



Short Story

Competition 2025

**CHILDREN'S CATEGORIES
SHORTLIST & WINNERS**



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Children Shortlist & Winners

(aged 5-7)

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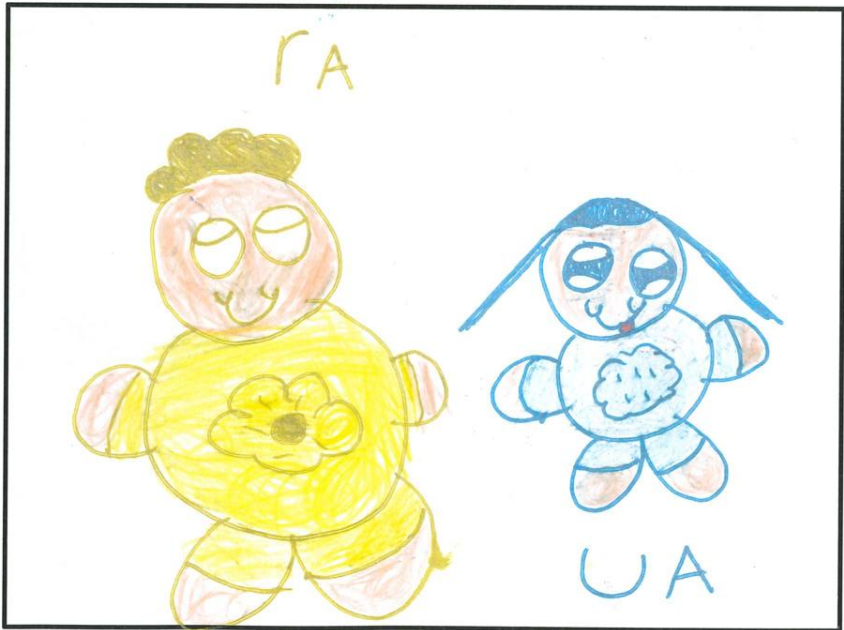
Children Shortlist & Winners

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1

RA AND UA: GUARDIANS OF THE NGAHERE

By Piper Sutton



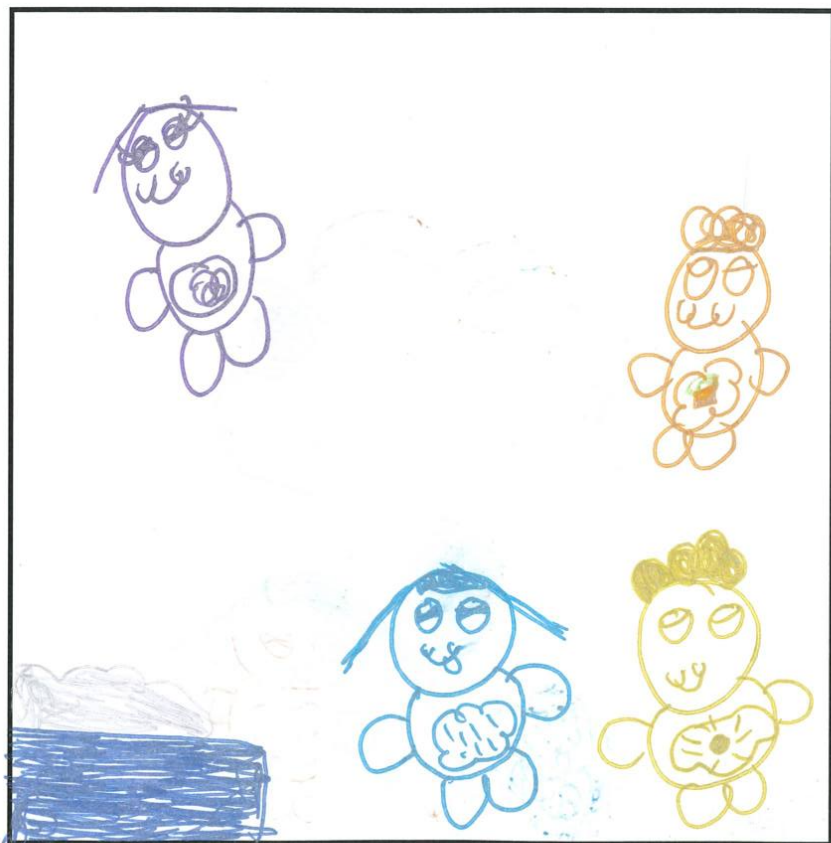
Ra and Ua are five-year-old twins. They live in the ngahere with their parents. They were lucky to grow up surrounded by the children of Tone Mahuta.



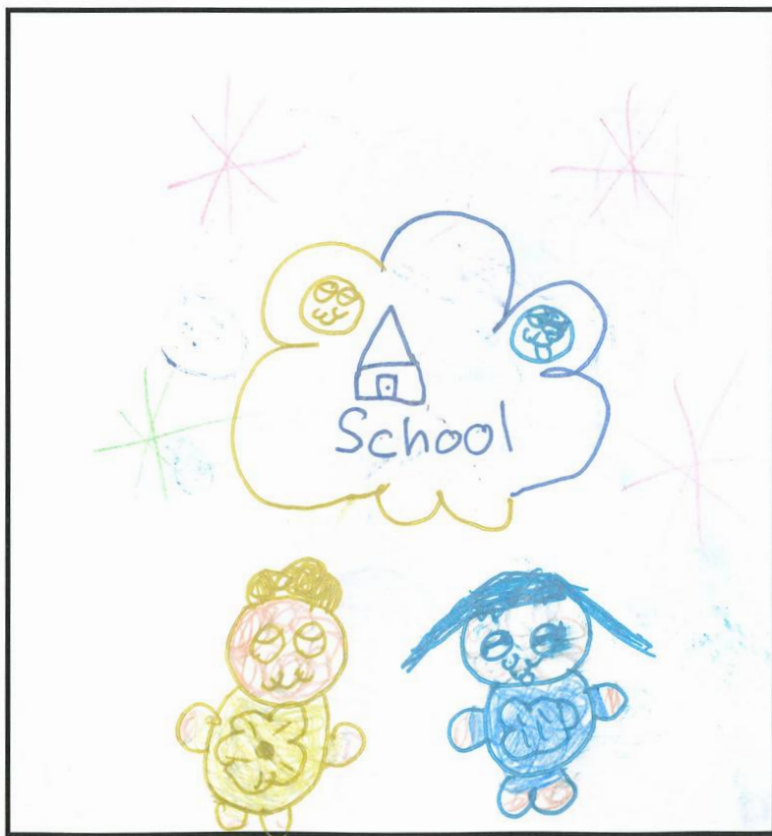
Ra and Ua spent their time chatting with pīwakawaka and tūī, watching kiwi at night, climbing trees, and foraging for karaka berries.



Their parents taught Ra and Ua the importance of kaitiakitanga (caring for the environment) and manaakitanga (kindness and care for others). They showed them how to respect and protect Te Ao Toroa (the natural world).



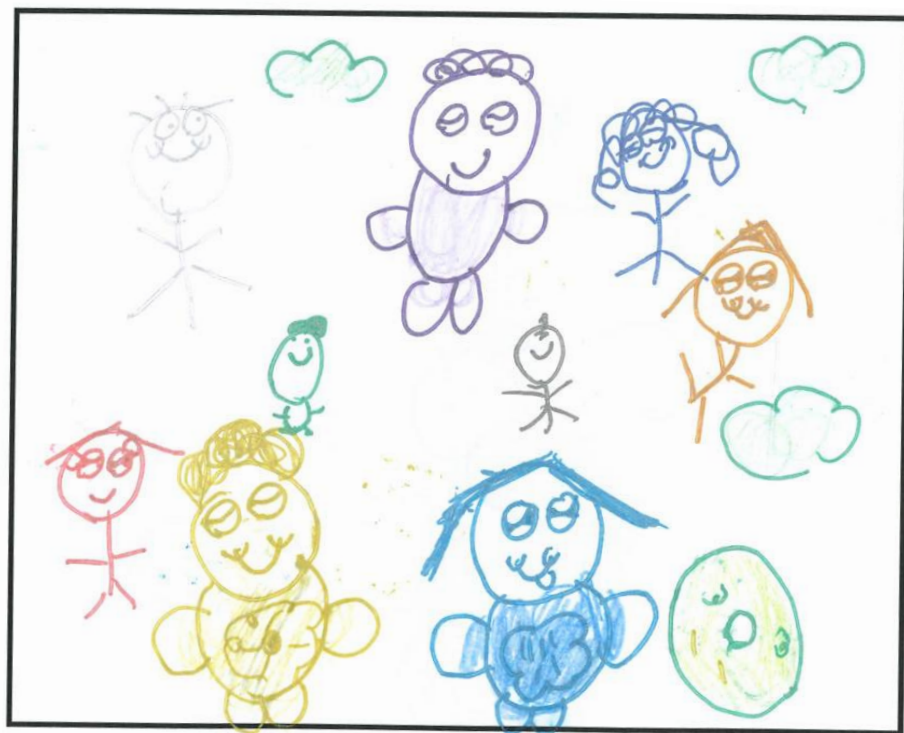
When the time came for them to start school, Ra and Ua were excited. They imagined a place filled with the same values as home, where people cared for each other and looked after their surroundings.



