

The Birch Wathen Lenox School



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The Literary Lion

2015-2016

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To submit work: Share your work as a Google Doc with Ms. Price at lprice@gbwl.org. Be sure to title your work with your **first** and **last** name as well as the title of your piece.

*Editor-in-Chief

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Sparks

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

A flame is lit so quietly.
A lighter ignites a raging fire.
A flame that feels, a flame that remembers.
It burns those who come close but only wants to learn to love.
Quiet and aggressive, it hides.
Surrounded by a plastic shell, a flame burns internal.
When released at last, it burns until it begins to tire.
Tired, it hides once more.
Waiting until its flame can wait no more.
Much like a bird with a song to sing.
Like a phone will ring, abrupt and sudden, the flame is free.
A cycle that will continue, inevitable and everlasting,
again and again.
A flame is sparked.
A flame within you.

Untitled

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

Sometimes to find yourself, you must first lose all of your pieces.

Blizzard Acrostic Poem

By Arianna Pitt, Grade 7

Bringing out your shiny winter boots and coat from the dusty, cluttered closet.

Living all day surrounded by the white, cold snow spending time with friends.

Icicles slowly growing on awnings under restaurants and buildings that fall as you walk by.

Zooming around the lawn covered with layers and layers of plush snow.

Zipping up your coat to prevent you from sickness and to keep you warm and cozy.

Allowing your family and friends to join in on the celebration of snow finally arriving.

Resting after a long day spent outside by having a sizzling cup of hot chocolate and sitting by the fire.

Dreading waking up early the next morning to get to school because you had so much fun in the snow!

Colors

By Ali Rosenfeld, Grade 8

Red: Red is a powerful girl that has a lot to offer. She has sass wherever she goes and she is filled with fire and fun. Red might be small, but she carries so much in her fiery soul. She does have a soft spot for her family, friends, and kickboxing. Her hometown is in Los Angeles where her exhilarating personality got started. She lives with her dad, twin sister Pink and a cat named Fighter. Her mom lives in New York City. Red's parents got divorced when she was two, but she will stay strong forever. When Red is bored, she loves finding new music on Spotify, kickboxing on the wii, and watching Family Guy with her dad. Her favorite singer is Fall Out Boy (she dances to their album *American Beauty*//*American Psycho* everyday and never gets sick of it); her favorite place in LA is Universal Studios; her favorite song is "Raging Fire" by Phillip Phillips; and, she treats herself by going to Chipotle. Her motto: "Before you learn to be a lover, learn to be a fighter to fight for love."

Orange: Orange is trustworthy and enjoyable company. She is known to be a good friend who will take you out for frozen yogurt or whatever you like. She has a bursting amount

of energy, just like Red, but she knows when to use it. She will never follow the crowd to blend in. Orange comes from loving parents in South Beach, Florida, and she has twin older sisters. In her spare time she likes to go to Soulcycle, read, and hang out with her friends. Her favorite singer is Beyonce (she has listened to all of her albums twice, but her most favorite is *Beyonce*), though her favorite song is “Bounce” (by one of her favorite people Iggy Azalea). She loves Florida because the weather never changes. She treats herself by drowning in John Green books (*Papers Towns* will always be the best). Her motto: “No matter how much energy you use, use it for your own good.”

Yellow: Yellow is one of the happiest, kindest, thoughtful people you will ever met. Everywhere she goes, she spreads some care and joy for people who are feeling like they aren’t part of this world. All of her friends think that she is a ray of sunshine that bounces into a room. She makes her friends and family feel loved. Yellow never was part of the crowd and never will follow the crowd. When she is alone, Yellow loves to dance, draw, and play the guitar. Yellow was born and raised in the happiest place on earth: SoHo, New York City, with her parents, younger brother Jamie and her dog Sunshine.

Her favorite singer is One Direction (loves their album *Midnight Memories*), her favorite song to dance to is “Ray of Light” (by the amazing Madonna), and her favorite thing in New York City is how there are so many things to do and so many parks to visit. She treats herself by watching *Friends*. Her motto: “The happiest people come from the happiest souls.”

Green: Green is one of those people who is always there to hang out and treat you like a friend. She is always true to herself, never would hurt anyone’s feelings, always pushes herself to help out, and is a fantastic friend. She also treats everyone and everything with respect. Green thinks that nature is one of the best things that has ever happened. Green is from the famous city of Chicago and she has loved everything about it since she was born. She lives peacefully with her mom, who loves her more than anything. When Green has nothing to do, she plays tennis with her mom and her friends, takes a nap, or gives a hand to her community. Her favorite singer is Demi Lovato (Her newest album *Confident* is her jam). Her favorite song to chill out to is “Let Her Go” by Passenger and her favorite thing about Chicago is the deep-dish pizza and the Navy Pier. She treats herself by using Lush bath bombs. Her

motto: “Listen to nature. It is calling you to get out there and breathe.”

Blue: Blue always knows when to calm down and let herself be free. She describes herself as intelligent, trustworthy, introverted, and sensitive towards others. Blue has faith in the ocean and the sky and she believes those are her secret elements. Blue always thinks that one needs her daily peace and alone time. While living in the calm quiet town of Montauk, she goes to the beach everyday to clear her thoughts. After school, Blue usually loves to do yoga, swim in her pool, and write stories about the Hamptons. Blue lives with her two moms and her older brother Patrick. Her favorite singer is Melanie Martinez (*Crybaby* puts her in a good mood in a snap), and her all-time favorite song is “Safe and Sound” by Taylor Swift. Her favorite thing about Montauk is the serene landscaping, the sweet and salty air of the outdoors, and her little beach house. She treats herself by playing card games with her next-door neighbor, Kiki, and making nutella milkshakes. Her motto: “The first thing you must do everyday is find whatever makes you calm and brings out your inner strength.”

Purple: Purple is described as crazy (in a good way), romantic, artistic, and optimistic. Her dream come true is to see that cute stranger from Target again and create stories about her and him. She is also known to be the life of the party, a caring and super fun friend, and passionate about everything life gives her. Purple is eighteen years old, so she has had a lot of boyfriends in the past, but now she wants to find the best boy that she wants to spend her life with. Purple and her parents are from the city that never sleeps: the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The activities that take away Purple's boredom is writing spontaneous love stories, drawing incredible pictures, and going to parties. Most of her life consists of music but she would have to say her favorite singer is Taylor Swift (**1989** puts her into party mood), and her favorite song is "The Day I Fall in Love" by James Ingram and Dolly Parton. Her favorite thing about New York City is that one can have fun whenever one wants, and it's where most love stories take place. When she is chilling out, she burns delicious smelling vanilla lavender candles and listens to old vinyls. Her motto: "In life, you must find love, be creative, have fun, and be silly. In other words, be yourself and live life happily!"

Pink: We know Pink is not part of the rainbow, but we are putting her into our rainbow! Pink is known to be a tomboy yet girly, hilarious, sensitive, energetic, and a loyal friend. Pink is very similar to Red (because they are twins), but Pink can't stand to fight though she will fight for something worth it. Pink has shared most of her life with Red and they have fought through the bad times and good times with strength and love. Pink loves her family more than anything, which means she is protective and she has tremendous respect for them. Aside from being a tomboy who is energetic, Pink embraces her girly side by loving and caring for others, shopping at Brandy Melville and Topshop, and laughing it all off. We all know that Pink is a "girly" color, but she does have some of Red's personality. Pink's friends think she is only made up of good things and that she is super sweet. When Pink is super bored and doesn't know what to do, she likes to play the piano, write positive messages in her notebook, and takes photographs. Pink lives with her father in L.A., has a twin sister named Red, and has a cat named Fighter. Her mother lives in New York City. Pink's favorite singer, matching her personality, is Madonna (*Rebel Heart* will never be beat). Her favorite song is "Don't Stop" by 5SOS. Her favorite thing about LA is how

the people are so nice and supportive, the spontaneous art one finds everywhere, and the weather. When she wants to relax, Pink watches *Once Upon a Time* and drinks iced coffee. Her motto: “Being girly doesn’t mean you like shopping, makeup, and nail polish. It means you are caring, worthy, and strong.”

I don't know

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

Uncertainty.

The idea that now will not be the same as what is to come.
Always knowing what could have been but never knowing
what could be.

A terrifying thought that we all have learned to cope with.
Yet, we still put on a smile and wave goodbye.
Goodbye to the close friend that is today and prepare to meet
the stranger that is tomorrow.

Falling For Your Eyes

By Megan Grosfeld, Grade 8

After everything that has happened,
I am finally okay and it's because of you.
Flowers have bloomed, the wind has gotten stronger
and the sun became brighter.
The sky is now clear like a crystal river floating up above.
My cold feet become warm.
When I'm with you, I feel boundless.
Some type of infinite feeling engulfs my body.
It's the feeling you get when you jump into a pool of cold
water.
Scared, but ready.
I see the world around me differently now.
My mind is filled with pages of never ending stories that we
share.
When you look into my eyes, I can hear your voice speaking to
me like a feather dancing in the wind.
When I look into your eyes, I can see all of you and can finally
understand what your words mean to me.
Your eyes will never age and never lose the things they have
seen and continue to see.
So, let me fall for your eyes darling because I already fell for
you.
Hurt is unavoidable, that I know.
The color will fade, the spark will simmer and all will turn
cold, but please don't break my heart because it's the only
thing I have left to give.

Nets Practice

By Dylan Blackman, Grade 6

This weekend my family and I got tickets to go and see the Brooklyn Nets practice at Barclay's Center. After a thirty-minute car ride we finally got there and saw that they were giving out Brooklyn Nets ear buds. My whole family got a pair and we started to make our way to our seats. This was my first time going to Barclay's Center so once I saw the inside of it, I was stunned. Madison Square Garden, where the Knicks play, looked so different than Barclay's Center because Barclay's Center looked much smaller and, since it was the Brooklyn Nets practice, there weren't as many people there to watch. When I sat down at my seat I watched the Nets practice by doing different types of drills. One of the drills I saw them doing was the "Three Man Weed." That was my favorite drill that they did because the benefit of the drill was to learn how to cooperate on a fast break. After the Nets finished practicing, the player walked towards the crowd and signed autographs. I got two autographs, one from Andrea Bargnani, the Nets Power Forward, and one from Jarrett Jack, the Nets Point Guard. When I was trying to get an autograph from Jarrett Jack, all of a sudden he started to take off both of his shoes and

took a sharpie and signed them both. Then, he launched one shoe into the crowd and it was heading towards me and when it got closer to where I was standing, I jumped up, but just missed it by a couple of inches. Someone caught it in the row behind me. The next shoe, he launched up to the other side where I had no chance of catching it. This was a very interesting and fun experience for me, but I hope next time I will get another chance at catching one of Jarrett Jack's shoes.

Falling Apart

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

My mind blows up.
Thoughts explode.
Dreams are shattered.
Ideas cease to exist.
My sanity is set loose.
Released like a bullet from a gun.
Smashed to pieces like a fine glass plate.
Visions of what could have been are broken.
Engulfed in the chaotic rubble of my thoughts,
My dilapidated mind struggles to escape.

Flawless

By Ava Smith, Grade 7

The twinkling lights through the city
each represented a person
a completely different story
but all the same
every light
a new person, story, place, dream, idea
they gleam and glow
flawless as it seems
each individual light
dark, evil, angry
but together
a masterpiece
from far away
everything is flawless
close up everything is messy
everything

Untitled

By Sydney Zgodny, Grade 8

11/10/2015 9:45 PM, home, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Update: They're found.

When I got the call, my emotions were mixed. I didn't know if I was happy that they found them, or sad that they almost died. I always thought that it was kids who were supposed to run away, not the parents. I thought that if I ever got mad I could leave and never come back. But, I could never bring myself to do that. How could my parents? They left me alone, no note, no call, no nothing. For three whole days I was truly alone. I knew I had to go see them, but what would I say? In all honesty they couldn't say anything. My mom was in a coma and my dad had just gone through major surgery. Why were they all the way in North Dakota? Why did they leave me for three days? I wish I knew, but I guess I will find out. I have to go to North Dakota now.

11/10/15 11:18 PM, Mercy Hospital, North Dakota

UPDATE: THEY ARE GONE!

I walked into my parents' room and they weren't there. Where are my parents? Where are they? Where did they go? "They were here. Right here," I just kept screaming over and over. They were in a car crash in North Dakota. They were running away from me. There was a doctor there. She had ravishing red hair and was beautiful and skinny. Too beautiful to be a doctor; she was more like a model. Her voice was crisp and clear. She told me to sit down and that she was sorry. Then, I knew they were gone!

10/13/15 1:00 PM, Home

Update: They're really gone.

The next few days were a blur. All I saw was black, I all heard was I'm sorry, and I all I said was thank you. The worst part about it was that I was living in my house all alone with my Aunt Danica who was from Kentucky. She walked around with a cakey face, 99-cent lipstick, bright pink nail polish and clothes that were clearly meant for eighteen year olds. I didn't know anything about her but I didn't want to. At the funeral there was a strange woman. She had light blonde hair and had a voice as crisp as an apple. I don't know her, but I guess she was just a relative. Mom and dad didn't look like themselves when I saw them, but I didn't look long so I guess it was just my mind playing tricks. Now I will never know why they left me, but I guess that doesn't matter. I'm not mad anymore. I will try to write again soon!

6/20/18 2:37 PM, Home

Update: I'm Back.

Sorry I was gone for so long! I can't believe I haven't written in two years. School has been rough and plus I lost this diary, so anyways, here I am. I graduated and I will be attending Duke University. You know the woman at my parents' funeral that I said was blonde; we have been in contact for a few months; she is Danica's sister. She said I couldn't tell Danica though because they are in a fight or something. Anyways, I'm looking through old boxes and I found this journal. I'll let you know what else I see.

6/20/18 2:46 PM, Home

Update: OHMIGOD!

I was looking through the stuff and I found a letter from two days ago from mom. I thought it was a joke, but it's not. It's her handwriting. Plus, she said something only she knew about me. Here it is: "Nicky oh Nicky The apple is red, the apple is yellow. It looks sweet at first but when you bite it, it will rot. It is crisp yet deadly. Don't bite it. But if you already have, it will come for you next. Find where the pipe is surrounded by oxygen. I might not be gone. The apple faked my death! I did not go in the place where they give you the poison. Look through those pictures and look where the wheel spins from your earliest appearance." I sifted through pictures and found one of the Ferris wheels at Funland. It was my earliest picture, from when I was two. I know this might be a joke, but if my mom is alive I need to know. See you at Funland!

6/20/18 4:18 PM, Funland, Philadelphia

Update: Currently on a Ferris wheel!

I am on the Ferris wheel at Funland! When I got here I was confused but then I saw the back of the picture. It told me to talk to a man at the wheel and say golden pear. Apparently that was some sort of code word. He put me in a special seat with a letter taped on the bench. It said: "Oh Nicole, it's really you! The apple is closer by now so don't trust anyone! Burn both the picture and this note immediately. Go to where the willow whispers **your** name. And remember I did not leave where they gave me the poison." I don't know what to think, but I know where the willow whispers my name. I will go home now and check there tomorrow when Danica leaves for work.

6/20/18 6:46 PM, Home

Danica is so mad at me for leaving without telling her. She is acting very strangely. She also just dyed the tips of her hair

green. GROSS! I spoke to Danica's sister tonight. She is so sweet and caring. She won't tell me her name though. I don't know why. She told me Danica has a short temper and not to be fooled. She knows that Danica loves me. The only problem is, I don't like Danica.

6/ 21/18 10:27 AM, Willow Park

Update: I am at the Willow Park

I went to Willow Park, where the trees whisper. I see my favorite one that whispers my name, or so I thought when I was a little girl. In the bark there is a carving that my mom and I wrote, except in its place was a note. It said, "You are surrounded with oxygen! Now just find the pipe." Let me explain. When I was little there was this big pipe. I don't know what it was for. I always wanted to go inside. I guess that is what my mom meant. When I walked over to the pipe there was a letter saying, "The apple is among you, so come inside." I went inside and there was... another note. It said, "Nicole, the apple has taken your father and is now among you. She is green. She was once red. Go to the place where they give you poison IV (not the woods or forest) and ask about me at the desk. Look for the name at the top. She is the apple." Ugh, I am so confused. Danica is calling; got to go.

6/ 21/18 12:30 PM, Home

Update: I'm stuck.

I don't know what my mom means by the place where they give you poison IV and she spelled it wrong. Is that a sign? It doesn't matter; I'm on house arrest. Danica won't let me leave. She sent me to the grocery store though and she said to get fruit. Lots of apples but no pears. I wonder why. Anyways, she says I am doing dangerous things. She said she wants to keep

me safe. Her sister called and told me that Danica overreacts sometimes. Whatever! Now I have to figure out this puzzle. Wait...I figured it out!

6/22/18 4:30 PM, Hospital of Philadelphia

I'm in the place where they give you poison... poison IV. An IV from a hospital. I asked the lady at the front for my parents' records. She said that they were just faxed over from the other hospital. They gave me the forms from the last time they were there. Two months ago. There was nothing about the car accident. They were never in one. It said my mom broke her leg. I was so confused. Clearly my mother is not dead! They called the hospital in North Dakota and they said the last car accident in which the patient died was two years ago. It was one woman. She said if I wanted to know her name I could look in the newspaper archive.

6/ 21/18 5:30 PM, Home

I stole the records and now I have the name of the doctor who said my parents were dead. Also, Danica came home with a big bag of apples. Creepy, right? Anyways, her name is Selma P. Hoptcin. It's a strange name. But now the apple is coming for me - why? I have no answers!

