainbow unicorns.

He placed his claws on her neck and clawed her to death.

The bed and Citrus's paws had red stains on them. Citrus was a smart cat. He went over to the bathroom and looked at how he could get to the sink since it was high up.

The bathroom was a sky blue bathroom with white shower curtains and toilet. He jumped onto the toilet and then onto the sink. He

used his paws to turn the tap on. The water ran as Citrus went under it. All the blood that was on his paws washed off.

He turned off the tap and went out the door, into the hall and then out the window that he had come in by. He walked back over to his house and went through the bottom stairs window. He walked in and went up the red staircase and into the lime green cat room. He went to his fluffy black-and-white bed and went to sleep.

The next morning, Citrus woke up to a car pulling into the neighbor's driveway. He walked back downstairs and out the window. He walked over to the open window at Jessica's house and saw a really short, long-haired brunette girl in her 30's standing at the door with five bags of clothes from Forever 21.

He watched as the brunette was greeted by another cat. She was a black-and-white ombre cat. She had grey between the two colors, mixing them together. The brunette bent down and pet the cat. She stood back up and went upstairs. Citrus followed behind, going to places she wouldn't see him, like dark, shadowy corners. The woman walked into the room calling for Jessica.

"Jessica? Jessica! It's me, your cousin, Brooklyn!" she said as she opened that door farther. She went over to the bed and pulled off the covers to reveal Jessica. She screamed and fainted.

When she regained consciousness after 40 minutes, she remembered what she had seen, dropped the bags, and ran.

About 45 minutes later police came in and looked around. They looked around Jessica's neck and found something.

"Found something!" one officer yelled.

"What is it?" asked another.

"Grey cat hair," the first officer said. Then they brought Jessica to the ambulance and kept looking around. They found the ombre cat, which was named Ombrecia.

The cat was taken to the cat prison where her hair was dyed electric blue so the security could see if they escaped, because no other cat out in the world was blue.

COMING BACK

*Death is a strange and unknown experience, unless you're Max. In **COMING BACK** by **Sam Frank**, a boy named Max will have to find his way back to the human world and reality after his untimely death.*

You never know what death is like...you know, until you die. I was at the beach, with seagulls squawking in the distance and little kids playing. Everything felt at peace, but somewhere in the distance there was a weird and different sound: screaming, and not the "This is so fun!" kind. It was the "I'M GONNA DIE" kind of screaming. I looked out in the distance and couldn't find where it was coming from.

I kept looking furiously. There was a little kid in the water. I jumped in the ocean, immediately swimming as fast as I could to him. Waves splashed in my mouth, and salt was gritting in between my teeth. I could feel the water seeping into my lungs, suffocating me. Wave after wave, it felt like the universe didn't want me to save that drowning child.

I kept telling myself, *Faster. GO! GO FASTER!* Then I was there...the little guy was right in front of me.

I tried to carry him while I swam, but I was too exhausted and didn't have enough strength to keep myself afloat, only him. While swimming, more and more water poured inside my throat. I was drowning, moving slower and slower, trying to get closer to shore. I decided if I could get this guy to safety, let someone else take him the rest of the way, and let him live a full life, I could die young. Which it turns out...I did.

I was screaming. How could I see my body lying there on the beach if I was right here?

After a few minutes of screaming I decided this would not help. As more people crowded around my body, I tried some of the dumbest things to turn back to normal. I tried lying down where my body was, chanting incantations, asking my body if I could go back inside it and other, weirder things. It wasn't until ten minutes in that I realized everything around me was moving really, and I mean REALLY, slow. I also decided nothing I could do would help, and I just started wandering around. After a while I saw this shiny

little coin on the ground and decided to pick it up. I wandered more and more, and then out of nowhere Death appeared.

He wore a long, black cloak, and where his face should've been there was a black vortex. How did I know it was him? Maybe it was the apparel, but honestly, I have no clue. However, I knew it was him. "Max," Death moaned, "I'm here for you."

I screamed again. "Please, Death, don't reap my soul. Pleaeaeaeaeese."

"Ughgh," Death mumbled, "that's not why I'm here. I'm here to tell you that you shouldn't have died."

"What?"

"Yeah, you were only supposed to notice the kid and tell the lifeguard."

"Ohhhhhhhh. That makes a lot more sense than what I did... Wait, did that little boy make it?"

"Yes, he will be fine."

"Oh, thank God."

"So you get a second chance."

"I DO!"

"Yes, but you will have to overcome three challenges. First you must locate the death coin and bring it to me. It can be found—"

"Oh, do you mean this thing?"

"Where'd you get this!"

"I found it on the ground while getting here."

"Fine. Then second, get me my scythe. It is in a place you don't know. However, you'll never forget knowing it."

"Wait. What?"

"DON'T INTERRUPT ME!"

"Ok, ok."

"Finally, you have to defeat the Egnor, a giant evil monster hybrid."

"Okay then, better get started on finding your scythe... bye bye."

"Wait, Max. Just to let you know, you only have three ghost days, or nine human hours, to complete this quest."

"Ohhhhh... okay."

I started my quest. I had no clue as to where death's scythe could be. I just booked it and started running. I knew it would be close by, but I couldn't figure the riddle out. I tried my house and other familiar places, but I couldn't find it for the life of me. "WHERE IS IT?" I screamed.

After making a double-check of everywhere I had previously been I thought, *"A place I don't know but will never forget...."* Huh... the BEACH. I can't remember being there because I'm unconscious, but I'll never forget being there. What I didn't know was that I was at the opposite side of the town from where the beach was, and it took me an hour to get there (I'll just skip that part). Once at the beach I found it lying there creepily, Death's very own scythe.

Then Death appeared in front of me. "I'm here to get my scythe"
"Good. I can finally..." Then I remembered the last trial: fighting the Egnor.

In a flash we were immediately teleported to a coliseum. Fans were cheering everywhere like they wanted me to get eaten. I felt like I was in *Star Wars the Return of the Jedi*. I was shaking; my body just wouldn't respond.

Then the giant doors opened, but what came out was unexpected. He looked like a butterfly the size of a warthog with a bear's face and cat's tail. He came speeding toward me. I was TERRIFIED, but when he got two inches from my face, he licked me and decided I wasn't so bad. He let me jump on him, and we flew around the coliseum, ghost-kicking all the spectators in the face. Their pale skin turned red as our feet slapped their faces.

Death looked up at me and said, "All the people who don't have a pure heart, the Egnor devours, but he didn't eat you. So... you... may... be... mortal... AGAIN!"

I was back in my body on the beach, my chest being electrified. All I could say was "WOW, being dead is weird." The paramedics looked at me with a strange grin like they thought I was crazy.

Later that evening my entire family came over and told me how heroic I was, and that they all loved me so much. All I could say was "Thanks, I love you too."

COWS OF THE CARIBBEAN

To save his farm, a boy takes many chances and faces tough obstacles. He is after the one item that everyone wants but only one can have in COWS OF THE CARIBBEAN by Heaven Harris.

At dawn the morning dew slides down each blade of grass. The plague season was here. The rain pours for days, and the grass grows greener.

But it is acid rain that comes because of the fuels from the plants on the island. A light shade of green spreads across the grass that appears to be innocent. However, it should be a dark shade of black and dry because of what it can do to its cow victims in a place just off the border of the Caribbean that goes on and on till it hits land on another side of the world.

The fields grew more empty every day. There is a fatal and bleak feeling that comes from just a taste to fill that gap of hunger. It ends with another one dead.

A barn sits on a half-empty field of nothing but fifty cows that sit and wonder. Sitting staring at what the farm has become is Jamie. His mother had passed away a couple years before. Jamie decides to go off and find a cure to save the cows. He knows about the tales his mom used to tell him about the black pearl and what it could do.

His mom told him stories about how his dad looked for the pearl and couldn't find it. His dad had to go to a mysterious island that sits in the middle of the ocean. The pearl was said to be used in many ways to cure poison and even hunger.

Jamie heads toward the docks where most of the plundering pirates hang out. He would ask to be a part of the crew because that was the only way he could get to the island in the ocean.

As he boards the ship at the dock, all the crew members stop and stare, faces full of scars and bodies full of tattoos of different tales that Jamie's mom used to tell him.

The captain says to Jamie, "So you're a stiff."

Jamie replies, "I'm not a stiff."

The captain says, "Just what a stiff would say."

Jamie works for days on the boat pulling and tying the ropes on the sails. Then they arrived at a large island in the middle of the

ocean, Kikiwana. Kikiwana was the island where all the pirates were trying to find the pearl to heal their cows.

A few crew members took one of the rowboats out to explore the land and make sure it is safe to dock. Once they gave the signal that it was safe to board, Jamie made a run for it from the garbage hatch on the side of the ship to get to the pearl before any of the other pirates got there. But as he was getting off the ship, the others were in the rowboat. So he grabbed on the back of the rowboat and held on till they were ashore. He was in plain sight, and the captain spotted him after noticing that a member of the crew was missing once the others were back on the ship.

Jamie headed straight for the top of the mountain where the pearl was said to be. He saw the captain behind him. The captain yelled, "Stop! He's trying to get the pearl!" All of the crew members had headed to shore with the captain to catch him.

The first thing Jamie saw once he hit the edge of the sand was the treacherous forest in front of him. He went in and saw a giant pond of water that had fog standing over it. He jumped and struggled to keep his head above the water. Then he saw a giant pit with a river sitting at the end of it with a waterfall beyond it. Finally, he arrived at the top of the hill and got the pearl to save the cows.

He headed back to the beach and stole the rowboat while the captain and crew were still on the island. The captain and the crew got on the ship after Jamie was already gone.

After a day goes by with Jamie in the rowboat during stormy, cold nights, a giant shadow appeared over Jamie and the boat. As it got closer he could clearly see what it was: a giant boat right in front of him. Jamie rowed and rowed until he got away a little bit, but he could not row fast enough to get away from the boat.

The crew cast him a net so he could board. There was nothing else he could do to get away.

He stayed on the ship for a night. During the night he got up and went for the rowboat hooked to the side of the boat.

He headed home with the pearl to save the cows. He could see the land in the distance. He only had a couple more hours before he hit land and could head home.

Once he got to the dock he ran straight home to crush the pearl up and put it into the cow's water. But when he got home he saw a field full of dead cows.

DAVID AND THE FORTUNE COOKIE

In **DAVID AND THE FORTUNE COOKIE** by Mathias François, a lonely boy returns home to find an entrance to a new world where his books used to be.

David is a lonely twelve-year-old boy. At home or at school, nobody seems to be interested by him. He has no friends and feels most of the time apart. He has only one little pleasure in his life: eating every Saturday at Shogun, a delicious Asian restaurant.

One day as he was eating his lunch at his favorite restaurant, he saw a fortune cookie on his plate. When he looked at the message inside, he read “The surprise you will get will lead you to an adventure.”

When he got back home, David was speechless. His house was totally empty! He searched everywhere and did not find anything except his old shelf. He looked in the shelf for an explanation and found a book called *Why Does Everything in the House Go Away?* He pulled the book to have a look, and suddenly the shelf opened up, revealing a dark corridor followed by a dumbwaiter. It looked like sunlight was flashing there. That intrigued him, so he decided to enter, and the shelf suddenly closed on him.

David felt trapped like a rat. He panicked and started shaking. He was scared, wondering what was going to happen to him. The only escape seemed to be the dumbwaiter.

As soon as he got in it, the dumbwaiter turned on and propelled him into another world in a matter of seconds. It surprised him with the brightness of the lights.

The dumbwaiter stopped in a forest, dropped off David, and immediately headed back in the direction it came from.

On first impression, the forest did not look real with its ceiling and sides. Then, a weapon, armor, some food, and a manual popped up from the ground and the trees.

David took the manual and looked at the instructions: “Welcome to the 10-days survival game! Every twelve-year-old boy must play this game in order to prove his survival skills. You will have to do this alone or with a partner. You are now in the forest of Brazil. Take your package, thank you, and let the games begin!”

David was stunned and quite scared, but he realized there were no exits to this game, so he thought to wait for the end of the game.

He went exploring before looking for a shelter. He spent the whole day exploring but found only woods around him. He spent an uncomfortable night and realized he had to play the game to survive.

The next day, he went to look for wood and somewhere to put his shelter. Later on, he found a great spot in the forest near a river. He took his pieces of wood and made the base of a tent. He covered it with leaves to make it waterproof. Then he made a fire to have heat and light. He cooked his food over it, too. He also tried doing the process of fishing and taking food from the forest. He did that process over and over again.

