



# YOUNG AUTHORS' & ILLUSTRATORS' CONFERENCE

2020-2021

Anthology

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## Chapter One: The Sound

"Come on boy!" Yelled Autumn Smith from downstairs. This ginormous husky ran down the stairs, "Good boy, Koda!" Autumn put on Koda's leash and made their way outside. As they were walking outside Autumn's big brother Nick stopped them on the porch, "Where are you going? You know we have the Wilkins coming over to check on us." Autumn sighed and said "I know, we'll be back by noon. I promise." They then walked out the door for their morning walk.

A half an hour later Koda started barking and tugging in the opposite direction of which they were walking, "What is it boy?" Autumn asked in confusion. "Where are we going?" Koda continued to tug when they heard a screech. "Why don't we go back to the house Koda?" Koda wouldn't stop, the leash slipped out of her hand and Koda was off. " Koda!" Autumn started sprinting after him. Stumbling through the trees Autumn was determined to not let Koda get out of her sight, Autumn saw Koda come to a stop and breathed a sigh of relief.

Autumn finally got Koda back on his leash when they heard another screech coming from the same area. Koda immediately fixed his attention on the sound and paid no attention to how much Autumn was out of breath. They walked towards the screech, the sound getting louder and louder as they got closer. Autumn was shocked when she saw where the sound was coming from. It was a huge bird five times the size of Autumn with yellow, red, and light blue strips of color all over it.

Autumn wanted to run away when she saw the left wing had a hole right through it. She knew they had to help it. But what shocked







her even more was when the bird yelled "Why are you just standing there, Help me!" Autumn looked in her bag for anything that could help, she found some medical wrap that she kept in there if Koda ever hurt his paw while they were in the woods. Autumn climbed up a tree to get to the huge wing, she started wrapping it up while Koda was chewing on the vines that the bird was stuck in.

Koda managed to get the bird free while Autumn was wrapping up the wing, the bird walked away from the vines and said " Thank you so much, my wing was shot and couldn't fly any longer. I've lost my pack, by the way my name is Athena named after the god. My pack was traveling to the campgrounds to prepare for war." Autumn was startled by all the information she had to take in but managed to get out a few words, "Wait, what war?" Athena looked shocked that she didn't know about the war, "Well you have to know about the war, especially if you're going to ride me into battle." Autumn immediately butted in, "What! You want me to ride you into war? I can barely pass a math test!"

Athena started again, "You have to ride me into war or else I won't be able to fight. You and your dog were the ones who saved me, that means you have to take me to war."

"Why me?" Autumn said in a slightly mean tone.

Athena was clearly upset with all the interruptions but still had to explain why Autumn had to do it, "When a bird of my kind is in danger who ever saves them has to help them in war."

Autumn had a volcano of thoughts erupting in her head, "Where exactly is this war? I live in a small town. I don't live near any big attractions." That's when Athena realized she didn't know exactly where she was. Autumn suddenly felt bad for Athena; she didn't have anyone with her besides herself, Koda, and Autumn. Autumn couldn't imagine being alone in a forest with a dog and a fourteen year old girl,







the thought of it gave Autumn goosebumps. At this point Athena was teary eyed and couldn't help but cry, "Don't cry Athena, I'll take you back to my house and help you find the campsite."

Athena stopped crying, " Thank you." Autumn, Koda, and Athena were walking home when Autumn's little sister Taylor was walking towards them, Taylor stopped in her tracks when she saw Athena.

"Hey Taylor, I can tell you've noticed Athena." Taylor squeaked out a couple of words, "What is that?"

Autumn started to explain, "Taylor, meet Athena. I'm going to fly her into war, don't worry Athena will keep me safe." Taylor was already speechless but when Athena started talking that put her over the edge.

"Hello, Taylor." Taylor fainted. "Taylor!" Thankfully Koda was trained to be a service dog when he was a puppy, Koda started licking her face until she was conscious, Taylor finally said something to Athena.

"Hi Athena I'm Taylor. I'm in first grade and I have the most gold star stickers by my name, in the whole class."

Autumn immediately realized that Athena and Taylor were either going to be best friends or enemies, Autumn decided to break the silence, "Look Taylor, you cannot tell Nick he'll make us get rid of Athena."

Taylor took the chance to blackmail Autumn, "I won't tell Nick, as long as you buy me the new Barbie Dream House play set, I will only accept the one that includes Barbie and Ken." Autumn sighed,

"I'll have to use all my summer job money but you must pinky promise that you won't tell Nick." Autumn and Taylor pinky promised. After a couple minutes of walking they were back at the house, Nick's



car was gone, they took this opportunity to sneak Athena into the house and created a plan to hide her.

"We could put her in the closet when Nick comes back with the Wilkins." Taylor said, that was the first good idea Taylor had in a lifetime. Autumn, Koda, Taylor, and Athena walked upstairs, Autumn took everything out of her closet so that Athena would fit. Nick's car pulled into the driveway of the medium sized cabin on Browns street. Autumn started throwing shirts, shoes, hoodies, and pants all over her room, they shoved Athena in the closet and slammed the doors.

Nick walked in the door with the Wilkins trailing behind him, "Taylor, Autumn! Come down here the Wilkins came to see us!" Autumn and Taylor came downstairs and greeted the Wilkins, "Hello Mr and Mrs Wilkins." said Taylor and Autumn.

"Oh, hello girls, how are you doing?" Autumn started talking first, "I'm great! How are you?" Mrs.Wilkins looked delighted to hear that kids still had some manners nowadays.

"I'm doing good,"

This time Taylor started talking, "Well, I'm doing amazing." Taylor was thinking that saying amazing was better than what Autumn had said.

Mr.Wilkins started, "You girls know why we are here. Yes?" Both nodded their heads yes, "Very good then, I'll get started with the inspection." Ever since Nick, Taylor, and Autumn's parents had died in a car crash three years ago it had really taken a toll on what was left of the Smith family, they had no aunts or uncles, grandparents, or any loved ones. Autumn was eleven when this happened and Taylor was only two years old, luckily Nick was eighteen and could take care of the girls but had to work three jobs.

The Wilkins' were a family friend and checked in periodically to see how the kids were doing. "The downstairs looks good, time to check upstairs." Autumn, Taylor, and Koda rushed upstairs into Autumn's room, "I'll check Nick's room first, then Taylor's and I'll do Autumn's room last." The girls and dog sat on Autumn's bed patiently waiting for them to come in. Finally Mr. Wilkins walls in "Alrighty last room, Autumn your room is covered in clothes its a mess."

Autumn spoke "I know sir I haven't had time to clean my room yet, I'm terribly sorry for the mess."

Mr. Wilkins started, "It's quite alright dear, I too was a teenager once and my room was never clean, do you mind if i check the closet?"

Autumn shouted "No! Sorry, I meant to say no." Mr. Wilkins wanted to go into the closet even more now.

"Well why not? Is there something in your closet?"

"Yes sir, all of my, uh, um, teenager stuff. Yeah, girly magazines and dresses."

Mr. Wilkins definitely didn't want to go in there now, "Oh, ok then. The upstairs is good." Autumn and Taylor let out a sigh of relief, then they got to thinking.

## **Chapter Two: The Campgrounds**

"I can't believe we pulled that off!" Said Taylor as she flopped down onto Autumn's bed.

Autumn responded "I know right? But we have to start thinking about how Athena is going to stay here. She has to eat, sleep, and get fresh air like everyone else."

Then Athena had a lightbulb, "You remember that old abandoned treehouse just south of the oak tree?" Taylor nodded yes, "Well, we could fix it up while Nick is at work. Then Athena could stay there until we find where the campground is and we'll fight in the war. When the war is over I'll come back home."

Taylor loves home remodeling shows, Taylor was super excited that she was going to get to fix up the treehouse. Athena burst out of the closet, "Were you ever gonna let me come out!" The girls giggled and started to make a bed on the ground for Athena.

"Can I sleep in here with you and Athena tonight?" Taylor said as she tried her best to use puppy eyes.

Autumn had always hated when Taylor wanted to sleep in her room, "Only for tonight." Taylor jumped in excitement.

Nick was working the night shift tonight so he wouldn't be back until tomorrow morning at nine. This gave the girls time to get out to the tree house in the morning, "Goodnight." Autumn whispered from her bed.

"Goodnight," Said Taylor from the other side of the bed.

"Goodnight girls." Said Athena from the ground. All the girls then went to sleep.

Autumn woke up at seven thirty, "Guys, wake up we still have to pack up our bag of tools and make a plan for the treehouse! Taylor I need you to pack the snack bag." Everyone was awake now, Athena looked like she had just realized something that she has been trying to remember for years.

Autumn noticed "What's wrong, Athena?"

Athena looked up, "I remember where the campgrounds are but I can't leave for a week." Autumn looked confused. "I'm glad you remember, but why can't we leave today?"



Athena responded, "In my pack if you are late to a gathering you are banned for a week to see anyone who attended the meeting."

Autumn spoke, "That's so stupid, why would you have to do that?"

Athena responded. "If you are late you were late for a reason, my pack never has meetings so if you are in fact late it had to be very important to miss a gathering."

Autumn could barely comprehend what she had just heard, "Well, we can still fix up the treehouse even if you're only going to be staying in it for a week." Then into the woods they went.

It was only a couple minutes in and Taylor wouldn't stop complaining, "Why do I have to carry everything? It was Autumn's idea to renovate the treehouse anyways."