6/ 21/18 5:45 PM, Home

I know what to do! There is a computer in the back of the room that is beeping and has been for the last two years. I think it is my mom trying to communicate with me. It said to type in the person of interest. I typed in the doctor's name. It said it was an anagram for McIntosh apple. This is a mac computer; oh my god! She is the apple, but who is she? It said she is a serial

killer and that she has some crazy vendetta against my parents. She purposely crashed a car with a girl inside. Her name was Danica Watson. That's my aunt's name. It said she died at Mercy Hospital. This was two years ago. This is the girl the hospital was talking about. Someone is at the door; be right back.

6/ 21/18 5:55 PM, Home

It was Danica's sister and she told me I am in danger and to trust my true mother. I tried to tell her what I found but she wouldn't let me; she was gasping for air. She said to keep searching. She is here to help me. She was sent by my true mom to look over me. But then, there was another knock on the door and a loud bang. It was the apple. She is here. She broke down my door. I am now hiding in the closet and Danica's sister was shot.

6/ 30/18 UNKNOWN

I cannot tell you where I am, but the woman who broke down my door was my mom. She took me here. She said I am safe and that the name of the place I am in is pear. Her hair is a bright red and her voice is crisp and sharp. She said that she faked her car accident so she could make sure I didn't suspect anything. For the past two years she was looking for the apple and then she was going to come back when it was safe. My mom works for this secret company called Pear. Then the apple was targeting me so my mom reached out. I don't have an Aunt Danica; she is the one who died. The one who is taking care of me - her real name is Emma. Emma was pretending to be Danica.

Wait - Emma is my true mother! Emma, er, Danica is my true mother. Wait! My mom sounds and looks like the apple. She knew I would follow her trail. She wants to kill Emma! Wait, Danica said that apples were her favorite fruit and that they were better than pears. I can't trust the pear. I have to leave now.

8/19/18 College

Hi, it's Nicole and I just found this journal. College is great and my parents are great. But I can't remember anything after graduation day. What does this journal mean, and who is the apple?

Asleep

By Valerie Gottridge, Grade 7

You lie awake in the center of your bed
You turn to the side
You stare at the ceiling
Your eyes blink in the darkness
With each blink you see the room darken
But when your eyes open,
After the 300 millisecond close of your eyes,
You see a bright light
But then the darkness comes back
You become secluded in the pitch-black room
Your mind plays tricks on you, making you see shadows you
don't want to
So you curl into a ball underneath the covers
When you finally fall asleep, you forget everything.

Painting

By Zemira Stevens, Grade 6

It was the most perfect setting I had ever seen. The sea sparkled and as the blazing sun bounced its golden beams from ripple to ripple, you knew from that very moment on you were meant to be there. Across, where the sea met the shore, the beach was small but lovely. The water was quiet and light blue and the bubbles were fuzzy and soft as they brushed the warm sand. Then, there was the enchanting, stunning palace that caught the eye. The sun was falling, gently, as it said goodbye to the sky. The colors of the sunset washed the sky and smudged it into one rainbow of colors. It was all like a painting but yet, it felt like so much more. The palace was bronze and the freely moving light made it look like a coat of sweet, warm caramel draped over it. Shaped beautifully, long with graceful dimensions, every part made you stare. It was all so pleasing to my mind as I let it sink in. It looked as if the palace had crawled out of the depths of the crystal seas and sat itself comfortably on top of the tiny island to rest. The sky now glazed and glowed, and I felt a jolt of energy deep inside myself. The palace was wide but low and it covered the whole land, and when it was all over it never really went away. The

painting wanted me to remember it now, so I did, after ten years, twenty, and finally today. I remember it because when you see something so amazing, you don't forget it. Like a painting and its colors, it smudges into your brain and leaves a wonderful stain forever. Like a painting.

The Lonely Fox

By Sebastien Bigar-Vann, Grade 7

Once upon a time in a forest, a lonely fox walked alone
Through a path that he called home
When he came upon a dying bird
Who was in tears, eyes blurred;
It was a very sorry sight to see.
The bird was done for, everyone could agree, so
The fox took the bird into his paws
The ground was cold, but the ice was beginning to thaw
The fox thought about how he could help the bird while
The bird was trying to speak, but his speech was slurred,
The fox put him on his back and rushed to the abode
Of the owl doctor, whose healing skills were in an
excellent mode.
The doctor healed him during the next few days
Using his special owl ways, and,
Once healed, the bird felt like he had to help the fox
So he invited the fox into his wooden bungalow
Where they befriended each other. Leaving all woe,
Their friendship lasted until their last sunset
Since they were friends, they never had a fret.

Honor Code Reflection

By Irini Livanos, Grade 7

The honor code? What does that mean? To be honorable to one thing or rule? Or maybe to be honorable to many things and many rules. As time goes on we have our own honor codes that we need to follow. For example: if your mother says it is against the household rules to have a cookie before dinner, that is a rule you need to follow or there will be punishments, big or small. Another simple part of the honor code is respect. Being respectful to all different people is important. If you want to be an honorable and respectful person, the deeds and “chores” you must do are written or told to you. It might not be called the honor code, but it is something that is seen everywhere. There are the honor codes of a job or a place of work. You must always be respectful to the people around you and to your boss or the person that has employed you. Even in schools, the students are given an honor code to follow. It doesn't have to be written on paper to show all different ages of life how to follow a simple set of rules.

But, still people break these bonds of honesty and soon they lose trust in the people they need most. Is there a reason why people break rules? Is it to prove a point? Or to show

someone their beliefs as a person of the world? Even the smallest, littlest, tiniest lie can change the course of someone's life; maybe not in a bad way, and it might not affect the people around you, but it will affect the person that did this small, little, tiny lie. Everyone does wrong in their lives but no one wakes up one morning and says “today I’m going to be the baddest I can be; I will hurt, break, and ruin the wall of honesty, with or without someone's help.” Lies are like a bunch of lives in a video game. After a while, your “lives” wear off and soon they aren’t forgiven as easily. But, even so, in video games it’s not worth anything when you lose a “life;” in real life, though, it’s even worse for you because you might lose a powerup (like a scholarship) or a head start. Even with all the reasons to follow the honor code and be an honorable person, why do people lie? What is a lie worth?

Untitled

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

Hate is heavy.

Leave it behind and walk away.

For it cannot survive if there is no one to carry its weight.

City

By Megan Grosfeld, Grade 8

The breeze was as soft as a baby's breath.
My hands were cold and stiff, I could barely feel my fingers.
The cold air fluttered through my hair and gave me shivers
down my spine.
The wind danced on my skin.
A dance so graceful, I forgot how to breathe.
Its view was beautiful.
The building replaced the stars.
The moon was shy, hiding behind a thin layer of cloud.
When I looked down, I felt small.
I was surrounded by the whole city and I could see everything.
No matter what time it may be, the heart of
the city is still beating.
I realize that when you are always seeing something up close,
you never take a
single moment to step back to look at
it from a different perspective.
When I took that step, I realized something that was simple
and lovely.
I was just a piece to this big city, but
this city is a big piece of me.

Just Another Day in Paris

By Anonymous, Grade 6

The luscious chocolate covered croissants you can't resist. Don't hesitate to get a creamy, rich hot chocolate to go. Then you skip down the street; you know Paris like the back of your hand. After exploring the City of Love, you turn the corner and you find yourself in front of one of the many parks in Paris. While you stroll inside the park Garden Des Plants, it starts raining cats and dogs. Running to your cobblestone house, you bump into a boy with an umbrella. You kindly apologize to the young man who seems your age. Then he asks, "Do you want to share an umbrella with me?" You just stare into his big, beautiful, blue eyes and say, "yes, merci!"

Later on, while he's walking you to your house, he asks if you want to go to the Eiffel Tower with him. You obviously say "yes." While you are walking, all you can think about is how his eye color is grayish blue. You feel like you're in the middle of a dream, dancing the night away with a young man you've just met; it's destiny.

When you get to the top of the Eiffel Tower, there's a violist. The young man asks you to dance, and you say a sheepish "yes." You and he dance the night away, like there is

no tomorrow. When the clock chimes for the twelfth time, you realize how late it is and say, “it was nice meeting you but I have to go.” Then he says, “Lets meet at the top of the Arc de Triomphe tomorrow.” You walk down the Eiffel Tower. Then you turn the corner to go home. Upon your return, you dream about the boy and tomorrow. You wonder if he’s dreaming the same things.

Alone

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

A cold depression overwhelms my body.
Wrapped around me like a rubber band.
Malleable and strong it refuses to release me from the mess,
the mess that I have become enmeshed in.
I twist and I turn,
Writhing around until I can bare no more.
Exhaustion has dawned and happiness has fled.
Evicted from the living space that is my mind, a new Feeling
takes control.
It is grotesque and bears a jagged smile that screams nefarious.
Gelid to the touch, its grip is icy with eyes that whisper hatred.
The atmosphere becomes cold and the lights have been shut
Off.
Darkness engulfs a once joyful living space.
Effortless and disparate, I lay calm and still.

Carmelo Anthony

By Dylan Blackman, Grade 6

Carmelo Anthony is a big inspiration to me because he plays for the New York Knicks, and for me to grow up watching him play at Madison Square Garden, or watch him on TV, is amazing. I love watching him lead his team to victory and watching how he gets his teammates all pumped up during the game. Carmelo Anthony did live in New York like me, except he lived in Brooklyn and I am in Manhattan. He was born on May 29, 1984. He went to college at Syracuse University, where I hope to go some day. Syracuse is a well-known college and students have to be motivated, responsible, and smart to get into it. He got a scholarship to play basketball, which allowed him to get into the college. When Carmelo was a freshman in 2003, he led Syracuse to a national title. Someday I would definitely love to do that for my team, too, because being a leader on the court is a very important ability to have in basketball and in life. Later in that year, Carmelo was drafted third overall by the Denver Nuggets, and that was one of the most exciting moments in his entire life. I can only imagine that the feeling of being drafted by an NBA team is unbelievable. You've worked so hard all your life to get to this

moment in time and you finally do it; you become an NBA basketball player. I hope that I feel the same way Carmelo did when he got drafted to the NBA because one day I hope to be in the position that he is in. After playing with the Denver Nuggets for seven seasons, he was traded to the New York Knicks. Luckily for me I could grow up watching him help the Knicks win games, and that, for me, was really special.

Place to Place

By Megan Grosfeld, Grade 8

I've left my heart in so many places.
Places that bring back memories that I try to forget.
The more I try to eliminate the memory,
the more I can't shake the thought of it.
I left my heart with people I love and with people that I can't
stop loving.
I left my heart where the sky was blue and where the shore met
the sand.
I left my heart in the hands of another,
only to find it broken into uncountable pieces,
lying jagged on cold ground.

“The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” Story Continues...

By Chris Vergos, Grade 8

“Well, thish-yer Smiley had a yaller one-eyed cow that didn’t have no tail, only just a short stump like a bannanner, and-!”

“It can transform into a dragon?” I replied.

“Yes, a dragon.”

“I heard everyone talking about this but I don’t even know what a yaller dragon lookin’ like but I think you are lyin’.”

“They are everywhere. You can probably find an animal that can transform into a dragon over yonder. But you are too much of a loser to even compete against me.”

“Oh I can totally destroy you, Wheeler. But wait, didn’t you say it was Smiley’s cow?”

“Well it is but I like taking it from him. Now, let’s have a bet and see if the animal you choosin’ can turn into a dragon like my one-eyed cow.”

“I’m not sure of this contest y’all havin’ all of a sudden. Everyone in this here town knew about Smiley’s frog that lost to a random frog. People in this town told me that he was

confident he would beat the guy. But I don't think his cow can turn into a dragon!"

"We'll see about that tonight, Tyroil Smoochie-Wallace. I'll crush you with my cow!"

Wheeler went around telling everyone in Calaveras County about the contest while I was plannin' to search for that yonder dragon. I knew I could find the best dragon this Calaveras County has ever seen. I looked everywhere for an amazing dragon. In the swamps, the forests, and even in Mr. McCringleberry's yard. However, I didn't find any animal that can morph into one of those dragons. I was so tired from wanderin' all over Calaveras. Then again, that Wheeler fool was probably bluffin' about his cow that transformed into a dragon. He couldn't have told the truth. I sat down and it was at this here moment when I knew I saw the most perfect animal ever. It was a little dog that looked like it had no owner. I could see it in this here dog's eyes that it could transform into a dragon. Since I would be using this random dog that I found, I needed to name it so I named it T.J A.J R.J Backslashinyou the Fifth. I arrived at the contest with my dog and it turns out Mr. McCringleberry was hosting it. And standin' right by him was that old coot Simon Wheeler.

“Welcome all! Welcome All! To the 1st ever Dragon Contest!” exclaimed Mr. McCringleberry. “Right now we have our two contestants that are ready to start battling it out and to see who can turn into a dragon! Now, welcome our contestants: Simon Wheeler and his cow named Jarvis Shulk and Tyroil Smoochie-Wallace with T.J A.J R.J Backslashinyou the Fifth, the dog! Now it is time to see if these two animals can transform into dragons! In 3... 2... 1... and GO!”

I tried to tell T.J A.J R.J Backslashinyou the Fifth to transform while Simon tried to kick my dog and even punched me in the face. T.J A.J R.J Backslashinyou the Fifth was tired and I know he was giving it his best to transform but I don't think it was enough. He was just lying on the ground and wagging his tail. But then, all of a sudden, T.J A.J R.J Backslashinyou the Fifth stood up and transformed into a dragon! He grew scales and started breathin' fire all over the place. He even ate up Jarvis Shulk but no one was there to see it because I think everyone ran away from the place.

“I win, Simon Wheeler, and now I can keep my dragon while Smiley's stupid cow is gone.”

Raquette Lake Camp

By Jason Weiss, Grade 7

Raquette Lake Camp is something that can never leave your mind. The friends and memories you make are so amazing that you never want to leave your second home. Every time I wake up in my bed at camp I just look around at my friends and think to myself how I never want this amazing summer to end. Every camp has its own unique qualities that are essential to a fun camp. These qualities can range from sports, land or water to the food. I am lucky enough to go to a camp that is overall unbelievable. Raquette (which is in the Adirondacks) is a camp where you can meet the funniest, most athletic, nicest kids ever. I have been going to Raquette since I was eight years old and it was my first true love. One of the reasons why I went there was because my brother and sister both went there for ten years each. I am on pace to be an eight-year camper and hopefully I will be able to come back as a counselor. There are also some kids from our school that go to Raquette. Katie G. and Morgan S. both go to Raquette with me. Another person that is from Birch is my group leader Mr. Birnbaum, but we call him Robbie at camp. He is the best group leader and best teacher, in my opinion. In conclusion,

Raquette is honestly the best, most fun, cool, incredible camp ever and I can't wait to go back for those seven weeks of heaven.

Camp Walden and Raquette Lake

By Valeria Gottridge and Jason Weiss, Grade 7

We both like our camps a lot.
If you ask us why, we say why not?
Camp is awesome;
We do so many fun things:
Waterskiing, banana boating, in jewelry we make rings,
Horseback riding, tennis and basketball,
Sometimes we wakeboard, but always we fall.
We sing fun songs and have s'mores at campfire.
To say we hate camp, would make us both liars -
When camp is over, we both sit and cry.
We hate leaving camp and saying goodbye.

Princess Paige's Problematic Pond

By Esme Blackstock, Grade 8

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there lived a young princess, Princess Paige. She lived in a castle up high on the hill, with her mother Priscilla, father Paul, and brothers Patrick, Parker, Peter, and Percy.

Paige was a wondrous girl who could always be found playing outside by the pond that sat in the castle's courtyard. She would splash and jump and stare down the fish swimming within the murky waters. She ate lunch with her toes dangling in, weeds brushing past her and fish swimming up beside her. She was never allowed any further in then that. Paige wondered why. The lake seemed safe, safe enough to swim in and have fun with the fish. But she obeyed her parents' wishes and never went into the pond. She just stood there, eating her cookies and drinking tea, talking with the creatures that swam below.

On the morning eleven days before her 8th birthday, Princess Paige promptly skipped outside to her pond and ran around on the grass. She skipped, she leaped, just like a frog. The strands of gold that grew on her head blew with the wind and her tiny toes rubbed against the earth. Her parents watched from afar, thrilled to see their daughter so happy. They watched and left the window as Paige flew through the air, the flying fish greeting her and the frogs croaking their morning song. The butterflies danced and the trees giggled. The wind howled and leaves rained down. The pond had a sparkle Paige had never noticed before. She crept up, trying not to wake the rabbits or deer that slept in the forest beyond. She lay down, her nose inches away from the water. She could feel a cool mist and saw koi draped in algae. Their colors blossomed like

invitations, begging for Paige to jump in and follow them home. Paige lifted her head, scoped out the area for her parents, and slipped her feet in. There she sat, her feet dangling in the water, a cool shock running throughout her entire body. She pushed her legs in, not caring that her nightgown was soaking. She turned around and went in up to her hips. She danced, twirling with the tadpoles. Paige lunged herself in up to her neck, doing doggy paddle to stay afloat. Her body was cold, but the water felt good so she went under. She rose like a dolphin, doing flips in the air and tricks beyond belief. She went under again, and this time, swam with the fish, away from the edge of the pond.

Meanwhile, inside the castle, Priscilla and Paul sat around the dining table, waiting for their children to arrive for breakfast. In came Patrick, the oldest son. His 15-year-old mind functioned not much differently from his other side. He promptly sat down and dug into the eggs that lay in front of him. Next came Parker. His body was built just like an ordinary 11-year-old, but he was incredibly strong. He strode in and plopped down next to Paul, the table shaking. He reached across for the bacon and began chowing down. Then in walked Peter. He climbed up into his chair and laughed like a 9-year-old would as he watched his brother devour bacon piece by piece. Percy came in moments later. He was lifted into his chair and the 5-year-old drank his orange juice in one swig. Priscilla and Paul waited for their daughter to walk in, but the doors stayed shut. The air giggled and whooshed around the room. Paul rose and looked out the window, expecting to see Paige dancing in the grass. But she was not there. Paul opened the doors and ran down the hall, his wife closely behind him. The two ran out of the castle, sprinting toward the pond. There was Paige, swimming in the middle, circling a clan of dogfish.