One night he saw lights and heard voices. He told himself to have a look in the surroundings.

The next day, as he was exploring the area, he saw a fire and a shelter, but nobody was there. He decided to wait for whoever it was to return at night.

When the night came he finally met him. He met Max, a boy who was twelve like him. He got in the game the same day as David and in the same way. They talked to each other for a long time. Step by step, they became best friends. This new friendship helped them to survive, as they were taking care of each other. Max and David won the game by their friendship and being the last ones surviving the game.

As soon as the game finished, David got back in the dumbwaiter that reappeared to go to his world. When he got in his house, all the couches and tables were back in place. The book that he pulled was gone, but one thing was new. His friend Max got home, too, and moved to the house next to him. That year, David found out that friendship is the key to life.

EMOJIS FIGHT BACK

In EMOJIS FIGHT BACK by Michael Gardner, Jack and Mark go through the horror of fighting electronics. They must remain calm in order to find out how to beat an emoji.

One day Jack was texting Mark. They were going to make a video on YouTube.

They made a video about emojis. They texted in the video and only used emojis, so it was funny until a mad face emoji covered their screen.

Mark said, "Do you have a face on your..."

Jack said, "Yes," interrupting Mark. "The eyes just follow you." They thought they got hacked, so they called the police. It was really creepy, like it was staring at them.

The police showed up and asked "Are you sure this isn't just a small texture glitch? If not, just go to the Apple Store two miles from here"

Mark called Jack's house phone. "Is everything ok? You won't answer your cell phone."

"Yeah, everything is okay. I need to go to the Apple Store. Do you need me to come and get you?" Jack asked.

Mark said, "No, I'll walk."

Jack got to the store and saw Mark waiting for him at the door. "How did you get here before me even though I was in the car?" Jack exclaimed.

"I must be faster," Mark replied, "plus I took a shortcut."

They went into the store. Mark asked, "Are you okay? It is kind of weird that you called me down here."

"Yes, I'm okay, but a little scared of phones or anything tech right now. Let's go ask them what to do or if they could do anything," Mark said.

They walked to the front desk. It was pretty empty. "Hello," said the calm lady, "how may I help you?"

Jack asked, "Can you help me with this? I don't know if it's a texture glitch or if it was hacked or anything."

She didn't even want to touch it after seeing what it was. Then she asked "Do you want this to be disposed of?"

“No, I want to get all of my account information off of it at my house, but thanks. May I have a new phone to transfer my information please?”

She urgently asked Jack to dispose of it, but Jack declined the offer. Eventually she brought another phone.

Jack and Mark went to Jack’s house. Mark was waiting inside the car for Jack to take him home. Jack went inside. He was on his computer transferring the items. Out of curiosity, since he had time, he looked this up to see if this had ever happened before. To his surprise he discovered that a lot of people saw this and never were seen again.

While he was googling he saw a little yellow dot in the right corner of his laptop screen.

Mark got out of the car and came inside the house because Jack was taking a long time. He saw the dot in the corner of the laptop screen. Then smoke came out of his computer and old phone. Mark asked, “Do you see that?” scared out of his mind.

Jack said, “Yeah,” walking away slowly.

Mark asked, “Where is your vacuum”

“In the closet. Why?” asked Jack.

Mark grabbed the vacuum to suck the smoke up, but it wouldn’t budge. Mark asked, “Why won’t this thing move? It always works in movies.”

Jack ran to his new phone and stopped the transferring so his new phone wouldn’t be corrupted. The transferring window closed, and then he saw something he hadn’t seen before: a way to seal it. Somebody knew how to do it, but the dot had gotten away before the person could catch it.

Jack said, “Get my hand mirror, Mark. And don’t ask why.”

Jack grabbed his phone as a distraction. Mark gave Jack the mirror. He put his phone in front of the mirror to distract it. Sure enough, it came to the phone. Just as it was moving to jump into the phone, Jack moved the phone aside and trapped the little yellow dot in the mirror.

Mark asked, “How did you know that it would come to the phone?”

“Because it was looking at it while you tried to suck it up with my vacuum,” said Jack.

They buried the mirror 10 feet underground behind Jack’s house, taking forever, but it was worth it. The dot was never seen again.

THE FAT KIDNAP

In **THE FAT KIDNAP** by *Kalli Gaggos*, an evil man plots to kidnap all of the fat children in the world in order to make them skinny.

Some children are very fat. It doesn't bother most people, but it bothered Robbie. Robbie was an evil man who hated fat children. When he turned 23, he swore to make every fat child skinny, without their parents even being aware he had come in contact with them.

When he was 24, he talked to a wizard to give him the power to manipulate time. It cost him \$10,000, but Robbie finally convinced the wizard to give him powers. He was now one of the only people in the world who had this very special magic.

A week later, he heard about an extremely fat child named Nick. Nick was so fat that his parents had to specially order extra-large seats for him in their cars. Robbie set out to find out where Nick lived and how to get there. In three months, he knew everything about Nick. He knew where he lived, his habits, and his hobbies. Robbie was ready to kidnap Nick.

On a Monday, Robbie set out for Nick's house. He crept up to the window and saw Nick and his family eating dinner. Robbie slunk around to the back of the house. He climbed up the jagged brick wall to the window. He saw a loose brick, and he used it to pry the window open. Then, he went inside. He closed the window and hid under Nick's bed. In a couple minutes, he heard Nick's footsteps, a creak on the bed, and then silence.

Once he knew everyone was asleep, he snuck out from under the bed and used his time manipulation powers on all of the citizens of the world. He did this by sending the power out to some satellites, and they shot the magic to everyone in the world except Nick and himself. These citizens would stay in bed for what felt like one night to them, but really it would be two weeks. He had exactly 14 days to make Nick skinny, or else Nick's parents would catch Robbie

Robbie clamped his hand down over Nick's mouth before he could scream. In a threatening voice he told Nick to come with him or else he would be hurt severely. Breathing very heavily from fear, Nick followed him out of the room.

They went back to Robbie's home. There, Robbie set to work. He weighed Nick, and he was 200 pounds. His goal was to make him 125 pounds in two weeks.

Every day for the first week, Nick did 5 miles of running and did 150 pushups, 150 sit ups, and 4 miles of swimming. By the end of week one, he weighed 150 pounds. Each day of the second week, he completed 7 miles of running, 300 pushups, 300 sit ups, and 7 miles of swimming.

It was terrible for Nick. He tried to complain, but every time he started to, Robbie made him swim 10 extra laps. He was sore, yet he could feel a difference in his weight. By the end of week two he weighed 120 pounds, and Robbie had reached his goal.

It was Sunday, and it was time to return Nick to his parents. They were only going to be under the time manipulation spell for one more hour. They departed for Nick's home.

They arrived with thirty minutes to spare until the parents awoke and saw Robbie. Robbie tiptoed through the front door with Nick and went upstairs. He gave Nick a sleeping pill. An important thing about the time manipulation magic is that by the end of the two weeks, everything must be the same way as it was before the manipulation happened. This meant that Robbie had to stay in Nick's room.

Robbie didn't know it, but Nick hadn't taken the pill. He faked taking it. When Robbie went under his bed, Nick spit it out. If Nick didn't go to sleep, Robbie would be found out.

It was time for the magic to end, and Nick was still not asleep. Robbie hid under the bed, afraid because he didn't know if the sleeping pill had worked. Suddenly, he heard Nick whispering. *Oh no!* Robbie thought. *Nick is still awake. He must have not taken the pill*

Seconds later, the door slowly creaked open. Robbie was very scared as he awaited the scream from a parent and the end of his career. Footsteps entered the room. Suddenly, they stopped. "Ah!" came a woman's scream. Robbie had forgotten to move his foot under the bed.

Nick's mother grabbed her shaking son. She ran out of the room with him. Then, she called the police and reported a mysterious man under her son's bed.

She told the father to grab a gun to make sure the man would not leave. The father came to them with the gun and looked at his

son. Strangely, he looked skinnier and much more muscular than before. The mother did not notice in her panic that her son was skinnier.

Nick hadn't forgotten about Robbie, because he hadn't taken the sleeping pill when he told him to. His father asked how he got so skinny overnight. He told his parents everything that had happened, and they told the police.

The police took Robbie to jail until his trial. Eventually he was sentenced to 50 years for child abuse and kidnapping.

Although this was a terrible experience, Nick was fit for the rest of his life.

FIRST FLIGHT

In **FIRST FLIGHT** by *Olivia Fryzlewicz*, a scientist wanders into the woods and comes upon a rather unpleasant surprise. But it leads to the experience of a lifetime.

Once upon a time... just kidding! This definitely is not a princess story. However, it is quite magical.

Let me tell you about myself. I am an ornithologist (someone who studies birds) and my name is Professor Anne Vogel (Vogel means bird in German). One morning I was just studying in the Amazon, when all of the birds, animals, and other creatures started stampeding. It sounded like an enormous thunderstorm. It smelled like sweat and mud, as though the animals were frightened. I knew I could die at any given moment, but somehow, from somewhere inside me, I could feel excitement. But, afraid for my life, I sprinted back to the campsite to give a report. My teammates agreed that it was a strange sight to see, and that it needed to be further investigated.

That night, despite my fears, my scientific curiosity brought me back to the place where the animals had been running from, and nothing happened. I went alone so that I could be quieter. I waited there for about an hour and still nothing odd had happened. The familiar sound of the nocturnal curassow comforted me.

Then, loud rumbling started, smaller trees were crashing down like toothpicks, and I thought it was an earthquake. I got down on my hands and knees and—*CRASH*—a giant harpy eagle (a bird that eats monkeys) flew straight through the trees, knocking down many branches. Then I realized that it was flying straight at me! It was moving so fast that I didn't even have time to think. By then I was so scared that I passed out.

I woke up about two hours later, groggy and tired. I looked around to see where I was and I could only see pitch-black sky, clouds, stars, and the tops of trees far below me. Oh, I almost forgot to mention: the other thing I could see was the top of the great bird's wings. I was thinking that when I passed out, the big guy must have snatched me right off the ground. I was scared, and worried that I would never make it home alive, but I was so tired. I

decided I would think about it later, so I sat there, just waiting for my doom.

About five hours later I saw the sun rising above the horizon. I had absolutely no idea where I was, apart from the fact that I had been freed from the beast. I also noticed that I was covered in leaves and branches, and that it smelled like decaying material. I figured I was in the bird's nest. It was absolutely enormous!

I tried to stand up, but my legs were much too weak. So I pulled myself up with all the strength in my arms, and I was terrified. The eagle was standing right in front of me, and since I could not see very well when I first saw it because it was so dark, I got my first good look at it. In the bright morning sunlight, the bird was beautiful; magnificent, at that. Typically, harpy eagles are three to four feet tall with a six-foot wingspan, but this particular bird was about three times the regular size. In addition to its impressive and excessive size, it has dark grey feathers on its back with a white stomach, similar to a penguin.

Like someone in a horror movie, I was terrified but I could not look away. Suddenly, the bird grew tense. It spread its wings and took off to the trees below. I couldn't see it from under the trees, but I did hear the sounds of many angry and scared animals. Finally, far below me, I could see the eagle and a very unfortunate monkey in its claws.

While the bird wasn't looking, I climbed out of the nest and hid in the leaves to look around for any signs of the campsite. I couldn't see anything, so I climbed down the tree, slowly but surely, to look for a path, or anything that could take me home. I ran through the trees, hoping to get away from the bird in time before it got back. I was running and running, and not before long I was exhausted. I stopped for a minute to catch my breath, and then continued on. But, eventually, I tripped on a tree root.

There was a pile of leaves and twigs on the ground that appeared to be rustling as though there was an animal hiding there. I looked closer, and a snake cautiously slithered out of the leaves. I recognized the creature as the great and extremely venomous coral snake. The snake looked around and then finally rested its eyes right on me. I tried to stay as still as I possibly could, but I knew that it was coming for me and me alone. It slithered right up to me, and I thought I was doomed.

Then—*CRASH*—my “friend” from before swooped down and snatched the snake and threw it back into the forest. I was so grateful that the bird had come at exactly the right moment, and so relieved that the snake was gone. But I was still afraid that the bird would take me away again.

However, the bird stared at me, but not in a menacing way. It looked as though it wanted to help me, to protect me. Then unexpectedly, the eagle lay down on the ground, stomach first.