But when they arrived, they were saddened to see that things were different. The school was messy, with rubbish on the ground, and some tamariki were unkind to each other. It didn't feel like a place they wanted to be.



Determined to make a difference, Ra and Ua brought a special pounamu to school that they had found in the awa near their home.



They handed the pounamu around to their classmates while explaining the importance of kaitiakitanga and demonstrating manaakitanga. They explained this knowledge had been passed down to them from their ancestors.

Most of the tamariki were inspired by Ra and Ua, but one boy refused to listen. He thought being mean was funny and picking up rubbish was a waste of time. He didn't understand why the twins cared about that stuff.



One day Tawhirimatea brought strong winds to the school, scattering rubbish everywhere. The school grounds became a mess, and a small pīwakawaka got tangled in plastic.



Seeing the pŌwakawaka was in trouble, Ra and Ua rushed to help. The other tamariki also joined in. They were all so proud when they freed the manu. They even cleaned up the area so other creatures would not get hurt.



Ra and Ua invited the class to visit their home in the ngahere. The tamari ki were amazed at how clean, peaceful, and full of life it was.



Everyone felt good inside because people were being kind to each other. Together they enjoyed listening to the manu sing, swimming in the awa, and eating the yummy karaka berries .



The tamariki learned how connected we ape to each other and Te Ao Turoa, and that is why it is so important to be caring.

Back at school, Ra and Ua led the way by composting, recycling, picking up rubbish, and always encouraging kindness.



When the school had a celebration for Matariki the tamariki planted a mānuka tree that Ra and Ua had grown from a seed.

They knew that the bees would love it!



The tree was also a symbol to remind everyone of the importance of care and protection for all, proving that even small hands can make a big difference.

2

The Time I Got Out by Jackson McCullagh-Smith

I was just hanging out with my friends and then my whole body started to shake.

I knew my time had come to go out of my cozy gum.

Some worms came past and pushed. No they weren't worms, they were noodles.
No, not noodles, spaghetti!

Then I was falling down, down, down into an oval shaped tube. It sounded like wind was rushing past.

Soon I was in some sticky mess. I was thinking I might be gone forever. It felt like forever. I was getting hit from all sides. It was like the time Jackson ate all his pizza crusts and my tooth-mates had to hold on tight to me.

I heard a loud whooshing noise and I was in blackness.

My name is Hangy-tooth and I like my new home in the large intestine.

Who knows what adventures are coming next?



The Two Best Friends and the Magical Creature

by Reese Huang

Once upon a time, there were two best friends called Violet and Ruby. Ruby was a girl who loved crystals and gems, while Violet was a girl who loved colours, especially the colour violet.

One day, the two best friends went outside to play. While they were playing, a strange pink trail appeared in front of them. Ruby and Violet were scared, but then something pushed them onto the trail, and everything disappeared except the girls and the trail.

The girls were very nervous, so they walked slowly until they saw a cave glowing pink. They approached the cave and looked inside, where they discovered a pink egg. Ruby ran into the cave and grabbed the egg, so they decided to sleep in the cave for the night.

The next morning, the girls opened their eyes and saw that the egg was cracking! Violet cried, "What do we do?" Ruby replied, "Calm down, Violet!" Violet managed to calm down a little. Suddenly, the egg hatched, revealing a baby pink fox! Ruby exclaimed, "It's so cute!" Violet suggested, "Let's name it!" Ruby agreed, "That's an awesome idea!" After thinking, Ruby proposed, "Let's name it Sparkle!" Violet cheered, "Sure, let's name it Sparkle!"

The girls took care of Sparkle, feeding her, giving her baths, and taking her for walks.

One day, while walking Sparkle, they encountered a weird monster with 98 eyes, countless arms, and legs! The monster charged at them. Sparkle hid behind a tree, waiting for the monster to leave. When she emerged, the girls were gone. Alone and frightened, Sparkle suddenly heard cries for help. She rushed toward the sound and saw Violet and Ruby trapped in a large black cage. Sparkle tried to save them but failed—until she realized she had magical powers! She used her magic to break the cage, freeing the girls. They escaped to safety, and the girls exclaimed, "You're a hero!" as they patted Sparkle's head.

Suddenly, a ginormous rumble shook the ground, and a green monster attacked. Sparkle used her magic again and defeated the monster.

The Boy Who Wanted to Be a Superhero

by Dev Rama

Once upon a time there lived a boy called Tom.

He always wanted to be a superhero even before he was born.

When he was in his mum's tummy he pretended to fly all around. He did big karate kicks and punches.

At school he always dressed in his best superhero costumes.

On Monday he wore a black and red spiderman costume (but he had to leave his web shooters at home).

On Tuesday he wore his shiny Iron Man costume (but his dad wouldn't let him take his laser gloves).

On Wednesday he wore his muscley green Hulk costume (but his mum said his Hulk puncher gloves were not appropriate for school).

On Thursday he wore his brand new superman costume (his mum and dad almost said he couldn't bring something but then they remembered that Superman doesn't have any weapons).

On Friday he wore his favorite Captain America costume (but he wasn't allowed to take the shield).

On the weekend he wore his special Batman pajamas the whole time- even to the shops.

Many years later...

Now Tom is a real superhero! He wears a blue and yellow suit. He has his own wrist shooters that shoot out nets to catch bad guys. He has armour that can shoot lasers out of his chest. He has his own special gloves that help him to do cool karate

moves. He has a symbol of his own on a red cape and a shield. His symbol looks like his shadow because he is...

SHADOW MAN!

Shadow Man tries to find as many bad guys as he can.

One day there was a gang of bank robbers on the loose. The town asked for help by lighting his symbol up in the sky. So he used his cape to fly over there because he really didn't want to walk.

He used his super strength to grab the money off the robbers. He shot the lasers from his chest into the sky to call all his superhero friends. Together they swarmed the robbers. He used his cool karate moves to take away their weapons and he used his net shooters to trap them. Then he used his shield to push them into jail.

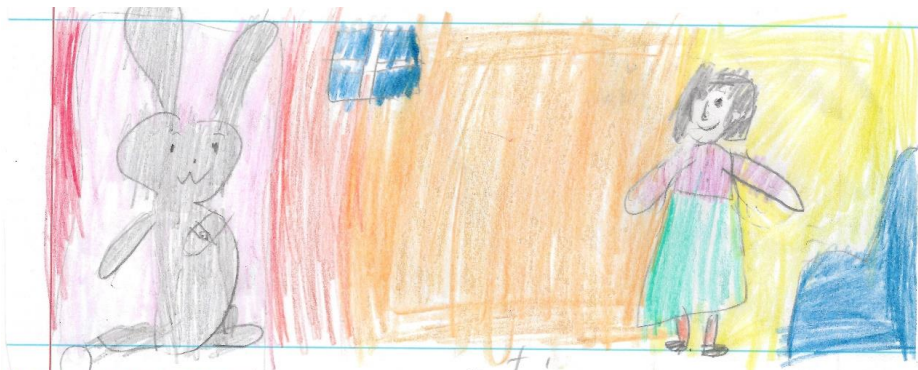
Tom's Mum and Dad were very proud of him. So were all the superheroes and so was the city! But not the bad guys, they were angry and annoyed.

The Easter Bunny and the Girl

by Jocelyn Liang



Once upon a time on a warm night, I didn't go to bed because it was Easter and I wanted to see the Easter bunny. I sat on the coach and waited for the Easter Bunny. I waited and waited until the door opened and in the door way. There was the Easter bunny.



I ask The Easter bunny "What's your name?" She said "My name is Kary." Then I said "My name is Jocelyn." She said "Would you like to be friends with me?" and I said "Yes and we played hide-and-seek and we also played tag."



4 HOURS LATER

We were so happy but she looked at the clock then she said "Oh I am sorry, but I have to go." I said "Goodbye". Then she went out.

I went to bed and fell asleep.



2 DAYS LATER

I saw a bunny jumping in front of my house and then the bunny looked like I've seen her before. Then it said "Do you remember me from Easter?" I said yes I do remember you from Easter". My mum said "It's time to go."



And I said "Wait a second." Mum waited. I said "When can I see you again?" She said "you will see me at the playtime at your school everyday."



Beach Story

by Surya Age

Today I'm going to the beach. It was a Sunday morning and I was really tired it was 8:00 but I was so excited. After we got ready I hopped in the car and and we drove off it was a 2-hour drive I was really bored, I wanted to go to the beach straight away, we didn't have breakfast so we went to a restaurant on the way but then after a while we got there.

When we arrived it was 1:00 p.m. I was really hungry but I wanted to go to the beach so I ran down to the sand but my mum called me saying it was lunch time. I was really sad but I was hungry. We had sandwiches for lunch. It was so delicious. I said to my mum "Can I go to the beach now?" but my mum said "no you have to put on your sunscreen" uhhh so much waiting.