“Paige!” screamed her father. “You come out of that pond this instant!”

“But father,” Paige pleaded, not noticing that the water was beginning to swirl much faster.

“Paige, you heard your father, out of the water now,” Priscilla begged.

“No, I’m staying. I’m having fun with the fish and you can’t make me leave!”

“Paige!”

The water lost control. It spun like a carousel without a controller. Paige went up and down, gasping for air as her parents cried with fright. Paige screamed for help, but her breath was caught short as she was dragged down to the bottom of the pond. She could see the light leave her parents eyes as she traveled farther and farther down to her doom.

* * *

The sun was blindingly bright. The white sand was scattered with shells and the bluest ocean bubbled and roared against the shore. Paige rose from the sand, her hair a tangled mess. Her nightgown was drenched with bits of fabric lying around her. She stood up and stretched, coughing and gasping for air. The ocean that lay in front of her sparkled with the sadness of loneliness and desperation. She missed her family. She ran around the beach, hoping to catch a glimpse of her family. Alas, no one was there. Paige turned and saw trees high enough to reach the sky. Palm trees filled with coconuts and flowers blooming with pink and red petals. She was intrigued and wandered in through the forest. Greens jumped out at her and the sky that shone was as bright as ever, not a cloud in sight. Paige looked up, hoping to be able to reach a coconut that lay high in a tree, her stomach rumbling in hunger and

growling up at it. She began to climb its arms and leapt up to its branches. She grabbed it quick and flew down the tree, right before the branch collapsed. Time seemed to stop. Paige looked at the branch, frightened and sad. She sat down beside it and began to cry. She cried and cried so loudly her voice echoed through the forest. She longed for her parents, longed for her pond.

“You shouldn’t be crying here, for this is a magical place where everyone is filled with joy. No one is ever upset,” said a voice from far away. Paige jumped up and looked around, searching for the source of the sound. Out hopped a frog so green it embarrassed the leaves. He had oval spots on his back and eyes the same color as he. His voice penetrated through the forest. Paige was amused at how a creature so small could talk so loudly. He wore a purple bow tie with periwinkle lines striping over.

“Princess Paige, right? Welcome to Glitteral. My name is Mr. Greenbacks and I will take you to the queen herself. Now, come this way.”

Paige lay frozen, not knowing where to go. All she could say was “Paige is fine.”

Mr. Greenbacks ignored her answer and continued to walk. “Well don’t just stand there, follow me.” Paige shook her head and followed Mr. Greenbacks, trying her hardest not to look back.

The center of Glitteral was truly magical. Fountains swirled like ice cream and confetti sprinkled down. The townsfolk sang songs and everyone held delectable foods in their hands. Each house was painted a different color that shone throughout the town. Colors blurred around, each blue, yellow, pink a different shade. Paige was overwhelmed by everything. Balloons fell in line with the wind and hats of all shapes and sizes popped out of the crowd. It was like a

fairytale come true. The people, however, were the most interesting. In fact, they weren't even people at all. Frogs, mice, birds, fish, and all other creatures wandered around. Even trolls. There wasn't a human being in sight. It was peculiar to Paige, to be in a place where no one was like her. She was puzzled, and it seemed everyone else was as well. All the animals looked up at her, wondering why a human should be in their kingdom. Mr. Greenbacks kept walking, ignoring all the nervous glances he was getting from friends.

"This way Miss Paige. I'm sure you'll find the queen quite riveting."

"Um, Mr. Greenbacks, sir, where exactly is the queen," Paige asked cautiously, asking like a princess would.

"Why, in the Castle of Glitteral, of course. It is straight ahead." And so Paige turned her head to see the most amazing castle her eyes had ever lay sight on. The bricks' silver paint glowed as bright as the sun and flags flew from the top of towers. Two guards stood outside of the giant oak doors that lay on top of the red carpet. The guards stood straight and nodded to Mr. Greenbacks as they opened up the doors to the castle. They saluted Paige as she followed in her green-eyed friend. The walls were lined with paintings and tapestries, each of which hung in front of the silver background. The marble floor was practically reflexive. At the end of hall, another pair of oak doors stood with even more guards standing outside with guns hung in their holsters.

"Gentlemen, step aside. The queen is expecting us," Mr. Greenbacks said sternly. The guards stared down the frog, looked at each other, and slowly opened the doors. Paige walked in and, sitting right in front of her, was a myth in and of itself. She had long blue hair with golden eyes to match. A bright yellow flower hung behind her ear and was fully blossomed. But below her face lay the myth. The queen's

seashell top was purple and as detailed as a shell could be. Ridges swirled and bits of white zigzagged over the shell. Below her waist was the start of her green tail. The scales shone in the sun and splashed around in her half-full aquarium.

“Thank you Greenbacks. You have been a very reliable assistant today. I give you all my gratitude. Now, Paige, I welcome you to Glitteral. I am Queen Lurissa. I hope you have enjoyed your walk here with my trusted frog friend. I assume you must be tired. I will have Jemma take you to your room.”

Paige stood, mouth agape. All of the excitement was too much to process. She felt as though she was in a dream and that she would appear home as soon as she closed her eyes. Paige blinked and opened her eyes to the sight of a mermaid staring her down and a talking frog. Her head was buzzing with thoughts, not knowing which one to stop and focus on. She needed advice, but was too afraid to ask. “Um, thank you Queen Lurissa, but I would really just love to go home. My mommy and daddy will be looking for me and I wouldn’t want them to worry. So, thank you for the offer, but I must be going.”

“Paige, it is not that easy to return home. Trust me, we will talk more about this tomorrow. For now, you must rest. Please, spend the night here and enjoy yourself.”

“But, I promised my family I wouldn’t play in the pond. And I did anyway. I need to get back home.” Paige started to cry. She missed her family, and even though Glitteral was a dream come true for her, she had to go back to reality.

“Please Paige. I know this is a lot to take in. Alas, you must sleep for the night. I will have my chef send you up the finest food in all of Glitteral. Then, tomorrow, we can work on getting you home.

“But please. I can’t stay here any longer!”

The queen sighed. “Paige, I cannot help you anymore then giving you a place to stay tonight. Trust me, you will be home soon enough, but you must wait for that time.”

Paige nodded and accepted that she would not be returning home that day. She followed what she believed to be a deer named Jemma up to her room. The deer strode elegantly through the halls and her antlers stood tall and proud. They reminded Paige of the tree’s arms. Big and mighty, but so small and feeble, able to break at any moment. The deer known as Jemma didn’t seem to notice Paige’s concern. She kept walking, her back as straight as a plank. Her chestnut coating evenly traced around her coffee stained spots. Her eyes were sparkling sapphires and spoke true to her name.

“We are almost there, Miss Paige. Just follow me,” motioned Jemma.

The walls of the hallways were beginning to get smaller. They started to creep up on the two, slowly but surely. They laughed down at Paige and the walls became five feet apart. The ceiling began to drop and the door at the end of the hallway seemed to be farther away. Jemma broke into a run, gliding toward the door. Paige followed closely behind her, her legs beginning to bend from the pressure. They were three feet from the door. Two feet. One foot. There. Jemma held up the key to the door and placed in its golden keyhole. The bass handle released its grip and Paige entered her room.

The walls were draped in silk and on the ceiling hung a chandelier brighter than the stars that was covered in innumerable diamonds. On the floor lay a rug with such adequate detail and tremendous skill. In the corner there was a red velvet couch with a glass-covered aquarium coffee table with fish of all different sizes that stood in front. Mirrors reflected against the walls and the lamps mimicked the chandelier. Up a row of four steps was a bed fit for a king. The

sheets tucked in the mattress and the pillows were fluffed like a chicken's feathers. The headrest was carved out of brass and was a picture of Glitteral. Brass knobs stood on top of the ends and by the footrest as well.

"I trust you'll find this room to your liking. We have stocked your closets with clothes just like you used to wear in your old kingdom. I hope they fit. The chef will be up in a minute with dinner. Just call if you need anything." Jemma walked out, shutting the door behind her. Paige rested on her throne of a bed. She fell back and stared up at the ceiling. Drawings of warriors and fairytales colored over the wood. She sat up and tried to hold back her tears. She tried with all her might, but couldn't control herself. The tears came, and they came fast, the word "old" hanging in her mind.

"I want to go home!" Paige bellowed.

"Um, why, exactly, do you, um, want to go, home?" questioned a voice.

"Who said that," Paige choked.

"I did, your, exc-ellenc-y. I am sorry to ha-ve bother-ed you. I can leave if yo-u wish," said a creature in the fish tank. A round fish appeared from one of the castle carvings, swimming faster than expected. He had spikes all around him and was bright red. He spoke fast and loud, but his voice was small and high. "I'm Puffington, ma'am. Puffington Chief. I run this aqu-arium and am at ser-vice to you."

"Hello Puffington. I'm fine, really. I just miss my family," Paige said.

"Oh I see, lonel-iness. Well, I-I-I can help there," the fish stuttered. He shrunk back down and leaped out of the tank. He plopped down into a bowl that sat on Paige's bedside table. "Now then, th-th-that's better. Now Paige, tell me ab-out your family."

“Well, there’s my mother and father, and my four brothers. We all get along really, really well. Why do I need to tell you this?”

“I will act as your fa-mily tonight. No-now get some sleep. You have a big day to-mor-row,” Puffington stated.

“Oh thank you!” Paige exclaimed. She turned off the lights and climbed under the blankets that covered her from head to toe. She nodded goodnight to Puffington and drifted off to sleep, her dreams fighting with the nightmares that hung over her head.

* * *

Thunder boomed outside the castle walls. Lighting painted the sky with strokes of electric yellow and white. Rain poured down, flooding the streets below. The wind howled and screamed with fury. It was as though all the happiness and joy had been sucked from Glitteral. There was no color out, only black and grey. Paige felt like the sky, dark and sad. She sat in the Dining Hall, her waffles tasting less plentiful and blander. She was wearing one of her new dresses - a pink dress with white polka dots and mary-jane shoes. The bow on her head matched and held back the braids that bound her hair together. Paige felt cold. This was something she would wear at home, with her family, eating breakfast, and then playing by her pond. She sighed and went back to her waffles and strawberries.

“Now,” said the queen, gulping down her breakfast. “Let’s talk about how we are going to get you home.”

“Yes please,” Paige gulped.

“Now, this may be overwhelming for you to hear, but I’m afraid this is your only option. You must go on a quest. A quest so dangerous it makes my toughest guards scared to hear.

You will have to go into the city of Kilijoy and retrieve the stone that shines as red as red can be. If you accomplish this task, you will be home wrapped in your mother's arms before you say mother."

"Um," Paige gulped so hard it felt like cereal scratched her throat. Her whole body felt cold and wounded, like she just fought in a war. "Maybe there's another way." Paige was on the verge of tears and the queen clearly took that into account.

"Well, we'll take it under investigation. But so far, this is your only option."

Paige rose from her seat and walked over to the window, hands wrapped around each other behind her back. Her eyes flashed across the sky, mimicking the white scars the lightning left on the sky's black canvas. Thunder roared as Paige breathed in the smell of mildew and rain. She envisioned her parents, her mother's warm smile and her father's sparkling wit. She pictured her brothers, each with their ragged hair and clumsy blue eyes. She tried to imagine never seeing them again, never getting a hug or sharing a laugh. Paige couldn't do so.

"I will take on this quest. When do I leave," she stuttered, trying to sound as brave as she could.

Queen Lurissa looked puzzled at Paige and was amazed at how a girl so small could be so big and powerful. "All right then. You shall leave at once. I will have my workers fetch you supplies for your trip. Shall we meet back tonight before dinner? Very well then. See you soon." She bowed in her fishbowl, carefully leaning over the edge. Paige curtsied in exchange and fled from the Dining Hall. She dashed up the stairs and locked herself in her room. The chandelier rocked back and forth as Paige jumped up onto her bed. It stunned her how a place so beautiful could be soaking in tears. She buried

her face in her hands and sobbed unlike she had during her whole time in Glitteral.

“M-m-miss Pai-Paige ma’am, why are you cr-crying?” puffed Puffington, his cheeks red with concern.

“Oh, I just learned the only way I can get back home is by going on a quest to my doom but no big deal,” Paige grumbled.

“Aw, you po-po-poor thing,” Puffington sighed. “Are you having co-o-mpany with you on this quest?”

“No, it’s just me,” Paige sniffed.

“Well, perhaps I-I-I could come along with y-you. I’m sure Queen L-Lur-Lurissa will let me-me come alon-g with you.”

“That’s very sweet of you Puffington, but I couldn’t put you in danger like that.”

“Oh no, may I please come. It’s such a bore sitting around in a fishbowl and having nothing to do but swim around. Please, let me come. I desperately need an adventure.”

“Oh, well, I guess, if you really want to...”

“Oh thank you s-s-so much Miss Paige! I am truly ho-honored! Now, why don’t we sl-sleep until it comes time to g-g-go.”

“You can, but I want to walk around a bit.”

“Okay, I will see y-you l-l-later.”

Paige walked out, grinning as Puffington rolled around in the sand. She strode down the hall, admiring the pictures that hung onto the wall. The carpet rubbed against Paige’s bare feet and the walls seemed to reflect her emotions. Once outside, Paige ran down the hills of Glitteral’s castle and rolled around on the ground. She ripped up grass and threw it around in a circle as she ran through her mess. She jumped up and fell on her back, looking up at the sky. The rain was beginning to stop, but thunder still shook the sky. She stuck out her tongue and let the rain fall in, the cool water running down her throat. She

smiled and sat up while wiping off grass from her back. Her dress was caked with mud and frosted with grass. Paige reached for her hair and tried to brush out the tangled knots. She rose from where she sat and walked over toward the edge of the hill. Looking down, she saw Glitteral. Houses shot out of the center and flags flew through the air. The streets were pools and townsfolk swam to get inside. Stray hats and banners floated through the town, looking for whoever owned them. Paige became sad and longed for the sun to shine and to see a town filled with people and foods of all sorts. She sat down and leaned over the edge.

“You should be careful that close to the rim of the mountain.” The queen’s voice slurred softly as she rolled up to Paige.

“I just... wanted a closer look at the town.”

“Paige, it’s okay to say you’re scared. I would be scared too. I’m scared for you.”

“I’m not scared,” Paige lied through her lips.

Queen Lurissa looked down at Paige and grinned. “Come with me. I’m going to show you something.” She turned her head and started to walk toward a patch of bushes. Paige glanced at the path the queen headed down and ran to catch up. To her dismay, Paige saw a long trail filled with bushes, leaves, trees, and more. The leaves seemed to enclose the two as they walked down a road made entirely out of pebbles and jagged rocks. The sky was a blueberry blue that blasted through the trees. Paige rubbed her arms where they had been poked by thorns and wondered where the queen was taking her. The path seemed to grow thicker and vines appeared out of nowhere, snaking themselves around arms and necks, entangling the young girl’s hair. Birds crowed in the distance and spiders marched on leaves. Several holes lay in the dirt on either side of the road where groundhogs had buried down.

Some trees held berries, ripe red berries that were too tempting not to pick. Paige plucked the biggest one she saw, careful not to get caught by Queen Lurissa. The second the berry stem jumped off of the tree, the forest began to roar with might. The trees seemed to grow higher and vines slithered out of the ground and climbed up through the rubble. Leaves fluttered through the air and the ground shook with power. Paige covered her ears to try and block out the noise, but it was too loud to be ignored.

“That is what happens when we pick from the sacred trees. They do not like to be bothered, especially during their afternoon nap. You must apologize, then they will stop,” said Queen Lurissa wisely, without even turning her head. Paige looked at the queen crazily, thinking she had gone crazy herself. But she had gotten used to all the other shocking twists and turns of Glitteral that she apologized to the tree. Suddenly, the noise stopped. The trees remained a foot taller than before and there were more vines than leaves. Paige scratched her head, asking herself why the trees didn’t shrink back down and why the vines did not shrivel back to the ground.

“They stay the same,” the queen said, as though she could read Paige’s mind. The longer they cry, the bigger they grow. This whole area started off with one little stump of a tree. He was a small little fellow and never complained. Until one day when a berry was rudely knocked off of his arm. The poor thing grew over six feet tall that day. Now, he stands the tallest tree in this whole forest. His brothers and sisters quake in fear beneath him. He can get very moody sometimes. We are about to pass him. Be polite.” The two stopped in front of the biggest tree anyone on Earth has ever seen. He was over four hundred feet tall and was over one hundred feet wide.

“Good afternoon, Boris. I trust you slept well?”

“Ah, Lurissa. How nice to hear your voice this evening. My, my, this forest has grown. I remember when it was just you and I. And who is this petite thing?”

The queen stepped back, revealing Paige, her eyes wide in confusion and utter amazement. The tree seemed to be speaking to her.

“*I’m going crazy,*” Paige thought. “*Trees cannot talk. That’s what Patrick always said. He said trees just stand, never talk.*” “Um, it is very nice to meet you, Mr., Boris, Sir,” Paige said, her neck straining from the way she held it up.

The tree swayed side to side. The trunk started to bend as if it would snap at any moment. Leaves rustled and the roots pulled at the ground with all their might.

“Yes, I can talk,” the tree whispered softly.

“I know. I never doubted that you could,” Paige lied.

Boris rose up and laughed, his voice echoing throughout Glitteral, competing with the last bits of thunder. “Are you taking her to the spot?”