I had no idea why, and then we looked at each other for about a minute. After that beautiful moment, I knew that the bird wanted to help me. I also figured out why the bird was lying down. It wanted me to get on its back so that it could fly me home.

I was scared right then, but I knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I got on the bird.

With not much trouble, the bird took off. While we were in the air, I had decided that I wouldn't just call my friend “the bird.” I tried to think of a name, and my final decision was Olivia.

Olivia and I had been flying for about a half an hour when I could just barely see the campsite. I said, “Olivia, you can land now,” and she did. I was clueless about how she had actually understood me, but I was so happy to be back. Once she had landed in a thick patch of trees, I told her to wait there. She did, and I ran off to get the professor and the others.

“Anne, you're back!” my professor said, “We've been looking everywhere, what happened to you!”

I said, “No time to explain, follow me!” I led them to where Olivia was patiently waiting. But before they could even get a glance at Olivia, she took off. She looked like she was afraid of them, and I tried to get her to come back, but nothing happened.

My teammates thought I was crazy, so they went back to camp. But later that night, when we were all near the fire, Olivia flew over all of us, and then actually landed right next to me. My friends were amazed that I was telling the truth before. They all apologized and said that even if you can't understand something, you should still try.

G.O.A.T.

*The goats are taking over. This is not a drill, as you will see in **G.O.A.T.** by **Gibson Rodriguez.***

One day on a very stormy Sunday morning when everyone was still waking up, goats were plotting their escape so they could rule the world. Suddenly lightning struck the barn, and their plans were burned. They were furious.

When the farmers came to the barn in the morning, the goats tied them up and left. They didn't stop there. The goats were going to the top. Once there was no one left in that town or maybe no one left in the world, goats would dominate.

The farmers called the cops and pet control to get the goats, but that still did not work. The goats got out and acted insane. They destroyed everything in their path.

There was a new solution to call in special ops, who had access to all kinds of weapons and traps. The people thought that the goats would have no chance, but the goats were strong and fought back.

Someone thought if the goats can't stop moving then they should be made to stop moving with tranquilizer guns. Finally, the people thought they had one. Special ops had put down all the goats and sent them to the moon.

At the celebration party, suddenly the ground started to shake. Over the hills people saw more goats than they could imagine seeing in one place.

Special ops had to drop a sleep nuke. They sent them to space, but what they didn't know was that goats on the moon got more advanced.

GONE

*Two siblings are looking forward to the beginning of summer vacation as they arrive home from the last day of school. However, they find themselves faced with a situation that makes them forget all about that in **GONE** by Alex Carter.*

I can still remember the day that changed my life forever. It was a gorgeous summer morning. I was at the kitchen table eating my breakfast while my little brother, Donovan, was still upstairs getting ready for school. At the time, all I could think about were the events of the day. But, this was not just any day. It was the last day of school. I thought to myself that nothing, absolutely nothing, could happen to mess up this wonderful feeling I was experiencing.

My thoughts were abruptly interrupted when I glanced at the clock on the wall, realizing that the school bus would be pulling up to our house in just a few minutes. I yelled to Donovan, telling him that he needed to hurry up and come downstairs before we both would be late to school. He yelled back, saying, "Okay, Melissa, I'm coming down now!" He raced into the room and quickly laced up his gym shoes. Then we yelled our daily goodbyes to our mom, dad, and dog, FiFi, and headed out the door to catch the bus.

As we were boarding the bus, I could see that everyone was excited for the last day. I was overjoyed myself. I could hardly wait to get this day over with so that I could get back to my family, my home, and my neighborhood. I couldn't wait to spend the whole summer with those I loved, playing outside all day without homework, teachers, or the four walls of a classroom.

When we arrived at school, a sigh of disappointment came rushing from my mouth. As I expected, we didn't do much in any of my classes. I felt like a zombie, just going through the motions of the school day. I was bored all day. Nothing piqued my interests, not even lunch or recess. My mind was set on the end of the day. Finally, after my Japanese class, that moment arrived. School was officially out for the summer.

As I walked out into the hallways, my zombie state melted, and I suddenly came back to life. There was a wave of excitement in the air. I saw kids running out of the school building so fast, they

looked like a pack of wild animals on the loose. I ran, too, and hopped on the bus with my brother, Donovan, eager to head home.

But, for some strange reason I cannot explain, an eerie feeling came out of nowhere and hovered over my head. The bus pulled off from the school headed toward my neighborhood. The bus ride home felt bittersweet, like no other bus ride I had ever taken. The first thing I noticed was when we got to our street, no one was outside, like they normally are. As we got closer to our house, I didn't smell anything cooking like it usually is when Donovan and I get home.

We walked inside our house, and to our surprise no one was there. My dad was not sitting in his big, fluffy La-Z-Boy chair. My mom wasn't on the couch watching her afternoon talk show. My dog, FiFi, wasn't even lying in her bed on the floor. Everyone who lived inside the house other than Donovan and me seemed to have disappeared.

The bittersweet feeling I experienced on the bus returned, but it quickly turned into fear. I was so scared that I could barely say a word. Donovan was afraid, too. I could feel him trembling beside me. Finally, I was able to mumble to Donovan. I said, "Stick close to me."

I took a step forward, and all of a sudden the lights went out for about thirty seconds. When they came back on, I no longer felt Donovan beside me. When I looked where Donovan had been standing, I saw that he had disappeared, too. My heart leaped in my chest in fear. I whispered, "Donovan?"

Then, I screamed his name so loud that it echoed throughout the house. I raced around the house yelling his name over and over. I thought, *How could he disappear? How could this be happening? Where is FiFi? Where is my dad? And where is my mom?* Donovan and I both had just walked into the house together from school. This was becoming the worst day of my entire life.

I grabbed my cell phone out of my backpack and tried calling the police, but my phone was dead. I threw it to the ground in despair and began really freaking out. I was standing in the middle of my house all alone. I did not know what to do. I started crying. I wished that I could go back and start this day all over again.

Just then, I heard a loud thump in the basement. I whispered, "Hello? Mom? Dad? FiFi? Donovan?" I went to the kitchen to check the drawers for a flashlight. To my surprise, one was there. I

grabbed it and checked to see if it worked. I was relieved when it came on. Then, I carefully went down the basement stairs to investigate.

When I got to the bottom step, I saw that it was very dark. I turned around and started to run back upstairs. But, I said to myself, "I have to find Donovan." So, I headed back down the stairs. I flashed the light in the farthest corner of the basement and went around the entire room until I saw a small, dark figure. I heard my name: "Melissa!"

My instinct again was to run, but instead, I shined the light on what appeared to be a familiar face. In fact it was Donovan. But, he was all tied up. The look on his face told me that he was happy to see me. This time he yelled out my name, "Melissa!"

I ran to him and nervously untied him. He was trying to talk, but I motioned by putting my finger to my lips, telling him to be quiet. I motioned for him to wait to talk once we were upstairs. He was still trying to tell me what happened to him. So, I grabbed him by the hands, which still had some rope loosely wrapped around them, and pulled him up the stairs.

Once we got upstairs, I was able to get him completely loose. Then we looked at each other and without saying a word, we both ran outside, into what we felt was safety. Although we were all the way out of the house, we kept running all the way out of our neighborhood. We never looked back. As we were running, Donovan, through tears, was trying to describe how something unexplainable lifted him off his feet, carried him to the basement, and tied him up in a matter of minutes.

When we got to the next neighborhood, we saw children playing outside and families happily going in and out of their homes. We both were in a state of fear and confusion, because we couldn't understand why the people in our neighborhood, our family, and the life we both knew were GONE!

All the while, I knew I had to go back, with or without my little brother Donovan to try to find out where the rest of my family was. I had to try to solve the mystery of where they were or why they had disappeared, into what seemed to be into thin air.

INVINCIBLE

*A 13-year-old boy has been secretly invincible his whole life. When he finds himself in the middle of a robbery, his secret might be revealed in **INVINCIBLE** by **Samuel Ruskowski**.*

My name is Jake Jones, and I'm a 13-year-old boy, but I'm not an ordinary 13-year-old boy. When I was born, I was born with super strong bones and muscles that make me invincible. The only people who know about my invincibility are my family and my best friend, Rocket. Rocket's real name is Francis, but since he made a viral video of himself in a rocket, everyone calls him Rocket now. Some staff at the hospital may also be aware of my special condition because when I was born, they thought I had a broken arm. But, when they took an x-ray and saw my bone formation, they knew I was different. These are the only people to know because my parents didn't want people to look at me differently and treat me differently.

One bright Sunday afternoon, Rocket and I walked to the video game store, which is only a couple blocks away from my house. When we entered the store, we asked Ronnie, the store clerk, where the new invaders game was located. "Toward the back of the store at the gun game aisle," Ronnie said. When we were about to get our hands in reach of the game, I heard a scream that sounded like someone was in trouble.

Rocket and I raced at lightning speed to see what was happening. When we arrived, I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I was standing behind a tall man with a ski mask holding a gun at Ronnie. I don't think the guy saw me, so I told Rocket to call the police while I handled the situation. "Help, please, someone come quick; there's a robbery in place," Ronnie said over the phone.

In the meantime, I snuck over to the robber and hit him. I actually hit him so hard that I knocked the gun out of his hand. At that point, Ronnie was unloading the cash register to give all the money to the man. "Here, take it all. Just don't hurt anyone," Ronnie cried.

The man hit me back with a gut-blowing punch, but my invincibility also makes me not feel pain. The man looked really confused when I wasn't on the ground in tears from his punch. I ran

off to get him away from Ronnie and Rocket so they wouldn't get hurt.

My plan worked. The man came running after me. I knocked down shelves to slow him down, but he was just dodging them.

By this time, the police were pulling up. I guess this scared him because he ran out the back door.

That was the first time I actually used my power in a real-life crisis. Before this, I tried to use my powers as little as possible so people didn't find out about them.

A couple of days later, I was awarded a medal for my heroic actions by the police department even though I didn't catch the guy. Although my parents didn't want people to find out about my powers, they didn't mind too much because I used my gift for a good cause. I wasn't satisfied, though, because I hadn't caught the man who tried to rob the store.

After school on Thursday evening, I asked my mom if Rocket and I could go to the library to do some homework. "Sure," my mom said, "but under the condition that you're back by eight o'clock," she replied. I said ok and rode up to the library with Rocket on our bikes. What I didn't tell my mom was, it wasn't homework for school, but homework for the robbery that happened a few days earlier.

We walked to the back of the library where they kept biographies of all the 44 Presidents. I knew that no one went over there because I saw a lot of dust on the books. Rocket and I sat down at a square, two-person table. Rocket seemed all pumped to get started, I think because of all the action movies he's seen.

I didn't want to break the news to him, though, about what his mom told me. She said she didn't want him involved in any more dangerous activities, which includes robberies, because he's not invincible like I am. I didn't know how to break the news, so I just said it straight out. After I told him, he seemed pretty upset, but then I told him he could still help me try to catch the man who robbed the video game store. Rocket still seemed disappointed, but he looked a little better after I told him he could still help me.

I took out all the evidence that I had collected from the past few days, which included a piece of paper that the mystery suspect dropped when he was chasing me. I also had notes I had taken about the case, and a picture of a muddy footprint left behind from the man when he was in the store.

I took a look at the piece of paper left behind at the store. All that was on it was the numbers 6-11-16 and 7, plus the letters T and S. At first I thought the letters were someone's initials. "Those are the same initials as the thrift store on Maple Tree Road," Rocket said. That was it! The guy was going to rob the thrift store on Maple Tree Road.

I got all excited, but then I remembered we still didn't know what the numbers meant. I started thinking about what they could mean. Directions? No, why would he need directions? Then a light bulb went off. What if those numbers meant the date and time he was going to rob the store? I told Rocket about my idea. I guess we were thinking the same thing because he interrupted me with the same things I was about to say.

I wasn't really paying attention to the time, and when I looked at my watch it was already seven-fifty. Rocket and I crammed all our stuff into my tiny backpack and ran so fast out the door that I tripped at the top step to get into the library and rolled all the way down a sixteen-step flight of stairs. Rocket thought it was hilarious and couldn't help himself from laughing, but when he saw how badly my leg was cut up he wasn't laughing anymore. I honestly have never seen so much blood in my life. It's a good thing I can't feel, because if I could I would have been in a puddle of tears from pain I couldn't even imagine.