The way to the treehouse was at least a ten minute walk. Athena was fed up with Taylor, "Stop complaining and get on my back if you're so tired." Athena walked over to Taylor and bent down to where she could climb up.

"Thanks." Taylor said in her grumpiest voice, Autumn and Athena chuckled.

They finally arrived at the treehouse, Athena was shocked to see how bad the treehouse looked, "It's going to take forever to fix this up!" The treehouse was a mess. The floorboards were broken, the roof was rotting, and there were vines growing everywhere. They have to start somewhere, so Autumn started climbing up the treehouse steps.

"Why don't we start with the floorboards so we have something sturdy to stand on when we fix the walls and roof?" Everyone shook their heads in agreement. Everyone was soon up in the treehouse tearing up the floor.

"Did anyone bring a snack?" Said Taylor while she was throwing the floorboard out of the treehouse window.

"I told you to grab snacks this morning. You didn't bring any did you?" Taylor now recalled talking to Autumn this morning about the snacks.

Athena realized she had to tell everyone what she was thinking, "Four steps left then fly south for four miles, stop at the old gas station then go west for two miles. All that's left after that is to follow the highway for two days until you get to the pond." Everyone was clearly confused,

"That's how you get to the campgrounds." Autumn spoke up. "Then what are we waiting for? It's going to take us forever to get there and it's already been a day!" They dropped everything and ran to the house to pack their bags.

"How are we supposed to get there?" Said Taylor who was out of breath from sprinting all the way home.

Athena spoke up, "You have to ride on my back. No exceptions." They packed their bags and said goodbye to the house.

"Why can't I come?" Yelled Taylor.

"It's far too dangerous to have you come to a battle of fire breathing birds with me! You have to tell Nick that I'm going to see a friend for a few days. Ok?" Taylor shook her head yes. Autumn grabbed all the bags and hopped on Athena, Taylor was crying while Koda was whining about Autumn leaving. Taylor had so many questions like, who is going to tuck me in at night, who's going to make me food. Nick was stuck on night shifts for a couple more weeks.





The girls only had an hour left of flying when a huge storm came out of nowhere, "We have to land!" Yelled Autumn to Athena, who was struggling to fly through the crashing lightning, thunder, and rain.

"If we land we'll be late. I won't get enough training in!"

Autumn knew they had to land now, "Look Athena if we don't land now we are going to cra-"

Lightning struck Athena's wing. "Land in the pond!" Autumn was hanging on for dear life as they came spiraling down into the pond. Splash! The girls quickly got consumed by the water, then Autumn poked her head out from the water.

"Athena! Athena where are you?" Athena flapped her wings trying to fly out of the water, but it was no use because Athena's wings were soaked. Autumn swam over to Athena and tried to help her to the edge of the pond.

"I can't move! My foot is stuck under a rock!" Autumn dived under the water and tried to get Athena's foot unstuck. She pulled with everything she could then, "Uh!"

The rock shot up into Autumn's face realising Athena's foot. Autumn quickly got knocked out from the rock, a couple of seconds later Athena saw bubbles floating to the top of the water. Athena dove under the water not knowing what to do, "Autumn!"

Athena saw Autumn slowly sinking. Athena had never had to swim before, she grabbed Autumn with one clawed foot and swam back to shore. Autumn coughed up water while Athena lay on the ground, Autumn grabbed her backpack and took out the bandage wrap.

Autumn started to wrap Athena's foot, "Thank you." Said Autumn in a slow voice, you could tell she had been scarred.

Athena spoke up, "I should be thanking you! You risked your life to save me from drowning."

"You did the same for me!" Said Autumn. The girls laughed. They began to look for somewhere to stay for the night. They found a cave to stay in for the night.

### Chapter Three: War and Goodbyes

When they woke up they immediately began walking to the campgrounds, "We're here." said Athena in a cold voice. The girls walked into a giant tent with what seemed to be a million rooms with a million different colored birds just like Athena. Athena flashed to the biggest room in the tent, Athena spoke. "This is my parents room." The girls walked in. "Athena?" Two birds even bigger than Athena seemed shocked to see her. "Autumn, meet my parents. Mom, Dad, This is my flyer Autumn." Athena's parents were obviously shocked that a fourteen year old girl was going to be flying a huge bird into a deadly war. The biggest bird with neon blue and green stripes flowing all over him spoke. "Nice to meet you Autumn." The other bird with neon pink and yellow stripes all over began to speak, "Hello, Autumn. I'm Athena's mom Gloria. This is my husband Neko. They girls talked with Athena's parents for a couple minutes, then made their way to their room.

In the following weeks the girls trained tirelessly to perfect every little thing and made sure that Autumn wouldn't fall off of Athena's back. The day had finally come. The whole tribe was ready for war. "Autumn, are you ready to do this?" "I have been for a couple of minutes." Autumn laughed with Athena. Everyone was in position when the bell rang and the birds took flight, It was chaos birds were dropping like flies. But they weren't the birds on Autumn and Athena's team, the birds in the blue harnesses were Athena's team. The ones in the red harnesses were losing by a lot. The blue team had no problem

knocking a bird five times the size of them on their tails, Athena even hit the captain once. Athena's parents were the captains of the blue team. The bell rang once again pronouncing the blue team victorious! The team cheered in glee, "We did it Autumn!" Autumn smiled " Yes we did!" They were soon back at the tent when Autumn had to finally ask Athena to take her home. "Athena. I need to go home. My siblings are waiting for me and Nick is probably getting suspicious." Athena bowed to the ground one last time for Autumn to climb onto her back. The whole ride home was very sad, the girls laughed, cried, and smiled together. They had finally arrived home, "Thank you for everything Autumn. I would be lost, hurt, and alone in the woods if it weren't for you." They began to cry, "No, thank you Athena. You showed me a whole new world of adventure! This was fun but I need to be there for Taylor right now." Athena was confused "Why? Taylor seemed fine." Autumn explained, "Nick is moving out soon and me and Taylor are going to live with Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins until me and Taylor are old enough to move out or someone adopts us." Athena was stunned, "Wow!" Well, I wish you the best Autumn Smith." They started to cry again, "Same to you Athena." Athena flew off and Autumn walked into her house, everyone was sitting on the couch. "Autumn!" Taylor shot up and sprinted into Autumn's arms. "Hey Autumn! How was your friend's house?" said Nick who was still clueless. Autumn was confused for a second, then she remembered what she had told Taylor to tell Nick. "Oh, It was super fun." Autumn winked at Taylor as Taylor winked at her, the girls laughed. Autumn looked out the window and saw Athena soaring high into the clouds back to her home. "Goodbye Athena." Autumn whispered softly to herself as she dreamt herself to sleep.

It was a humid and sticky morning in Bayfield, Wisconsin. Riley Lewis's alarm rang through her ears as she climbed out of bed. Riley managed to stay up late...again. But this was fairly normal of her. She was known to stay up late reading and writing about anything you could imagine. She read about eighty foot whales, and castles high in the sky. Riley only dreamed that one day her stories would be as amazing and enchanting as the ones she read.

As she threw on her grey knitted sweater she heard her mom call her down to breakfast. "Coming, Mom!", called Riley. Before she headed down the stairs, Riley plopped down on her bed and snuggled up to her dog, Bongo. Bongo was an older boxer dog, who slept a lot. He was nine years-old, and was classified as a senior citizen.

"Goodbye, Bongo.", said Riley as she got up off the bed. "Riley. Breakfast!", called her mom a second time. "I'm coming!" Riley ran down the steps. She didn't really like breakfast. I mean, she loved the food. It's just that she wasn't really hungry first thing in the morning.

As soon as Riley sat down at the kitchen table, her mom was already overwhelming her with questions. "Do you have everything in your bag? Do I need to sign anything? What classes do you have today?", asked Riley's mom.

“Yes, no, the normal ones and library.”replied Riley. She knew that her mom just wanted to make sure that everything was going to be ok, but sometimes she got a little annoyed. “Okay, I was just making sure.”, her mom said.

As soon as breakfast was over, Riley and her mom set off for school. On her way to school she noticed a poster.The poster read:

### Local Writing Contest

You can enter now for a chance to win \$50! Create your own original story, and call 715-685-2510

“That looks like it could be fun!”, commented Riley’s mom as soon as she saw the poster. “Yeah, I guess.”

“Aw, come on sweetheart, you know that you have lots of amazing stories,” her mom said sympathetically. “I mean yeah, I do write stories, but none of them are good enough to enter into a *contest*”, said Riley emphasizing the word contest.

“Oh, don’t be a debbie downer!”

“Ok, fine.” replied Riley. She continued, “You can drop me off right here.”, she said pointing to the sidewalk.