“Yes. We are heading there now,” the queen responded calmly, a smile escaping her closed mouth.

“Good. This one needs it,” Boris snapped. “She needs it.”

“I’ll make sure of it.”

“Ah, very well. Run along, I shan’t keep you waiting any longer.” Boris shook one last shake and remained as still as a tree.

“Come along, Paige. We are almost there.” Queen Lurissa began swishing through the bushes and out to an opening in the path.

Paige crawled through and saw the prettiest garden ever grown. Apples grew high over her head and flowers were splashed with reds, blues, and so many others. Bees buzzed through the air and butterflies danced in the sky. Wooden benches painted green stood on either side and a path of white

marble stretched across the garden. In the center stood a marble statue of a mermaid leaping out of a pond that bubbled with crystal clear water. Her right hand hung to a young boy, his hair drooping over his face. Her left hand reached outward toward a giant ball that radiated its invisible light. On her head sat a crown that glowed with jewels and diamonds. The silver outline shone through the garden and captured all of Paige's attention.

"This is the Crown of A Thousand Suns," Queen Lurissa spoke quietly.

"It's beautiful," Paige breathed, her breath practically spraying the crown.

"You can hold it if you want."

Paige looked up and the queen nodded. She put each hand around the crown and slowly pulled it off the statue. The crown seemed to grow in her hands and was it enough to stay on her head. "Who is this of?" Paige broke the silence.

Queen Lurissa circled around the statue and sighed deeply. "This is my mother, Rosina. She was queen years ago, before she died. She was murdered by a hooded figure. The Cloaked One, we call him. He stole many things that night, but left her crown, the one you hold now. I was only five when she died. The young boy is my father, Nate. He was banned from Glitteral after he was discovered to be a mortal. My mother was so upset she wouldn't come out of her room for weeks. Weeks turned into months and months turned years. Then one day, we found her soaked in blood, her eyes shot open. That minute I became queen. I had this statue built for them in their honor. Her crown never leaves her stone head. Until now. I am giving you this crown for your journey into darkness and danger. You must only use it at times of need. When you do, help will fly your way. Take care of it. It will do you well."

"Oh, I can't take this-" Paige began.

“Take it. You must,” sighed Queen Lurissa. Paige flung herself up to the crystal bowl and hugged Queen Lurissa. The water shook inside the fishbowl the queen stood in as she wrapped her arms around the little girl. The two walked back toward the exit of the garden, hand in hand. Rain began to fall, but the two ignored the water dripping down their spines.

* * *

Paige kicked off her shoes and removed her water heavy dress. She slipped into a white dress with rose red petals painted on it and a red ribbon wrapped around her waist like her mother would at home. She went into her closet and picked out a red cloak and Little Red Riding Hood calmly skipped down to the Dining Hall, careful not to be followed by the big bad wolf. Once inside, Paige sat down and stared at her lunch. The golden platter was home to bite sized sandwiches and fruits that belonged on a lady’s hat. Paige pushed aside her platter and reached for a single slice of bread that lay piled up in the center of the table. She devoured it slowly, pausing between bites. She flicked her attention to face the queen, who looked at her with sad eyes. Paige could see tears building up; and her bottom lip began to quiver. Paige swallowed and wiped her mouth with her napkin, feeling the queen staring down at her. Silence hung in the air as though all the motion was sucked from the room.

“Thank you very much for letting me stay here,” Paige spoke, careful with what she said. “But I think it is time for me to go.”

The queen nodded and rose from her sitting position. Her aquarium rolled down the carpet-covered floor and out the front door. The rain had stopped yet the sky remained a sullen

grey color, matching their sadness. Queen Lurissa breathed in the fresh air, then dunked under the water that remain in her tank. Paige stepped forward, off of the carpet and onto the grass. She sighed and walked over to the edge of the mountain where the castle stood. The queen rolled over and stood up straight.

“We sure will miss you around here, Paige. I know you will accomplish greatness on your quest. You must return here with the stone before you can travel home. We look forward to seeing you enter those front gates once again.”

“Thank you, Queen Lurissa. You have been a great help and I know I have your faith with me.” The guard handed Paige a duffle bag, not as big as she hoped, and she swung it across her back. She could hear something rattling around inside. The crown. She smiled as she completely zipped the bag closed. Paige turned around and waved to the castle’s residents and she began to walk.

“Wait!” A voice cried. Out jumped Mr. Greenbacks, Jemma, and Puffington, each with his or her own bag. “We are coming with you!”

The guards jumped in front of the three, shields up and swords out.

“We refuse to let this tiny child go on such a perilous journey alone. Queen Lurissa, surely you understand,” Jemma begged.

“Your majesty, I have been your faithful servant for years and years to come. Please, let me embark on this journey and I promise I will make you proud. However, if you say no, just know I will run past these guards and do what my heart desires.” Mr. Greenbacks rose tall and looked the queen sternly in the eye. He didn’t flinch.

“Plea-please Mi-miss Queen. Grant us th-th-this wi-ish an-d we wi-ll make yo-o-u proud,” Puffington released.

“You have all been such a help. I would hate to make you unhappy. Go. Help this child in her quest. You will have done an amazing thing and you are forever in my heart. Glitteral will miss you all. We are awaiting the day you return.” Queen Lurissa bowed. She approached Paige and reached out her arms in embrace. Paige ran up to her and hugged her like she was her mother. “Take care now. Remember, use the crown, but keep it secret,” the queen cried, tears dripping into her bowl. Paige nodded and began to walk, her three friends following closely. She waved and hopped down the hill, the sun beating down in the sky, accompanying them on the journey to greatness.

* * *

The ground was caked with mud and the sky began to look sad. Raindrops sprinkled down and covered the cake with frosting. Everyone’s legs were tired and sore. Puffington’s fins were drooping in his mobile tank. Mr. Greenbacks ribbeted with pain and Jemma’s eyes had turned to stone.

“Let’s rest.” Paige could barely get the words out as she plopped to the ground. Her breathing was heavy and she could feel her heart pounding inside her chest, as though it were trying to escape. Everyone moaned with joy as they copied the action of their legs bending beneath them. Looking up, tree branches provided them shade and leaves blocked out the bits of sun left exposed. The four had no knowledge of where they were or what their next move would be. The world seemed to spin and the ground was a volcano ready to explode.

“May-maybe we should sl-eep for the n-n-night,” Puffington said as his eyes fell closed. Jemma nodded as her knees folded. She lay down and nuzzled her nose into Paige’s dress.

“Of course you puffball. But someone will have to take watch. I suggest Paige, since you got us into this mess.” Mr. Greenbacks buried himself in the dirt, tossing and turning in his dirty blanket. Paige lay against the tree shaking her head at the frog, her back rubbing against the bark.

“Greenbacks! Shush. This is not Paige’s fault. We will all sleep. No one needs to take watch,” Jemma noted. Mr. Greenbacks emitted something like a growl. He shut his eyes and he tried not to argue. Jemma nodded on Paige’s knee as she stroked the deer’s fur. She looked back at Glitteral, the castle glittering in the sun’s dim light. The pinks and oranges provided the perfect canvas for stars that were out too early. The moon began to push its way through the clouds, only an eighth of a circle. Bird silhouettes flew through the air and hooted out to the townsfolk. It reminded her of home. Paige sniffled and wrapped her arms beneath her knees, providing warmth for herself. She had always wanted a dog snuggled up beside her. Instead she had a deer, puffer fish, and a talking frog.

“This is better than my dreams,” Paige thought. *“This is reality.”* The sun dropped behind the mountains and blues began to invade the sky. The sky was perfect. Her friends were perfect. But Paige wasn’t.

* * *

Everyone’s feet ached. Their toes curled up and Puffington’s fins were useless in that state. The sun beat down on their open backs and fried the freckles and spots off. The land ahead was bare and plain, not a leaf in sight. They had been walking for hours, ever since dawn. Trees cooled Glitteral miles away and taunted the four. Baking like biscuits in an oven, their skin began to puff and turn red with sunburn. Their

lips were parched and dry, skin peeling away. Vultures flew over the barren wasteland. Paige looked back and could see the outskirts of Glitteral, flags flying and bells ringing so loud her eardrums jumped. Mr. Greenbacks' hops were few and short and Jemma's knees began to buckle. Paige could see Puffington gasping for air inside his tank, his cheeks beginning to blow up, his face changing colors to a purpley-red .

Everyone's shadows crept up on them, laughing in the disguise of their faces. The shadows walked behind the four, careful not to step on their feet. Paige tried to catch them, to turn around and see their grim faces. But they were quick. Too quick. They disappeared the second her head turned around. Paige could feel their presence, their hands reaching out to strangle her at any given time.

"Can we please rest? My legs are numb and I am as red as a crab," Jemma whimpered, her tongue sticking out.

"Yes, I am loosing my green glow," Mr. Greenbacks stated.

Paige nodded and plopped onto the hard earth. The ground was as dry as she and crumbled at the touch. Jemma and Mr. Greenbacks began arguing about who would drink from Puffington's tank first as he swam around and splashed as little water as he could at them. They had all decided to save their water for emergencies. Paige called the shots. This was not one of them.

"Enough!" Paige jumped up. "You all have been arguing the minute we left! Please stop."

Everyone glared at her, but nodded and closed their mouths. Then, silence. The wind howled, but even it could not fill the void that remained still and sullen. It realized it had lost. The wind turned into a hot fog and blocked any cold air that tried to enter.

Suddenly, a howl rang throughout the desert land. Jemma's ears pricked up as all four got up.

“Of course. We are going to be eaten. My life is just one big disappointment. I should have just stayed home. I could be eating Fly-Fritters and relaxing. Instead I am out here, roasting, only to, what, be devoured by a beast bigger than I? I blame you, you disease carrying spike-ball. You forced me into this. If I had a choice I would have-”

“Stop! Just stop! All you do is whine. Whine, whine, and whine some more. You had a choice. You chose to come, to help this little girl find her way home. But of course, you can't see anything past the fact that you are not being treated like a king. And, stop picking on poor Puffington! He is acting like a champ compared to you. You are a coward.” Jemma stood tall, proud of what she said. Everyone stared at her in awe and utter amazement.

“Do you guys hear that?” Paige held her hand up to her ear.

“No. No-no-thing. It's qu-quiet,” Puffington whispered. It was the first he had spoken in hours. Yet Paige was right. It was quiet. The group relaxed and shuddered with comfort and joy. All of a sudden, the howl appeared again. Paige spun around, yet there was no one in sight. Only a cave far in the distance. It stood in the rock, open for guests and desert dwellers.

“Look, there's a cave! Over there, by those rocks. Shade!” Paige ran forward, leaving her friends in the dust.

“It's probably a mirage. You haven't had water in hours. Please come back!” Mr. Greenbacks wailed after her, but Paige kept running. Jemma sighed and frolicked in Paige's footsteps. Puffington pushed against the glass and swam ahead at full speed.

“Really? You all are just going to follow her? It’s just a mirage!” Mr. Greenbacks screamed at the top of his lungs. Jemma stopped in her tracks and turned around. She glared at the frog and her eyes seemed to petrify him. Mr. Greenbacks shook his head and hopped forward, muttering under his breath.

Paige ran faster, the wind cold on her face and in her hair. For the first time in over twelve hours, she was cold! She laughed as she ran even faster to the cave. She was three feet away. Two feet. She stopped, only a foot in front of shade. Paige breathed and began to tiptoe over to the opening of the cave. The cave’s belly grumbled, hungry for passing princesses. She was one step away from shade. The line in the sand was clear and dark. She petted the rock outside. The beast seemed to calm and the cave looked less dark. She stepped in, half in black and white, the other in color. She jumped through and came out as a character in a 1930’s movie.

“Paige! Wa-wa-wait for u-s!” Puffington jumped and landed at Paige’s feet. He giggled and water spewed from his lips. “That was f-fun!” Paige laughed and picked up his crystal bowl. The two looked out to see Jemma practically trampling Mr. Greenbacks, who kept screaming for her to carry him.

“No, you can walk yourself! Get off me or else I really will crush you!” Jemma galloped like a horse at a rodeo with a frog mimicking a cowboy.

“You should carry me. It’s not even that far.”

“Exactly! That’s why you should walk... your... self!” And with that, Jemma flung Mr. Greenbacks from her tail and he flew through the air, landed in the sand, and was glued with sediment.

“How dare you, you demented pony! I am royalty! You should be thrown in the dungeons for this. I will be sure you do. Otherwise I will do it myself!”

“Oh hush. You think you are even half my size. Ha!”
Jemma flicked dirt and it rained on Mr. Greenback’s head. The sand-frog sneezed as he hopped out of his castle usually found at the beach. Paige and Puffington were lying down in the dirt crying with tears of laughter. Jemma snuffed and grinned, trying not to laugh. Mr. Greenbacks hopped out of his hole and tried to shake off the sand. Even he was on the verge of laughter. The four sat down in the cave. Silence grew. Puffington sneezed. He laughed. Paige laughed. Jemma laughed. Mr. Greenbacks laughed. All began to laugh. Tears came and breaths went short. Their laughs were honks on a car, bells from a cow, boot buckles, the wisp of trees. Laughs that would have been thought of as ugly. But no laugh is ugly.

“Ah, okay. Now we need to think about what we are going to do,” Paige breathed out. Jemma nodded and Mr. Greenbacks rubbed his bow tie.

“M-may-maybe we sh-shou-ld build a-a fi-i-re?”
Puffington suggested.

“Great idea. There’s bound to be plenty of bark around. I’ll start searching.” Jemma turned on her heel and walked out of the cave. She whimpered and ran back into the cave.

“Perhaps we should look in the cave. I fear the heat has gotten worse.”

“Agreed. Now, you species go and find the fire parts. I will lay here and recover from my sand storm,” Mr. Greenback said.

“No! You are lazy. Do some work for a change,” Jemma said. She picked up the frog and carried him around. She was a dog with her chew toy. Paige sighed and the four walked farther into the cave, leaving the blinding sun and their home behind them.

* * *

The sand was wet and clumpy. The walls seemed to ooze out water no one dared to touch. It was cold. For once in the day and a half they had been walking it was cold. Their breath hung in the air and forced their bodies to shiver. They had finished most of their food, as Mr. Greenbacks had devoured all the fruits and vegetables the night before. The sun seemed like a mythical thing now, long gone, something that didn't exist.

"I want to sit," moaned Paige. Her little legs were red and strained with pain.

"No, it's okay Paige. You can sit on my back." Jemma kneeled down like a camel and motioned for Paige to hop on.

"Won't I hurt you?"

"Nope. I'm trained to do this."

"Okay, if you insist." Paige walked over and climbed onto the deer's back. Jemma rose slowly and strided down the muddy road. Paige smiled and sat up straight. She released her hands from clenching Jemma's neck and breathed in.

"I always wanted a pony for Christmas," Paige said. "But now I want a deer!" Jemma laughed and her cheeks reddened.

"My mommy always got me a dolly. I love my dollies, but I wanted a pony. Now I want a deer!"

"Ha! You are too much," laughed Jemma.

"Smh," snuffed Mr. Greenbacks.

The group grew silent and they kept walking down the cave. The four had completely forgotten about the howl they heard earlier. A surprising shock swept through the group when the howl rang again. The rocks began to vibrate and the walls shook with might. Dirt began to rain down from the ceiling and water splashed into mud. Far back in the distance, rocks began to build a wall closer and closer to the four.

"I think we should run, don't you," Paige asked.

"I agree," Jemma added.

“Don’t ju-just -stan-d here talki-ng ab-out i-t. Run!” Puffington shrieked.

“Don’t keep me here! Move!” Mr. Greenbacks pushed through to the front and hopped along the path. The rock started to fall and crept up behind the fours’ feet, nipping at their heels. A light shown in the distance as they ran faster. Faster and faster until they thought they would make it out when a giant slab of rock shut out the light. The rock stopped falling and everything grew quiet.

“We’re trapped? No, no I can’t stay in here! I need to get out! Please, someone, find a way out of here,” screeched Mr. Greenbacks.

“Get a grip you toad,” Jemma muttered.

“Please, let’s just find a way out of here,” Paige spoke softly. She walked down and tried to push the rock away. “It’s too heavy. I need help,” Paige squeaked. Jemma ran over and pushed with her forehead. The rock didn’t budge.

“Uh,” Jemma grunted. “There must be another way out of here.”

“Wh-why don-t we try a-a-nd di-g ou-u-t of he-re?” asked Puffington.

“Great idea,” said Paige. She got down on her hands and knees and began to make a hole big enough for them all to fit in. Jemma scooped up the excess dirt and carried it off while Puffington helped smooth over hard chunks of dirt with water. Mr. Greenbacks sat back but was swiftly relieved of his “relaxing duties.”

“Paige,” Jemma said, startled, “there’s something moving over here.”

Paige got up and walked over to Jemma. She was right, the ground was shaking. Bits of crusted dirt began to crack and a small hole appeared right before their eyes. Out popped an eye, a long skinny eye. It surveyed the area and jumped when

it caught a glance of Mr. Greenbacks. The eye dove back down and everything grew quiet.

“How rude,” exclaimed the frog. He put his head down into the hole and screamed. He hopped back over to Paige and buried himself in her cloak, shaking with fear.

“What is it,” asked Jemma.

“There’s something down there,” stuttered Mr. Greenbacks.

Jemma leaned over the hole and stood petrified.

“What is it,” Paige asked with concern.

Puffington scooted over and looked over the hole. “It-s just a lit-tle crab,” he laughed. Puffington motioned for the crab to come out and a red shell climbed out of the hole. It turned around and a small red face and long red-ish brown eyes. His claws lay closed and his legs sat in the dirt.

“Ahoy. I’m Curby Clawson. And who might you be my beauty,” bowed Curby to Jemma.