My mum told me there's a hike and I was excited. I want to get to the top and take cool photos. but it was so tiring we have to climb up so many stairs but the end was so worth it. but then I saw we are creature its head was like a sock. I was so scared I ran down the hill. I finally got to go to the waters yes. I was playing in the water and slashing in it. After 2 hours of playing I was tired. I think we should go home, mum says. ok we drove home today was really really fun and strange.

My BeFFs

By Hannah Saker

Once upon a time there was a little girl. Her name was Lily. Her BeFFs [best forever friends] were April, Frankie, Scarlett and Ally. All of them were 10 years old. It was a Monday afternoon. Lily invited all her BeFFs, which was April, Frankie, Scarlett and Ally to go the roller-skating rink and the library to see the llamas and have a disco. Finally, the day arrived. Lilly was so excited. All the other girls were excited too – especially April, but she was scarred of the dark. But her mum said to Lily's mum she was scarred of the dark – but she was not afraid of the dark in their sleepover party they had. They had the time of their lives. The best thing was the disco. They were so sad when the sleepover party was finished. The End.

Hamsters

by Archer Pentecost

The hamster likes grass and leaves and has brown eyes.



They are fluffy and they are brown, white and black.



"What! Is it growing?" It eats everyone. A hero kills the hamster, he saved the day.



The Blood Hand

By Brooklyn Sheehan

Chapter One – A scary start

One Tuesday night the whisper of the freezing cold air was the only thing you could hear. The bulging wind was whistling through the air. You could also hear the sound of crackles zooming across you.

The tint of a blood hand touches you on the shoulder. You turn around, but no one is there. You think to yourself, who was that? Why were they there? You shout "come out" but there is no reply.

You stand there shivering, scared and want to run and hide! But there is nowhere to hide.

Chapter Two – Another blood hand

The blood hand has gone, you are safe, but no what? Just then, another blood hand is on your shoulder. You turn around, and.....there's a vampire! You scream and run far, far away from home.

You think you are safe, but the vampire has followed you. There's only one thing left to do, and it is run.

You start running as fast as you can go, again the vampire follows you. You come to a dead end with an overflowing waterfall. You jump; the vampire jumps too. What do you do now?

Chapter Three – The evil appearance

You swim onto dry land. You're cold, but that doesn't matter now. What really matters is that you escape from this vampire man. You start walking, this time you get faster and faster, but surer. You hear crackling.

There, standing right in front of you, are more evil vampires. You should have known the vampire would have its own pack. He was the leader of the pack! The leader has drowned and now the pack is furious. What do you do, run, or hide?

Chapter Four – A bad time

You have chosen to do both. First you run. They don't see you! You run to a hiding spot you saw earlier.

You have read on the internet that if you look a vampire in the eye, the vampire's eyes will turn the red of blood, blood so red that anyone would die if they saw it. The only way to turn them back to normal is by letting them bite one of your pinky fingers on your wrinkled cold hands. Your hands have to be cold, otherwise the treatment won't work on it!

Your hiding place is up a tree in a little crack that you squeeze through. Even though you're tough as a nut, you start crying.

The vampires have been sniffing for you, but they don't need to anymore because they have heard you crying. You quickly stop crying. You try sniffing for them, but you don't have a good enough nose.

What do you do? Where do you go? And most importantly, why have you done this? This is a terrible mistake you need to fix.

Chapter Five – Mistakes

You try to fix the mistake by whispering "cooooooooooooooooooooo," hoping the sound would echo and lead them away, but they don't seem to hear you. You need to get home without them seeing you and without your Mum and Dad knowing you are out in the depths of the haunted woods.

All is quiet, but you haven't been concentrating on where the vampires are. You glance down from the tree and see a vampire staring up at you. Will it catch you, or can you somehow escape?

Chapter Six – Oh no

You decide to escape, but just as you try to jump from the tree, the vampire grips his hand around your body and squeezes you so hard that you can't breathe. He squeezes so hard, that out pops a bone or two and he bites them in two.

You try to scream, and kick hard with your legs. He drops you to the ground. You turn around to run, but there is another vampire waiting behind you! The second vampire picks you up and tosses you to another vampire. The pack of vampires squeeze out more bones from your body. Finally, you fall to the ground and manage to start running, very slowly because of the missing bones.

You struggle back through the woods to your home. The vampires are right behind you. You try to open the front door, but it's locked. You call loudly for your Mum and Dad, but there is no answer. The vampires are getting closer and closer. You feel a blood hand on your shoulder.

Chapter Seven – The wave

You turn around and see that it's a vampire hand covered in squelching blood. All of a sudden, a big wave of water rushes towards you. The overflowing waterfall has drifted all the way to your house! You are wet, very wet. You can't see the vampire, you think the vampire must have drowned but there are other ones still close behind.

You run round to the back door, and there are your parents. "Mum, Dad!" you scream. Then you remember the vampires. "We need to get going!" you gasp, "there are vampires!" You start to feel dizzy.

You wake up on the ground by yourself in shallow water. You must have fainted because of all the trouble you've caused. The vampires are chasing your poor parents and for some reason the vampire pack isn't taking any notice of you. What do you do? Go out and fight or run away, which you can't really do because of your missing bones in your almost dead body.

Chapter Eight – The finale

You run to your parents. You ask them why they are fighting instead of of..... running! You all start running, running as fast as you can go. You are faster than your parents now, and you're dragging them along. You get to the flooding waterfall, it's about to explode!

You start running sideways, away from the waterfall. There's another massive wave coming! You all quickly scramble up the nearest tree. The wave gets closer to the vampires, "they can't escape now" you say to your parents while you hold onto the tree branches. The vampires disappear under the water and get swept away.

You are wet, broken, and tired, but you are safe. "Let's go home" you say to your beloved parents.

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(aged 8-12)

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Children Shortlist & Winners

(aged 8-12)

1

Behind the Blue Door

by Vicky Vu

Beatrice Trinket greeted her older cousin, Chester, and followed him up the path toward his house. He noticed her quiet smile and sighed. "I'm sorry things have been rough," he said. She shrugged, feeling sheepish. Her parents' divorce had ripped through her life, but here she was, seeking solace in the quiet coastal town of Alderbay where her mother had grown up.

"It's a shame how things have been for you. The quiet here will be great." Chester said as they walked up a slope. Bea looked around curiously -the cozy little houses all squashed together in a cozy heap with boxes of spilling flowers. Bea turned around and saw the bright blue sea, shimmering in the sunlight like a diamond. She gasped in wonder.

"You never get tired of the view," Chester laughed.

"I've never seen water so blue," she said under her breath.

"Well, you don't get much of the sea in the city," said Chester matter-of-factly as he trudged on. He had chestnut colored hair, similar to Bea's brown, and a warm smile.

"True." Bea murmured as they continued uphill. The roar of cars she could hear from her cramped apartment in the city still echoed in her mind, as well as the crash of her cat knocking things over.

"Here we are! Come meet my wife!" he cried, his arm flinging out toward a milky yellow house with a flowing garden of colors. There were flowers of all kinds, neatly trimmed with dew still dripping off the petals.

There was a pathway that cut halfway through the garden, leading to the white door. Chester fished a key out of his pocket and unlocked the door.

"Hazel!" he called. A blonde woman with wavy blonde hair appeared, wearing a gingham apron. She immediately enveloped Bea in a warm hug.

"Welcome to Alderbay, honey. Are you hungry? Do you need to lie down?" she asked politely.

"I'm fine, thank you." Bea replied. Sunlight was pouring through the windows like golden honey, coating a small dog as it slept.

"That's Daisy," Chester said.

Bea was guided to her room, where she fell asleep before her head even hit her pillow. All those sleepless nights had worn her out.

Fluffy white clouds of spun sugar coated the sky as Bea woke up. She could already hear Hazel and Chester opening the flower shop downstairs. Yawning, she sped down the stairs nimbly and helped Hazel water some flowers.

After Hazel had insisted that she didn't need help anymore, Bea set off. The smell of spring shot up her nostrils as she wondered if her mum had ever felt that way. Wandering around, she breathed in the fresh air and sighed.

The sound of songbirds chirping away at their own little melody almost made her want to whistle along. Suddenly, Bea noticed a tiny bakery with a chipped blue door and no name. She glanced inside curiously and decided to go inside. Opening the door, she looked around.

There was something comforting about the bakery, despite its smallness. Wooden stools lined the counter and charming little plants sat in terracotta pots.

"Good morning," the baker chirped. There was something about his smile that made Bea return it.

"Good morning. Could I please have the menu?" she asked, sitting on one of the stools. A soft laugh escaped the baker's mouth.

"There is no menu." He spoke. Bea was confused. No wonder there was no glass case displaying baked goods.

"How do you feel?" he asked patiently.

"Tired." Bea mumbled. The baker then scrambled away into the back room like a speedy mouse.

Bea was baffled, but she didn't have to wait long as the baker arrived soon holding a plate with a warm slice of cardamom bread with honey butter. Bea couldn't help but raise an eyebrow, puzzled.

"Enjoy." The baker said. Bea took a bite as the flavors burst in her mouth.