“Alrighty, here you are. Hey, remind me after school that



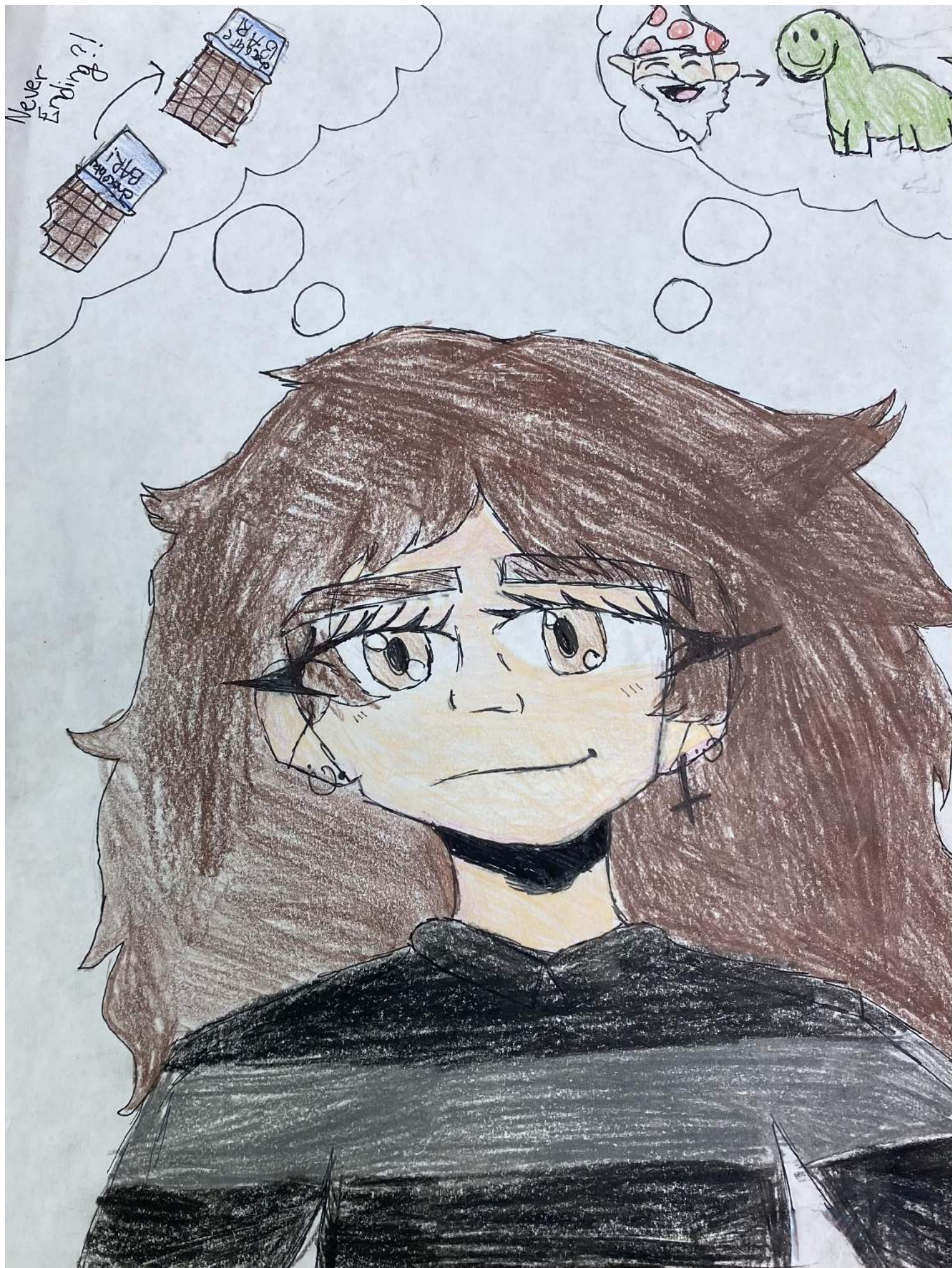
we have family dinner tonight.”, said Riley’s mom. “I will.”, replied Riley as she got out of the car and closed the door behind her.

Once she got in her classroom, Riley was immediately greeted by her teacher, Ms. Gemma. Riley did as she normally would. She set her bag down, and started unpacking. A few moments later her best friend Cassy walked in. “Riley! You will never believe what happened last night!”, exclaimed Cassy as she walked to her desk. “What happened?”, Riley asked filled with anticipation.

“My brother insisted that he take Kasey on a walk. So, mom said yes, but I had to go with him. I was fine with that and all. But, as soon as we got outside Milo let go of the leash and Kasey ran off.”, Cassy said. “Oh no! I’m so sorry!”, Riley said sympathetically. “Oh no, it’s fine, we managed to get him back. But I’m still mad that he didn’t get in trouble!”

“Haha, yeah I would be, too.” A few moments later Riley’s other best friends walked through the classroom door. Ella and Bailey both came in and started unpacking. “Ella! You will never believe what happened last night!”, exclaimed Cassy once again. “What! What happened?”, asked Ella. “Well...”, began Cassy. As Cassy told her





story, Riley started copying down all the assignments, and doing her math.

It was a long morning, and Riley was really tired. She once again stayed up all night reading and writing. During social studies, Riley pulled out her journal and started writing. As Riley looked down at her journal she saw;

8-30

My Fun Thoughts....

- Garden gnomes that turn into dinosaurs
- Never ending candy bars
- Smell-o-vision
- Unicorns that fart rainbows
- Aliens that only eat brussel sprouts

Riley had an amazing imagination, so she writes down some of the stuff that comes to her mind. Soon enough, Riley was sitting in class daydreaming about everything. Then, her tiredness got to her and she fell asleep. When Riley woke up, it was the end of the day. The bell rang,







and all the kids ran through the doors. Riley took her usual way home, but this time she stopped at the local bakery.

“Afternoon, Riley!”, shouted Emma, one of the few employees. “Good afternoon, Emma!”

“So, what will it be today?”

“I’ll take one blueberry muffin.”

“Alrighty, that will be \$2.25” Riley handed her a five dollar bill. “Keep the change.”, she added. Emma gave her a smile.

Riley took her usual seat in the bay window with a table instead of a seat. She pulled her notebook out of her back pack and started writing.

8-30

Now, I know this isn’t any diary, and I mentioned that before. But, this is seriously important.

Before Riley could write any more, Emma came by with her blueberry muffin. “Here you are!”, said Emma as she set her muffin down on the table. “Thanks, Emma!”, Riley

said. When Emma walked away Riley took a big bite of her muffin. Warm blueberry juice smeared all over her face.

A while later, Riley cleaned up her place, gathered up her books, and left. On her walk home Riley started to think about her idea of the unicorns that fart rainbows. Riley glanced over at the street. And she couldn't help but notice... "There is NO way that I am *actually* seeing this!", she exclaimed. Riley saw two unicorns running down the street with a trail of rainbows behind them.

Riley sniffed the air. It smelled like cotton candy. She thought that unicorn farts would smell more like cupcakes, but cotton candy made more sense. *This seems familiar...* She thought to herself. Riley flipped back in her journal and saw that this was on her "My Fun Thoughts" page.

She decided to just ignore it and keep going. Riley was about a block away from her house when she saw a garden full of... dinosaurs? As Riley grabbed her journal she rubbed her eyes. She had to be imagining this... right? Riley skimmed through the text and saw that she had written about garden gnomes that turn into dinosaurs.

She saw one of the dinosaurs sleeping. *How sweet!* She thought. Then, all of a sudden, the dinosaur got up, and



started chasing her! *This can't be real!* She thought to herself. Riley managed to make it home safely. She plopped down on the couch and started watching TV. A few moments later Riley found herself rummaging through some of her secret candy stash.

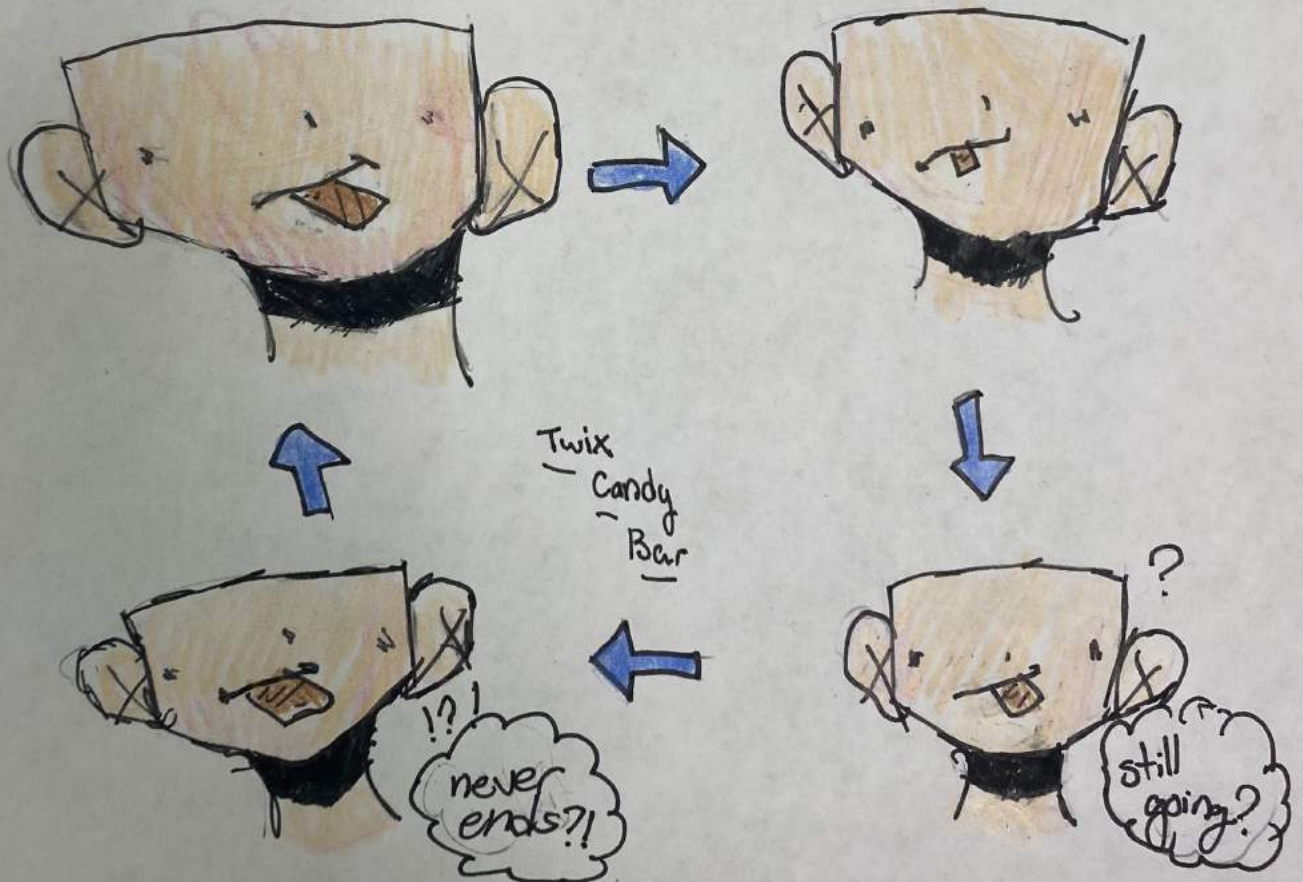
She found a twix bar, and took a big bite out of it. When she was done with it, she noticed that there was more? No, how could this be? A never ending candy bar? It was at this moment that Riley realized that all of her story ideas were coming to life! As she continued to eat her candy bar, she heard her name in the distance.