“Um, I’m Jemma.” Jemma tried to speak bravely.

“Hello, Curby. I’m Paige and these are my friends. You are on a journey to retrieve the stone that shines as red as red can be. Do you know where we can find it?” Paige asked.

“Holy butter!” Curby exclaimed. “You mean you are really going to the Lair of Kilijoy? You must be very brave to do so. I sure couldn’t,” Curby sighed.

“Sure you could, Curby,” said Paige.

“No, I’m just a lonely crab, alone in the sand. My family left me behind. I assume it was an accident. Now I live here. I’m too scared to leave.”

“I’m sorry, I feel like you mentioned a way out of here?” Mr. Greenbacks asked.

“Hush. Can’t you see sadness when it comes crawling your way? But, that is a good question. Is there a way out?” Jemma asked.

“Oh, why yes there is. I’ve been down here a long time, you see, so I’ve built a tunnel. Unfortunately, none of you will fit in it. Only made for crabs,” said Curby softly.

“Oh flies!” Mr. Greenbacks shouted.

Paige turned around to hush the frog when Curby caught a glimpse of her bag. “Oh My Gravy! Is that what I think it is? It is! The Crown of A Thousand Suns, belonging to Queen Rosina herself. How did you get this?” asked Curby in excitement.

“Woah. You have the crown? Why didn’t you tell us?” Jemma asked.

“Yes. Were you trying to kill us?” Mr. Greenbacks asked sternly.

“Kill you? Don’t be ridiculous. Queen Lurissa told me not to tell anyone. She told me to use it only in times of need.”

“That’s just like her. To put a mortal in charge of something so dangerous,” Mr. Greenbacks muttered.

“You evil toad! How dare you say that! Paige is more of a hero than you’ll ever be. You really shouldn’t be talking,” Jemma said with fury.

“Yes! You are s-o mean! J-u-st sto-p it already!” Puffington yelled.

“It’s fine. Let’s just find a way out,” Paige said, tears filling her eyes.

“It’s o-kay,” said Puffington, his tank leaning against her knee.

“Thanks Puffington,” Paige cried.

“Enough tears! Tears lead to sadness,” said Curby. “Now, let’s see to getting you all out of here.” Curby crawled over to the blocked off exit and examined the rock slab. “Mmh. Mmh, mmh. I think I’ve figured it out,” Curby said.

“Really? What is it,” Jemma asked with excitement.

“Well, if we all work together, anything can get done.”

“Teamwork? That’s the best you have?” Mr. Greenbacks rolled his eyes.

“I’d like to see you come up with something better,” Jemma said snippily.

“Ugh, fine.”

“That’s the spirit! Now, everyone grab one end of the rock,” Curby instructed. Everyone gathered around the rock slab. They were the townsfolk of Whoville on Christmas morning. “Now on three, everyone lift. One. Two. Two and a half. Two and three quarters,” Curby said.

“All right already. Three!” screamed Mr. Greenbacks. Grunts were heard around the group, each sweating up a storm. Muscles bulged and legs became weak.

“I feel it working,” Paige said happily.

“Yes! It’s working!” Curby laughed with joy as he pushed with all his might.

“We sh-ou-ld have it o-u-t in fiv-e seconds. The-en we will be a-ble to walk th-th-through,” Puffington noted.

“Everyone countdown,” Jemma added.

“One,” said Curby.

“Two,” Mr. Greenbacks continued.

“Three,” Jemma wailed.

“Four,” Paige screeched.

“Five,” Puffington grinned. The rock began to move and all of a sudden, the rock was lying on its side in the middle of the path.

“Hooray!” Jemma celebrated. She danced around and bumped hips with Paige. Everyone began to laugh and smile and forget about what they were doing.

“Thank you, Curby. We never could have done it without you,” Paige said.

“Oh, I believe it is you who deserves the credit, Miss Paige,” Curby beamed.

“What do you mean,” Paige asked with confusion.

“It is the power of the crown. While you have it, it makes you stronger. Stronger than anyone in the world.”

“Really?”

“Why, yes.”

“Well, we still couldn't have done it without you,” Paige blushed. “I just have one last question. Why were you all so scared when you saw Curby,” Paige asked the others.

“Well, we've never really seen a crab before. Normally crabs live in oceans or streams. I guess we just got surprised. Sorry about that, Curby,” Jemma said.

“No problem. I completely understand,” Curby nodded.

“Well, now that that's all sorted out, we really must be going. Thank you again,” Mr. Greenbacks said as he hopped down the path.

“Wait a minute. Curby, would you like to come with us?” Jemma asked sweetly.

“Oh biscuits! Are you kidding me? I'd love to come! Thank you so much,” Curby squealed with delight.

“We would love to have you. I'm sure you are brave enough,” Paige winked. Curby giggled and took Jemma's notion to hop up on her back.

“Don't try anything up there,” Jemma teased. Puffington laughed as he ran to catch up with Paige. Mr. Greenbacks snuffed, trying to disguise his smile. Light shone up ahead.

“We'll be there soon,” Paige thought. “We have to.”

* * *

“I'm tired,” whined Mr. Greenbacks.

“We all are,” Jemma added.

“How much farther,” asked Paige.

“My fin-s fe-el cold,” Puffington shivered.

“Look, the light is just up there,” Curby said.

The ground was beginning to get harder and sturdier. Bits of grass grew here and there and less water dripped from overhead.

“Look! Up there! It’s the exit!” Paige jumped up and down, filled with joy.

“Yay,” everyone shouted. The five ran up ahead and raced out of the cave. The light was all too bright, but vaguely familiar. Paige shut her eyes and awaited to open them, like a child trying to catch a snowflake. She shot her eyes awake and saw a wondrous sight: trees bursting with fruit, flowers coating the grounds. The sun shone bright in the cloudless blue sky. Birds tweeted in the air and bees buzzed past. They were out of the dark.

“Finally. Out of that stupid cave,” Mr. Greenbacks breathed.

“I haven’t been out here in years,” Curby said with awe.

“It’s so pretty,” Paige said, mouth agape.

The five walked through the forest and admired the nature that stood out to them. Jemma brushed past the grass that grew tall and Mr. Greenbacks attempted to leave the insects out of his mouth. Puffington flung water at flowers and gave them a drink while Paige and Curby gathered fruit. Suddenly, a howl all too familiar rang. Curby looked confused while the others began to worry.

“We should keep moving,” Jemma motioned. She grabbed Curby and pushed the others down the path of beaten grass.

“What was that,” asked Curby.

“Something that we will never find,” Jemma replied. She started to break into a run and ran down the path. Everyone struggled to keep up with her, but they did their best. After a few hours of running, the five realized they were lost.

“Of course. This is what happens when you don’t listen to me. I told you we should’ve gone right, but instead we went left,” Mr. Greenbacks said with a snarl.

“It’s not Jemma’s fault we are lost,” Curby defended.

“Ever-yone stop and let-s think this thr-ou-gh,” Puffington suggested.

The howl spoke again and seemed to be louder.

“While you all have been arguing, nobody’s been able to hear that howl. It’s closer than before,” Curby said.

“It is. I’m scared,” Paige cried, tears flooding her face.

“It’s okay. Whatever that is, it won’t find us,” Jemma comforted.

“Too late,” said a mysterious voice. It was cold yet warm and smooth as silk.

“Who said that,” Mr. Greenbacks asked. “I demand you tell me. I am Queen Lurissa’s most trusted servant. I am royalty! So, tell me.”

“Ha! You don’t scare me, you old fool,” the voice said.

“How dare you!” Mr. Greenbacks began to jump up and down, screaming with fury.

“Look, over there. I just saw something move,” Paige pointed out. Leaves rustled and the trees protected the figure that spoke with ease.

“You’ll have to be faster than that to find me,” the voice laughed.

“Found you,” Puffington said. He had waddled over to the bushes where a pair of glowing brown eyes stared. Puffington smiled and backed away. The creature shook and the bush blew away to reveal an orange-cloaked animal. Its ears pricked up and its tail waved hello. Its four legs stood tall and towered over the bush. Its nose was as black as a dog’s and its long floppy tongue hung out and spewed saliva.

“Well, seems you all are smarter than I first thought. At least the fish is. I’m Roxy,” she said.

“Roxy the foxy? What a ridiculous name. I’m Mr. Greenbacks.”

“And you call me ridiculous. What about you all,” asked Roxy.

“I’m Paige and this is Jemma, Puffington, and Curby,” Paige informed.

“Hello,” Curby said politely.

“Hey,” Roxy snarled. “What are you all doing up here?”

“We are on a qu-ues-t to fi-ind the stone that shi-nes as re-d as red can b-be,” said Puffington.

“Woah, really? I have to admit, you guys got guts. Seems I was mistaken by your outer image,” Roxy said sarcastically.

“We also have the Crown of A Thousand Suns,” said Jemma proudly.

“Are you serious? Wow.”

“And we are also going to the Lair of Kilijoy,” Mr. Greenbacks bragged.

“Ha! You all won’t survive thirty seconds there. Do you all have a plan of some sort to evade the King?” Roxy asked.

“Oh... well... I guess... I suppose,” Mr. Greenbacks stuttered.

“I knew it! Ha!” Roxy laughed and rolled over on her back in excitement.

“Doubt you could do it,” Jemma mocked.

“Betcha I could do it ten-thousand-hundred-million times better,” said Roxy.

“Um, millions come be-fore the thou-sands place,” said Puffington smartly.

“Oh shush! I’ll bet you couldn’t swim the River of Blank even if your life depended on it,” Roxy snapped. Puffington grew red and his bowl began to flood.

“He could swim anything better than you,” Mr. Greenbacks replied.

Roxy pursed her lips and stood silently. Her eyes glowed a chestnut brown and her red fur seemed to beat like a heart.

“What’s the River of Blank,” Paige asked, trying to break the silence.

“Oh honey, you have so much to learn,” Jemma said. “Blank is the name of this area. Years and years ago, three brothers, the founders of this gorgeous place, claimed this whole area as their home. Each had his name marked off as a strip of land and their names made up the name of the forest. They lived here for years, centuries, some even believe they still live here now. Others say they died out a thousand years ago,” Jemma began.

“I’ll continue,” Curby said, shoving his way to the front. “While the brothers lived here, they practiced magic. You see, the three brothers had a gift of magic. They could turn a pebble to a mountain in only a flick of a finger. They practiced on the nature that grew in the forest. One day, the eldest brother began to grow cocky. He thought he had mastered all the magical arts.”

“But he didn’t,” interrupted Mr. Greenbacks. “He bragged and boasted to his other brothers, and they found him quite, how do you say, obnoxious. They killed him in his sleep. His name was scratched away from the forest. A few years later, the second brother announced he was leaving for his bride-to-be. The youngest brother felt sad and insulted, so he killed his other brother. His name was scratched away. The third brother was proud as he had the whole forest to himself.”

“My turn,” Puffington said. “So then, after ma-ny years, the villagers be-gan to g-e-t annoy-ed with the youn-gest brother becau-se he would not let any-one int-o his forest. They devised a plan t-o k-kill him, and suc-suc-ceeded. His

name was scratched off and they threw his body in the lake. Then the villagers didn't know what to call the forest, so they called it Blank as well."

"So that's the story," Roxy concluded.

"Oh," was all Paige could say. Her bottom lip began to quiver.

"Don't be frightened, that was a long time ago," Jemma comforted.

"I'm not scared," Paige breathed, puffing her chest out.

Roxy grinned and turned to face the forest. Her long tail bobbed up and down and whipped all the way around her body. She turned back and faced Paige. "Why are you here," Roxy asked silently. Paige stared into her big brown eyes. They stared back, but stared with curiosity and seemed cold and sad. Paige could see the amazement in the back of Roxy's mind and looked around at her friends. Everyone had leaned in and had a thirst for the answer. It was clear they all wanted to know as well.

"Ahhh," Paige breathed. "Do you all really want to know," she asked.

"Please," Jemma asked so quietly crickets seemed like firecrackers.

"I had wandered out of my house and was down by my pond. I hopped in and swam around. Then the water pulled me down and I woke up on the beach. But it's okay because this is all just one big dream come true," Paige said happily. "Then the queen told me this was the only way I could get home to my family, by retrieving this stone.

"Ha! What a hoot!" Roxy laughed.

"What do you mean?" Paige asked innocently.

"You really believe a stone is your ticket home? The queen just sent you to do her dirty work so you'd be out of her

hair and not asking her ‘How will I ever get home?’ You’ve been set up,” Roxy snapped.

Paige gasped for air, her heart beating faster and faster. “Is this true,” Paige asked Mr. Greenbacks. “I know you’ll tell me the truth.”

“Yes, it is true,” Mr. Greenbacks sighed with a heavy heart. Jemma looked down at her feet and Puffington’s eyes began to water. Curby looked around in shock at the others, his claws tightening up.

“So, you all lied to me? Liars liars pants on fire,” Paige screamed. “How will I ever get home when now I know I can’t,” she asked, tears rolling down her pale face.

“Oh no, Paige. We didn’t lie. We just didn’t want to hurt you by telling you we don’t know of a way to get home. Please forgive us,” Jemma pleaded, bending down to sit with the crying girl.

“I’m sure there is another way to get you home. But obviously the queen sent you on this mission for a purpose. You are needed to retrieve this stone. She gave you the crown for goodness sakes. You are destined for this, Paige. I’ll be here every step of the way. Please, don’t give up now,” Mr. Greenbacks said, doing his best to comfort her.

Paige sniffled, “Promise?”

“Of course,” he said.

“Good.”

“I’d hate to break up this very touching moment but we are still lost in the woods,” Jemma said sternly.

“Oh hush,” Puffington said.

“Why don’t we ask Roxy. Maybe she can help us,” said Paige.

Roxy, who had had her back turned to them, whipped around barked at them, “Everyone line up!”

“What, I’m confused,” Curby said as he looked around.

“You want my help, then line up,” Roxy slithered.

Mr. Greenbacks stood before Curby but after Puffington who stood next to Jemma who leaned against Paige.

“Now then, I know how you get out of here,” Roxy strutted. “The exit’s around here somewhere. I’ll help you find your way, if you give me something in return.”

“What do you want,” Mr. Greenbacks asked. His voice had grown hoarse and rusty and his eyes had a scared hint of gleam to them. He adjusted his bow tie and swallowed hard.

“I want you five to go find me a yellow apple.”

“You don’t like the other colors?” Paige asked but was cut off by an annoyed frog.

“There are red apples right here. Eat one of those!” He bellowed.

“Yes, but I’m really in the mood for a yellow apple,” Roxy whined.

“You swear you’ll g-et us o-u-t of h-ere?” Puffington gulped.

“Swear on my last meal’s grave,” she grinned.

“Fine we’ll do it,” sighed Jemma.

“Ok friends, let’s go!” Curby said with excitement in his whole body shooting him forward.

“Someone needs to calm that crab down,” Mr. Greenbacks snapped.

Paige laughed and looked back at Roxy, who called out “See you before dinner!” Paige grabbed her hair and let it fall in front of her shoulder. She pulled out twigs and leaves that had become entangled and re-tied her boot as the others strolled out of sight.

“Hey, wait for me!” Paige said running to catch up. She could see Puffington’s bowl rolling down the path, reflections of the last bits of sunlight reflecting up and down. She followed the bobbing of heads far away and ran to keep up,

Untitled

By Daniel Spilker, Grade 8

I was running as fast as I could. I didn't know what was chasing me but I knew I was in trouble.

Right now you are probably confused about what you are reading, so let me fill you in. My name is Henry Ilvnophsky, and the details about me aren't important. What you need to know is that I am an elite member of the *Where's Waldo* book club. You might be asking yourself why there would be a *Where's Waldo* book club. The secret is that the book *Where's Waldo* contains information about the recipe to Coca-Cola. For years now, the book club has been searching for the recipe and we were so close until the inventors of Coca-Cola found out we were searching for the recipe. The rest of the members of the book club and I had to go into hiding. Now that you're all caught up, we can get back to the story.

I was running as fast as I could. I didn't know what was chasing me but I knew I was in trouble. I couldn't run for much longer. I tried turning corners; I tried running through shops but I couldn't get away for the people who were chasing me. I knew I could only escape by getting to my hideout, so I ran down the street, made a left, and climbed up the stairs

leading to my hideout. I had escaped. My hideout was a little room with a small bed and radio. I shared it with one of my friends from the club whose name was Notare Alname. We would always be on alert in case they found us.

Later that day, at around 4:30 in the afternoon, Notare came back to the hideout. He had had a much better day than I. I knew we couldn't keep living this way forever so I decided to come up with a plan to get the recipe and be able to live free again without having to worry about people chasing us. Notare and I started to come up with a plan.

The week before we had found the recipe. It was hidden in an underground lair in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. The problem was that the lair was guarded very heavily and we could not get in ourselves. We had to find people willing to risk their lives for a cause that no one cared about, so it would be hard.

First, we needed someone who was good with technology and could disable the security systems. Second, we needed someone who was an expert at manipulating people so they would let us through. We also needed an explosives expert to get us into the base. Finally, we needed someone who was great with maps of the ocean and would be able to get us to the

lair. With this squad we could never fail this heist, though unfortunately I couldn't possibly be able to find these people, so we were stuck with us two.

The plan was to get a boat and drive to the middle of the ocean, then get into a submarine and drive it directly to the bottom. We would get scuba gear and swim to the lair. After that, we would improvise and try to get the recipe, which was in the middle of the base. After that we would escape back out and free swim up to the boat.