When I walked into my house I washed the blood off with a towel and threw it away because it was so gross. After my mom tucked me in and said good night, I lay in my bed thinking about what I was getting myself into. I finally fell asleep around eleven-thirty.

Straight after school Friday afternoon, Rocket and I rode our bikes up to the police station to tell them about the evidence we found about the case. I was dripping wet in sweat because it was so hot outside. As Rocket and I walked through the doors, we were greeted by Chief Pete. "What can I do for you, boys?" Chief Pete asked. I told Chief Pete about the evidence we found about the case. He told us we needed more proof than just a piece of paper with some words and numbers. Rocket and I trudged sadly out of the police station with our heads down. I was really bummed about the situation, but Rocket and I decided we were still going to try to take him down.

I woke up Saturday morning with a determined face. The piece of paper said the heist was going to take place at closing hours at the thrift store, which is seven o'clock. The whole day I basically sat on the couch bored out of my mind waiting for the night to come. I sat on the couch so long that eventually my mom kicked me out of the house. Instead of just standing outside all day I rode my bike up to Rocket's house.

Rocket was also outside, but instead of looking happy, he looked sad. Rocket told me that his mom grounded him so he couldn't leave the house. He said he did badly on his homework and then on the test because instead of studying we worked on the case. I felt bad that Rocket was grounded, but then again at least my mom still hadn't found out.

By six-thirty, I was all ready to leave with all my stuff packed up and my bike outside waiting for me. I told my mom that I was heading into town to get some supplies for school.

As I neared the store, I hardly saw anyone driving. I reached the store, and there were only two cars in the parking lot. When the sliding doors opened, I only saw one other person in the store besides the clerk. The man had a baseball cap on and a black and grey sweatshirt. I wondered if that was the same guy who robbed the video game store. I got in closer to get a better glimpse of the man. As I observed him in a non-creepy way, I saw a snake tattoo on his hand: the same as the guy from the video game store. I realized it was him! I took out my phone and immediately called the police.

The man was slowly making his way toward the checkout. His hand was in his jacket pocket. It looked like he was reaching for something. All of a sudden he pulled a gun out of his left jacket pocket. I reacted fast by hiding behind a coat rack. When he was right under it, I pushed the coat rack into him, knocking him down.

He still had possession of the gun. The man quickly got up and with one lift of the finger shot off his gun. The bullet came straight toward my leg. My leg started gushing blood, but I was still going strong. The man turned around and fired another round to my right shoulder. The impact made me fall down. I quickly got up.

We were running through the store dodging obstacles as they came. I was chasing him as I heard the police in the background. But instead of running away this time, he stayed.

I got tired after a while, but the man was still running around shooting rounds in the air, I think to scare us. By this time, the police entered, guns at the ready. Now the man was face to face with four police officers. The man looked like he was about to shoot again but then dropped his weapon. The police apprehended him. "Take him away," one of the officers said to another officer.

After about five minutes my mom came running in, and all she did was hug me. At that time I knew I was a hero. After that, I was put on the news. I didn't care if people knew about my superpower anymore because I wanted people to know that there is someone to protect them and keep them safe, and so did my parents.

JIMMY'S MAGIC SHOES

When a boy named Jimmy buys shoes from Walmart, his whole world changes. Jimmy has to stop crime, save the people, and save his shoes in JIMMY'S MAGIC SHOES by Caroline Kirsh-Carr.

With Jimmy out of the way, the shoes could finally jump in the.... Maybe I should start from the beginning. So here it is.

One year ago a boy named Jimmy was walking through Walmart. Jimmy was 11 years old. He had pink hair and was eight feet tall. Jimmy was looking for a pair of shoes in size 52.

Jimmy found only one pair that would fit him. The shoes were black with pink and purple stripes, and, little did Jimmy know, his shoes were magical.

It was a Saturday afternoon when he was walking to the ice cream shop and he started flying. He flew higher than birds and higher than planes. Then he took out his phone and saw that school was about to start, so he flew over there.

He started shooting laser beams out of his eyes. When a laser beam hit a tree it turned into ashes. Jimmy was scared and wondered if he had any other powers. Jimmy was excited to try his new powers.

Once Jimmy started using his new powers he could not control them. He knew that he needed a lot of practice. Jimmy practiced all his new powers for a long time in a secret area behind his house. In this area there were a lot of willow trees. The willow trees comforted Jimmy when his only friend Bob wasn't with him. This was just the beginning of Jimmy's newly-discovered powers. Jimmy was super amazed at his new powers, but kind of scared. Jimmy knew that there was good and evil, and Jimmy wanted to be good.

Jimmy went to school the next day. When Jimmy got to school he said to his best friend, Bob A. Mann, "I have superpowers!"

Bob did not believe Jimmy, so he said to prove it. Jimmy took Bob to the Deep Dark Woods of Death. In these woods are unicorns, magic flying cheese balls, and a giant active volcano. This volcano's name is Mt. Volcano. Jimmy started flying and shooting his laser beams. Bob was so amazed that his best and only friend had

superpowers that he was speechless. Then Jimmy accidentally shot Bob. Bob turned into a pile of dust. Bob's ashes smelled of chicken.

Jimmy's knees got weak, and his palms were sweaty. Jimmy said to Bob, "No! You can't die now! you have so much to live for!" He was so scared he threw up on Bob's ashes. Jimmy went down to his friend.

Bob's ashes turned back into Bob when Jimmy touched them! Bob said, "Let's not do that again."

Jimmy said to Bob, "Oh thank God you're alive, and I'm so sorry that I threw up on you." Then Bob and Jimmy went home.

Jimmy wanted to know how he got his powers. He thought to himself, *What changed last night?* Jimmy realized the only thing that changed was his shoes. To prove it he tried using his powers without his shoes, and it didn't work.

When he flew to school he said to Bob that it was his shoes that gave him powers. Jimmy decided to become Jim A. Dude, the superhero. Jimmy snuck out every night to fight.

One night he had to stop a bank robbery. That's how he met his archenemy Connor Peach. Connor was a 40-year-old man in a 2-year-old's Batman costume. Connor Peach had the one power that could beat all of Jimmy's powers: super strength. Connor got his powers by taking a shower in radioactive waste.

Connor Peach had a catch phrase: "I'm black; I'm white; I'm going to stalk you through the night: I'm Connor Peach."

Connor's super strength could deflect Jim's laser beams, but Jim was too fast for Connor.

After that night, Jim A. Dude fought Connor Peach almost every night.

One day Jimmy's shoes were not there when he got up. Jimmy called Bob through the tin cans. Jimmy and Bob looked for them everywhere, but they could not find them. Jimmy and Bob kept look for Jimmy's shoes until...the shoes came in and started talking to Jimmy and Bob. They said both at once, "I know you never heard us speak before. That's because we were too shy. But you have to listen to us. Connor Peach stole us while you were sleeping. We are going to jump in Mt. Volcano so no evil person can ever get us again."

Jimmy could not believe that his shoes could talk. His mind was blown. Jimmy jumped onto the shoes, and they started flying to the top of Mt. Volcano.

When Jimmy got to the top of the volcano he tried to reason with the shoes so that they would not jump into the volcano, but they would not listen.

Jimmy said, "Please don't jump in. I need you. Without you I'm just an ordinary boy. Who will help save the city from crime? You can't jump; you can't."

Jimmy kept talking with the shoes. The shoes got fed up with Jimmy and pushed him in. With Jimmy out of the way the shoes could finally jump in the volcano.

Connor Peach was stalking them the whole time, and when the shoes jumped in Mt. Volcano, he realized he had nothing to live for. Connor Peach jumped in Mt. Volcano, too.

THE JOURNEY OF POSEIDON

In **THE JOURNEY OF POSEIDON** by **Jack Knoper**, the god Poseidon gets turned into a kid and goes on a journey to return back to his old self.

Good day to you, mortal. I'm Poseidon, god of the sea. I live in the sea, but I visit family on Mount Olympus on some occasions. My brother is the king of the gods, Zeus: you know, the one who throws lightning bolts. Have you heard of him? Good. Now the story that I'm about to tell you happened a long time ago and is unforgettable.

One day, I was doing my usual evening patrol on the banks of the Indian Ocean. I came across a well at the nearby docks that I had never seen before. It was lined with gold and had a bronze base instead of a stone base. I went over and took a drink from the well, for patrolling the world's seas are tiring. I felt a searing pain shooting through my body. I was getting younger, and it was happening fast. I was no longer an elder because my wrinkles were fading as my hair regained its color. Quickly, I could no longer remember who I was or what this place was surrounding me.

I fell back into the water, sinking ever so slightly. My trident slipped out of my clenched hands and into the depths of a terrifying abyss. The abyss seemed to swallow my gleaming trident. It turns out the monstrous abyss was actually the leviathan, and it was looking straight at me. A slithering water creature with a snake-like body and a mouth that could have the *Titanic* as a snack is only a quick description of the leviathan. It probably was asleep, and it woke up when I splashed through the water's surface.

By the time I realized it was a leviathan, my memory was slipping away. I swam upward, forgetting I could breathe underwater. From the fear of getting eaten by the leviathan, I surged forward. When I got to the surface, all but the memory of Mount Olympus was gone.

I felt like going to Mount Olympus was going to help answer my questions, since it was the one familiar place.

I made my way to the Hudson River, which surrounds Manhattan Island, thanks to the currents carrying me. After I climbed out of the river, I saw creatures strolling by on the sidewalk above, holding boxes and talking about the myth of Mount

Olympus. It was believed that Mount Olympus was on Manhattan Island. These strange creatures said this myth came from a book.

I spotted a harbor, and when I climbed out of the river, there was a flash of blinding white light. The next thing I knew I was wearing a spotless white tunic. I felt a tug toward a towering structure. I decided that was where I needed to go. On the way there I saw some strange creatures. Some of these creatures I spotted looked like me. There were loud sounds coming from moving objects that carried other creatures like me.

When I got to the entrance of the towering structure, I tried to walk through the entryway, only to hit my head on the glass door. Another one of these creatures that looked like me simply opened the door from the inside. I walked through and nodded my head in the creature's direction.

I felt the tug stronger now. I was pulled toward the gleaming doors that slid open like jaws after the creature who let me into the massive structure pushed a button. I stepped through the jaw-like doors into a cozy compartment with lots of buttons. There was a button on the top that caught my eye with the number 600 marked across it in gold print. I felt the sudden urge to press it. My hand seemed to have a mind of its own and pressed the button. The compartment shot up with increasing speed. I came to a sudden halt. The jaws slid open and revealed a mystical place.

I was particularly interested in the unusual building that was perched on top of the mountain that was before me. I made my way up the mountain to the building that was built on top that I then realized was a temple. When I made my way to the entrance of the temple, I saw a huge banquet table piled with every kind of food imaginable. There were creatures young and old, hulking and scrawny, sitting around this table.

The creature who seemed to be in charge noticed me first before the other creatures did. This massive creature in charge said in a booming voice, "Come here, boy!" I shuffled to where this creature, who towered over me even though he was sitting, had summoned me. He looked into my eyes and whispered, "Poseidon?"

My memories came back bit by bit. I remembered my father, Kronos, swallowing me as a baby. This memory sparked an idea: Kronos had put the well there. Hearing my name spoken by my brother Zeus broke the curse of the well. The reversal of the curse allowed me to remember everything prior to that drink from the

well. The well had been built by Kronos's followers to wreak havoc, and now it had been broken. I called to all the creatures who I now remembered were gods. I remembered each of their names.

Then I finally recalled that I had dropped my trident into the leviathan's mouth. I asked my cyclops uncles for a favor while they were still sitting around the table. They agreed to make me a new trident only if I would track down the leviathan that swallowed my trident and slay it. I of course agreed that a monstrous creature with that much power would be devastating to mortals.

I tracked the leviathan down and slayed the beast. The battle shook the sea and created what mortals call a hurricane. The battle was called the Battle of Agnes. It lasted for nine mortal days, and it resulted in my giving the old trident to my uncles for safekeeping.

I returned to my palace where my son Tyson was organizing a search party for me. Tyson saw me, swam up, and started crying.

I handed him some seaweed to wipe his tears and said, "Let's just have a welcome home party," and we celebrated all night. The day after, I destroyed the well and continued my duties as god of the seas.