The taste was indescribably fantastic. It had hints of nostalgia, comfort and raw emotion wrapped into a bite, with sweetness from the honey butter and pepper from the cardamom.

It tasted like...home.

And Bea had never had that before.

She returned the next day, and the next. Each time, the baker gave her something different—lavender scones when she was anxious, soft rolls with thyme when she felt numb, and once, just a mug of warm milk and a hug of a smile.

Bea didn't dare to question this magic-the food felt like a warm blanket on a cold day, and it never failed to make her smile.

One rainy afternoon while water pelted down, the baker glanced out the tiny window and sighed.

"The food's perfect?" he inquired.

"As usual." Bea replied as she ate hot miso soup with tofu and scallions. The baker's mood shifted in his eyes; he was trying to work something out. He coughed to get Bea's attention.

"If you're still hungry, try upstairs," he said as he eyed the narrow staircase. Bea gulped down the last of her soup, nodded to the baker and walked up the creaking and groaning steps.

At the top was a small door with a teacup painted on it. Bea pushed the door open and gazed around the small room. It was warm and toasty, a little too quiet and lit by soft lamps. Lacey white curtains danced, even though the windows were closed.

A woman with raven black hair and pale skin was sitting on a worn-out armchair reading a book. Her dark eyes shot up as Bea walked in and she gave her a dampened smile.

"I'm Nori." She murmured softly. Some kind of peaceful aura surrounded her, like she never got mad.

"Beatrice Trinket." They shook hands gingerly and Nori poured into a teacup,

handing it to Bea.

"Apple blossom tea for your hopefulness." She said. Bea's lips curved upwards and she drank contently.

A light sweetness poured over her tastebuds blissfully. When would she ever feel happiness like this ever again? Suddenly the flavor changed; it was something deeper, richer, tinged with bittersweetness. A sadness hiding in the shadows seeped through, spreading silkily. A bittersweet love knowing that this wouldn't last forever.

"Does this tea change with my emotions?" she gasped in wonder. Nori laughed with a slight nod of her head. Suddenly the tea changed again, swirling as the flavors contrasted with each other. Something like starlight.

"How do you and the baker do this?" she whispered.

Nori crossed her arms and gave Bea a look she only understood many years later.

"Where do you go when you explore?" Chester said to Bea through mouthfuls of creamy pasta.

Bea said softly, "There's this bakery."

"Really?" Hazel gasped. "All the bakeries are downhill, though."

The next day Bea stormed towards the blue door with a fierce fire igniting inside her. The door flew open, and the baker looked up, concerned.

"Aren't the bakeries all downhill?" she demanded.

"Not this one." the baker said calmly.

"I just feel like a stranger," she croaked, her voice breaking. "I'm taking up space I don't deserve. I'm a guest in my own life!"

"Nori!" the baker called. "It's time we told Beatrice."

Nori clattered down noisily as teacups rattled from upstairs. She stumbled down and looked into Bea's eyes deeply.

"These places don't appear to everyone; they appear when you need them. When

you start to feel okay again, they slowly fade.” She explained.

Bea couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Her jaw dropped and she looked at the baker. Immediately she knew it was true.

“Oh,” she whispered softly.

Bea’s routine of coming for the tea and food continued. One morning she woke up with sudden hollowness inside of her and she knew something was wrong.

The bakery and the tea shop will help. She thought as she raced towards the chipped blue door. But when she swung it open, it was gone.

There was no bakery, no stairwell leading to the teashop. It was just an abandoned building that was slowly crumbling. Panicked, Bea began searching frantically for anything that could leave a trace, even breadcrumbs. She desperately fumbled in her pocket as she felt something and pulled out a napkin from the bakery. A recipe was scribbled on it in what she recognized as the baker’s handwriting: her favorite bread. Underneath it read:

You can always make your own comfort. Start with flour.

Bea walked home missing Nori, the baker and their cheerful smiles. At home she began to bake. When she was finally finished, she took a deep breath and tried it. It didn’t taste the same as the bakers, but it was cozy and warm. And hers.

Weeks later, Bea opened her window to discover the scent of tea and honey lingering in the air. She smiled, but didn’t look. Maybe the place would be back, maybe it wouldn’t. But she knew how to find happiness now.

She just had to start with flour.

Planet Noodleopolis by Hannah Scott

Zigglepop (or Ziggle for short) is a super cheerful creature who lives on a planet called Noodleopolis. Noodleopolis is a world made entirely of pasta and cheese! Everyone on the planet has noodle hair, and some people's noodles are long, like spaghetti, while others have curly, squiggly noodles like macaroni. Zigglepop's hair is soft and wiggly, just like fettuccine, and it bounces when she skips. She has green skin, one big round eye, and a soft yellow belly that's always warm and happy. Zigglepop is known for her bubbly, cheerful personality. She's always making people smile, and whenever anyone on the planet feels a little down, Zigglepop is the first person they think of.

Zigglepop's best friend is Goober. Goober's noodle hair is long and curly, and his skin is blue instead of green. He's smart and silly, and he and Zigglepop are always getting into fun adventures together. They go to school to learn about humans, which is a class they both really enjoy. They've always been fascinated by humans and their strange ways. For lunch, Goober always brings a big sandwich with extra cheese, and Zigglepop brings a bowl of noodle soup. The two of them are inseparable, and everyone in Noodleopolis knows that where Zigglepop goes, Goober is never far behind.

On weekends, Goober and Zigglepop sell their homemade drink, Alienoad. It's the most refreshing drink on Noodleopolis, and everyone loves it. The recipe was passed down from Zigglepop's grandmother, who was famous for making the best Alienoad in the galaxy. Goober and Zigglepop have big dreams of opening a larger Alienoad stall. Right now, their stall is small, and it only fits a few cups. But one day, they want to make it bigger so they can serve more alienoad and make even more money to buy fun things, like a giant trampoline to bounce on!

One afternoon, everything was going great. Zigglepop and Goober were enjoying a beautiful day, playing in the park and talking about their future Alienoad stall. Goober was playing his favorite game, meatball dodgeball, when something unexpected happened. He threw a giant meatball with so much force that it went flying straight into the cheese fountain in the middle of town. The fountain was

meant to keep the cheese flowing in the park, and it was a local treasure!

With a loud *splash*, the meatball hit the fountain, and cheese immediately started to clog the pipes. The fountain began to overflow, and the thick, gooey cheese spread across the park. It oozed and splattered everywhere! Zigglepop's shoes got stuck, and Goober slipped on a cheese puddle. The whole park turned into a melty mess! The cheese just kept pouring, and no one could stop it.

Zigglepop and Goober didn't know what to do. "We've got to stop the cheese flood!" Zigglepop said, her eyes wide in worry. The two friends spent hours trying to contain the cheese spill. They tried shovels, buckets, and even tried using a broom, but the cheese just kept coming. It covered everything in sight!

The cheese overflowed until it started dripping into the streets, turning the town into a gooey mess. But it didn't stop there. That night, something even stranger happened. It started raining cheese! But not the usual light parmesan sprinkles. No, this was giant blobs of cheddar and huge chunks of tomato sauce! It splattered all over the place, making a total disaster. The whole town was covered in thick cheese and red sauce. It was like a cheesy, saucy storm!

Zigglepop and Goober quickly grabbed all the mops and brooms they could find. They ran to the school, where the cheese storm was hitting hardest. They spent hours sweeping and mopping the cheese away, but it just kept coming down! It was so heavy, they were both getting exhausted. As the sun set, the two of

them sat on the steps of the school, covered in cheese and tomato sauce. "How are we ever going to stop this?" Zigglepop sighed.

But then something even weirder happened! Zigglepop's spoon, the one she always used for her noodle soup, suddenly turned into a noodle! It was long and twisty, just like spaghetti. "This is getting too strange," Zigglepop giggled, pulling the noodle-spoon from her soup bowl. She still had to drink the soup, but now she had an extra noodle to munch on.

Suddenly, the ground began to shake. A loud rumbling noise echoed across the town, and Zigglepop looked up to see a huge tomato sauce volcano rising in the middle of Noodleopolis! It was like a giant ketchup fountain, only it wasn't ketchup—it was boiling tomato sauce! It erupted with a force so powerful that the sauce splashed everywhere, covering the town in red goo! The volcano was massive, and

it seemed to be getting bigger with every second!

Zigglepop didn't think twice. She knew she had to act fast or the whole town would be covered in tomato sauce. Without wasting a single second, she turned to Goober. "We need to stop it, Goober! Fast!" she shouted.

Zigglepop ran as quickly as she could to the National Utensil Museum, her heart racing. She was looking for something that could stop the volcano before it covered everything in sauce. The museum was filled with all sorts of important tools, from giant forks to colossal spoons. It was the place where all the most famous utensils in Noodleopolis were kept.

When Zigglepop burst through the door, she saw it: the biggest fork in the entire world. It was huge, shining brightly in the sunlight. It was so big that it could fit an entire noodle house on it! Without hesitating, Zigglepop grabbed the giant fork and ran back toward the volcano, her heart pounding in her chest.