It took us three days to get ready for the heist. We were on our way to the ocean in the boat and we were ready. We got to the destination and we got in the submarine. Once we got close to the base, we swam to the entrance and went inside. For some reason there were no guards, so we just went with the plan. We were walking towards the center of the lair when we saw about twenty guards come out the door in front of us. We quickly hid behind a corner. We watched slowly as the guards passed us. We snuck behind them and got to the door. Behind the door was the recipe, but the door was locked and only someone with a security card could get through it. We had to get a card! We snuck up behind one of the guards and took his card without him noticing. Suddenly, someone appeared

behind us. He started shouting and alerted the whole base.
Sirens started going off and we were being chased....

To be continued

Broken Bottle

By Megan Grosfeld, Grade 8

She was a broken bottle.
Shattered, but all the pieces are there.
She could never go back to her original
state, she could try, but it will never be the same.
No glue could fix the damage that
smashed the vessel that is her body.
Her soul is released, like a flower blooming.
Slowly in time, then all at once.
Her surroundings are pure reality and
a continuous white noise.
There she lies on the sand,
shards of permanent glass in her heart.

My Summers in Kent, CT

By Ali Rosenfeld, Grade 8

It is the first day of winter and I'm thinking about how much fun I had at my sleep away camp in Kent, CT. Camp Kenwood is the place I would always go to if I needed a break from reality. It's the place where I have crossed off ideas on my bucket list: make international friends, make a friendship bracelet, and swim in a lake. The list could go on. I have been experiencing this paradise for two years now. The first night I was in my bunk bed in the Sophs 2 cabin, I was not homesick. Within the first hours of camp, I had already made some friends. I will always remember those people and how they treated me like a friend. The last day of camp in 2013 was so disappointing for me because I had made my first sleep away camp best friend (Maggie Butterfield), and I was so sad that I might never see or talk to her again because she lives all the way in Chicago. Luckily we communicate through texting, facetime, and Instagram. This summer was one of the best summers because I started to find myself and make even more new friends. I made friends who were a few years younger than me, and some who were older. I started expressing myself by trying new activities, such as fitness, yoga, arts and crafts,

improv, and tennis. Whenever I did them, I started to feel better about myself and I felt like I had a deep interest while I was participating in those activities. While I was doing the activities, I was surrounded with people who made me feel good about myself and who liked to have fun! The greatest thing about Kenwood is how mostly everyone treats each other like they are a sister (not the mean kind!) and how you can experience things you thought you would never experience. Everyone shows amazing sportsmanship and there are counselors who you can always go to if anything is bringing you down.

It's so interesting how two years can change your life so dramatically. The atmosphere makes you feel like you belong there. You feel free while breathing the mountain air and swimming in the cool blue waters of the North Spectacle Lake and playing in the soft green grass. What makes this camp so unique is that it can change the way you see new places. I do not know what I would do if I had to change camps. I feel that Kenwood forever will be in my heart and I hope I can hold on to the memories I will treasure forever. The beautiful shades of blue and white touched my life.

Rain

Sounds like pitter patters on the second floor of my house

Rain

Smells like fresh, morning dew on the well cut grass in my front lawn

Rain

Looks like discolored, clear teardrops from a little girl's eyes when her ice cream drops

Rain

Feels like a touch from the memories of the deep sea

Rain

Tastes like a drop of shivers down my spine

By Leadra Reeves, Grade 8

Look Beyond the Details

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

Never scrutinize beauty because by the time you will have finished, she will be gone and you will be by yourself, left unaccompanied to over think individual fragments of a picture depicting a love that no longer exists.

Nothing is beautiful when it stands alone.

So take it all in and appreciate life as a whole rather than studying its sole features.

Second Chance

By Zemira Stevens, Grade 8

Why do they say at the end of a thunderstorm there's a rainbow? Is it just to give you something to look forward to? I mean, who said there was a pot of gold and a cheeky leprechaun twiddling his thumbs all day, waiting for the next little kid to somehow show up? Well, trust me, I looked, a long time ago; there was no rainbow, no pot of gold, and definitely no leprechaun waiting to welcome me. I used to spend days walking across the dew dropped grass, the gray clouds pitying my cluelessness. Letting the rain take me away, held me tight, too tight. Searching for something I didn't know would never be there, a cruel punishment of youth, innocence. I used to brush my fingers against the soft moss on the trees in the rain and wait until I could see just a bit of color. Just a bit of color. The anticipation and longing for growing color in my black and white life. I never did.

Well, we've all told a lie before, for different reasons. They say it's not okay to lie so someone else can hurt. Well, someone did that to me, way back when I searched for my rainbow. I didn't believe them at first, but I eased into it like honey sliding down a spoon, nice and slow. The spoon was the

lie, it tried to hold me back and keep me from my rainbow. It's not about if you believe whatever the lie was, it's what you do with it, how you react to it. You can make it a rainbow, or just another storm to strike you down again. Maybe I got it all wrong the first time. Maybe it was never really about the rainbow; maybe it was always about the rainstorm that started it. The person who was looking for it never realized what they were looking for was always inside them. Too bad real rainbows don't last long. No matter how fast I ran, I never did make it in time. So painful rainbows can be. It was like a game everyday. Over, and over, and over again. Storm after storm. I was stuck on the spoon. No way out of this black and white life.

Someday I'll get my second chance. Do you know why I know? Because the thunderstorm told me so. Because that's what made me strong. I guess rainbows and rainstorms really aren't that different. Right?

Untitled

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

The ghost of our past will always be the chaos that haunts our present.

Cross My Heart

By Kaitlyn Gerstin, Grade 8

Once upon a time, in a castle-looking house high above the clouds, in a dusty attic, lived Brooke and her family. Brooke was 17 years old and had two brothers, who were twins, and two little sisters. She lived with and worked for a wealthy family that was well known all around town, the Mandells. Early last year, right after her sister, Ellie, turned 6, her parents were walking home from a town meeting. There were no streetlights and a car sped on the very road they walked along. The car swerved on the road and hit her parents, killing them on impact. As the oldest child, Brooke took responsibility. She sold her original home and moved into the house of the Mandells with her siblings. In exchange for food, shelter, and an education for her siblings, she agreed to take care of the four Mandell children and work and clean around the house. Everyday, she would get the seven children ready for school. She would clean while Mrs. Mandell went to fancy brunches and horse races with her friends and while Mr. Mandell worked as a lawyer. At 12 o'clock, she picked up the children and made them lunch and walked them back to school at 1 o'clock. She then had time to spend on her own in her room in the high, dusty attic; she could go out for a walk, or she could mend the farm.

One day, after she walked the children back to school, she stayed with the farm animals. Music from brunch at the palace played and swung Brooke into a dance. She skipped and leaped across the land, gathering food that grew on the fields. She fed the animals in song and took out Joey, the family horse. She tied him to the fence as she sung to him and swiftly brushed his hair. Before she knew it, Brooke was practically jumping onto Joey's back and started trotting into the woods. The music

grew louder and she sung along, remembering all the words to the songs, the songs her mother would sing to her when she was a child. She let the horse run free with her on his back, unaware of the direction they were traveling, unaware of the hour. Her raggedy blue dress flew behind her, as did her golden blonde hair. She squinted her blue-green eyes while the sun glared down on her. Tired, Joey slowed down to a walk and she looked around her. She saw the tall trees and listened to the vibrant music. Singing along, she came upon the tree that her mother, father, and she carved together when she was six, like Ellie, her sister's age. She placed her hand on the bark, staring at it, speechless and song-less.

"May I help you with something? I know the forest quite well," a voice said.

Brooke whipped her head around frightened, "Um, I was just leaving. Sorry." She started to turn away but the boy came and rode next to her on his horse.

"You have a lovely voice." She looked down blushing, "I'm Brett." The boy said holding out his hand.

"Brooke." She said astonished as she looked up to meet his sapphire blue eyes. His sun-kissed hair pushed back just the right amount, slightly shifted to the right. "I was- I was just heading back actually," Brooke said turning around.

"Tomorrow?"

"What?"

"Will you come again tomorrow, this time?" Brett said.

"Why not?" Brooke said grinning. She turned around on the horse, blushing, biting her lip and smiling.

"It was nice meeting you!" Brett called after her. She looked back and waved at the boy she met deep down in the woods. The music stopped, but it still played in her head. She rode away singing and finished the rest of the day in song. At the end of the day, she put her siblings to bed and sung them

lullabies that her mother used to sing. She told them stories and they finally drifted off into a deep sleep. High in the attic of the castle-looking home slept the family and guests, except for Brooke. She couldn't stop thinking of him; every time she did, her heart sped and stomach fluttered. She stayed up drawing in her journal and writing about the boy, Brett, that she met deep in the woods, on the chocolate-brown horse, until she too fell asleep.

Brooke woke up early Wednesday morning, made breakfast, ran the children to school and headed down to the woods on the horse. No music played, but she still heard it in her heart. She grazed through the woods and searched for the boy, Brett, she met yesterday. She continued moving towards the end of the woods, but went slowly, taking in the scene around her.

A twinkle shone in the corner of her eye high in a tree. Joey, the horse, jumped with fear at sight of the twinkle too, but he saw more than just a shining light, he saw a mini person. The twinkle came out of the tree, coming closer and closer to Brooke. Soon, the twinkling stopped and revealed a little fairy dressed in pink.

“Hello, dear!” She said to Brooke. Joey jumped at the sound of the fairy's voice. “I'm Luna!”

Brook held out her hand to shake Luna's tiny hand and it wrapped around her finger. “Br-”

“Brooke, I know. So what brings you into the woods?” She questioned.

“Well, I met someone yesterday and we're supposed to meet today. I must be on my way. Goodbye, Luna!”

“Let's meet up sometime, I need to talk to you; it's time you know.”

“Know about what?” Brooke hollered as she rode away.

With that, Brooke took off, puzzled. Brooke was heading down deeper into the woods to find the boy, Brett, with sapphire blue eyes. Little did she know that Luna was following her. She traveled behind Brooke and Joey and floated with them down the hill, over the tree roots, through the falling green leaves. Luna was a curious fairy, she couldn't help herself, but she kept traveling behind them. Even though she had a sense of what Brooke was doing, it was her responsibility to watch over her.

Brooke went deeper down into the forest where she was approached by a strange shadow. It crept closer to her and followed her into the depth of the forest where the music began to play again. It grew louder and louder and more shadows appeared. The sun was blocked from a huge, dark cloud and blocked out all the light, causing Brooke to stumble on the roots. Joey tripped on a branch in the dark and threw Brooke off his back and to the ground. Luna was still there but couldn't light up, as that would reveal her presence. Brooke started screaming, hoping Brett would be there to help her. "Help! Someone?" But Brett wasn't there and then floor began to sink in. Roots from the trees wrapped around Brooke and pulled her in with the leaf-covered ground. Luna followed Brooke down into the ground and lit up, revealing herself to Brooke.

"Don't worry. I'm here to explain everything," Luna spoke softly.

"What? Explain what? How are you here?" Brooke responded.

"Just stay calm, we're almost there."

"Almost where?" Brooke said. Soon the ground shook with the sound of horse hooves. A figure jumped off the horse and into the forming hole that Brooke was strapped to.

“Brooke, it’s me. What’s going on? AH!” Brett jumped at the sight of Luna, “Wha-who is that?”

“I’m Luna. I’m taking Brooke home, where she belongs, where she needs to be from now on.”

“Well, I’m coming,” said Brett. “Where am I going exactly?”

“You’ll see,” said Luna and she pulled Brett into the hole with her and Brooke. She pulled a root and the ground opened up. Brooke and Brett fell and dodged floating objects. “Don’t worry, we’re almost there!” Luna yelled over Brooke and Brett’s screams. Soon, a light started to show and the three stopped falling. A tiny door in the corner of the large room appeared and Luna motioned Brooke to a basket of sugar cookies and Brett to another. “Each of you can eat one, but no more than that.” Brett and Brooke exchanged glances and then looked at her like she was crazy. “Go on. We don’t have much time,” Luna spoke motioning to the cookies.

“On three.” Brett said.

“One, two...”

“Three!” Brooke and Brett ate the cookies and started to decrease in size rapidly. “Luna! What are in these cookies! What’s going on?” Brooke yelled in frustration.

“Brooke, I’m taking you home, you just have to be this size to one, get into the encha- through the door, yeah the door, and two, you’ll be a giant if you stay your size!” Luna pulled out a shiny gold key and stuck it in the door. She slowly turned it and unlatched the door. “Let’s go,” she said to Brooke. “It’s time.” Slowly, Brett and Brooke crept in the tiny door one by one and entered ‘Brooke’s real home’.

“Wow! Luna, what is this place? It’s amazing!” Brooke cheered.

“I told you, Brooke, this is your true home, this is where you belong,” Luna said to Brooke.

The vibrant colors shocked them; the flowers and trees were brighter than ever. Birds flew and chirped, chipmunks ran across the ground. A majestic waterfall splashed and misted cool, clear water in the distance. There were hills, mountains and more! How was this Brooke's home? It looked like an enchanted forest! On the highest hill, a beautiful white palace stood. A long cobblestone path led to it and horses lined up on each side of the path with men on their backs. The horses were snow white and the men wore white and silver armor. They held swords in their side pockets and trumpets in their hands with shining silver and sky-blue flags with a symbol on it. The trumpets blared music that Brooke never heard before. It wasn't like the music they played back at what she thought was home for the ladies at the brunches. This was different. It was more upbeat and happy. Brooke walked in circles examining each beautiful flower when she spotted a red and black castle on a lower hill, acres away from the white palace. There was no pretty cobblestone path that led to it, there were no strong men lined up with music blaring trumpets. There was just a castle with checkerboard colored towers that were built sky-high. Black flags and red flags shot out of the top of each tower with a snake wrapped around a heart and an arrow going through it.

"Hello!" A voice called.

"Hello!" Four others repeated.

"Nice to meet you dear! I'm Dawson Dwarf. This is Adam, Bernie, Caleb, and Frankie. And you are?" Dawson said holding his hand out to Brooke.

"I'm Brooke," she said, taking his hand, "This is Brett and this is Luna," Brooke said, pointing the two out.

"Would you like a tour? Do you have a place to stay? How long are you here for?" Dawson asked eagerly.

“Well, we would love a tour! I’m not sure about a place to stay. Luna said she has everything planned out. And honestly I have no idea.” Brooke looked over at Brett who was playing with the smallest dwarf, Caleb.

“Go go go!” Brett yelled as he threw the ball they made of leaves and sticks. Caleb dove for the ball and rolled on the floor with it safely in his arms. “Whooo!” Brett and Caleb ran around with their arms in the air, laughing and screaming.

“Brett, are you ready for the tour? We have to go now, as it’s getting late.” Brooke called.

“Yup! Let’s go!” Brett lifted Caleb on his shoulders and followed the four other dwarfs through the forest and to a small little cobblestone cottage far beyond the plants, trees, and flowers. They all entered the tiny home and were led to a door and stairs that followed.

“Many houses here are built up, but ours was built down. We practically live underground I guess you could say. Come on!”

“Brooke,” Luna said, “we mustn’t stay long, a very important person is waiting for you. We have to leave now.”

“Aww Luna!” Brooke cried, “Can we stay for a little longer? Please? Please? Please? With a cherry on top?”

“No, Brooke, we have to leave now, it isn’t safe for you to be out so late. You’re supposed to be there right before sundown and that’s right now.” Luna explained. “Dawson, I’m sorry, but we have to leave. The two have to be somewhere right away.”

“Alright. We’ll see you soon!” Dawson said waving goodbye.

“Luna, where and what is ‘where’?” Brooke said running after Luna.

“Luna, what’s going on?” Brett worried.

“I’m taking you to the palace. Queen Elena will explain everything else. Hurry, it’s almost dark!” Luna quickly flew out of the little cottage and lit up, leading the way with Brett and Brooke running behind her.

“What’s so bad if we’re out at night? We’re safe, aren’t we?” Brooke questioned.

“I’ll explain later, hurry!” Luna rocketed through the forest and Brooke and Brett tried to keep up, but they trailed behind. Luna came rushing back when she saw that they weren’t behind her anymore. “Quick! Grab that leave and hop onto it!” Luna said. She immediately started flying again, but this time she flew faster than before. Trees and cottage homes flew by in a blur, and, in a blink of an eye, Luna, Brooke, and Brett barged through the clear glass doors.

The guards shifted, startled at the sight of Brooke and Brett. Luna kept flying forward, still dragging the two behind her. “Okay listen. I’m taking you to Queen Elena. She’s right in there,” Luna said pointing to a double door room. “Just be yourself, don’t say anything about the dwarfs yet and listen to her carefully. I’ll be right behind you if you need anything.” Brett and Brooke nodded and knocked on the huge doors.

“Come in!” a voice said. Luna, Brett, and Brooke pushed open the heavy doors and walked into a huge room. There was a gigantic crystal chandelier, glass cases holding beautiful china cups and plates. In a far corner there was another glass case, but this one had a lock on it. Inside the case was a wand. It was made of crystal and glass and pretty designs swirled through it. At the top of the wand there was a diamond that glistened in the light of the room. “You must be Brooke,” the queen spoke. Brooke awoke with amazement and looked the queen in the eye.

“Yes, ma’am, that’s me!” Brooke assured her.

The queen stood out of her chair and walked down the six white-carpeted stairs and walked to Luna. “Great job.” She smiled. “Felix! Axle!” The queen hollered and snapped her fingers. “Please show Brooke to her room and Brett to his.”

“Yes, Queen Elena.” The two said in unison. The dwarf-like people reached up to about my shoulders, they weren’t as small as the five dwarfs they met before. “Hello, I am Axle.” One said. “This is my brother, Felix.” Felix shyly waved at Brooke and continued walking in silence. “What brings you to Pearly Gates Forest?” Axle questioned.

“I’m not quite sure.” Brooke said, “Luna-”

“Luna?”