THE MAGICAL ADVENTURE

*Kate needs to step into a new world to find her friends in **THE MAGICAL ADVENTURE** by Danae Jordan. She meets a helpful pig and figures out that she is an independent girl.*

Kate was a very special girl. She went to the best private school around. On Monday, June 5th, 2020 Kate rode her hovering board to school. When Kate got to school she noticed that there was nobody there.

When Kate finally got to her classroom, it was dark because the lights were off. It was quiet and lonely.

As Kate looked around, she saw something glowing in the dark. It was a portal. Kate was thinking to herself, *Should I go in, or should I go home?* After debating, Kate decided to go in the portal.

In the portal flying, she saw all of these random colors and animals also flying around her. When she finally made it to her destination she saw the cutest flying pig ever. She asked the pig, "Where am I?"

The flying pig answered, "Well, my lady, you are in Gardena Land, the land of wonders and magical things." Kate was surprised because she had dreamt of this land.

Kate asked the pig two questions. One of them was "What is your name, pig?"

The pig answered, "My name is Mr. Piglet."

The second question she asked was "Can you help me find my friends and classmates?"

Mr. Piglet said, "I cannot help you, but I bet Miss Gardena can help you find your friends and classmates."

Kate asked, "How can I find Miss Gardena?"

Mr. Piglet said, "All you have to do is find three things. One is the blood of a dragon, another is a flower in the Gardena garden that is pink, and the third thing is the hair of a nine-legged cow."

Kate asked Mr. Piglet to come on the journey with her to find all three of these things. Mr. Piglet said, "No."

Kate was surprised Mr. Piglet said no because she thought he was a nice man.

Mr. Piglet said, "The first thing you have to do is find a blue cave. That's where the dragon lives."

Kate said, "Will you at least tell me where to find the blue cave?"

Mr. Piglet said, "Fine. I will help you find the cave."

Kate looked around. She finally found the cave. Mr. Piglet said, "I will fly you up there and help you kill the dragon."

"Mr. Piglet, I have a bad feeling about this. It doesn't look very safe," said Kate.

Mr. Piglet said, "It looks unsafe to me because of all the dead skeletons around the cave and the bat noise."

Kate yelled, "Mr. Piglet, I am not going to let a silly dragon fool me or you. I think I will use this sword from this dead person to kill the dragon."

The dragon woke from Kate yelling about him. When Kate turned around to kill the dragon, she saw him right there with his blood-red eyes and wrinkly skin and thought, *I'm going to die*. Kate ran, but the dragon grabbed Mr. Piglet and said, "Mmmm, bacon."

Then Kate got angry. She turned bright red and threw the sword. It stabbed the dragon in the heart. She stole Mr. Piglet out of his hands while he was falling.

Kate hurried up and got a sample of the blood. Then, Mr. Piglet said, "Thank you for saving me. I almost became bacon."

Kate chuckled and said, "It was nothing."

Mr. Piglet said, "Did you get the sample? If we don't get the entire thing before midnight you and your classmates might be stuck here forever." Mr. Piglet continued, "Now you have to find a blue flower garden."

Kate said, "I thought you didn't want to help me."

Mr. Piglet said, "I might as well since you saved my life."

Kate found the garden very quickly because it was right next to the blue cave. Mr. Piglet flew Kate to the garden. When they got there, Mr. Piglet said, "You have to find a pink flower."

Kate said, "This is impossible. How are we going to find a pink flower in a blue garden?"

Mr. Piglet came up with a solution. He said, "Let's fly over the garden and look for the flower that stands out."

Kate said, "That's a great idea."

Mr. Piglet and Kate flew over the garden and found the pink flower hidden in the far back where no one ever looks. Mr. Piglet told Kate about the myth of the pink flower: Five thousand years ago a queen wanted a special flower. That flower was the only pink flower that grows in that state. The queen sent thousands of men to look for this

flower and couldn't find it, only because none of them dared go to the back of the flower garden. There were stories that it was cursed by a creature that will kill you. Mr. Piglet said, "You have already killed the beast that roams the garden." Kate and Mr. Piglet went back down on the ground, and he helped Kate grab the flower.

Mr. Piglet said, "There is only one more thing on our list we have to find. We need to find the rare nine-legged cow." Mr. Piglet also said to Kate, "Look for a very small farm with black grass." It took Kate a while, but she finally found the farm with black grass. When she pointed to the place, Mr. Piglet said, "We might have to walk because I won't have enough fuel in my wings to bring you to the great castle."

So Mr. Piglet and Kate had to walk 15 miles to get to the black-grassed farm. When they made it, the nine-legged cow was having a baby. So what Kate did was help this cow have its baby now. Mr. Piglet thought they should just let the cow lie there and die and then they could go to the castle, but Kate did not think that was the right thing to do.

After the cow had nine babies Kate stole a piece of the cow's hair and ran away because the cow had said, "Anyone who steals my hair ends up in my stomach." Kate did not have enough time to talk and change this cow's mind, so she just stole it.

Kate had all her stuff, and she and Mr. Piglet went to the castle. The doors were open, so they just walked in. The queen, or Miss Gardena, said, "Who dares to come in my castle?" Then the doors shut.

Kate said, "It is I, Kate, and I would like to free my friends and classmates."

Miss Gardena said, "Your wish is my command." Then Kate saw her friends and classmates across from her.

She said, "What about the stuff I need to give you?"

Miss Gardena said, "It does not matter. I just needed to see if you had skills, and you have wonderful ones, my dear." Then Miss Gardena said, "Blink twice and you will be back at your school."

Kate did not understand very much, so she asked, "Will I ever see you again?"

Miss Gardena said, "Only in your dreams, my dear."

Kate did just what she said and was back at her school learning about all the wonders of math. Even though she hated math, it felt special this time.

NINJA HAMSTERS

*It's the Ninja Hamster against The Other Side in a battle of quick-thinking and warrior skills. He is a credit to his country in **NINJA HAMSTERS** by Sarah Newman.*

“Ninja hamster! Ninja hamster! We need you right away!” said Mr. Hamster.

“Yes, Mr. Hamster?” said the Ninja Hamster.

“We need you to get our secret file. These files have information in them about the identity of our secret agents and their families and could be devastating to them and our cause if they end up in the wrong hands. Other Side Hamster Government stole them, and they are hiding it in a secret abandoned warehouse in Alaska,” said Mr. Hamster.

“Ok, I will take on the quest,” said the Ninja Hamster.

The Ninja Hamster was sent on a helicopter to Alaska. They found the warehouse-shaped house. They lowered the Ninja Hamster down on the roof. The Ninja Hamster used his laser to open a hole in the corner of the roof so he could get in. Then he slowly jumped down onto the hard, stony floor.

Suddenly he heard, “He’s here! Get him!” from the back of the room. He couldn’t see the hamsters when he came in because it was too dark, and they probably heard him when he landed on the roof. The Ninja Hamster swooped around to face them.

Two guys came after him and started throwing punches. The Ninja blocked them and kicked them right in the gut. The two bad ninjas were knocked out. Three more ninjas came after him. The Ninja Hamster ran but soon realized that he was cornered. He looked around to see anything he could use. He then found a giant sandbag above them held by a rope, left by the sand factory that used to be housed on that site many years before.

He threw his ninja stars to cut the rope. The sandbag went down, covering the Other Side ninja hamsters in the sand and leaving them unconscious.

The Ninja Hamster found the filing cabinet and grabbed the files. What he didn’t realize was the rope he just cut was held by a giant metal container that was hung above where he got in. The ninja was trapped.

He saw two different hallways leading somewhere. He decided to choose the hallway on his right. While he was walking, he didn't notice that there was a tripwire on the ground. Suddenly "Ahhh!" He fell into this tiny box with the lid slamming shut. Soon the walls started to close in on him.

There was no way he could get out of this box. He thought of a plan and hoped it would work. He started to breathe out all the air he had in him and tried to make himself thinner. The box continued to close. By the time the walls were about a hair away from him they stopped. The machine must have thought he would be gone by now. When it was done, the lid opened. The lid opened because someone had to clean up the mess. The ninja got out his grappling hook and climbed his way out of there.

He continued walking to try to find an exit. Soon he found a garage door that was open. He ran toward the exit, which is when Other Side Ninja Hamsters started to chase after him. He had to run with all his might to get away from them, but they were still chasing him.

While he was running, the helicopter pilot saw him and came to the rescue. The crew lowered down a ladder for him to jump onto. The ninja tried to reach, but it wasn't close enough. He had to jump for it.

He leapt as high as he could. He grabbed the ladder with his finger. He pulled himself while being dragged by the ladder across the hard, sandy ground.

He climbed up the ladder, and they headed back to the Hamster Government.

"We owe you a big thank you. You not only got our files back, but you also knocked out all of the Other Side ninja hamsters, so now the Other Side doesn't have any more good ninjas."

"Thank you," said the Ninja Hamster.

For the Ninja Hamster's bravery, he got a medal and will always be remembered as a true hero.

Somewhere in the Other Side

"You think you saw the last of me? Well, you thought wrong. I will get my revenge on you, Ninja Hamster, and I will rule the world! Mwah-ha-ha-ha-ha."

ON THE RUN

*A pig who lives a life of crime will do anything to keep from being arrested in **ON THE RUN** by Zachary Bradford Peters.*

On a stormy day in April, there was a big, old, wrinkly pig who was up to no good. His name was Bacon. Bacon was hiding in a dark, scary alley with garbage everywhere. The smell was so strong and foul! He could hardly stand it himself, which is saying a lot, since Bacon lived in pure slop while growing up on the farm.

Bacon looked behind him for any sign of those mean, nasty cops. There were none in his sight, so he called his getaway driver, Brian the human, and said, "Meet me at Money Bank for a robbery."

Once Brian arrived, Bacon the pig ran into the bank and shouted, "GIVE ME ALL OF YOUR MONEY! THIS IS A ROBBERY!" The people behind the counter gave him all of their money and the scared, shaking customers ran around in circles screaming, "AHHHHHHHHH!" One of the customers in the corner was calling the cops. Bacon ran out of the bank and was waiting anxiously for Brian.

The very anxious pig, Bacon, sent an urgent text to Brian that said, "COME HERE NOW!"

Fifteen seconds later Brian said "Get in now!"

The pig opened the door and said to Brian, "STEP ON IT!"

The pig heard the loudest, screechiest sirens and gunshots. The cops were chasing them. The tires on the car popped, and the car flipped over. Brian hit his head on the window, giving him a concussion. The pig was flying in the car, hitting every wall.

The cops stopped and approached to see if anybody was in the car. The pig shook Brian to wake him, but he did not wake up, so he ran away.

Bacon took his money and hid in a damp, stinky, sloppy pig pen. He was buried deep within so the cops would not find him. The rain was dripping off his face.

He stood up, the slop and mud dripping down his body, and ran up to the cops and said, "You killed my friend!" Bacon pulled a gun from his pocket and shot one of the cops. The other cop fired, but Bacon got away and hid for two long years.

In that time, he changed his identity by wearing a wig with long, dark hair and big, baggy clothing. He changed his name to Peter so nobody would know it was him involved in the Money Bank robbery. He bought a new, clean home and finally ended the madness!

OUR STORY: WINTER AND LEAH

*A near-tragedy for Winter the unicorn turns out to be the beginning of a dear friendship in **OUR STORY: WINTER AND LEAH** by Erika Long.*

Winter was sitting in her jet. Little did she know that she was about to meet her best friend.

Winter was off to Unifrance when her flight was rerouted to Univille. Suddenly the jet tipped sideways, and the door tipped open. Winter was falling from the sky! It happened because of a big lightning bolt.

Then came a bright rainbow unicorn named Leah. She saw Winter falling and saved her life from falling from the jet.

“You saved my life!” said Winter.

Leah said, “It was nothing.”

Winter said, “I will do anything you need me to do.”

Leah said, “Well, I would really like you to be my friend and live with me.”

Winter said, “Why must I live with you?”

Leah said, “Well, my old friend died last year because of a sudden stroke.”

Winter said, “Ok.”

Leah took Winter back to the town where Winter lived. It was a town for unicorns. Winter told Leah that she wanted Leah to show her around Unicornio. Leah took Winter to a candy store. Winter found her new favorite cookie. Winter’s new favorite cookie is a Uni Oreo Cookie.

After weeks of Winter and Leah meeting each other, they became best unicorn friends. But one day as Leah was walking down the street a car hit her beautiful rainbow tail. The driver claimed that he didn’t see her walking. Winter, with no time to lose, rushed Leah to the hospital. Leah got her tail x-rayed, and her tail was completely broken.