As she reached the volcano, the tomato sauce was pouring out like an unstoppable river. The sauce was so thick, it looked like it could cover the whole town. Zigglepop didn't let the danger stop her. She knew what she had to do. With both hands, she lifted the giant fork and charged up to the volcano. The sauce was splashing all around her, but she didn't stop. With all her might, she plunged the fork into the bubbling sauce, twisting it with everything she had.

For a moment, nothing happened. The sauce kept flowing and splashing, and Zigglepop thought she might not be able to stop it. But then, to her surprise, the sauce began to slow down. It twirled around the fork, getting sucked back into the volcano. Slowly, the flow of sauce stopped until there was just a small drip here and there. The volcano was calm again. The town was saved! Zigglepop had done it!

Everyone in Noodleopolis cheered. They gathered in the streets to celebrate, singing and dancing. To thank Zigglepop for saving them, the whole town threw a massive spaghetti dinner. There were plates piled high with noodles, sauce, and all sorts of toppings. Zigglepop couldn't resist. She ate so much spaghetti that she could barely move by the end of the meal! She had never felt so full in her life.

Zigglepop spent the next week lounging around, too stuffed to do anything else. But she didn't mind. She had saved the day, and the whole town was safe. The spaghetti was delicious, and everything was back to normal.

Zigglepop smiled, happy in the knowledge that she could always count on her friends and maybe a giant fork, when things got tough. When met with a nod, she continued, gesturing to the elevator.

"They're just this way, if you would please follow me."

They filled the time with idle chatter, little things which helped Nadia get a scope of what she was walking into.

But nothing could prepare her for the hand in the cupboard, clinically severed just before the wrist.

...

"Just like the other one, only this time a hand," the husky voice of her partner, Charles Knight, greeted her. "Hey Duke, they're over here."

The artificial lights caught his tousled blonde hair, signs of a fitful sleep. It was hard to find pockets of peace being a detective - you always had so many regrets. There were bags under his pale green eyes, ones which had seen more of the darker side of the world than most his age.

He directed Nadia over to the bedroom, where a couple was waiting. The lady seemed distressed, pacing the room while running her hands through her curly black hair. The man seemed unfazed, slightly irritated at most, from where he sat at the ornate desk.

"Nadia, this is Kira Fowler and Dairo Fortune," Charles said, nodding in the direction of each.

It was the second name that caught Nadia's attention.

"Dairo Fortune - You're the CEO of Fortune Foundations, correct? The building company?"

"Yes, that is me. And you are...?" He addressed her with a bored gaze, his countenance oozing wealth and power.

"Nadia Duke," he didn't make any attempt to shake hands, so she continued, "I'll be looking into what happened here."

"Isn't it obvious?!" Kira suddenly broke her stride to raise her voice, her British

accent thick. "There is a bloody hand in the cupboard ... literally!" Cringing slightly at the unconscious pun, she went and sat down on the bed, staring blankly at the air before her.

"When can I leave?" Dairo asked impatiently, breaking the awkward silence. "I'm missing a lot of important meetings."

"We're doing the best we can, Mr. Fortune. Hopefully you won't have to stay here much longer," Nadia re-assured, mumbling, "For both our sakes," as she turned away.

...

The hand was grotesque. Its pale form was stiff with rigamortis, blood crusting the bottom where it had been cut with precision. But the most morbid thing was the creamy white ribbon wrapped around it, the ends of the bow stained red with the victim's blood. Attached was an invitation card addressed to Mr. Dairo Fortune, requesting his presence next Friday at 6pm, inside the town's theatre.

The irony of the white ribbon made Nadia choke back a laugh. The person behind this was hardly innocent or pure. The real question was ... who did this? And why?

Oh, and also, who's hand is this?

...

The cruel sun shone down over the town, causing the frosted rooftops to glint blindingly, providing no warmth to the people below.

For the lady hopping out of the green rubbish truck, Winter mornings were the worst. Her gloved hands fumbled with the piled bags as she hefted them onto the back of the truck. One was particularly heavy, the thin plastic tearing beneath her grip. Mumbling a string of curses - a few directed to someone's mother - she bent down to transfer it into a new bag.

It wasn't until she opened it that the lady noticed the smell. Peering inside, she suppressed the urge for yesterday's lunch to re-appear.

...

Sitting in her car, Nadia mulled over what she knew - quiet classical music playing

through the cheap stereo. The lights of passing cars blended into a blotchy canvas through the foggy windows. Nadia twisted a lock of hair as she thought, trying to figure out what she was missing.

They now had almost a complete body. The leg discovered had been addressed to Lara Hastings, the creamy bow now stained with garbage waste. It clearly had not been the parcel she was expecting, and she had long gone before Nadia could even try and talk to her.

Aligned together in a mockery of a child's jigsaw puzzle, the pieces formed the body of a man in his mid-30s, just a little older than Nadia herself. All they were missing was the head. Any hopes of identification had quickly been diminished - all his prints had been wiped, and there were no tattoos or significant scars that could help. So all they could do was search and wait - the twisted anticipation that comes with the job. It would be a sick kind of relief when - if - they discovered who it was.

Then there's the matter of who has been 'gifting' these body parts to people. The only link between all the recipients was that they went to high school together, but even then they had hardly known each other.

So why did this ... psycho want to host a meeting with all these people? As a type of reunion? And why at the theatre?

There were too many questions, and not enough answers for Nadia's liking.

...

The cold winter sun was shining again, glimmering across the frosty lawn. Nadia sat at her desk, flicking through the case file. The aroma of cocoa filled the house, her cup waiting in the kitchen.

The doorbell abruptly rang, piercing through the morning quiet. Silently grabbing the gun from the drawer Nadia walked over to the door, opening it cautiously.

There was no one outside, only a severed head on her doorstep. The pale cream bow wrapped around it had an invitation card attached, a typed message on it.

"Seeing that you are so interested in me, you are also cordially invited to join us inside the town's theatre, Friday 6pm. See you there, Nadia Duke. I look forward to it."



A Whale's Mission by Willow McIndoe

Harlyn lived on the beach. Not exactly on the beach of course; her granddad's house was a few minutes away. But if she could choose to live anywhere, she would choose Weramore Beach. She spent all her free time there: after school, on the weekends, even on Christmas, when the snow lay up to her knees. If you needed to see her, you could count on her being at the beach.

On this particular day, she was playing in the sea. No one else was there with her because she had no friends. Plus, it was the middle of winter. The whales were there though. They were always there, splashing about and blowing water from their blowholes. Harlyn would sit in the freezing water for hours on end, listening to their song and dreading the moment when she would have to go home. The kids at school called her a freak because of it. 'Whale Girl' was her unofficial name. At least it's the holidays, she thought. No more school. She could hear her granddad calling. She could wait. Just a little longer...

"Harlyn Rosswell! Come back here this instant or dinner privileges are revoked!" Dinner was her favourite tonight: tofu soup. Harlyn hated the idea of eating animals. She reluctantly dragged herself from the sea and trudged back home, sopping wet.

The next day, she was at the beach again, obviously, listening to the whales' song. To Harlyn's ears, it was the most beautiful thing on the planet. She dived down deeper into the bay, at ease in her oasis. She needn't worry about her breath; she was a self-trained master freediver. As the whales came closer, she felt a strange sensation. The one at the back, she thought. The one with green eyes. She swam to the back of the group. The whale seemed to tell her something. It was like she knew what it was saying. My name is Poriwan, it told her. Leader of the Tribe of Time. Come here, and I will show you something only you can fix. Harlyn floated there in dumbfounded silence. She had just talked to a whale, for crying out loud. Her granddad was calling again, much to

Harlyn's great annoyance. She took one last look at Poriwan and his tribe, and emerged from the waves.

It was Christmas Eve, so they had to spend the rest of the day decorating for Granddad's Christmas party. He was a dirty rich, snooty hog, and every year he invited all the other dirty rich, snooty hogs in the area to his Christmas party. It was as boring as the Boring Monster of Boringness with a capital B to Harlyn. She wanted to see Poriwan again more than anything.

After a dinner of fried fish, which Harlyn refused to eat and yelled at her grandad for killing it, she was sent to her room. She found difficulty in falling asleep, and when she finally did, dreams of Poriwan still played across her mind.

She woke early the next morning and changed into her hoodie. Harlyn didn't bother with togs. She ran out the door and didn't stop sprinting until she got to the sea. She jumped in. Harlyn didn't celebrate Christmas, anyway. It didn't take long to find the whales. She dove down deep to reach them. There you are, said Poriwan. I thought you would never come. Harlyn wanted to apologise, but didn't know how to talk underwater. The whale opened its mouth. Harlyn could see a clock ticking at the very back. Come, the whale said again. You must swim into my mouth and touch the clock. It will be your key, Poriwan told her. This is weird, thought Harlyn. What key? And what if he eats me? But she trusted Poriwan. After all, he was her only friend. So she swam into his mouth and touched the clock.

What came next was a series of images: war, fire and blood. Even the sea was being attacked by people with a hungry look in their eyes. The Earth was peppered with craters and rubble, seasoning for the main course: destruction. The pristine white buildings and defence robots lay broken on the ground. Innocent people screamed. There were no animals or green life to be seen anywhere. It was horrifying.