*"Riley...Riley....Riley Lewis!"*, shouted the voice. All of sudden, Riley snapped awake! She must have been dreaming because her teacher, Ms. Gemma was standing above her. Riley rubbed her eyes and yawned. "What happened?", Riley murmured to herself. "You fell asleep!", exclaimed Ms. Gemma.

All eyes were on her. "Anyway, let's carry on.", said Ms. Gemma. Riley listened to her teach the lesson, but she began to think. After Riley thought for a while, she came to a conclusion. *I think I might enter the writing contest. I mean after seeing some of my ideas come to life, I guess they're pretty good.*



# Never Ending Candy Bar.



After class was over Cassy came over to Riley's desk. "So, I saw a flier for a writing contest and I think I might enter.", she said. "Oh yeah, I saw that, too.", Riley replied. "Are you going to enter?", asked Cassy. "Yeah, and I know just what to write about", replied Riley. Riley left school that day feeling more excited and proud than ever.











"Come on" said Bella to the others. "We do not want to be late to the meeting" she included as they raced to the park. It was Bella Alner's, Emma Alner's, Jack Bull's, and Kevin Bull's first day of the Spy Club. They could not wait to see what they were going to learn. When they reached the park there was no one there and they were so confused and disappointed. They also didn't know they were not just joining a club. But when they turned their backs..."Boo!!!" The club yelled as the four were so relieved and a little scared. They actually jumped a little.

During the meeting they realized they would get missions and quests like actual . They learned how to scare people and hide really well. When Bella went to bed that night with her sister Emma they were just thinking of missions they would do and the excitement that they would have on their first mission while Jack and Kevin (the twins ) were watching a cool spy movie to see what it was going to look like.

Their meeting was in the school but this time they rode bikes and it was a whole lot easier. When they got the news that the next meeting they were going to be assigned with an awesome and really fun mission, they were so excited for the next meeting. The leader of the group is a man named Logan who was also a real spy and on a mission himself, so his partner, Eliza, was in charge. " Hey guys, it's good meeting you here today. I know some kids who are going to go on missions today" Eliza said very cheerfully and then she listed the names of the people who were going on missions. But they never heard their names so they went to Eliza and said "Logan said we would get our missions today". "Names" said Eliza and then they each said their names "Bella..Emma..Jack..Kevin." "Oh that four" whispered Eliza but

Bella heard her "what four" she said. "Oh nothing but good luck. Now" Eliza paused and she saw everyone was gone except her and the four. "Well guess you could go too" said Eliza and of course they were already gone.

Tonight they were going to have a sleepover at Bella's and Emma's house (even though the twins lived right next to them) they were planning on staying up all night. When they were walking all of them just kept asking themselves "I thought we were going to get a mission" or "Logan said we were going to get an awesome mission." When they got to the Alner's house Calie (Bella's and Emma's mom) had already brought pizza, snacks, dessert, candy, popcorn, and a movie to watch.

Once they were done with dinner they watched the movie with popcorn and candy (they saved some for the night to help them stay up.) By the time it was midnight Emma just kept thinking that there is something she forgot to do and just then ... "I forgot to do our homework!" she said as ran out of the room like a crazy person. "Us too!" the rest said as they copied Emma and ran out like a crazy person. As they all looked in their backpacks they found a fourth of a letter and of course their homework but now they were mostly concerned about the letter. They found the order of where the pieces went and they read carefully "You weren't just missing homework, but you were missing a mission, so I will give you a mission. It will be kind of a scavenger hunt, but there is way more fun things in than just finding things. You are going to split up, the girls are going to find a key. This part is going to be more like a scavenger hunt because I learned you two are really good at riddles. I didn't forget about the twins. You are

going to stop the villain who is also trying to get the key. Be careful, it is going to be at the school girls, your clue is 1569.

Sincerely your spy club leader, Logan". "Wow, things got real." the twins said, "lets go wake mom," said Emma, as they all ran to the couch to wake up Calie.

When she woke up they all said at the same time "We have a mission and we have to go to the school. So bye for now" and they rushed out the door with their backpacks so excited. The boys kept acting like wrestlers punching and kicking, while the girls were thinking 1569. "What would that mean?" asked Bella to Emma, " Maybe a classroom, a poster,... wait I think it's a locker number!" answered Emma. When they arrived at school the doors were locked, but it had a code to open the door. Then Bella and Emma looked at each other and said "Why didn't we think of that," so the girls unlocked the door and found another clue. It said "170" and then they split up after they read the clue.

The boys were walking through the halls and saw a man with a weird hat and then he ran to the next hall and the boys followed. They saw a janitor, but it didn't look like the janitor, and it had the weird looking hat on. They had a plan to distract him and pretend he was not the villain. Kevin told him jokes and Jack played charades to kind of act out the jokes, while the girls were running through the halls trying to find the number 170. They finally found two things that had 170 on it: a locker and a room number. They tried to do the locker code, but it was still locked. They tried to unlock it with the number 170, but the code was a four digit number so they went in the room 170 and looked for the clue. When the boys were distracting the villain, but the twins

didn't think they could pull it off and they were right he ran off. They ran after him and thought they could play tag so Jack had enough speed to catch and tag him. "Tag your it," Jack said, when he tagged him and then he sped back to Kevin so he wouldn't get him that easily.

When the girls found that the clue was on the smart board and it was a puzzle they had to put together. The girls struggled a little, but they got it done. It said, "look up." When they looked up they saw a poster. They stacked up the desks and chairs but there was nothing up there. Bella said, "Wait, I have seen that poster before in the cafeteria," so they hurried to the cafeteria. The boys had lost the villain, "I am pretty sure that the girls are so close to the key, so there's no chance the villain will get the key. Right!?" said Jack. The boys went looking for the girls who had finally reached the cafeteria but someone already got there "The villain Logan was talking about in the letter!" Bella said as she shivered. "Oh! I forgot about the villain," Emma said, also shivering.

The boys finally showed up, when the villain started to run off. He made them run around the whole school but, soon enough they lost him. They kept thinking what the key could've unlocked, if they had it. The boys just kept whining, "It's all our fault. We let him go, because we thought you almost had the key." Then the girls said, "No, it was our fault! We spent all that time stacking desks and chairs to get to the poster." "Wait just a minute! How could he know all the clues that we have collected?" Emma said. Then they all yelled "Ya! How did he know all the clues?" The four heard stomping and music at the top of the school building. "The roof. The villain is on the roof, Let's go!" Kevin said, as he started to run up the stairs. Then the rest followed.



When they got to the roof, they found the villain celebrating with the key, in his hand, while dancing. Then the boys looked at each other and said "Let's fight that villain!" They ran to the villain and started to wrestle and then the villain took his mask off. "Logan, what are you doing here? I thought you were on a mission and why are you dressed like the villain?" said Emma, very confused. "Well, I was on a mission to be the villain. I wanted to see how well you will do and you guys did great!" "Guys you can come out now!!!" All the spy club members jumped out, including Eliza. "How did you do you, because I think you guys did great" said Eliza to Bella. "I think we did great," Bella answered. Then Logan said "It's party time!" So they danced to their favorite songs but the boys kept practicing fighting, so they pretended to punch and kick evil villains. Logan told Eliza "We are going to need a whole lot of clean up tonight," very quietly.

Then they played hide and seek for an hour and then they played tag for another hour. But then Logan gave a special speech and said, "You guys did so great that we are giving you two things to each of you, one a spy license, two a trophy. It's a way to say thank you for joining our club." He was interrupted by Emma, "We forgot to do our homework" they were so concerned because it was so close till sunrise. Thank goodness they brought their backpacks, so they did their school work right after they got their rewards.

The End







# The Scarlet Rose

## Chapter 1

It was a damp morning in the year 2020. A large, yellow sun looked over the small town of Magenta, California. The trees sparkled, and the grass felt as if it were a shallow pond. Small crickets jumped all over lawns, and dogs barked at soaring birds. The town was peaceful, with the exception of Charlotte Scarlet.

Charlotte was mad because of the coronavirus. It ruined her life. She missed her friends. They didn't even have google meets together! Her BFF, Peyton's birthday was in 2 weeks, and Charlotte couldn't see her to give her her present! The only good thing that had come out of this, was that she was friends with the cool kids. Amelia, the leader of their group, was her neighbor, so they talked over their fence very often and became friends.