Leah said, “Winter, I need your help!”

Winter said, “I will help you because you saved my life.”

Winter was such a sweet unicorn. She helped Leah gain back her tail strength. She helped Leah by doing her grocery store shopping and cleaning her room. Winter could hardly wait for Leah’s tail to heal.

This helped Leah and Winter's friendship grow. Winter and Leah became best friends forever. Leah was excited to help. She and Winter spent the rest of their lives together forever.

POWER IN MY HANDS

*There's a mad murderer out there, and there's only one person to stop her. In **POWER IN MY HANDS** by **Maya-Rose Trajano**, a girl must stop a murderer who turns out to be just like her.*

I was born with something special. I was born with something dangerous, if not handled properly. I was born with a power activated through strong feelings and released through my hands. The power that is released through my hands is fire, which I control. Fortunately, for my sake, I'm not the only one who was born with this. Other people have a power like mine, except it might not be fire released through their hands. It could be lightning or water. I like to call mine The Touch of Fire.

My brother had made me so mad the day I found out that I had this power. My brother always makes me mad, and this time I had had enough. I was full of so much anger and hate that I ran away to what I call "The Safe Spot."

I slammed the door to my house and ran to an old, abandoned shed behind the park around the corner. I turned on the lantern that I put in there when I first discovered this place. It was nightfall, so there was little light. I sat down on the dusty, creaky floor with my head buried in my knees.

I sat there letting my anger get the best of me. I felt my hands ball into fists. Then the lantern blew out. Slowly, out of the corner of my eye, I could see a light start to form. I looked up to see that my fists were on fire.

I just sat there looking at my fists. I didn't jump in fear or do anything. Was I just so in shock? Another weird part was the fact that I felt nothing. There was no pain at all.

My fists were getting tighter. The flames raged. *Ok, ok, calm down, this is not real*, I said to myself. I pinched myself, hoping that this was all a dream. It was not a dream. *Ok, just calm down*, I said again. The flames slowly disappeared along with my anger. After all of that, it took me a while before I could move. It took me a while to just accept what had happened.

I ran home from the shed. It was really quiet when I got home. Mom wasn't home yet, which meant that she was working the night shift. Lately the hospital has been in need of extra help, which

meant double staff. I didn't know and didn't care what my dad was doing. He ran off a long time ago. My brother must've gone to that sleepover he was talking about. "Samantha?" I said. Samantha was my babysitter.

No one answered. It was silent. I slowly walked into every room, scanning them to see if she was there. The kitchen was the last place to look. I slowly walked in, and what I saw was not a pretty sight. Samantha was dead!

I dropped to the floor. I checked her pulse, because there were no wounds or blood on the floor. My mom taught me that. Her pulse was still.

A million feelings rushed through me. I was sad, mad, shocked, and scared. There were tears dripping from my face. Then, all of a sudden, my hands were on fire again. My hands still did not hurt. The flames grew bigger and bigger the more I cried, so I tried to stop myself.

There was a voice in my head. It was soft and calm, and it had an echo. "Hello, Mica," she said.

I said, "Who are you?"

"I am your guardian. I watch over all those with a power like yours, and the one who did this has a power like you. Except it's not the Touch of Fire. She has the touch of death."

The touch of death? What in the world does that mean? "What do you mean?" I said.

She explained it to me. "If this person touches someone at the time her powers are activated, the person she touches will die. The person who holds this ability is Asami. No one really likes Asami. She has had a sad life. She is shunned by many people, bullied for her personality, and everyone despises her. This angers her, so now she is going around killing people for revenge. Mica, I need you to find her and stop her before she gets to more people."

I have to find her? What does she want me to do to her or say? What if she touches me? I asked, "How do I find her?"

"I'll give you a map of all the locations she has reached. I should probably tell you that your power is activated by feelings and released through your hands. If you're not careful, then you could cause great danger. You must learn how to control it."

"How do I control it?" I asked.

Unfortunately, she left me with the worst answer I could have received at a time like this. She said, "You find a way to control it." Then she was gone.

The first thing I did was call 911. They came quicker than I expected. The ambulance took Samantha's body to the hospital. The cops asked me a few questions and then called my mom. My mom was crying on the phone. She was coming straight home.

It had been three weeks since the death of Samantha. I had been practicing my power. I'd also been working on controlling my power, or at least trying to. The only time I could was when my brother made me mad, which is good, because that's all the time. I did think: *What if when I face this girl, I end up having no strong feelings at the time?* Well, she took away someone who was very close to me. But I couldn't use my anger and just go off at her. I had to talk to her. I said that I should learn to control my powers before I even thought about going to look for Asami.

The map that my guardian gave me put a glowing dot on each spot Asami hit. Wait, this couldn't be! Ten dots showed up on the map! That's way too many. I may not have controlled my power yet, but I had to go before more dots showed up.

I snuck out at night. I left a note in my bedroom on my bed.

I looked at the map to see where Asami hit latest. The bad part is that there were dots spread across the map, and there was no way to tell which area Asami hit last. The only way was to hit all 12 spots.

I spent all night searching. I looked at three of the closest spots. The bad part was that there were at least three people who were victims in those spots.

I caught some sleep on the bus ride to the next stop. The abrupt stop woke me up. That day I'd wanted to hit five more, which would have left me with four more spots to search.

This was just great. Most of my buses were delayed. I got to two of the spots. There were seven victims, and I still had seven more spots.

It took me four days to hit all the spots, and I finally found her. I was standing like a yard behind her. I could tell that she knew I was there. She said, "What do you want?"

I replied, "Please stop this, Asami. Revenge gets you nowhere. I know you're in pain, and you're going through dark times, but...."

I'm never that good with words. I had to figure out what to say next. "You just have to let go and calm down."

She turned around and ran at me full speed. She had her hand out in front of her ready to touch me. I was very scared, and I noticed my fists were on fire. I jumped back to dodge the attack.

The guardian had said to take her arm and make her touch her head. It wouldn't kill her, but she would pass out. As long as I didn't touch her hand I would be fine.

I grabbed her arm. The fire burned her. I heard her scream. I pushed her arm, making her touch her forehead. My task was completed.

Asami passed out, and after a while she woke up. She was crying. She was remembering everything she'd done. She was looking at her hands like they were monsters. I went over to put my hands on her shoulders to calm her down. When I set them there, she jerked back. She got up and started screaming and running.

I heard that voice in my head again. "It's okay. I'll take it from here." I stepped back. "Go home."

I started walking home and felt myself crying, too. I was crying because of joy.

THE PRICE WE WILL PAY

Life and death aren't always what they seem for one girl and the women in her family in THE PRICE WE WILL PAY by Liliانا Warnica.

BOOM! The sound of an explosion could be heard throughout the silent park.

The good characters looked at the ride in horror as parts of the attraction littered the ground. They were stunned. What had this dispute between good and bad caused? This was one of Magic Kingdom's most prized rides. If something happened to it, the Magic Kingdom would never be the same.

The Disney villains and heroes, who come to life whenever the park is closed, are always at odds. Each side is trying to be in control of all things Disney. The heroes have always been in control, but the villains feel as if there needs to be some change in leadership. During park hours everyone works together and plays their appropriate roles, but at night all these characters become more human and act on their own.

Before the explosion, the good characters that weren't fighting in the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train ride were celebrating 60 years of Disneyland magic by eating Dole Whip and riding It's a Small World. Peter Pan, Dumbo, Baloo, Mowgli, and Sebastian were happily singing and eating in their Small World boats.

It was also a typical night for the villains who were planning their revenge for not being invited to the celebration. Scar was busy plotting how to let the animals out of their cages in Animal Kingdom. The Queen of Hearts was dreaming of causing havoc in Epcot by spray-painting the words "OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!" on all the buildings in Epcot's United Kingdom. Meanwhile, Cruella De Vil was whining about not having her own ride. Typically when the park is closed and the visitors are gone, there was a lot of planning of mischief by the villains but little action. Tonight, however, was different.

The Evil Queen looked toward the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train. Smoke was curling off the ride. *HA! Those fools, she thought. Serves them right after everything they have done to us! That ride should have been all about me!* The Evil Queen turned her back to the ride and walked away, cackling evilly.

The Disney Princesses were having their annual Happily Ever After Meeting in the Town Hall when they heard the explosion. Almost immediately after, Prince Charming came running into the Town Hall.

"I'm super sorry to interrupt your meeting, but we need your help down in Fantasyland. Maleficent, the Evil Queen, and the Haunted Mansion ghosts were fighting the fab five and Pixar characters, and they accidently blew up part of the mine ride," said the prince.

The reaction was immediate.

"What are we going to do!" yelled Snow White.

"Isn't that one of the children's favorite rides?" asked Belle.

"But there are only six hours left till the park opens," exclaimed Anna. "What is going to happen?" This comment stopped everyone cold. "How do we fix this?"

Back at the mine train ride Doc cried, "Why won't these pieces of track fit together!"

"Maybe because you're missing a piece," said Maleficent, as she held up the piece.

"Give it back," said Doc.

"I'd rather not!" yelled Maleficent.

"But you will."

"Make me."

"Good always trumps evil."

"Not today," stated Maleficent.

All of a sudden they heard a shrill scream coming from outside of the ride. Doc was the first to run out to the front of the ride and see the cast member, who was early for her morning shift. The cast member looked up in shock and screamed.

"Who are you, and what have you done?" said the cast member as she started pacing. "Oh, I am so getting fired. How am I going to explain this? They'll sue me! I won't be able to live in America anymore!" she exaggerated.

"Excuse me, but I think I am going to leave now, okay?" Doc said as he backed away slowly.

"No, you stay right here," stated the angry cast member.

"Okay! Sounds good, please don't kill me."

"Who are you?" the cast member asked sternly.

"I'm known as Doc."

“Okay, Doc. Tell me what you exactly did, and why you did it.”

* * *

“...and that is how leopards got their spots,” Doc finished.

By now there were five characters that were with the cast member: Doc, Maleficent, Rapunzel, the Evil Queen, and Flynn Rider.

“Okay, but that doesn’t answer my question. One last time: What...were...you...guys...doing...here?” she said in a low, slow tone. “And what is with your outfits?”

“Oh, this old thing. I sewed it with this fabric I got from...” Rapunzel started.

“That is not what I meant, and you know that.”

“Sorry,” Rapunzel said apologetically.

“Okay, so the truth is that we’re actually new cast members, and we had no idea where to go. We were already dressed up, and then when we got here, the ride was in ruins. Doc was just checking it out, and yeah,” Flynn said all in one breath.

“We called the Imagineers and maintenance, and they said they would be right over,” added Rapunzel.

“Hmmm, okay. That makes sense, I guess. But why didn’t you just say that at the beginning?”

“We were just embarrassed,” Maleficent replied.

“Oh, so you can talk,” the cast member said sarcastically. Maleficent just stuck her tongue out at that last comment. “Well, I guess you’re free to go. If you need anything, just give me a ring.” And just like that, she walked away.

Thank goodness that worked, thought Doc. The characters have a few rules if a cast member starts questioning them. The first rule is to act clueless. The next option is to pretend to be cast members. The third thing characters must attempt is to try to talk their way out of the situation.

“Oh golly!” exclaimed Doc. “We now only have two hours till the park opens, and one hour till the rest of the cast members show up! We will never fix the ride on time.”

“Don’t worry. Let’s just check out the damage and see what we can do,” Rapunzel told Doc.

When they walked into the ride, what they saw was amazing. Every character, good and bad, was helping clean up the place and to make it look as if nothing had happened. Fix-It Felix stood

tapping his magical hammer on the most damaged parts of the ride. The tracks were all put together with no missing pieces. The animatronics were up and moving in their normal spots. The cracks on the wall were covered up. It looked as if nothing had happened.

Now today, if you visit the Magic Kingdom and go on the Seven Dwarfs Mine Train, look closely at the ride. You will notice things you didn't see before. There may be a small crack in the wall or a tiny split in the track, and now you will know the real story.

SHADOW WING

*When a war starts between dragons and humans it's up to a brave warrior and a dragon to stop the fighting in **SHADOW WING** by **Karam Asi**.*

It's all because of the new kingdom that there is a war between dragons and humans. Why would the humans choose to kick the dragons out of their kingdoms for more land?

"My name is Doom, and I am a dragon slayer," said me, the guy in the hood.