She withdrew from the clock, and kicked back up to the surface. I need to stop this, thought Harlyn. She ran, turning corners at breakneck

speed. She went down countless roads in the time it would normally take her to cross just the distance from the classroom to the school gate. Finally, breathless and red-faced, she arrived at the door to her house. She could already hear the rich people partying in the living room. She immediately went to the art room, picking up bits of wood and buckets of paint. She spent the rest of Christmas Day making signs that read things like: stop climate change and bring peace to Earth. Exhausted, she slumped onto her bed that night and fell asleep as soon as she closed her eyes.

The next morning, she grabbed her signs with renewed energy and made to go out the door, only to be stopped by her granddad.

"Now where do you think you're going with all that junk young lady?" He asked.

"I'm going to be an advocate for our Earth." Was Harlyn's simple response. Her granddad snorted.

"Advocate? What rubbish." He muttered under his breath. "Go to your room now, and stop this nonsense!" Harlyn stomped up the stairs. But when she got to her room, her gaze fell on the window. I could fit through there, she thought. After all, there's nothing here to stop me?

Why Chromebooks Always Run out of Battery

by Sophia Le

Once upon a time, there was a genius scholar named Chromebook. Chromebook was the smartest in the whole universe, but she preferred to remain in the land of Work Office, humbly offering her service to those who needed it. She was quite content with her life.

Time was the complete opposite of Chromebook. He was quite stupid, though he had a sheer amount of raw power. Time was everywhere, at all times, even when he just wanted to stay in one place. Time was not content with his life. He was jealous of Chromebook and wished he could be just as smart as her. So he created an entity named Low Battery which could sap Chromebook's energy and give all the power to Time. Time thought his idea was perfect. He immediately sent his newly created weapon to the land of Work Office to wage war against Chromebook.

In the land of Work Office, there were also battle preparations. Chromebook, who knew how much Time hated her, had deduced Time's plan from scraps of information that she had gathered from her clients. She was disappointed in Time, but she knew he could not change his mind, so she started creating a counter weapon to Low Battery. Her name was Charger. Charger could take Low Battery's borrowed energy and give it back to Chromebook. It was a perfect plan.

By the time Charger had been created, Low Battery had reached the land of Work Office. Not being very smart, he simply decided to barge in and take Chromebook by surprise. But Chromebook was ready. When Low Battery snuck up behind her and started to drain her power, Charger leapt out from under the table with a large roar.

"Stop that!" she cried and started sucking Low Battery's stolen power. Immediately, Time leapt into action, fighting with Low Battery while Chromebook fought alongside Charger.

Their big battle affected everyone worldwide. Enormous time warps stretched, growing bigger by the day. Machines everywhere started either exploding with too

much energy, or shutting down. The battle lasted days, weeks, months.

After a long time of continuous fighting, Chromebook realised that the battle would never end, and she, Chromebook, had to stop it. So reluctantly, she hacked both Low Battery and Charger, changing their functions so that the battle could stop. Now, Low Battery would only work if a certain amount of Time passed, and Charger would only work when Low Battery started draining energy. This made sure that the battle would end forever.

And this is why Chromebooks always run out of battery.

The Forest Showdown: Crocodile, Frog, and Handbag Chaos

by Srinidhi Bankapalli

An old grandma was wandering through a forest. She came because she needed to go to her grandson's house on the other side of the forest. It was also his birthday. Crossing through the forest was the only way to get there. The wind whistled as she gazed through the trees. The birds chirped as she walked along the pathway. She could smell the earthy smell of the squishy mud beneath her feet. Then she encountered a beautiful bright blue lake. The grandma wanted to cross because a bench was on the other side. She needed to sit down since she didn't have an excellent back. She saw a bridge. She thought it looked odd but beautiful and unique with scales and spikes in an earthy green colour. She clutched her handbag tight. Her handbag had a gift for her grandson, a watch he always wanted. Grandma was afraid to fall in.

Grandma stared at the bridge, clutching her handbag tightly. She hesitated, she knew this wasn't the only way. Grandma fought with herself for a while "Should I cross or Should I take the safe route?" It looked safe enough, but as she placed her foot on it, she felt the surface sag slightly under her weight. A chill ran down her spine. "A bit squishy for a bridge," she muttered, trying to convince herself it was fine. She shifted her weight cautiously, only for the bridge to tremble slightly. Her heartbeat quickened. Something wasn't right. Just as she took another step, the bridge blinked—and before she could scream, the crocodile lunged.

"Of all days to get stepped on, it had to be today! Can't I just enjoy one peaceful day off?" the crocodile muttered, glaring at the old lady.

"My back, it hurts" Grandma exclaimed

Grandma hit a frog as she fell into the lake, splashing water into his territory and disturbing the serenity he cherished. The frog recoiled, glaring at her with quiet disdain. 'Do you mind? Some of us enjoy peace and quiet!' he snapped, his croaks growing louder with irritation. But the grandma, clutching her handbag, wasn't having it. She whipped the frog with her handbag, only to provoke him further as he

shouted, 'Stop! You're the one in my territory!' As Grandma whipped the frog with her handbag one final time, she shook her head in frustration and muttered, "Gosh, you creatures get upset over the smallest things these days!" Her voice echoed across the lake, cutting through the frog's croaks and the lingering splashes. It was a reflex of Grandma's to attack with her handbag, she felt she was in danger.

"Why does this have to happen on my nap day," the crocodile groaned. The crocodile has a specific day where he can sleep all day and that was today.

"My nap! My precious nap! Why won't you all stop ruining it?" the crocodile bellowed, flailing his tail in exasperation.

Then the crocodile got so angry and fed up with the noise and fighting. He just wanted to rest in peace. To stop them, he whipped Grandma with his tail, and Grandma got so annoyed that she forgot about the frog and whacked the crocodile hard on the head (with her handbag, of course).

"I just wanted to nap" The crocodile said as he blacked-out from the scene, then started floating across the lake.

Grandma desperately tried to swim out of the lake, but she realized she couldn't swim. Then Grandma started screaming for help as she sank.

"Oh no, I'm gonna die today. I can't because it's my grandson's birthday. What will he do without me? No no no no." Grandma cried. Then amid the chaos she saw the unconscious crocodile, and grabbed it for support. She climbed on. As she was steadying herself, she accidentally swung her hand bag which hit him, and woke him up.

"Why do you have to ruin things for me, dear handbag" Grandma mumbled.

He flung Grandma out of the lake.. But Grandma landed in a patch of dog poop, deep in the forest. Grandma didn't realize until she touched it and realized how moist it is. Grandma looked at her hands and stood up straight away and rinsed them off in the lake before the crocodile/frog could get to her.

"What kind of forest doubles as an adventure park? And where's the refund desk?" Grandma mumbled

She gathered her things and trudged along to her grandson's house. Shoulders

hung over, arms dropping low, water dripping from her hair and handbag.

Grandma knocked on the door. Her grandson opened the door and laughed at Grandma's messy appearance: hair sticking up in all directions, mud and dirt all over her clothes, and water dripping from her handbag.

"Let's get you cleaned up, Grandma," the grandson said

"I'm sorry, I couldn't get your gift to you, dear," Grandma said

"It's fine, grandma, you being here is more than enough for me," said the grandson with a warm smile on his face. Grandma chuckled as they walked off to clean Grandma up.

"Dear, is there a way to get to your house without going through the forest?" Grandma asked

"Of course there is. Instead of going through the forest, you take a left turn, then a right turn, and go straight. There's my house," said the grandson

"You could have told me that yesterday!" "Remind me not to take the forest route," Grandma muttered

"I sure will grandma," said the grandson

Sunrise Ride

by Alette Gibbons

"Beeeeepppp, Beeeeep, Beeeeeeeeeeeeppp!" I groaned as my alarm clock went off at three o'clock in the morning and groggily pulled myself out of bed. I quickly pulled on a shirt and jeans, pulled my knotty hair back into a ponytail, grabbed my cowboy hat and rucksack, and slipped on my socks and riding boots. I then quietly snuck through the almost silent house - my dad and older brother Ryder snore really loudly -, grabbing a banana on the way, and headed to the stables. When I open the door and slip into Willow's stall she nuzzles me and laughing I give her the apple I'd had in my rucksack while stroking her soft velvety nose. As I saddle her up I can't help but peek into the stall next to hers where a mare named Dolly is sleeping with her filly.

Once Willow is all saddled up we head out and start trotting along the path which soon becomes a canter as we race further along the path; over fields and meadows, up hills and down valleys, across ridges and through streams we race. Because of our fast pace we take only two hours and soon get to our destination; a grassy meadow up in the mountains. After a few laps of the meadow to cool off, we wait for the sun to rise. While we wait, I give Willow some apples to munch on and then have a muesli bar and an apple as a second breakfast. Another hour and the sun slowly peeks up its head, ready for a brand new beautiful day, from behind the black shadowy mountain ranges. I got out the new digital camera from my rucksack that I got for my birthday a month ago. It's one of those really high-tech cameras that fancy photographers have, and snap some really cool shots of the sunrise. A few of the photos I take also include Willow posing majestically in front of a wonderful sunrise.