Hopping out of bed, Charlotte got dressed in her denim shorts, and yellow tank top with the puppies on it. She looked around the small room and saw the socks from last night lying on the floor, looking at her as if to say, "Put us in the laundry basket, or your mom will be mad." Hastily, she went over and put them in the laundry basket.

As Charlotte walked downstairs, the smell of bacon filled the house. Charlotte exclaimed, "Mmmmm, Mom that bacon smells so good. Are you making eggs, too?"

"Yes, you know it!" Mrs. Scarlet said. "Wake up your brother, and then walk your dog."

"Redd...REDD!", called Charlotte.





"I'm awake!", Redd yelled back, nearly falling out of bed. Sarcastic Charlotte said, "Good. Mom says breakfast is going to be ready soon," Jackie, their dog, ran in right then and attacked Redd with a hurricane of kisses.

Jackie was the Yorkshire terrier puppy that the Scarlet family had adopted over summer. In two weeks, school was going to start again, and Jackie was going to be so sad. Even though Jackie sounds like a girl's name, he was a boy. Redd wanted him to be called Jack. Charlotte didn't like that, because she had a crush on a boy named Jack, so it might have sounded like she named her puppy after the boy she liked. So she suggested they added the "ie" part. Thankfully, the family agreed with her.

As Charlotte stepped outside with Jackie, the cool breeze blew on her hair. Charlotte thought this was perfect California weather, but it got too hot for her in summer and the afternoon. When she moved away, she was going to Alaska, she said to herself.

Jackie and Charlotte started their morning walk. As Jackie sprinted down the sidewalk, Charlotte watered the flowers in her yard. The flowers seemed to reach up to the sun, which was peeping out behind the clouds.

After watering the flowers, she held Jackie's leash and walked toward Peyton's house to say 'hi' from a distance. She hadn't seen Peyton for 3 weeks! To Charlotte and Peyton, it seemed like 300 years. At Peyton's neighbor's house, she saw the strangest thing.



The old woman who lived there was out in her yard giving milk and fish to a stray cat. The woman heard the footsteps and turned around.

"Oh! Aren't you the girl who is best friends with my sweet neighbor? She has told me so much about you!" the old woman cooed, "But where are my manners, I am Charlotte Anna Toot, and you can call me Mrs.Toot, or C.A.T. for short. I am so pleased that we share a name!"

While Mrs.Toot was talking, Jackie had scared away the cat. Charlotte was unhappy that she shared a name with this fool. Charlotte answered back, "Pleased to meet you, C.A.T.!" "Oh, you are just the sweetest little thing! Come closer and I will show you something.", Mrs.Toot replied.

Woman, have you heard of this thing called the coronavirus, Charlotte asked herself, stepping closer still staying 6 feet apart.

## Chapter 2

"Look at this beautiful rose! It's scarlet," exclaimed Mrs.Toot.

Charlotte had never seen such a beautiful rose. The red was like a cranberry, but not wrinkly. The petals were soft as silk, and it was not rotted, or in need of pruning.

"WOW!" Charlotte said, "Can I take it?"

"No, dear, I'm entering it in a gardening contest. But you may look at it whenever you want."

Disappointed Charlotte waved goodbye, and went on to Peyton's house. She rang the doorbell, and stepped back to the sidewalk. She looked at Peyton's house. It was a white house with a chocolate brown roof. The small attic window was where Peyton's room was. She saw Peyton put something down and jump out of her bed.

The oak door swung open, and Peyton squealed with joy. "Charlotte! And Jackie! I got your text and photo about Jackie, your new puppy, so this must be him," she screamed, nearly exploding now. It was true, she had gotten Jackie just 2 weeks ago.

"Hello, Peyton!" Charlotte screamed back when the dreaded Mrs. Toot opened her window and said, "Can't you people quiet down, I'm trying to take a nap!"

Rolling her eyes, Peyton said, "Let's go out back to talk." Charlotte nodded her head and followed her to her treehouse. Peyton climbed the ladder and sat in the "crows nest" at the top of the tree. Charlotte placed Jackie up to the platform with the wall and shimmied up the ladder.

"I am so happy to see you, Peyton! I should probably put my mask on, though." sighed Charlotte.

"OH! Oops, me too, I forgot your dad had asthma. Sorry." Peyton apologized, pulling a paw-print mask out of her pocket. The two girls sat in the treehouse, just looking at the landscape. Finally, Peyton broke the silence and said, "I saw you were talking to C.A.T."

"Yes, I was. Why?"





"Well, she probably told you I was friends with her. I am not. I was nice to her, in like, third grade. She is a crazy cat lady, and I think she has 29 cats. Crazy right?"

"That's weird. Today she showed me a scarlet rose, and something was just too addictive about the rose. I feel like I have to have it."

"Then take it, steal it, she's taking a nap now, and you should go anyway."

"Ok, bye Peyton! I'll take the rose!"

"See ya later, Charlotte!"

Charlotte looked at leashless Jackie, and saw him jumping and snapping at a butterfly. She clipped the leash to Jackie, pushed open the gate, and went to Mrs. Toot's garden. She looked at the rose, looked at the house, and looked back down at the rose.

Grasping the stem, she pulled, and pricked her finger.

"OUCH!" she yelped, and then saw nothing but a vibrant blue.

## Chapter 3

When the blue faded, she found herself flat on her back, with a major headache. She got up and walked down the street. She looked around and saw there were so many more people than there were before on the street. And no one was social distancing.

Then, she saw people were staring at her mask, so she took it off and ran back to her house. Along the way, she noticed that Jackie was running really fast to keep up with her. "Mom, is breakfast ready?" asked Charlotte.



"Yes, sweetie, now go wash up, and wake your brother." Her mom requested.

"Ok. AAAA! Where's Jackie? I just had him with me!" said Charlotte, worried.

"Who's Jackie? Ohh, are you starting a dog walking business? And you already lost someone's dog? Come on, this is going to cost us." Charlotte's mom asked.

"Mom, don't you know, Jackie is our dog!" pleaded Charlotte, knowing something was different.

"It's ok, now go and wake up your brother." her mom said.

Charlotte went to her brother's room, and wondered why he wasn't awake, for she had only woken him up thirty minutes ago.

"Redd, Redd, wake up!" she called into his room. Pulling the blankets over his head he yelled, "Go away, Charlotte! I'm trying to sleep!" Charlotte sighed, and pulled her little brother out of bed and dragged him down stairs.

"Ouch! Unph! Stop! Owww!" Redd said the whole way down the stairs, into the kitchen. Charlotte dropped Redd's feet and went into the bathroom to wash her hands. She sat down at the kitchen table, quickly scarfed down her eggs, and went out to look for Jackie.

First she went to Peyton's house, and saw Mrs.Toot's rose had completely wilted away, just from her touching it. Charlotte felt horrible and decided it was best to stay away from Mrs.Toot. She knocked on Peyton's door, and Peyton opened the door.

"What's up? Come in!" Peyton excitedly told Charlotte.





"Peyton, have you seen a little yorkie anywhere?" asked Charlotte.

"Matter of fact, I have." Peyton said, a little annoyed that Charlotte refused to come in her house and wouldn't come closer than six feet.

Surprised, Charlotte asked where it was.

"Downtown in the humane society animal shelter." Peyton said.

Without saying goodbye, Charlotte ran to the humane society animal shelter to see if it was Jackie. The Scarlet's had gotten Jackie from the shelter, so it might be him.

Charlotte sprinted into the front door and went to the back section for dogs, where they had found Jackie. Sure enough, Jackie was sitting there.

"Hello, can I help you with anything?" a familiar voice asked from behind Charlotte.

## Chapter 4

"Jack!" Charlotte said surprised.

"Charlotte?" Jack asked.

Charlotte was about to faint, Jack had tapped her on the shoulder when he asked to help her. This was the closest she had ever been to him!

"You volunteer here?" Charlotte asked him.

"Yes, Charlotte, do you want that dog?" Jack told her.

"Oh, uh, yes, that's the dog I want. Can you get him out for me, and I have thirty dollars, if that's enough," she said.



Laughing, Jack said, "First of all, the adoption fee for that one is \$412, and second this one is reserved, so i'll see you later. Bye!"

Later that night, after dinner, Charlotte laid in her bed.

"Jackie, here Jackie." she whispered, then remembered Jackie was gone. Finally she realized what had happened--she had been sent into a dimension where covid-19 wasn't a thing. Frustrated, she dozed off.

## Chapter 5

Charlotte woke up to the smell of bacon, eggs, and pancakes. She went down to the living room to watch some tv before breakfast, then realized it was 5:45 in the morning. The only time her mother cooked breakfast that early was on a school day.

Still dressed in her Pj's, Charlotte went to the kitchen. She was just about to say, 'Mom, today is not a school day, we do it online.' Then at the last second she remembered that this dimension did not have Covid-19, so it was best not to bring it up. Instead she said, "Mom, when is school? I want to make sure my backpack is packed."

Her mom laughed and said, "Same time as always, 7:25am."

Charlotte zipped upstairs and got dressed. She wore a pink shirt with a deep, navy blue jacket. The pants choice was easy--black leggings. Everyone who is anyone wears black leggings.





Charlotte learned that from Amelia. Charlotte couldn't believe that she was friends with the coolest girl at her middle school.

She rushed back downstairs, and sat at the table with her dad. Charlotte thought that it was awkward to talk to her dad, who was almost always away with business.