“Yes, Luna found me at home in my woods and then she brought me here. She didn’t say why. Do you kn-”

“Nope.” Axle cut Brooke off. “Here’s your room and your new wardrobe selected personally by the queen herself,” Axle said quickly. “Um, you can make yourself comfortable and, um, yeah, okay, bye now.”

“Wait! Why are you acting so strangely? Is everything alright?”

“Well- um yes, yes everything is dandy, ok now toodles!” Axle said as he shut the door to Brooke’s room and locked the huge gold lock with a huge set of golden keys.

Brooke spun around in awe of her guest room. The walls were painted a baby pink and yellow and she had a queen-sized bed with fluffy white pillows and sheets. Drapes hung down from the posts above her head and clay butterflies were spread around the room and on the bedposts too. She had a beautiful white dresser with all new clothes. In the back of her room there was a sitting window. She could see the whole kingdom from her very room. The window seat had a light pink cushion and curtains that hung down and touched the wooden floor. A big mirror attached to a far wall reflected light on the locked

door and its white butterfly engraved frame wowed Brooke. Lastly, Brooke discovered her favorite thing about her room. It was the crystal chandelier. Diamonds and silvery white gems glistened and the fragile lights shone bright, giving the room a lovely look and feeling.

Brooke heard a knock on the door and soon the queen emerged into her room. “Hello dear.”

“Your majesty,” Brooke said bowing.

“No need for that dear, you’ll see why in a minute. Get dressed in your new clothes and follow me, will you?” Brooke nodded. A couple of minutes later the queen was leading Brooke down a long hallway with paintings and pictures. They soon approached the queen’s throne room and Brett, Luna, Felix, and Axle were all waiting on their knees facing the throne. But there wasn’t one throne like there was earlier. There was another one identical to it with a diamond crown on it.

“What’s going on?” Brooke said in puzzlement.

“Brooke dear, you’re the lost princess of Pearly Gates. When you were introduced to the kingdom, an evil witch came and cursed you. The curse she put on you is going to go into action soon, that is why you are here. The curse was this: “When Princess Brooke Olivia Norman turns eighteen years old, she will be pricked with a thorn from the rare Magelica flower. The pricking will put the princess in a deep, permanent sleep. The only thing that will break the spell is the magic from the Tulip Sepia flower. If the Tulip Sepia flower doesn’t reach the princess in twenty-four hours after she is pricked, the princess will be in a deep sleep forever and she will never see the light again.”

“What?” Brooke screeched. She started breathing heavily and sat down on the floor. “What’s going to happen to me? What if I get pricked and there is no good flower? Then what?”

“We’ll find another way to save you. Brooke, it’s all going to be okay, I promise.” The queen spoke. Brooke wiped her eyes. “Before you came here, we went around town and collected and got rid of all the Magelica flowers we could find. Not one exists in this kingdom. In the kingdom over there,” Queen Elena led Brooke over to the window and pointed to the castle on the lower hill Brooke saw before, “I can’t make a promise to you that it’s safe. Until after your eighteenth birthday,” the queen lifted Brooke’s head and made eye contact with her, “until then, you must stay in Pearly Gates, in this castle. You cannot go to the basement where the destruction of the Magelica flowers took place. You cannot go to the other castle under any circumstances. Do you understand? It’s for your safety, Brooke.” Brooke nodded and ran in tears to her room and sobbed in her bed until she fell asleep.

A knock on the door was what woke her from her sleep. “Come in,” Brooke said shyly. The door cracked open and Brett emerged.

“Hey,” he said. “Are you okay?” He sat on the edge of her bed.

“What’s going to happen to me, Brett?” Brooke said shakily.

“Nothing. As long as I’m here, I promise.”

“But people break promises and you don’t know what you’ll have to stop, Brett. What if you can’t protect me?”

“I will, Brooke. I’ll do whatever it takes,” he responded. Brooke nodded and took a deep breath. “Whatever it takes.” He repeated getting up from the bed. “Queen Elena said to get dressed. We apparently ‘have a big day ahead of us’, whatever that means.” And he shut the door behind him.

Brooke put on her periwinkle dress, white shoes, and silver jewelry. “Brooke, dear. You look marvelous. Now come with me, dear, there is someone you must meet. He is a bit, well, unusual I guess, but be kind and act like he is a normal person just like you. Okay?” The queen said.

“Okay, may I ask his name?”

“He’ll tell you, dear, let’s go.” The queen led Brooke through the same long hallway and took her to the front of the castle. Through the big glass doors they went and Brooke threw herself over a white horse.

“Where are we going?” Brooke questioned. The queen sat uncomfortably in the horse-dragged carriage.

“We are going to the dungeon of my sister’s castle.” Queen Elena finally replied. “Her castle is the one I told you not to go near. I know-” She stopped, “I know I told you not to go there, Brooke. But you are with Axle, Felix, Luna, and me. And Brett. Nothing will get by us; you’re in good hands, I promise.” The carriage rumbled along a cobblestone, gravelly road. Up and down hills, through the forest, passed the dwarf’s home, and to the red and black castle on the low hill.

They pulled up to an ugly dressed soldier in rusted silver armor. He held out his hand to Brooke, but Brett stopped her. “This way,” he said and led Brooke away from the knight. He glared at him and continued bringing Brooke over to the queen’s far side. He nodded at them, and the queen nodded back. Together they led Brooke into the castle, down the stairs and to the dungeon where they met the mysterious man.

“Hello, we are here. Princess Brooke Olivia Norman and Queen Elena Norman are here,” the queen shouted out. Brooke looked at her in awe.

“Did you say Queen Elena Norman?” Brooke said.

“Yes, I’ll explain later, this is more important right now.”

“THE QUEEN! THE PRINCESSA! HELLO!” A straggly voice yelled. Chains rattled and soon a silhouette of a creature began to form. “HEL-”

“Shh,” the queen hushed him.

“Hello! My apologies, Madam. Who is this beauty?”

“This,” the queen spoke, “this is my daughter, Princess Brooke Olivia Norman.”

“I’m your - you’re my-” Brooke struggled to speak.

“Yes, darling,” Queen Elena said.

“I thought you were - gone. What about Johnny, Ellie, Abigale, and Ryan? Where are they?”

“They are still with that family. After your birthday I’ll bring them here too.”

“And my father?” Broke said. The queen looked at her and then at the prisoner.

“Well,” she smiled weakly and looked over at the chained prisoner, “That’s him.” Broke looked at her so-called father in amazement. Her mouth dropped open and she stood there staring. No words came out of her mouth. She didn’t have anything to say. Even if she did have something to say, she couldn’t.

Brooke slowly walked over to what her mother called her father. “You’re my father?” Brooke asked shyly.

“Yes, honey,” the raggedy prisoner replied. He reached out to touch her shoulder, but Brooke turned away. She closed her eyes tight and walked to Brett.

“Brett? Can we leave now?” she asked. Tears were building up in her eyes. Her vision became blurry and she stood there in Brett’s embrace.

“Um,” Brett looked over at the queen for permission and received it. “Yeah, c’mon let’s go. It was nice to meet you sir-”

“Da-” the prisoner started.

“His name is David,” Brooke shouted and ran out of the castle. Brett chased after her. They ran hill after hill and ditched the horse and buggy ride.

“Brooke! Wait up!” Brett yelled after her. He followed her up and down each green grassy hill until she finally slowed down. “Wait,” Brett said catching his breath. The two sat down on the top of a hill right in the middle of the two castles. “So, are you going to tell me what that was about?”

“Ok.” Brooke sighed. “When I was younger, my parents went to a ball at the kingdom. You know, yours. We never had enough money for a car so we walked everywhere we went. They were walking back on the dark, dusty road at midnight and. And-” Brooke took a deep breath, “and there was a car coming down the road. Their headlights were out so none of them, my mother, father, or the people in the car, could see each other. The car skidded off the road by the smallest bit, hit them, and instantly killed them.” Brooke sobbed. “Since then, as the oldest, I stood up and took care of everyone. I have four other siblings and they’re all younger. I gave up my education so I could work for a wealthy family in return for a place to stay, food, and an education for my siblings. I even sold our old house for money to support them. But now I’m here, in this place, and these two people who look nothing like my parents, from what I remember, are telling me that they are them. How are they them? They’re- they’re dead!” Brooke cried to Brett. All he could do was assure her that everything was okay. He hugged her tightly and calmed her down.

“Look at the stars,” he said. “They’re starting to come out. When I was younger, I would lay outside in our backland with my sister. We would just lie there all night long and gaze up at the stars until we fell asleep. I used to talk to the stars, as if they knew all the answers to my questions. They were my only friends, considering that I was never allowed to leave the

castle gates until I was sixteen. They've just always been there for me. And they'll always be there for you."

Brooke nodded and looked up at the shining stars. Are they lying? She thought. Or are they telling the truth? She stood up and started walking towards what was now her temporary home. Brett followed her through the dark, through the big glass doors, down the long, long hallways, to her bedroom door. They said goodnight and Brooke went to bed with questions in her head and unclear thoughts that she thought no one knew the answer to.

"Up, up, up!" Luna yelled as she flew around Brooke. "It's time for breakfast and morning activities! Get up!" Brooke didn't move. "Come on, Brooke." Luna pulled off her covers.

"Hey, Luna," Brooke said sadly. "Were they lying?" she asked.

"Brooke, they were telling the truth. They're your parents," Luna replied. "Now get ready, Queen- your mother is going to explain it to you later." Brooke nodded and led Luna to the door. "Don't be long." Luna said and exited the room.

"They were telling the truth," Brooke said to herself. "My parents - they're - they're alive?" Brooke couldn't believe her ears. She pulled a sapphire dress on and put on her lucky butterfly necklace. She hadn't worn it ever since her parents "died". Her mother gave it to her as her fifth birthday gift and she kept it all these years.

"Hello, sweetheart!" Elena greeted her. "I see you kept your necklace. I remember picking it out and giving it to you. Your face lit up. It was all you could talk about. You loved butterflies. We bought you a kit to raise your own, but you let them out one day. You were devastated and you couldn't stop talking about how you wanted them back to keep forever. So,

your father and I bought you the necklace. We saved up for it forever. But, it was worth it to see you so happy, my dear.”

“So, you’re actually my mom?” Brooke's eyes lit up. Elena nodded her head. Brooke's eyes started to tear. She ran in for a hug and squeezed her mother tight. “I missed you, mommy.”

“I missed you too.” Elena embraced her child and wiped her tears away. “We have twenty-four hours until your birthday. We are trying to free your father, get your siblings here, and prepare for everything. It’ll all be fine. Okay?”

“Yeah. Everything will be great,” Brooke replied with a grin. “I’m going to go find Brett now! Bye!” Brooke left her mother and went on a search for Brett. She searched through the halls and made her way to Brett’s bedroom door. “Brett, it’s me, open up!” Brooke knocked on the door.

“Hello, Brooke! You look lovely today!” Brett opened the door and emerged in a suit and tie. “So, do you like it? I picked it out with your mom for your birthday.” He spun in a circle and spread his arms out wide.

“I love it,” Brooke said smiling. “I’ll show you my outfit. Come on!” Brooke took Brett’s hand and dragged him to her room. “Tada!” She flailed her arms and motioned to a beautiful blue gown. It sparkled from the top and faded to the middle until the fabric was a silky sky blue. Brooke pressed it against herself and twirled around in circles. “Mother said she was going to get my siblings to come and father out of the dungeon. I think she’s throwing me a party!” Brooke spun around and around and flopped on her bed with her arms to her sides.

“Come on, Brooke. We gotta go set up,” Brett held out his hand but Brooke pulled him down with her. She laughed and looked into his eyes. Soon her laugh died down, her smile

began to change into admiration. He did the same, but he came closer to her.

“I can’t!” Brooke said and she got up. “We better go and, um, you know, uh, setup. Like you said, we have lots to do!” She exited in a hurry, leaving Brett happy but confused. He sat there for a minute thinking. Wow. She likes me too. Quickly, he rose from his place and went to his room to change. As he walked to his room, he peered downstairs and looked at Brooke through the huge glass doors. He saw her lying down, face up on a hill, thinking.

“Hey!” Brett called while running over the hills. He was running to Brooke. “Hey,” he said while sitting down next to her. “You know, what happened back there. It doesn’t have to happen. Nothing does, we’re friends, right?”

“Yeah,” Brooke said unsurely.

“Why do you say it like that? Brooke, what’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing.”

“It isn’t nothing, Brooke. Come on, tell me.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to stop anything from happening,” she started, “I just don’t know if I can.”

“What do you-”

“I don’t know, Brett. I need to think first, okay? Let’s talk tomorrow. I need to help prepare for the dinner.”

“Okay.” Brett said and he nodded his head goodbye. Brooke swept herself to her feet and she walked to the palace. What do I do? She thought. I can’t, can I? Won’t it mess everything up? I’ve got to talk to mother and see what she says.

So, do you like the story so far? Sorry for my cheesy friend; she loves to tell stories, and I guess she chose my life story to tell you. Anyway, I’m taking over because we are

almost at the end and, well, don't tell her this, but my friend doesn't really know the whole ending. So where did she leave off? Oh right, so I was on my way to my mother, the Queen. But, when I got to her door, I had a change of heart. I didn't need her opinion, I needed my own. I looked out the window and saw Brett still sitting outside. He was leaning against a cherry blossom, my favorite.

"Brett!" I called as I ran to the tree. "I thought about it and I'm fine with being more than just friends," I said to him.

"Really?" he questioned. His pearly white teeth began to show and his lips curved upwards revealing his alluring smile. "Okay," he said. Over each hill we walked, hand-in-hand. My feet brushed the green grass beneath me and my head leaned on his broad shoulders. We walked and walked, talked and talked until the sun started to set and the stars came out once again. We slowly made our way to the cherry blossom tree and saw a little light coming from behind it. "That must be the Tulip Sepia flower your mom was talking about. You know, the rare magic flower. Brooke, if you get poisoned or something with that other flower, this can save you."

"Yeah. Take it, we'll show it to my mother and have it saved for when we need it."

"Okay," he said to me. His eyes beamed at the flower as he bent to pick it up. The flower glistened and Brett gently pulled it from the ground. Soon, the light that the flower gave off started to fade and it swayed from side to side." What's it doing?"

"I think it's dying! Quick we have to get it home!" Brett and I ran over the hills and made our way back to the palace. We burst through the doors in a hurry. "Mother! Mother where are you?"

"What? Brooke what do you need? What happened?"

“We found the flower so we picked it so we would have it just in case we needed it, but it’s dying we need water and something to hold it! Mother help! Please!”

“Okay, Okay. Calm down. Here’s the vase and here’s the water to put it in a dark place. We will be able to see if it is still glowing or not.” I nodded my head and did just what she said to do. “Now go to sleep. Both of you. We all have a very long day ahead of us. Goodnight, darling.”

The birds chirped and the sun glared through the curtains and on my face. “Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday dear, Brooke! Happy birthday to you!” In came mom, dad, Brett, Luna, Felix, Axle, Adam, Bernie, Caleb, Frankie, Johnny, Ellie, Abigale, and Ryan. They were all there singing to me on my eighteenth birthday.

“Thank you!” I laughed as I was pulled into a group hug.

“Get dressed! We have to plan for tonight!” Mother exclaimed.

“Okay!” I said and I shooed everyone out. Everyone but Brett left.

“Happy birthday, Princess,” he said and he embraced me so tight I swear my eyes fell out of my head.

“Thanks. Now get out.” I laughed and pointed to the door.

“Yes ma’am,” he retorted and exited my room. I put on my pink dress. Not the everyday one. The birthday one, of course. I brushed my curly blonde hair and pinned a piece from each side back. I slipped on tan shoes and walked out of my room and into the kitchen. Mother and her helpers were cooking, cleaning, setting the table, etc.

“Hello birthday girl!” everyone said.

“Hi,” I said overwhelmed.

“Pink or white?” Mom asked.

“Both.”

“Okay. We’ve got it all under control. Go find Brett and play with your siblings. It’s a miracle that the Mandells allowed them to come.”

“Okay, I’m going to go. Are you sure you don’t want my help?”

“Yes, yes. Go have fun.” And she motioned for me to leave.

“Hey bud!” I said to Ryan. “Where’s everyone?”

“They’re playing with some creepy lady. She’s dressed in all black and has green hair. Who does that?”

“Okay. Bud? I need you to go get everyone and bring them inside, okay? Don’t let her come inside though, just say goodbye.” I ran into the kitchen again.

“Brooke, what did I tell you? Stay ou-”

“She’s here! The evil witch lady who cursed me. She’s with them. With all of them and I can’t find Brett! Mommy, what do we do?” I yelled.

“I’ll get the kids, go to your room! Lock the door and close all the shades!”

“Okay.” I ran out of the kitchen and slammed the door to my room. The curtains were pulled closed and my door was locked. I turned around and saw a beautiful vase with a pretty dark purple flower in it. I walked over and picked up the flower. A card came with it. It said.

Dearest Brooke,

Happy birthday. I left you a present. It is the flower you are most likely holding right now. Be careful... you can certainly guess who I am, can’t you?

“Okay...” I said. I brought the flower closer to my nose. The purple petals touched the tip of my nose. I slowly exhaled and then inhaled. The flower’s smell was trapped in my nose. But, this was no ordinary flower. This was the flower. More

specifically, “the present.” The vase slipped out of my palms and hit the floor with a bang. I followed it to the floor and hit the floor just as hard as the vase did. I felt like I too broke.

“Brooke?” A voice called. “What happened? Are you okay? BROOKE?” The voice came closer and something hit the door. “Brooke!” Brett broke through the door and barged in to find me laying on the floor with glass and a single purple flower. My eyes were shut and I lay on the floor with no expression. Mother and Brett carried me to my bed.