"All right, we need a talent like that. Get in your armor and let's get to battle," said the general.

Five hours later

Everyone is in armor and ready for battle. No one knows the outcome except one person, who is me.

The army pulls catapults and spears to fight the dragons, but I don't think that will be enough. To fight a dragon, you need another dragon. I have an old dragon friend called Shadow Wing. He was small when I met him, but now he has grown into the strongest dragon alive.

Finally the fire-breathing lizards show up with their fierce looks. The humans fire their catapults, but no dragon falls down, although some are badly injured. They are going to strike. That's when I decide to step in and call Shadow Wing.

A bright light covers the sky, and then every dragon is gone. No one knew how until they saw me, Doom, on a dragon. It is not any dragon, but Shadow Wing. The outcome is clear. No one can beat us now.

Another wave of dragons approaches. Another fierce breath from Shadow Wing, and everything is gone again.

Another wave approaches. This wave is different. You can feel something is different, and it is that the Dragon Prince is leading the dragons. There are more dragons than before.

Shadow Wing fights with the Dragon Prince. They seem equally matched, but Shadow is way stronger. The prince breathes fire while shadow has a laser-type breath. Shadow receives some hits, but they aren't critical.

One fierce breath comes from Shadow. It is a direct hit. The prince retreats and takes the dragons with him because he doesn't want to lose more soldiers.

"What's that bright light!" one soldier yells. Shadow Wing attacks the humans! A small part of the army is destroyed, but it won't change the outcome of the war.

"Shadow, why did you do that?" I say.

"In order to stop the war, we have to attack our friends to earn our enemy's trust," says Shadow Wing. "I am sure they saw what I did. Let's go to Dragon's Castle and talk to the Dragon King. I know they won't like us there and attack, but let's try anyway," says Shadow Wing.

"That's not a bad idea. Maybe we could end this somehow," I say.

Shadow Wing and I make it to Dragon's Castle. We get attacked but do not attack back.

Shadow Wing roars the word "Stop!" Every dragon stops out of fear. "We are here to talk to the king. Let us through, please," says Shadow Wing.

The gates open. Shadow Wing and I enter, eyes looking at us from everywhere until we reach the king's room...

Shadow Wing, the Dragon King, and I are in the room making the agreement.

"We will give you your land and not try to take it," says me.

"For how long will this treaty last?" says the Dragon King.

"For 40 years," says Shadow Wing.

The Dragon King accepts the treaty. Dragons and humans live in peace now.

THE SHOCKER

*A missed catch, an electric fence, and an odd doctor combine to give Danny new abilities and a way to fight back against the bullies in **THE SHOCKER** by **Drew Varda**.*

“**D**anny, go long,” says Dad. There I go running, like I’m The Flash, the ball ahead of me I’m trying to catch. The ball is almost at ground level, and the fence is getting closer and closer. I have almost got the ball in my hands, but all of a sudden I get a jolt of electricity by the fence. I’m lying down on the ground, and I hear someone saying “Get up, Danny. Get up.”

The next day while going to school, the sophomores, also known as Jacob and his gang, were out to get me and other freshman, just like every day. Today was my day to get harassed. I’m walking to school and I hear “Get him!” Here they come on my tail, but the same jolt comes back to me just like when I was electrocuted by the fence. I suddenly feel faster. I am running so fast I can’t see, but everyone else sees, and now I’m the most suspicious kid at school.

I was so embarrassed by my new fame that I told my mom I was sick, and she said, “If you’re sick, you go to the doctor.”

We went to the doctor, the same odd man as always: my family doctor, Dr. Brock. As my mom was filling out the paperwork, I noticed every other person there was actually sick, so I had to step up my game and put on a real sick-person look.

The doctor says it’s up to the patient if parents go back. I went alone. Dr. Brock took me back to the rooms, checking my height and then my weight. While we were walking to his room he was asking questions like “When was your last concussion?” I said two days ago. Then he asked, “How did it happen?”

I answered, “I was electrocuted and knocked out by a fence yesterday.”

He examined me and found something odd. He said the jolt messed up my muscles and made them move 20 times faster than average. He told me to meet him at his laboratory on Saturday and gave me directions where to go. Even though he is odd, I trust him and decide I will go.

On Saturday, I told my mom I was going for a walk. I'm walking toward his office. I knock on the door and he says, "Who is it?"

I answer, "Danny. I saw you on Monday and you told me to meet you here."

He unlocks the door and lets me into a very bright room with a lot of metal and steel. He tells me I have super speed powers. What a shock! There I am, sitting there asking him the same question over and over again. "How did this happen?"

He told me to keep on the low note, that only we can know. He also told me there is a secret gang of kids my age with powers just like me. He said, "They only use powers for evil and they all have the same power as each other: super strength." Dr. Brock told me he had already said too much, and if the wrong people heard this he would be ripped in half, literally.

Time for school. Oh gosh. I get up Monday, and I'm on the same daily routine: get chased. But today it wasn't me. How odd: at school, Jacob was lifting the largest kid at school, Casey. He weighed more than four gang members combined, and he was all muscle, but only Jacob was lifting him like Casey was a feather.

I am going to see Brock today. Off I go to the lab. I knock at the door. I hear the same question: "Who are you?"

I say, "The Shocker, aka Danny." Dr. Brock lets me in.

"Hey, do you know the names of some kids with powers?" I ask.

Brock says, "Yeah, one: Jacob. I was his doctor years ago."

It was now my responsibility to stop him. How would I stop him? I got it! First I could embarrass him. Then he will come after me.

It's Tuesday, and the start of the plan to embarrass Jacob. Jacob told me, "You wear that ugly shirt a lot."

I thought up my comeback. "Well, you wear that ugly face a lot, and look who's complaining," I said. He got angry and threw me into a locker. I felt his super strength. I got out and told him to catch me.

I lured him into the park.

Dr. Brock said the only way to stop him is to lose my powers, too. I couldn't. My powers have made me feel good for once and powerful. And the worst part is I only used them once. So I made up my mind.

I went as fast as I could in a circle, and at one point I could go through anything. So I did. I went through Jacob and grabbed his steel bone to get rid of his strength and stop him. Dr. Brock used invincible cuffs on Jacob just to make sure.

Dr. Brock said I would never get my powers back, but he said to try it anyway. I did, and they worked! Dr. Brock said that I was the only human on Earth with these types of powers. So now people call me The Shocker.

THROUGH THE DOOR

*Three kids enter a new world through a magical door. Getting back home is a lot more complicated in **THROUGH THE DOOR** by **Madison Helmick**.*

One day a girl named Ally, who is 12, her brother Jack, who is 9, and her sister Katie, who is 6 turning 7 today, were walking around in their backyard. But they weren't just walking. They were searching in their backyard for the big prize hidden somewhere for Katie's seventh birthday party. The three of them decided to be on a team together.

But then they heard someone screaming. They ran around to their front yard to see what was going on. They saw that two of the other kids at the birthday party were fighting over the big prize. They decided that they should leave that to the kids to figure out on their own. They just went to their backyard again to look for anything out of the ordinary.

Just then, Katie tripped over something, which led all the other kids in the backyard over to her. Ally bent down to look and see what it was. It was a handle that connected to something. But they didn't want the other kids to see it so they pretended that it was nothing and just left it.

Later the day when all of the kids were gone, the three kids went back to the handle and started to move leaves around, and after a while they found a door. The kids spent 15 minutes arguing about whether they should go through the little door. Katie decided not to wait for her brother and sister to stop arguing. She just went through the door. Then Jack went through, and then Ally followed.

Once they went through the door, they climbed down a ladder. They all said that they shouldn't have gone through the door. There was a little village, and a large, stone castle at the end of the little street.

The houses all looked abandoned. Some of them looked like they were burnt down. Others looked like they were either about to burn or about to fall into pieces. The trees and bushes all looked dead. But even though they were dead, Jack went to go and touch one. As soon as that happened, the whole bush lost all of its leaves and broke.

Some of the bricks on the street were missing, and some were chipped, and to them it looked like there was no one living in the little village.

Before they started walking, they looked behind them to help them figure out if they should go back, but at that same moment the ladder that was connected to the door disappeared. The kids went crazy because they had made the wrong decision and they wanted to go back into the real world. But then Ally said, "There's no going back now. The best we can do and all we can do is just keep going. We should try to find a house with a person living inside."

But Jack didn't agree with Ally, so he said, "We can't just start to walk around. We don't know what lives here, and as far as we know, no one lives here. No one could live here. It's too gloomy and dark." But they thought that if there was some kind of light in the world, that maybe there would be more people and live plants and animals.

Even though Jack didn't want to walk through the village, he still did because he knew that he had a sister that would protect him. The three of them were walking for what felt like three hours, but just then they saw a light.

They all ran for it and realized that it belonged to a house, which meant that someone was living there. Once they were all there, Ally knocked on the door. It opened very slowly and quietly. Then they heard a woman's voice, and it said, "Come in quickly and quietly. I don't want anything to see or hear you guys or me."

Once they were all inside, the lady said, "Sit down. Make yourself comfortable. You might be here for a while." While the lady said that, she made some drinks and food for the four of them to eat. The lady also said, "I am not going to be feeding you three a lot of food right now because I don't have a lot left and I need as much as I can get. I only go out every two weeks to go and collect food, and I only go during the day time."

Katie asked, "Why do you only go during the day time?"

The lady said, "Because at night, monsters lurk around. I am probably the only person left living here. Well that is, other than the queen, of course. She is the one that controls the monsters. The only way to take her powers away is by pulling the lever that is behind her throne."

"Is that also the way that you can make the ladder reappear so that we can get back home?" Jack asked.

“Yes, that is the way to get yourselves back home. Once you pull that lever, the queen loses her powers, your ladder and door reappear, and the queen won’t be able to control the monsters. You are totally safe after the lever is pulled.”

The lady continued, “I guess you are also wondering why I don’t just leave so I can be safe. Well, I would leave, but there is no way out. Everyone who used to live here got captured by the queen.”

Katie said, “Why can’t you just climb the ladder like us to get out?”

The lady said, “If you were born in this world there is no way out. So I am stuck here forever.”

After that, Ally asked, “How do we get to the castle?”

“Just go straight down the street, and if you keep walking, you will find the castle.” The lady said bye to the kids, and they got up to leave. But then the lady remembered to tell the kids, “Also, once the lever is pulled, you have until dawn to get to the ladder and close the door. If you don’t close the door before dawn, the ladder will disappear, the queen will get her powers back, and you guys will be stuck here for a very long time.”

She said bye to the kids again and they all said bye back. Then Ally said, “I forgot to ask your name. What is it?”

The lady hesitantly said, “It’s Lila.”

Ally said, “That is such a pretty name. Bye, Lila!”

The kids walked to the castle. When they got there, they were intimidated by the castle because of how big it was. They also saw that there were no monsters trying to guard the castle.

The kids quietly walked up to the front doors of the castle. At the door they saw three big, black creatures with big, sharp teeth coming at them. They knew right away that those were the monsters running straight at them from all directions. The kids didn’t know how to get past them, and then Jack said, “Through the door.” They all went through the front door, and they saw pictures hanging on the walls of all the bad things that the queen had done.

Jack asked, “How are we supposed to find the lever if we don’t know our way around the castle?”

Once they got further inside the castle they saw more and more pictures of the townsfolk that had been turned into prisoners.

All of a sudden they heard a creak from something, but they didn’t know what. They kept walking. A few minutes later they

found a door. Ally said, "There is another door that leads right to the curtain that we can go through to pull the lever."

The kids walked around the castle to the other door. They opened the door, and it squeaked. That made the queen stand up, which allowed the kids to see how intimidating she was. She had a red and orange dress (which they knew represented fire), she had orange hair (which, again, represented fire), and finally, she had a tattoo of one of the slaves in the dungeon having a fireball thrown at him.

The noise made all the monsters look around the room to see what it was. Ally ran, but her sister and brother weren't fast enough and got caught by the monsters. They got taken to the queen, and the queen said, "Put them in the dungeon. Then I'll have more people that will feed my monsters." When she turned around, she saw Ally. Ally was taken with her brother and sister to the dungeon.

When the kids got thrown in the dungeon, they saw that the dungeon was filled with people. Some were alive and some of them were ill because they had been down there for so long. After a while, Ally figured out a way to break free from the dungeon, and let all of the people stuck in the dungeon out. Everyone in the dungeon asked Ally how she did it. All that Ally said was "I used my sister's hair pin." They were all amazed at the way she did it.