"Good morning, dad." Charlotte whispered.

"Good morning, Charlotte. Are you ready for school today?" her dad asked, with a smile.

"Yes," Charlotte replied. "Oh, breakfast is ready!"

Mrs. Scarlet put a plate full of pancakes on the table, right in front of Charlotte. Then she put the bottle of syrup, a plate of bacon, and a pan of eggs on the table. Charlotte loved pancakes, and they were her favorite food! She couldn't imagine a life without them. The aroma of bacon and eggs filled her nose as she dumped gallons of syrup on the tower of pancakes.

"Charlotte, you are going to be sick! Don't put too much syrup on your pancakes!" Her mom scolded.

"Sorry, I can't help it!" Charlotte said.

Charlotte finished her breakfast, put on her backpack, and went out the door. The bus was sitting on the street, and the driver wasn't pleased they had to wait for Charlotte. Charlotte hopped on the bus and found a seat, beside Peyton.

"Hey!" screamed the bus driver, "Don't you remember your assigned seat? This is the *eleventh* kid I've had to tell, and only twenty kids ride this bus!"

Charlotte protested, and that was a big mistake, "But, uhh, we never had assigned seats. Can I just sit here?"





Of course, it wasn't Charlotte's fault that she didn't know they switched seats, because she had not been there. But Mrs.Wasp, the bus driver, didn't know, so like usual she lost it.

"ARE YOU KIDDING ME! I ASSIGNED SEATS ONE WEEK AGO! YOU WERE THE ONE KID WHO KNEW WHERE YOURS WAS! FINE! ANYONE CAN SIT WHEREVER THEY LIKE! I DON'T CARE!"

Charlotte felt bad, but sat quietly the whole ride to school. They took the familiar drive and passed many houses, and a small farm with horses. When they passed Mrs.Toot's house, Charlotte noticed that the scarlet rose was still all wilted and withered. She wondered why the whole plant was wilted. Could it be her fault?

Finally, there it was. The school was standing there in front of her nose, just as she remembered it. She was so happy to be back at school and thought it would be a great day.

## Chapter 6

Charlotte got off the bus and went into the building. She had all the same classes as Peyton because they both wanted to be nurses. Peyton had diabetes and wanted to help other kids like her. Charlotte felt so bad for her even when Peyton told her getting a shot 5 or 6 times a day wasn't bad. Charlotte wanted to be a nurse to help people with asthma because her dad had asthma.

First, they went to algebra. Charlotte was excited to go today because Ameila was in algebra. Amelia would want to talk to

Charlotte, and Charlotte wanted to talk to Amelia. When Charlotte and Peyton walked into the classroom, Amelia glared at them. Charlotte wondered what was wrong. Peyton took her seat beside Charlotte, and they quietly chatted.

"I hope we don't do exponents again!" Peyton told Charlotte.

Then it occurred to Charlotte why Amelia was glaring at them--they hadn't become friends! After algebra was done, Charlotte was going to go and talk to Amelia and start their friendship if she was going to be stuck here.

"Hello, class. Today we are going to progress through our exponents unit. Pull out your books and flip to page 98," announced the teacher. The whole class let out a large sigh, and then everyone heard the turning of pages. Then the teacher said, "Complete problems 1-12, then I will call on some of you for the answers. You have thirty minutes."

Thirty minutes later answers for problems 1-11 were revealed. Amelia was called on for the last question.

"Miss Casey, what did you get for problem 12?"

"Uhh, 64?"

"Why don't you try that one again on the smart board?"

"Why don't *you* try that one again? You're the teacher. So teach us."

All eyes were on the teacher, waiting to hear her response.

"Well you just earned yourself some extra math practice today at lunch\recess, Amelia Sue Casey," the teacher snapped back. Suddenly, the bell rang signaling Amelia's escape from the watching eyes. Rolling her eyes, Amelia darted out of the

classroom, forgetting her water bottle. Charlotte grabbed the water bottle to return it.

After algebra, Charlotte caught Amelia in the hallway. "Wait, Amelia!" Charlotte called.

"Um, hello, why are you talking to me?" Amelia said.

"You forgot your water bottle. And if you need help with your classes, I am always a friend." Charlotte told her, thinking she would say yes.

Laughing, Amelia said, "No I don't think you are a 'friend'! Go away you nerd."

The only thing Amelia seemed to like less than exponents was Charlotte. Charlotte felt so betrayed, but it was her fault. If she had not touched the rose, none of this would be happening. Amelia taught her how to be cool, and she taught Amelia how not to be a jerk. The whole day Charlotte had one thought--I have to get out of here.

## Chapter 7

Charlotte decided to hang out with Peyton after school. They walked home together, and Charlotte texted her mom to tell her where she was. The whole walk, Charlotte debated if she should tell Peyton where she was actually from (an alternate dimension) and see if she had any idea how to get back. She also thought about how she missed Jackie so much. She would give anything to



see her puppy! They passed Mrs. Toot's house, and Mrs. Toot was out in her front yard, crying.

"What's wrong with her?" Charlotte asked, curious.

"One of her cats died, like, 3 weeks ago. Then she planted a rose on top of its grave, and a deer ate the rose. Weird, right?"

"Yeah," Charlotte replied, "But why can't she just buy a new rose?"

"That was her prized rose, her sister gave it to her, and then her sister died, too."

Charlotte finally knew the whole story. She felt even worse. Why did she have to pick that rose? She could plant her own! Why, why, why? It was her selfishness that caused Mrs. Toot's sorrow. If only she had known. . . Then she wouldn't have picked the rose. No, it was not Mrs. Toot's fault, it was hers. The girls climbed into Peyton's treehouse, and Charlotte made a confession.

"A deer didn't eat the rose, I picked it! I am so mad at myself, and I will never see my dog again! I lost good friends! And worst of all, I was so selfish, I stole a silly flower that reminded a sweet old lady of her cat and sister!" Charlotte confessed everything she had done.

"What? What are you talking about?" Peyton asked, confused.

Then Charlotte realized how to get out. It was simple really!

## Chapter 8

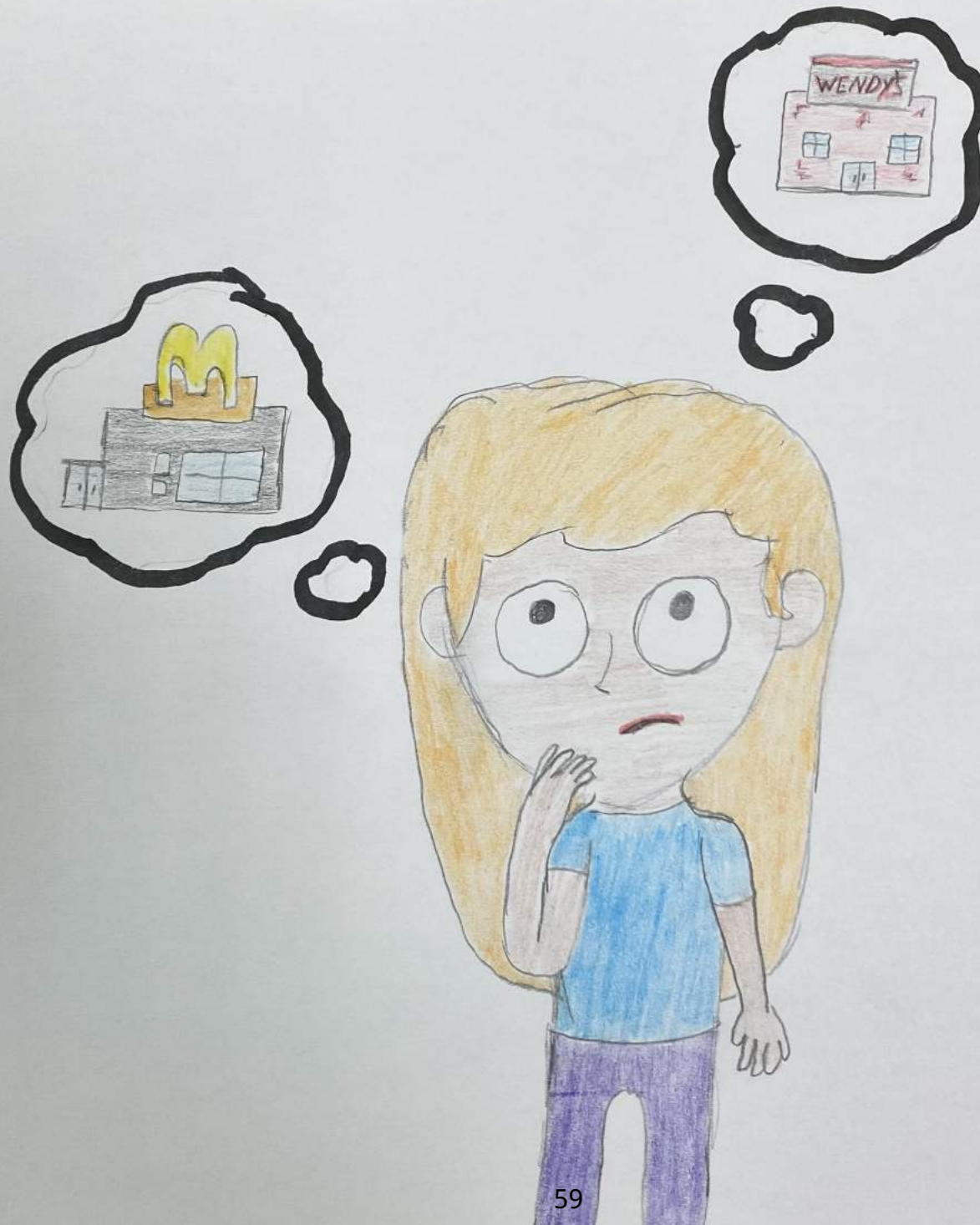
Charlotte thought her idea would work. She was so confident that she didn't have any second thoughts and put the plan into

action. She jumped down from the treehouse and ran across the yard. She went out the gate and towards Mrs. Toot's house. When she saw the light in Mrs. Toot's room turn off. She looked at the time. It was 6:00 p.m.! Charlotte had to hurry home or she would be in bigger trouble than she already was.