We spend another half an hour up in the mountains admiring the beautiful sunrise and then decide to head back for breakfast as it is seven-fifteen and breakfast is at eight forty-five, which gives us only an hour and a half to get back home, give or take. That means we're going to have to be quick if we want to get home in time for our breakfast to be warm. Or at least for me if mum is making scrambled eggs and hash browns and good juicy bacon strips for breakfast, for Willow it won't matter as much. She'll just have some hay and chaff and oats - maybe an apple or two if I can

sneak them in without Ryder noticing or maybe I can convince him to let me give her a couple of apples as he is usually pretty soft on me after a bit of coaxing and doggy eyes which he cannot say no to- for her real breakfast. I don't think the apples that I gave Willow up here really count, as they were more of a treat for her getting up early and taking me up the mountain rather than breakfast.

As we race down along the path, I feel the cold bitter gusts of wind blowing my hair out across my back; loosening the already loose hair tie in my hair and biting, nipping every bit of exposed flesh I have and trying to seep between my clothes, chilling me to the bone. But even as the savage wind attacks me, I can't help but feel so grateful that I'm alive. Just being out here with Willow - racing the wind and time along the paths to get back home for a warm steamy meal is great! I could ask for nothing better than this,

The Brave Old Man

By Jacob Johnson

Once upon a time there was an old man with grey thin hair, a long grey beard, he wore tattered and aged clothes, and his nose was long and crooked. He went by the name of Jack and was extremely humble. He dwelt in a small wooden house in an old run-down town of no more than 200 residents. The town was full of dilapidated buildings near the coast. He was a farmer, and he was very passionate about farming. Because the old man was a farmer, most of the town's food came from his farm. Everyone in the town liked him because of his humble nature.

One day at the brink of dawn, a person rode into the town on a horse. He seemed very scared and quite anxious. The old farmer asked if he was alright, and the man said that a huge dragon had come to his town and absolutely demolished it. The rider also said that he was one of the only people to make it out of town before the dragon started its onslaught. The man described the dragon in a fearful voice and said, "it had deep crimson scales, a long tail with fiery gold scales, blood-shot red eyes, a long snout, razor sharp teeth, its back claws as big as a small tree, and large maroon wings that can make wind stronger than storms".

After the old man heard all of this he ran back to his house as fast as he could. While he was in his house he went into his wardrobe, and he got out his shovel. Then he went out into his garden and started digging. He dug two or three metres down until he hit a wooden box. He then dug around the box in order to get it out. His neighbour Paxon and best friend Adrino looked on while he dug. Then he dragged the box inside his house and opened it. Inside the box was an axe, a helmet, boots and body armour. There was a set of horse armour as well. But that wasn't the weirdest part, they all had an emblem with a dragon's head carved on them.

His neighbour saw the symbols on his gear and exclaimed, "Holy smokes, that's the Dragon-Clan symbol, the bravest humans on the planet! I thought the Dragon-Clan was just a made-up story. Anyway, all of the members are supposed to be dead!". The farmer told him that he was the last surviving member of the Dragon Clan. "I can't fight a dragon with my axe alone, I will need a fast and strong horse and a bow, quiver and arrows."

Paxon and Adrino set out to go find the materials to make the bow and quiver while Jack went to find the Horse. It wasn't long until they found the materials to make the bow, quiver and a sufficient number of arrows. Jack didn't take long to find a horse once word got out about his true identity. They immediately got to work. They worked all night and by the next day they were finished.

Jack set out in his armour to fight the dragon. After a few hours of riding, he saw the dragon in the distance flying towards his village. He immediately got out his bow and shot the dragon with precision, hitting it in its eye. The dragon immediately shrieked and flew straight at Jack angrily. Jack positioned himself in the dragon's blind spot with his axe ready to deliver a huge blow. After a few seconds, the dragon was within range. While staying in the dragon's blind spot, using his axe specially made to cut through dragon scales, he delivered the fatal blow which cut right through the dragon's neck.

The towns' people arrived shortly after the battle and saw that Jack had killed the dragon. All the towns' people could hardly believe that humble Jack was able to pull off such a feat. Adrino was in awe! He could not believe that his best friend, a humble farmer, was actually the bravest person alive and... the last member of the Dragon-Clan!

Bubbles and Fire

By Paris Yiannoutsos

"Ugh. look at this! Must be another tourist. No-one from around these parts would do something that odd." The store manager Marjorie Harris thought to herself with weary disapproval. The "tourist" she was criticizing is known as Lottie Jones. Lottie is a lively, bubbly 23 year old with blonde flyaway curls that bounce like a pogo stick with any sudden movement. If you looked up "extrovert" in the dictionary, her picture would be the only thing there. Now I know what you're thinking - What is a person like Lottie doing in such a boring store like 'Cleaning Products R Us'? Well it was Lottie's turn on the roster she made with her flatmates to get a refill on dishwashing liquid. As Lottie skips ahead and then halts to a stop directly in front of the dishwashing liquid refill station, Marge peers at her from behind the counter. "Hmmm. Do I just turn the tap and then I'm good to go? Oh well guess I'll find out!" Lottie pulls the handle a bit too enthusiastically for Marge's liking, but nothing happens. "Huh. Wow okay then..." Something caught her eyes though. A slow drip of soap had begun forming a pool on the floor. "Ohh boy." Lottie then bunches up the sleeve of her hoodie to stem the now steadily flowing current. Within a couple of seconds it seeped through. Lottie exhales deeply as Marjorie strides over. "My goodness, what has happened here? Lottie stands up only to fall back down and burst into laughter. "I-I-I'm sorry!", she gasped, "Just give me a moment." She then stands up by leaning on the dispenser tap only to yank it right off so that a waterfall of soap comes gushing out. Lottie then comes tumbling down, taking Marge with her. "Goodness!" Marjorie cries, spread-eagled on her back. She sits up to see Lottie trying to wedge the spout back where it goes. "Got it!" Lottie sang. "Almost." The waterfall was now a trickle, gentle as a butterfly. "No! My uniform!" Lottie warily stepped around the puddle of dishwashing liquid to see Marge frantically fanning herself to try and dry her manager vest. All of a sudden there was a mechanical sort of humming sound and out of nowhere the fire sprinklers turned on, saturating everything in sight, while the fire alarms went off. Marjorie and Lottie rushed outside, sodden with soap bubbles to see the staff all in a panic. "The fire engines are here!" someone cried. "Help!". Lottie decided since there was nothing she could do to assist anyone there she ran back inside the building, to many shouts

of disapproval (because that building was supposedly on fire), came out with her dishwashing liquid and danced off into the distance, leaving a sopping trail of soap behind her.

Two hours later, Lottie was back at her flat and opened the door to the living room where one of her flatmates, Annie, got off the phone and said "Hey guys guess what? The fire at the cleaning store wasn't real! The lady on the other end of the phone said that some kid slid across a puddle of DISHWASHING LIQUID that some delusional customer spilt, and tripped the alarm! She was really grumpy too. Said she was the store manager or something, and had to deal with the customer who ran off with her soap WITHOUT PAYING and that was AFTER she broke the dishwashing liquid refi-", then seeing Lotties expression as she leaned on the doorframe, she pressed, "Lottie what is it? Why are you - Is that soap? You know something don't you?"

Her flatmates swiveled in their chairs to look at her. Lottie heaved a sigh, sat down on a chair saturating it with soap and replied, "it's a long story," and began to tell her tale.

Based on true events (not really) ☺

The Underwater Cave

By Vida Kyle

Fern slid on her sunglasses, breathing in the fresh sea breeze. She plopped into her sand seat she had dug and focused on her tanning. "Fern. Fern! You'll never believe what I just saw in the water!", cried Fern's identical twin sister, Sadie. Fern ignored her. "Feerrrrnnn!" She groaned, as she tried to pull her out of her chair. "Ok,ok," mumbled Fern as she reluctantly jumped out of her hole and flung her purple towel onto the sand. They both dived into the water and started swimming.

They had been in the water for nearly half an hour and nothing had been spotted. Fern rolled her eyes behind her goggles in annoyance. Sadie waited until Fern turned her head then beckoned for her to come above the surface of the water. Sadie opened her mouth, but Fern was first to speak. "Did you even see anything Sadie? Anything?" She asked, getting frustrated. Her sister was one for comedy. "Yes! I swear. I saw a cave under water!" She screamed. I'm just ITCHING to explore it!" She said starting to shake in excitement, her face going red. "Whoa, whoa, whoa!" Said Fern. "Don't burst your boiler!" She said, not wanting her sister's head to explode. They took a big gulp of air, went under water and immediately saw the cave. Sadie shot through the water and into the cave. But it was dark, and Fern couldn't keep up with her sister. So she went in too.

Both girls stood with their jaws hanging open. They were standing in a cave filled with air and encrusted with crystals! "I bet this cave is worth a fortune!" Cried Sadie as she stared at a piece of amethyst sticking out of the wall. But Fern wasn't interested in the crystals. She was inspecting two tunnels at the back of the cave. She pulled Sadie over to the tunnels.