“She’ll be okay. Go and get the yellow flower you brought in last night.” Brett nodded at the command and ran to receive the flower. He sprinted back to her room with the flower in his shaking hands. “Thank you,” Mother said. “I am not sure if the flower is going to work. Look,” she said, “it is not glowing anymore. Let’s put the flower in her hands, place it right under her nose. We will check and see how she is in an hour. If she is not awake, then we will have to find a way. We have to get her back.”

“Okay,” Brett said. He kneeled down to get to eye level with me, “It’s all going to be okay. I promise, cross my heart.”

An hour passed and Brooke was still unconscious. No change had happened. Brett, Elena, Brooke’s father and siblings all came in to see her sleeping body.

“Okay, everyone go outside or in the kitchen. Brett and I are going to find a way to save her.” The crowd left and Brett, Elena, and Brooke were together. Elena leaned over her daughter and smoothed her hair. She took her hand and stared at her eyelids. “We’re going to get you back. I promise, honey.”

Brett looked over at Brooke and notice that she wasn’t wearing her butterfly necklace. “Where’s her necklace?” he questioned.

“I don’t know,” Elena said startled. “She was wearing it just before she went into her room. She was wearing it in the kitchen.” She got up and started towards the place where the flower and glass was. She bent down and there it was. The diamonds glistened in the water and under the broken glass. “Here! It’s here, I found it!” She said. Elena picked up the shiny necklace and brought it over to Brooke. “You put it on her. It’ll be more special,” she said to Brett.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Go on,” she motioned. Brett unclipped the necklace and brought it around Brooke’s head. He clipped it back and let the butterfly charm lay on her chest. The diamonds glistened and shone brighter and brighter. Brooke’s breathing began to escalate. Her eyelashes moved the slightest bit. Her eyes opened in slits revealing the most beautiful green. Her hand moved over and found Brett’s.

“I’m awake,” she said. “And I will be here, with you, forever. I promise, cross my heart...”

The End

Paper Boy

By Megan Grosfeld, Grade 8

There was a paper boy and a paper girl.
She was everything that he wanted, a beautiful girl
with doll eyes and a smile so big that you
could never tell what she was hiding underneath.
He saw her ups and downs, her mistakes
and flaws, but he accepted them
and liked her just the
way she was. She was closed and quiet, didn't want
to start trouble. He would watch from a distance
as all the other paper boys fawned over her
mysterious beauty, but he wouldn't
say a thing. She of course noticed him and
enjoyed his time, but never wanted anything more.
He just wouldn't give up. She pushed him up, up and away,
far from her life
and never realized how she hurt the love of her life.
She did indeed love him deep down.
She wanted him more than anything, but the fear of jumping
off the edge
scared her tremendously. After all that
trying and all the time he wasted,
he gave up and walked away.
Time had run out.
She needed to catch him quickly before he would leave
forever.
She was in a panic, very aloof, but it was already too late.
Another paper girl had taken her place.

Pain

By Irini Livanos, Grade 8

Pain is something that no one would know about without happiness

Happiness is something that wouldn't exist if pain wasn't given to people

No one would prefer the sunset to the sunrise if there was just one or the other

As time goes on you are given a right and a wrong choice
Sometimes those choices can either be right and right or wrong and wrong

But either way it doesn't matter what choice you make

It's what happens after the choice, that's what counts

Going into a hail storm and coming out wounded doesn't mean you're hurt

It means you know pain and you passed the test

It means you are strong enough to show pain when you are lost

When happiness is given to you, you make sure that happiness is the right choice

Sometimes people are blinded by trying to find happiness so that they miss the right turn

To show pain means you've seen happiness and to be happy means you know the feeling of pain

Innocence

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

The longer we live the emptier we become.

With each time we observe wrong, a small fragment of our innocence breaks off.

Like the leaves of a tree, innocence cannot survive if it is exposed to the cold.

Bare like a frigid branch during winter, innocence is fleeting.

Beginning once again, it searches for someone who is youthful.

Someone who has not yet seen the brokenness of this world.

Someone who still has a chance to heal the cuts and bruises inflicted on humanity.

Innocence is never permanent.

Every instance in which a fraction of our innocence is lost, we undergo exposure to the constant sin that surrounds us.

This is how we grow up.

The Legend of Mr. McCringleberry

By Chris Vergos, Grade 8

Mr. McCringleberry was a very grumpy old man. He was normally the old guy that all the kids made fun of. He had the house that always got toilet papered or had eggs thrown at him. He wanted to have his revenge on those meddling kids.

One day, a kid named Tyrone had a party with all of his friends, and Mr. McCringleberry wanted to get them back. He had everything planned out, and he would definitely be able to get them. Mr. McCringleberry decided to bring his cane and try to whack some sense into Tyrone and his friends. Once Mr. McCringleberry came to the party, no one recognized him at first but when DJ Doritos saw Mr. McCringleberry, things were not looking good.

“Yo Tyrone! I think that old guy is trying to barge into our party!” said DJ Doritos.

“Ok, let’s get everyone to surround him and then teach him a lesson not to mess with our group!” exclaimed Tyrone.

Mr. McCringleberry was enjoying some club soda when all of a sudden the group of kids surrounded him. Let me tell you this, I don’t know if Mr. McCringleberry will ever walk again.

“What up McCrings!” said Tyrone. “We about to mess you up and make sure you ain’t comin’ to another one of our parties!”

All of the kids yelled very loudly, and Mr. McCringleberry seemed so overwhelmed that all of a sudden, he fell on the floor.

“Yeah, he is such a loser. He can’t even make a comeback to what I said! He probably can’t even get up off the floor!” yelled Tyrone.

But then, all of a sudden, Mr. McCringleberry got up from the floor and what he did here might be the most glorious thing I have ever seen.

“Oh you little whippersnappers think you can beat me? Ha! Well let’s see how you are gonna be able to beat me in my next form!”

Mr. McCringleberry yelled very loudly and a blue aura swirled around him, spreading out like a gush of wind pushing

some of the kids to the wall. But then all was calm, and what he transformed into seemed so out of this world that I don't even know how this is possible. Mr. McCringleberry transformed into John Cena. (Think of John Cena theme song when this is happening)

“John Cena?!?!?!?” yelled Tyrone. “How is this even possible?!?!?”

“Because I'm John Cena!!” yelled John Cena as he went up to Randy Orton and drop kicked him off the balcony.

That was just the beginning. All of the other kids tried to fight the Magical John Cena, but their efforts were in vain. First of all, I don't even know how Randy Orton ended up at Tyrone's party. But, then again, I don't think this story is supposed to make sense. Anyway, Tyrone called up his squad to help beat John Cena because he was too strong. Eventually, there were too many kids, and John Cena looked like he was losing. But then...

“I now am gonna transform to something that no one will be able to defeat!!”

Following this, John Cena was covered in red light and then somehow grew larger until he became a giant octopus! The type of octopus that John Cena transformed into was called the Wunderpus Photogenicus and, yes, that is a real animal name. You can Google it if you want to. So then, John Cena as the Wunderpus Photogenicus destroyed Tyrone's house with his mighty tentacles. Tyrone's house was reduced to rubble and Mr. McCringleberry finally had his revenge on those whippersnappers. He grabbed his cane and some club soda and went back to his house.

It Was Just a Dream.

By Anonymous, Grade 6

I was waiting, impatiently in the line with other students, leading up to the stage in the school's auditorium. Crowded with people. Parents, siblings, cousins, and even grandparents were there. I could see straight at my mother, even in the crowd. Her smile was so big and wide, almost like she thinks that I am going to win student council, becoming a class president.

I take a deep breath. Who is she kidding? I can't win student council. Neither could I even read this stupid speech without hesitating! However, I knew I couldn't let her down. Slowly, the line starts moving; I take one step. Then another. Then another. Soon, I was almost about to face the front of the auditorium, ready to perform my speech. I grabbed my speech in my left hand, leaving a wrinkle. My palms broke into a sweat, as the kid who was at first right in front of me in the line now is finishing the final words in the last sentence of his speech. "Thank you," he said as he was started to climb down the stairs from the stage.

"Up next, we have our next candidate running for class president. Give it up for Sarah!" The whole auditorium broke into silence. I could see my mom out of the corner of my eye, already videotaping me on her phone, all wide smiles. I didn't know what to do. My heart pounded, as I was slowly crossing the stage to where the stand was to present our speech. All eyes were on me. I took a deep breath, took one last glance at the crowded audience, cleared my throat, and just as I was about to read, I heard the usual sound to my alarm clock going off. Then, everything just suddenly went dark. I opened my eyes again, and found myself in my room, lying on my bed. I rubbed my eyes in confusion, and put my glasses on to make

sure I was seeing correctly. I glanced at the clock sitting besides me on my bed stand. Sure enough, it was 7:00 am. I glanced at the sheet hung up on my wall. Then, I suddenly remembered that I hung it up on the wall the other day after school. It read: SIGN UP SHEET FOR RUNNING FOR STUDENT COUNCIL. There it was written below: my name.
It was just a dream. It was just a dream.

Untitled

By Adon Rackson, Grade 8

Your gleaming light blinds me.
I cannot see clearly.
I stumble in the dark despite the glaring radiance that engulfs my eyes.
I spend hours attempting to fathom who you are.
I come close to unraveling the mystery, but am burned.
Burns that leave me with scars.
Burns that tell your story.
In the end, I am able to understand.
I realize that your warmth is only an allusion.
Underneath your beauty sits an underlying layer of fiery deceit that burns with rage.
Your luminescence is brilliant but what smolders within is the true magnificence that defines your misleading beauty.

Myrefall

By David Guo, Grade 7

Once we moved to Applewood Farms, Mark and I began to get really over obsessed about football. We love to throw the ball around and pretend we're some football stars. And since we live on a farm, playing football without anyone yelling at us is a definite plus.

“Cole! Go long!” Mark yelled.

I ran and ran as far as I could, but missed the ball. Instead, it went flying over the hill and rolled down rapidly. I scrambled down the hill, tripping myself in the process. “Shoot!” I screamed, rolling down the hill at full speed. As soon as I stopped, my body began to ache like crazy. But, as soon as I saw what was in front of me, I stopped in my tracks.

“Are you okay?” Mark asked.

“Yeah...”

As soon as Mark saw what I saw, his eyes gaped open. “What...what is this place?” He asked.

We heard a guy sneeze inside the old castle ruins. There was a huge wall, but it was destroyed, and inside were tons and tons of houses with a large castle in the back. Slowly approaching, I heard the guy cough and sneeze again. “Well, who might this be?”

I screamed, falling back onto the dirt. The man wasn't tall, only about 4 feet 5 inches, with a GIANT beard. He was wearing dirty ragged clothes, and he reeked of smoke.

“We don't want any harm! We just came to get our ball!” exclaimed Mark nervously.

The old man laughed. “You lads don't hurt me; I won't hurt you,” old beard-face chuckled. “Call me Sven.”

“Yes, sir,” I said with a salute.

“Young laddy, you don’t need to salute,” he said with a toothless smile. “Welcome to Myrefall, once a legendary town, now, a giant piece of rat puke. I am related to King Ives himself.”

I had no idea who that was.

“What happened to it?” Mark asked.

“Allow me to tell you a story about the great hero Nicholas Hemmet III, and how he saved Myrefall from the tyrant and prince Bryanus, the son of great King Berion.”

We smoothed the floor, sat down, and got ready to listen.

King Ulfric Berion was an old man, 92 years. He had almost never lied, betrayed, or disrespected anyone. He was an honest king, a good man. Someone who should have been made king long ago, even before he was born!

“How is that possible?” I asked.

“Shush, young lad!”

“Yeah Cole, shut up,” Mark taunted.

I rolled my eyes and got ready to listen again.

Alas, he was growing old. He needed to find someone to take his place. When he had his first son Tristan, King Berion was around 60 and very proud of him. He loved his first son; he was handsome, talented, and gifted in playing the lyre. When King Berion’s second son, Bryanus, was born, Bryanus was way ahead of his time. As soon as he saw the beautiful castle and clothing of his father, he knew he was going to be king.

As the king grew older, and his sons too, Bryanus wanted to be king, as he knew his father was going to decide who would be king soon. Both boys had much potential.

“Father,” Bryanus announced, “I want to know who will be king.”

“I, uh, well, I have my reasons,” Sven stuttered.
“Anyways....”

Once Nicholas was dressed, he raced down his stairs and met Peasant Lovell, his good slave, at the door.

“So what does the Great King say?” Nicholas asked.

“He wants you to meet him in his town.”

“Myrefall?” He groaned. “Can’t he come over here to Silverkeep? At least here the community is clean.”

“Yes, but King’s orders; we must follow them.”

“Last time I went there, rats bit at my boot,” Nicholas grumbled.

They mounted their horse, and traveled to Myrefall.

“Nicholas Hemmet!” King Berion announced in his booming voice. “Welcome back!”

“Haven’t been here in ages,” Nicholas mumbled. “Yet this place is still not clean.”

“Peasant Lovell! How are you young lad?”

“Enough of these distractions. Let us talk.” Nicholas said.

As they walked into the room, King Berion made sure the door was locked. “Bryanus is planning to kill me,” King Berion whispered desperately. “You have to help me.”

“Your son?” he asked

“Yes,” the King said. “Please.”

“I shall call my men; they should arrive by tomorrow,” Nicholas said. “They will take care of Bryanus and have him arrested.”

King Berion sighed with relief. “You have been traveling all day to come here. Spend the night with us. Peasant Rainard, prepare a bed for Nicholas.”

Nicholas had to agree, despite the filth, and thus ended the meeting.

Late that night, after Nicholas sent the letter, he was ready to go to sleep when he heard a creak, right outside his room. Nicholas knew something was going on. So did Bryanus, who was right outside, holding a sharp knife. Suspicious, he had been listening to the entire conversation in case the King would do something to prevent him from being king. Nicholas pretended to not hear anything, and jumped onto his bed, yet he kept his sword with him.

Around 30 minutes later, the door slowly cracked open. Nicholas took a deep breath, and waited.

Bryanus barged in, suddenly, and lunged forward with the knife, but Nicholas countered and slashed at the boy's chest. He fell back in pain, and Nicholas thrust his sword at his arm. Ingran suddenly came out of the door with another knife, slashing at Nicholas. Nicholas parried the attack and swung, but this time Ingran was ready and blocked the attack. They fought for a while, but Nicholas faked a move and landed a kick to the groin. Bryanus jumped onto Nicholas' back, choking him. Nicholas struggled, slamming his back onto the wall, but Bryanus held tight and Nicholas started to turn purple. Ingran stood up, still holding his groin, stabbed Nicholas in his stomach, weakening him. Ingran got ready to try again, but this time Nicholas kicked him in the chest, pushing Ingran to the ground, and elbowed Bryanus in the hip, hard. Getting out of his grip, Nicholas pulled out the knife in his stomach and turned around and connected his fist with Bryanus' face. After both Ingran and Bryanus had been knocked out, Nicholas tied them together and put them inside the storage closet.

The next morning, Nicholas woke up from his bed, and feeling no marks on himself, pleasantly sat up and went into the main hall, only to be greeted by a loud and scary roar. The

only thing that came to his head was one word: Dragon. He should have known this would happen in such filth.

The castle door blew open, with fire bursting inside, killing the council members. Nicholas grabbed his armor and shield and picked up his sword on the floor. He ran outside, seeing the dragon looking into the door of the castle, and screamed in fear. Nicholas noticed his men on the town's streets firing arrows at the beast. Nicholas knew he had to protect the king. The dragon soon flew over Myrefall and blew fire into the poor houses and streets, burning everything. The townspeople ran everywhere. The king lay on his bed, outfit stained with blood. "They, they got to me," King Berion stuttered.

"Who?!"

"Bryanus...get the dragon..." And just like that, he passed out.

Furious, Nicholas ran out of the castle, forgetful of the large dragon looming over him. He found Ingran and the two crawled into a small tunnel near the castle wall. Nicholas sprinted past his confused men, and dove at Ingran, missing. He dropped down the tunnel to the sewers and Nicholas followed. Ingran eventually came to a dead end, and faced Nicholas.

"Impressive," Bryanus said behind Nicholas. "You've managed to get yourself killed."

Nicholas smiled. "We shall see."

And so they began fighting. On each side Nicholas had to defend, and soon he was overcome with fatigue. Pausing for a second, he dove at Bryanus, taking him down and forced his hand onto Bryanus' head, shoving him into the water. He then turned around slightly to see Ingran charge at him. He lunged between his legs and slashed at both his ankles, cutting them

The Stage

By Megan Grosfeld, Grade 8

When you are standing up there, it is like the world stops right in front of your eyes.

All you see are the silhouettes of people staring at you, judging your every move.

You would never know that it would be so hot up there with all the lights beating down at your skin, sweat dripping from your forehead creating droplets that fall abruptly on the floor.

The feeling you get hits you when you walk to the center and look up.

This feeling is almost like when you know you are about to do something crazy, something ridiculous, but even better.

When you stand up there, you can either head North or plummet South.

Either reach for the stars in space or head back to Earth as a fiery meteor.

As you open your mouth, your throat swells and a gooey lump of semi liquid substance fill your throat.

Your mouth is dry even though you drank water two minutes ago.

People's whispers can be heard, they chirp like little birds in a tree on a warm summer day.

I can hear them, usually they think I cannot, but I absolutely can.

Music starts to play, an intro to a familiar song, a song I know by heart, one I cannot seem to forget.

I am far from the music, but I am close to it as it blows calming breaths past my ear.

As the music continues to play, I close my eyes and take a singer's breath.

Next thing I know, it is over.

The lights shut off and I exit to the left, hearing an uproar of hands smashing together.

I leave the stage humbly and quietly, but I feel like doing a million turns and jumping out of my shoes.

Leaving the stage makes me feel the way words cannot even describe.

Actually, it makes me feel infinite, free, and right where I was born to be.