While she was dashing down the street, Charlotte's backpack came unzipped. Charlotte didn't notice her favorite photo of Jackie fly out. And then she remembered that her mom was cooking salmon for dinner. Salmon was Charlotte's least favorite food. She knew she had to go home, but she had money in her backpack, money that could *buy* her something more tasty than salmon.

Maybe she could go to a McDonald's or a Wendy's on the boulevard. Her mom would be so mad, and she wouldn't be allowed to get any money for months. Her mom wanted the whole family to eat together every night. Charlotte could text her mom that she was spending the night at Peyton's to get out of it, but if her mom found out she was lying . . . let's just say things weren't going to be pretty.

She was going to have to eat the fish. Yuck! Charlotte walked home and decided that tomorrow would be the day she would go home. *Real* home! She would finally see Jackie! And Amelia would be so much nicer to her. She couldn't wait. But to do this, she had to eat the fish. Charlotte hurried home and went inside. She almost kneeled down and called, "Jackie!" but remembered that Jackie was gone.





Poor Jackie, the person that bought him hadn't gotten him the shots he needed because they didn't want to pay money for a vet to prick his dog. Jackie is now really sick. The Scarlets had no idea. . .

Charlotte went up to her room and put her math homework on her desk. She scanned the page to see how long it would take. She estimated 20 minutes. Dinner would be ready in 25 minutes. How perfect! Now the night was almost over, and she could finally go home tomorrow. She started on her homework and realized if she was going home tomorrow, she didn't need to finish it. So she sat there and drew pictures of Jackie.

"Charlotte, time for dinner!" Her mom called from downstairs. Charlotte rushed down and sat at the table. She was going to eat the salmon, and quickly, so she could go to sleep sooner. Too bad she would have to wait until 8:00 a.m. to go home tomorrow.

## Chapter 9

Charlotte was awake the next morning at 7:00, and that was just enough time to eat breakfast, then go. She planned to be at Mrs. Toot's house around 7:50, and she would try to get home then. Her REAL home. She couldn't wait! She was about to burst into a million pieces if breakfast wasn't ready soon. She was so hungry!

Breakfast was just eggs this morning. Nothing fancy. No pancakes. Charlotte was not a picky eater, so she didn't care. She was just happy to get going. "This is it!" Charlotte told herself, "I

finally get to see Jackie, and Amelia, and now I can volunteer at the humane society, to help Jack!" Charlotte quickly ate her eggs and went out to the garage. She pulled out a lilac bike with small, white lilies painted all over it. Then she put on her pink helmet, and peddled to Peyton's house.

Mrs.Toot was standing in her front window washing the dishes. She looked out the window that had once shown the beautiful rose. Her heart dropped a million miles, noticing that this was the only object she had left to remember her beloved cat and her sister. She was mainly sad about the cat, but the rose was the last birthday gift her sister had given her. Then she smiled and shook her head, saying, "What in the world am I doing? Washing dishes at this hour!" Suddenly a girl on a purple and white bike pulled up.

Charlotte ran up to the door of Mrs.Toot's house and knocked on the door. She was so nervous, but inside she knew this would send her home. She has to apologize to Mrs.Toot, that also means she will have to confess. Then the door swings open and Mrs.Toot steps out.

"Hello, I am Charlotte Scarlet, and I need to tell you something."

"Ok"

"I am the one who destroyed your rose, I don't know how, but I did it. I am so sorry, all you need to know is that it is *my* fault. That's all, Mrs.Toot." Even though Peyton told Charlotte to take the rose, they were Charlotte's actions. Charlotte had to take the blame.



"Ok"

"Ok? That's all? I thought you would be mad."

"No, it was just a rose. I am just glad you were truthful. That is all that matters. I have other things to remind me of my cat and my sister. I forgive you."

And then that same vibrant flash of blue flooded Charlotte's eyes.

## Chapter 10

Charlotte was standing in Mrs. Toot's front yard, looking at a rose. The rose was back to normal! How? That was the one question Charlotte still had. Then she looked around and saw the sun was higher in the sky. She felt a leash slip out of her hands. "JACKIE! Get your tail back here!" Charlotte screamed at the top of her lungs.

And she knew where she was. HOME. Charlotte got down on her knees and bent over. Jackie came over and gave her a big wet lick on the face! Charlotte was the happiest girl in the world. She ran home and left the rose alone. She jumped inside and unhooked Jackie from his leash. She sat down at the table for a breakfast of bacon and eggs.

As she sat down to eat her breakfast, Charlotte heard a reporter say a vaccine is coming soon. This pandemic could finally be over! Charlotte gives her brother a giant hug and runs over to Amelia's house. They smile and wave. Charlotte thinks it is so much nicer to get a smile instead of a glare. Then Charlotte asks her mom to sign her up to volunteer at their local humane society.



After 2 more months, the coronavirus was gone. Charlotte starts volunteering. Charlotte, Peyton, and Amelia all get together and paint nails as they hang out like normal girls. She eventually starts dating Jack, thanks to their shared love for animals.

Charlotte's life went back to normal. But rather than seeing the virus as a disruption to her 'normal,' she realized the coronavirus actually brought lots of opportunities into her life. Charlotte never told anyone about the odd experience she had. And just like Mrs. Toot's missing rose, Charlotte learned that *things* in life were meaningless without the memories attached. A dog was not a pet, a classmate was not a friend, a rose was not a rose without the memories created through the hard times of the terrible virus.

As she walked through the empty hallways of the school, she felt uneasy. Something wasn't right. All alone, in an empty school. Someone was following her. She could feel it.

"Boo!" Suddenly, all her fears went away. The one scaring her was this dingbat.

"Not funny Koro."

"Oh come on Yokio, that was super funny!"

"Whatever. I have to go get my books, go home."

"Aw man! Why do you have to ruin all the fun?" Koro put his hat on the other side of head, covering his face. "You're such a party-poopers."

While he was still talking, she was almost at my homeroom. She quietly opened the door, not wanting to disturb anything. (Even though there's nothing to disturb) Koro was practically running down the hallway, mad that she'd left him. He'd understand if he was in her place.

"What's the big idea?!" He put his hands on his hips. "Well It's not my fault you can't shut up!" She stuck her finger in his face. He backed up. "Well..!" He stuttered. She walked into the classroom, and looked around for her book on the shelf.

"Yokio...Yokio....Ah, there it is." She picked up the book and shoved it in my bag. She turned around to see Koro, messing up the teachers files. "Koro no!"

She grabbed the files from him. "Whoops. Hehe..sorry." Yokio was putting the files when suddenly, the teacher came back.

"What's going on here?" She trembled in fear. "Well, uh. I was helping Yokio get her book, and suddenly, your files dropped! So we decided to pick them up for you." Yokio wiped the sweat of her forehead and nodded her head in agreement. The teacher sighed, "Alright. Make sure you don't miss the bus."

"See you Miss Kabia-san!" I grabbed Koro's hand and we ran out of the school. "What were you thinking? We could've gotten in so much trouble!"

"But we didn't, and that's what matters, right?" Koro smirked and grabbed his hat.

"Yeah, but-"

"You probably would've been screwed without me." He giggled. If you didn't know, Yokio is a fourteen year-old girl, and until recently, Koro was part of her life. Now, he had gained interest in her again, but not like *that* exactly. Koro had pretty much disappeared right after they had become friends a few years ago. Now, he had re-appeared.

"Well? You coming?" Koro lifted his hat.

"Listen. We need to go home, right now. Meet me at the park at six o'clock sharp." Koro whipped his hat off and ran down the street. This is probably one of his weird tricks again. She thought she'd just go for the heck of it. Yokio stepped onto the bus stairs and the bus driver closed the door. It was a nice ride home, and no one interrupted her calm and quiet noise. No one makes friends in the bus. She reached into her bag and grabbed her notebook and started drawing. It was the perfect opportunity.

“Koro..”

“Yes?” She jumped nearly to the roof of the bus. Is that..? No..h-he ran down the street, That can't be- She thought. But it was obvious it was him.

“Yokio answer meeee~ I'm getting bored!”

“Koro, how did yo-”

“Got ya!” He booped her nose and chuckled. The bus stopped at her house, finally. She jumped off the bus, with Koro two steps behind her. “You know Koro, you don't have to follow me. I'll meet you at the park, I promise-” She turned around, then Koro was gone. How...did..She thought. Her thoughts raced through her head, they were like bullets. She ignored most of them, mostly because all of them were just crazy. She slipped her shoes off in front of the door, and then slid on her slippers. Yokio's brothers immediately came to the door, excited to see her. She walked in, and could already smell the scent of her mom's famous pork and rice balls.

“Hi mom, I'm home,” She said as she set her bookbag on the coffee table and walked into the kitchen. “Do you need help with dinner?”

“Ah, that's ok sweetie. Do you want to go and hangout with your friends? I heard that's what's popular these days.”