Before any of them climbed out, Ally told them, "Be quiet, or the monsters will see you and throw you right back in here." Her brother, sister and she all ran upstairs to the throne room, quietly opened the door, and snuck behind the queen's throne to pull the lever. A monster saw her and ran at Ally, but within a second, Ally pulled the lever, and the monsters fell out of the queen's spell.

Luckily they had no problems getting back to the ladder. When they got home, out of the crazy, new world, they all told each other that they were never going back into that world. They all bent down to finish closing the door and to cover it back up with dirt, mud and leaves. Ally said, "I know that we experienced a lot today, but don't let it bother you. It is just a fake world that no one can come out of except for us."

"Thanks for saying that. It will really help Katie and me later when we don't feel safe," said Jack.

"Yeah, thanks," said Katie.

When they turned away from the door and started walking toward their house, they realized that time had stopped while they

were gone. They were relieved that their parents or friends didn't want to ask or know where they had been. But then they thought that Lila would be a little more cheerful and happy if her world had colors and live plants and good, healthy food. So Ally, Jack and Katie asked their parents if they could look in their basement for things.

They came upstairs once they had everything and walked outside. They went to the door and put a doll toy on the ladder so that it wouldn't disappear again. They went to Lila's house to ask her for her help and for her to ask the freed people to help. When they finished, the world had trees and flowers and stores and restaurants, and all the houses had been repaired. Lila was happy to have a nice world with people and friends and many other helpful features again.

WIFI

*Some people are obsessed with technology. In **WIFI** by **Nin Le**, Gustave goes to the tallest mountain in the world in his search for decent cell phone reception.*

Gustave is an independent 23-year-old who is living in the outskirts of Nepal. He works part-time at a Mexican diner called El Fuego. Gustave has not always been the brightest. He has complications when it comes to fulfilling his desires.

He was sleeping on his favorite couch when he heard a noise. It was a noise that would drive anyone insane if it went on for more than five minutes. It was Gustave's microwave. His Pizza Rolls were done.

After he was all settled in, he heard his phone go off. It was a text from one of his buddies, Alfred. He read the words in his head: "Hey dude what's good." He was going to respond, but he noticed something rather peculiar. He only had two bars of wifi! He had get to three bars of wifi. This enraged Gustave, and it made him throw his Pizza Rolls across the room.

While Gustave was watching the news something caught his attention. "Four people have died this past evening while trying to reach the summit of Mount Everest."

"That's it!" Gustave yelled. "Mount Everest is the perfect place to get better wifi!" Gustave has been to Mount Everest once or twice, and he knows that hungry devils that eat people for breakfast live there.

He went into his garage, and he revved up his newly-bought Lamborghini and hit the city. But Gustave did not notice something very important. He was almost out of gas!

He was in the middle of a highway when his car suddenly stopped. "Oh no, I'm out of gas." Unfortunately the other cars did not notice that a yellow Lamborghini had suddenly stopped in front of them.

Luckily, Gustave had gotten out of the vehicle before a white sedan rammed into the side of the expensive car. "Noooooooooooo, Berthaaaaa!" Gustave screamed. Almost 20 more cars had piled up behind Gustave as another came just a few inches from his waist. He knew this wasn't good and got out of there as fast as his legs

could take him. A giant semi-truck was all he could see in the distance. Gustave, using his amazing reflexes, dodged the truck that was going 60 miles an hour. There was a huge explosion when the truck collided with the other cars, but Gustave just shrugged it off, and he continued his journey to the top of Everest.

It has been almost a week since Gustave has eaten, and his stomach has been growling ever since. He could only go for half an hour before he would pass out at the bottom of Everest. Gustave slowly stumbled and collapsed at the bottom of Everest. He had completely run out of fuel. All he could do was hope for a miracle.

Gustave was woken by hikers that happened to stumble across him. "Sir, are you ok?"

All Gustave could say was "Food, food." The hikers desperately gave him a couple of pieces of beef jerky from their backpacks. "We have more food in our van," they said. Being the thoughtless fool that Gustave is, he hurried to their van.

He was surprised by the amount of food they had. Without a second thought, he dove in. There were piles of beef and steak. It was almost like they were carrying a buffet in their van. Gustave gave them a big thanks and headed to the top.

Gustave had never seen a dragon in his life, but that was going to change in a matter of minutes. He started to hike up the mountain, unaware of what was about to head this way. "What's that noise?" he wondered. He shrugged it off his shoulders and continued.

It became slightly warmer and warmer until Gustave finally realized that a fire-breathing dragon was closing in on him. "Oh god no," he said as he quickly reached for his pocketknife in case of emergencies just like these. But it wasn't some ordinary pocketknife; it was enchanted and re-forged by the best blacksmith in Nepal. Unfortunately it stood no chance against a fire-breathing dragon.

Gustave had no fears. He jumped at the dragon with all his might. The hikers from before could only see fire emitted in the distance. Gustave stabbed the dragon multiple times, but it had little to no effect.

Gustave knew what he had to do. He had to use his evasive skills and put them to the test. While dodging fire breath and razor sharp claws, Gustave became victorious. He was standing on the defeated dragon, but Gustave did not kill it. He made a truce, and the dragon

agreed to take Gustave to the top of the mountain in exchange for a Taco Bell coupon that Gustave happened to have in his back pocket.

Gustave hadn't been to the top of Mount Everest before, but he knew what he was doing. He stood at the highest peak and got his phone out. He was very excited to see three full bars of wifi. He was finally going to respond to Alfred's text.

He replied with "Nothing much." It took Alfred half a millisecond to respond, like he was waiting for Gustave to reply. "Don't forget to do your dishes," Alfred said.

All Gustave could do was not get mad and jump off the side of the cliff, so he shed a tear, and headed back home on his new pet dragon "Bertha."

THE WORLD OF TABENAH

*A boy and his sister, on a quest to find their parents, follow mysterious instructions that lead them to an unbelievable place in **THE WORLD OF TABENAH** by **Mark Morris**.*

It was a regular day. Jake was lugging his burden-filled backpack and lunch box from school. Like every day, he would head home to his nearby house from school and wait for his sister. Then he would do his homework and watch TV till his parents got home, and then go to fencing practice. But today was different.

After he finished his homework, he realized that his parents hadn't come home on time. He checked outside to see if they were almost home. He looked down and saw a brown cardboard box and a white tag saying "To: Jake Boblesten, From: anonymous."

He tore open the box and saw a card and a dark blue box with an emerald outline. The card said "Do not open the box till the time is right. I hope to see you soon." Jake tried to open the box, but it was stuck. Soon he gave up on trying to open the box. On the back of the box showed a map to a tall clock tower, which was downtown.

Later that day, he got another note saying "We have your parents." He told his sister Rose about the box and the cards. Right away they sprinted to the clock tower.

The clock tower was tall and skinny. It was white and had a royal blue and metallic gold outline. Rose and Jake climbed up the silver stairs till they got to the top.

You would think there would be all these gadgets and levers and springs because there was a working clock on the outside, but on the inside was one big lever which just connected to the clock. Jake thought, *Well, that just helps a ton.* They searched for anything to give them info on what to do next, but they found nothing.

Jake saw another lever and hoped it would do something, so he pulled it down. A blue portal appeared. The portal was around ten feet tall and wide, and was also spiraling. It was pulling anything in its path, and soon Jake and Rose got sucked in through the portal. Jake and Rose closed their eyes because they didn't know what would happen next.

They started spinning and spinning in a huge loop of blue space with white streaks. They were both horrified.

Thud! Jake landed hard on his wrist and sprained it, but Rose luckily landed flat on her feet. When they stood up they discovered that they were on a rocky mountain. It was a bright sunny day on one side, and the other was in darkness, and it was very gloomy.

In the far valley below, it looked like there was a bloody war going on. Half the people were wearing white, and the other half were wearing black, like good guys and bad guys obviously.

Rose was scared of the war and what would happen next, so Jake said, "I'm scared, too, but we need to keep moving on if we are to find our parents." Both Rose and Jake were freaking out about the new world, wondering how they could possibly get home. Rose agreed to go on down the mountain as long as Jake didn't rush ahead.

As they were heading down, a huge boulder came loose and bounced after them. Jake quickly pushed Rose away and jumped out of the way. It was close. If Jake had waited a second longer, the boulder would've crashed into both of them.

As they got to the end they came into a mythical jungle. The trees were high up with olive-colored leaves and light red trunks and branches. There were plants that looked exotic with bright orange dots in some and hundreds of leaves in others. They were nothing like Jake or Rose had seen before.

They crept forward slowly because they didn't want anyone or anything to know they were there. Who knows what they would find in a jungle like this?

As they got farther into the jungle they found a path. As luck would have it, they noticed that there was also a huge tree house/fort with hundreds of monkeys. It looked like they were working on daily survival. They seemed very industrious.

The monkeys saw Jack and Rose, and they cleared an ordered path for them. Then a monkey came down from the fort who was like no other monkey. He had a golden crown with jewels and a silver and brown cloak with specks of diamonds, and he had light brown fur. Like no regular monkey in Jake and Rose's world, this one could talk. "I see you got my letter and box!" the monkey said excitedly.

The monkey king explained how the good side of the world of Tabenah was in war with the bad side. He also said there are five

tribes of the good side: the monkeys, the tigers, the red pandas, the lions and the kangaroos. The good side was losing, so they needed a strong, brave warrior. The monkey king said, "That's why I sent you a map."

Jake looked puzzled and said, "What about the ransom note and box I got?"

The monkey king said, "What ransom note?"

Jake explained how he got a ransom note about his parents soon after the box came

The monkey king said, "This is no good. The Dark Lord must have sent you this. Your great-great grandpa was a warrior here. He was very brave, and he turned the tide of our last war. He helped us not just for war but also as a community until he left for family reasons. The Dark Lord must have found out I sent a letter to get you so he took your parents. I sent for you to help the good side in the war. You two, I sense, will become great warriors."

Jake asked, "What about the box?" The monkey king told Jake and Rose to come to his tree kingdom to rest because they would have a big day tomorrow if they were going to the Dark Lord's castle. He also said not to worry about the box.

Jake seemed to remember nothing about his grandpa. He also never heard his parents talking about him.

The next day Jake woke up to a loud monkey call. His sister was already eating breakfast. To his surprise there were pancakes, orange juice, maple syrup and French toast. Jake scarfed his food down as fast as he could so he could head out with his sister and the monkey king.

All three of them headed off to the Dark Lord's castle. They went through the rest of the jungle, which took two long hours. It seemed like forever for Jake and Rose.

Finally the monkey king said farewell after they got to the edge and wished them good luck. He said he could go no farther.

Jake and Rose climbed the hill of the Dark Lord's castle. The castle was black and dark purple with spiked fences and watchtowers. One of the castle's security guards almost saw them with a flashlight, but Jake and Rose dove into the tall green bushes.

Quietly they snuck up to the fence, and Rose threw a rock in the other direction to distract the security guard. After she threw it the security guard went to see what was going on. They ran into the castle.

When they went inside they saw the first part was a huge ballroom with silver and black railings and columns. They headed up a stairway into a long hallway. They saw two more guards coming their way. Jake and Rose ran into a darkly lit room and saw their parents! Rose ran to them to unknot the ropes that their parents were tied up with.

The Dark Lord came in and said, "Well, well, Rose and Jake. I'm glad you could make it to join your family, but sadly it's time for you and your parents to die. You fell right into my trap. You think it is that easy to get into my castle?"

Jake heard a voice in his head saying "Open the box." The voice also said that it was the world of Tabenah speaking. Jake pulled out the box from his back pocket, thinking that there was nothing else to do.

In the box was a tiny sword. Jake thought, *Well this is useless*, but out of nowhere it sprang to life and landed in his hand life-sized and glowing golden.

The Dark Lord said, "You want a fight? Then come at me!"

He fought the Dark Lord. It was an intense battle. It turned out the Dark Lord's sword was also glowing, but black. Jake remembered his fencing lessons and soon stabbed the Dark Lord in the chest. The Dark Lord's body evaporated because of his evil mind.

Jake and his family rejoiced that they were together again. He and his family went back to the monkey king to thank him. The monkey king asked if Jake and Rose would stay to help and train, but they replied that maybe they would return in the future after their family settled down from what had happened.

They hiked up the hill where the portal was, and one by one they jumped in. All was well for the Boblesten family.

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