Suddenly, two little lights came through the tunnel. It looked like a teenytiny car. It halted and out hopped a teeny-tiny person, no bigger than Sadie's thumb. "Um..." Said Fern. "Hi!" Said Sadie. "Hello. My name is Kendra Snoofleduff! Our small town is down this tunnel!" She said, pointing down the tunnel she had come from. "Oh, goodness, it talks!" Said Fern, clutching her chest. "What's down that tunnel?" Asked Sadie. "Oh no, you don't want to go down there. That's where the evil elves live." Kendra said, with a face as hard as stone. "Oooh! I want to explore that town!"

Chirped Sadie, and she danced down the opposite tunnel. "Sadie!" Fern hissed. "I've got to follow her!" She cried and sprinted down the tunnel after her sister. Kendra groaned and raced after them on her little legs.

"Oh. Em. Gee!" Squealed Sadie, hopping up and down on both feet. "This is amazing!" Fern, Sadie, and Kendra were standing in the entrance of Evil Gnome Village (there was a sign.). The three girls trotted into the village, entranced by its magical beauty. All the Evil Gnomes stopped and stared at the girls, some dropping the items they held in their hands. Strangely, the Gnomes were much larger than Kendra, and she quickly scurried behind Fern's back. "Intruders!" A voice rang out of the crowd that had gathered. Two guards pushed through the crowd and seized Fern and Sadie by the arms and hauled them to the city hall. Meanwhile, Kendra sprang into the bushes with a frightened squeak.

"Enter." A gruff voice crawled through a big wooden door after a brief knock. Fern gulped. Sadie struggled unsuccessfully to break free of the guard's grip. One of the guards placed the end of her spear on the lock of the door and pushed, and it popped open with a ker- click. The other guard put his boot on the old door and gave it a good shove. It swung open and a small man came into sight. He was rather plump, had an ancient white beard, and spoke with a thick Irish accent. "We found them snooping about the village." Said the female guard, narrowing her eyes at Fern, who let out a small whimper. "Lock them in the weapon room. No one will find them there." The guards nodded their yes and stalked out of the room, with Fern and Sadie at their heels.

The weapon room was musty and cramped, and, to make matters worse, Sadie and Fern were fastened to each other. "This is all your fault! You went down that tunnel, and I, as your big sister, had to follow you!" Remarked Fern.

"Three minutes isn't older! Plus, you didn't have to follow me!" Objected Sadie as she folded her arms. "Hey, are you guys finished arguing yet?" A voice echoed around the room and Fern and Sadie's heads whipped around the room, half expecting some sort of magical piece of furniture that could possibly free them from this mess. "Is that..." Fern stopped in her tracks. "Kendra!" Cried Sadie, a grin creeping across her face. "How did you get in?" Questioned Fern. "Crawled under the door." Kendra replied. She fetched an old sword from the ground and chopped the ropes that held Fern and Sadie together. "C'mon, lets get out of here!" Kendra motioned at the door and winked at Fern, who lifted an axe off the wall and bashed

down the entrance.

Outside, the three girls slipped past the guards and out of town. They said their farewells to Kendra and thanked her for her help. They walked through the crystal cave one more time, then plunged back into the ocean, relieved to have escaped all in one piece.

The Vent Girl

By Aoife Raggett

Have you ever wondered what it would be like living underground? You probably have at least once. But for a young girl. She lives that life.

Foxie was weirdly small for her age, standing at only one hundred and eleven centimetres at 10 years old. If that wasn't bad enough for her, she had bright orange hair her parents just had to name her after. She was constantly teased by the other children for this. Her family always said, 'Good things come in small packages.' Foxie would just roll her eyes. She would often wonder whether or not she was even related to these people. Her father was very tall, her mother average height, and her sister? Only two years older than Foxie, but she was taller than her mother. Foxie found that very annoying.

But she also found pros to having such a small build, see, when you are little, you can fit in so many places others cannot. A great example of this, and Foxie's personal favourite, is the vents. She could sneak through the vents like a super spy. She had done it so often, she had the layout memorized.

Well, most of it.

She had only ever explored the vents in the Living Quarters, the Working Quarters and the School Quarters. She had never had the guts to explore anywhere else, plus, she never had any reason too. But that day. That day was a different story. That day she was bored. So she decided she needed to go on a nice adventure. So she carefully crawled through the vents, to the large vertical cylinder she had passed so many times. Looking around the cylinder, there were four exits. One directly in front of her, one to her left and one to her right. As she looked around more, she noticed something. In between the exit in front of her and the exit to her right, was a ladder. Foxie looked upwards, trying to figure out where it went, but it just kept going and going, like it never ended.

That was totally the first place she wanted to explore.

She carefully rose, holding on to pipes and frames for support, she made her way

around the cylinder to the ladder. When she grabbed the ladder, she quickly retracted her hand. It was freezing! But that didn't stop Foxie. If she couldn't hold onto the ladder, she would have to find another way to get up. Looking around, carefully taking it all in, she noticed a pattern. Frame, horizontal pipe, frame, horizontal pipe. Foxie smiled, and she began to climb. One foot on the frame, one hand on the pipe, then swap. One foot on the pipe, one hand on the frame.

This was her first mistake.

Not the fact she decided to climb using the frame of the cylinder and pipes, but the fact she decided to climb at all. Going through any of the other exits, she would have been perfectly fine. But this one? This one led to a highly restricted area. A dangerous area.

As Foxie climbed higher and higher she noticed a platform appear. Eventually, she pulled herself up on the platform and looked around. This part of the cylinder looked almost identical to the part she was just in, with one minor difference. It was brighter, like someone had turned up the brightness on the lights to one hundred percent. Foxie found that weird, why would someone waste so much precious energy on somewhere they are never going to see? Then, the weirdest part happened. As Foxie looked around, she realized she couldn't actually see any

lights. The light couldn't be coming from up, because it was blue up there, and all the tunnels were really dark. This really confused Foxie. The thing that most confused Foxie, was that it was really cold up here, unlike the warmth she was used to.

Foxie's science teacher said it got colder the higher up the shelter you went, and that going all the way up could give you hypothermia. That didn't scare Foxie one bit.

As she looked around, trying to figure out how it was so bright, and why it was so cold, another weird thing happened. Her hair began to move on its own! It was going all over the place, and Foxie got even colder as her clothes began to move too. A wave of uncertainty washed over her and she looked around, trying to figure out what just happened. Then it happened again. This time, Foxie was able to pinpoint where it came from. It came from above.

Being the fearless child she is, Foxie began to climb again. Determined to figure out

where this weird coldness was coming from. As she climbed higher and higher, she got colder and colder.

Maybe she was going up too far... Foxie paused for a second, breathing in and out. Looking up, she could see another platform she could rest on. She began climbing again, faster this time, determined to see where the cold was coming from. Soon, she was at the platform. Pulling herself up, she almost fell from shock. There, right in front of her, was a leaf. She had only ever seen them in images, she didn't realise they were actual things. Carefully, she reached over and picked it up. It had a weird feeling, one side it was cold and smooth, whereas the other was fluffy, but still cold. Foxie looked around, trying to identify the place it came from. Then it hit her.

The coldness was coming from above. A breeze. She had, for the first time in her life, been feeling a breeze. Meaning, the only place it could have come from. Foxie looked up at the blue, barely visible through the grates. The only place it could have come from was above.

Foxie stood up, and began to climb towards the grate above her. As she climbed, another thought struck her. What if that blue was the sky? The teachers had always said that the sky was blue. It was very possible that the blue she was seeing was in fact, the sky, due to how high in the shelter she had climbed. Soon, she could climb no more. The grate was right above her head. She released the pipe with her right hand and reached up to try and move the grate. To her surprise, it moved with ease.

Moving the grate was her second mistake.

A mistake that would cost her life.

Foxie was struggling to get herself up out of the cylinder, when something grabbed her. Foxie froze. She knew this was a bad idea. She moved trying to get out of the grip of the thing. As she struggled, her hands slipped from the pipes.

She fell.

"She was never seen again." Savannah gazed at children sitting in front of her. "That, my children. Is why we never go up to the surface." Her eyes flitted from child to child. Eventually landing on a young girl. Sunny. Standing at only one hundred and eleven centimetres at 10 years old, with wild orange hair. An exact image of Foxie. Savannah dismissed the students,

walking over to her desk. She hated telling that story, she was a close friend of Foxies. Was. As she opened her laptop to finish some work, she heard a small voice.

"Miss Montenegro?" She looked up. Sunny was standing there with an unusual look on her face.

"Yes Sunny?"

"Why did Fokie look so much like me?" Sunny asked, another wave of grief washed over Savannah.

"Because..." Savannah sighed. "Fokie was your mum's sister." Sunny blinked, before she smiled.

"Thank you Miss Montenegro."

"You're welcome Sunny."

Sunny didn't turn up the next day, or the next, or the next. A missing persons report was filed. No one saw her again. But, Savannah knew where she was. If Fokie got hurt going up. Then Sunny must have gone down.

Savannah just hoped Fokie was looking after her.





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