“Yeah, actually. I came here first just in case you needed any help with anything.” Her Mom hugged her, and kissed her forehead. “Have a good time honey.”

“Aw she's leaving already?” The boys whined. “I'll be back in no time, ok?” They nodded, and cried. “N-no don't cry! I'll be back! I promise!” She stepped out of the door and put on her real shoes. By the time she left, it was already ten till. Yokio rushed to the park, not wanting to be late. She arrived at the park, but didn't see Koro. I knew it. I should've never trusted him. She thought.

“Koro! You got me, okay?” She heard no reply. She knew for sure that he was playing a trick on her.

“Yokio, you give up too easily. That's what I've noticed the most about you. You should be more confident.” It was Koro's voice. She turned my head. It was him. “Were you going to stand me up?” She asked aggressively. “No! I had a bad time getting here, so chill.” Koro put on his jacket. “Now, the reason I called you here is because I need to tell you something..important.” He paused before taking another breath.

“Ok? Get on with it, because I'm already fed up.” He once again put his hat over his face. She could see the sweat on his palms. “I...”

“I..??”

“I.. want to be friends again! You never wanna hang out with me anymore!!” He stomped the ground and started crying. “You big old meanie!”

“So you called me out to this cold park just to tell me that?”

“I wanted a dramatic background. So it could be kinda mysterious, like I would tell you I was a 'Magical wizard' or something, you know?” He looked proud of himself, like he

had just won the state championship. "KORO!!" She growled and stood up from the bench, and started to run after him.

"Oh how fun! Our first game of tag!" He ran at full speed. "Haha! You're fast Yokio, but I'm faster!"

"Darn it Koro! Get over here!"

"Not until you catch me! Hehe~" She finally caught him, about fifteen minutes later.

"Now, tell me how you literally teleported to the bus, and at my house?" Koro stopped smiling. He took his hat off, and put it by his leg. "Well uh..I didn't think you'd catch on that quickly."

"I'm not stupid!"

"Well I didn't know that!"

"Koro."

"Right. Well, you have to promise not to leave me again after I tell you this, so shake my hand!"

"Are your hands dirty?"

"No." She gently shook his hand. "Great, now I will tell you." He paused before saying another word. "Alrighty, here we g-"

"Get on with it already."

"Anyways, I'm a demon! Ta daaaa~" He did jazz hands, and jumped in the air. She paused and thought for a moment. "Wait, so you're a demon?"

"Yeperoo! Ooh! If you don't believe, watch this!" He suddenly disappeared.

"Ok, I believe you."

"Do you..? Because I think you're a big old liar." He whispered in her ear. She turned around, expecting to see him, but he was not in her sight.

"Koro, It's getting pretty late, I think I'm gonna go home."

"Wait, there's something I need to do. Stand still." He appeared again, and started walking toward her. He grabbed her hand and held it tight. She looked at him in fear, but with just a little trust. It would be stupid to kill someone you had just met, right? She thought. But then again, he was a demon. A woosh of cool air lifted up her hair. It swayed, and shined in the moonlight. "I need you to fully trust me, Yokio. I can't do this if you don't."

"Can I trust you?"

He gripped her hand a bit tighter and smiled. "What are friends for?" A marking appeared on her hand, where Koro was holding her. She looked down and wondered what the marking was, and if it was going to hurt her in any way.

"Don't worry, it's not bad. It's actually a protecting charm. Don't rub it off please, I spent good money on that."

"You had to pay for this?"

"Everything has a cost." He let go of her hand, causing Yokio to fall.

"Ow! Thanks so much!" She got up and brushed herself off. "So much for protection."



"I'm happy to help!" He smiled. She wished she could just punch that smug look off of his face. The cold weather made the air bitter, cool air blew into Yokio's face, making her shiver. Koro wasn't affected. The cold didn't bother him, anyways. She put out her hand and looked at her watch. It was almost nine, which was when her father came home.

"Koro I need to go right now." Koro frowned.

"We were just having fun! Don't go now!"

"Koro, you don't understand, I-"

"Just a bit longer..please?"

"Koro I'm serious-" Yokio heard her phone ring in her pocket. She looked as if she had seen a ghost. She ran to the park exit and sprinted down the street.

"Yokio?"

Koro watched as she ran. She looked as if she was going to cry. Koro took a second and thought if he should follow her or not. He decided it was best to mind his business. Besides, she had the protection charm on her, nothing bad could happen.

Yokio approached her front doorstep. Her father's car was in his parking spot, and his car seemed warm, like it had just gotten there. She still had a chance. She ran into the shed and grabbed the ladder. She mounted it beside the wall and started to climb it.

"I can make it to the window." She thought. She reached the window and quietly opened it. Her father didn't seem to know she had been out, which was a good thing. She fell into her room, making a loud noise. She gasped, and put her chair on the floor, making it look like the chair had fallen down. She heard the steps of her father on the stairs.

They were loud. He opened the door and looked inside. Behind her father was her mom. She felt a bit better. Her father grabbed her shirt and picked her up.

"You little-

"Dad!"

"Where were you?"

"Daddy! Don't hurt her!"

"Move it, brat." He shoved her little brother into the hallway of her room. Yokio tried to cry, but her tears wouldn't come out. It was like they were blocked. The charm on her hand started to glow, and she didn't have control over her body anymore. *Some-thing* was controlling it.

"Look, it's ok if you want to hurt me, but hurting my brother crosses all the lines."

"Excuse me?" He grasped her shirt harder. Her mother gasped and grabbed her son's hands, tightly.

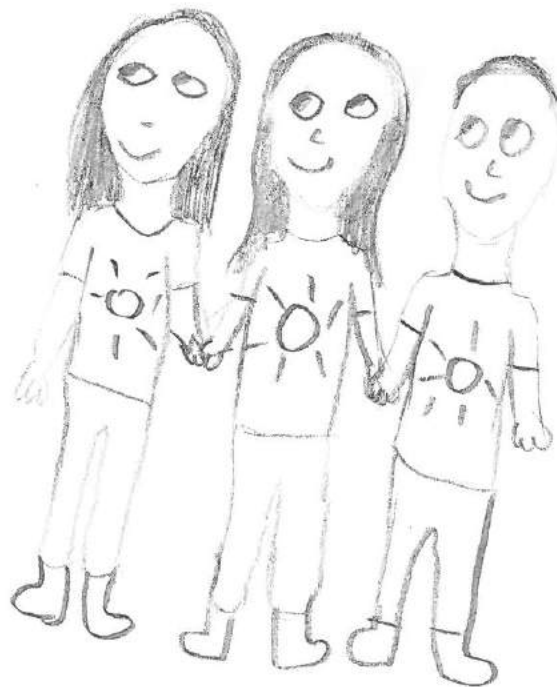
"Yokio, don't!" Shoko, her brother yelled. Her father suddenly let go of Yokio, and turned around to Shoko.

Yokio ran down the stairs and into the kitchen. She grabbed the biggest frying pan and grasped it hard. "I can do this."

She ran upstairs to see her mother shaking in fear. She pointed into the room. Her brother lay still on the floor, sitting upon the wall. He was breathing heavily. She had a rush of adrenaline as she swung the pot at her father's head. He collapsed to the ground.

Koro ran down the street. "Something's wrong."

# A Week To Remember



# ***A WEEK TO REMEMBER***

***BY SAMANTHA JOHNSON***

Hi, my name is Teresa Davenport. I live in a sleepy little beach town named Clearwater in the southern part of Florida. It's a nice town and all but it's rather dull and quiet. I live with my parents, who work all of the time so I get to spend a lot of time with my grandma who lives just a few blocks away. My cousins are currently visiting for the summer from Brooklyn, New York. Tonight is their last night with us before they head back home and we are celebrating with a family barbeque in our backyard. We are all making hot dogs and s'mores. My cousins and I are begging to go to the beach later. My Dad said, "sure" but mom said, "No" and gave dad a look that clearly said "REALLY?"

"Why mom, why can't we go to the beach" I asked? "Teresa, you know that it's not safe on the beach at night. Sorry but the answer is still no", said mom. "Fine" I said with all hope of playing in the sand gone. Around 10:00 pm the rest of the family began to leave. As we said our goodbyes, I noticed that there was something in the pool. A bit startled, I said, "Mom, Dad I need your help! There is a crab stuck in the pool!". They quickly came over with the pool net and mom said, "that is no ordinary crab. That is a European Green Crab!" Mom knows this because she is a marine biologist. A marine biologist is a scientist who studies animals that live in the water. Mom ran back into the house and grabbed her phone and a plastic box from work. She came back to the pool and put the box gently into the water. Around 3 minutes later the crab swam into the box. Mom trapped him and rushed to the bathroom without saying a word. She called her office and one of her interns came over and took the crab to the sanctuary.

After all the commotion was over we finally got to bed. My dad said to me in the morning, "That was quite a night! I will tell you that". Mom had gone to work early that morning to observe the crab. Dad said she wouldn't be home until dinner tonight. As I sat down, dad placed a plate in front of me that had a waffle with fruit and powdered sugar on it. To wash it all down I had fresh squeezed orange juice. Later that afternoon while I was reading a book called "The Magic Academy" I heard a car pull up in the



driveway. I thought it was mom's car so I ran down the stairs and surprisingly found someone else. As I raced down the stairs I realized that the car was a cool blue jeep belonging to my Aunt Jessie and Uncle Bill.

Dad went to open the door, and I went to grab my book because all they ever do is talk about the news. Before I could get back up the stairs dad called me into the kitchen. "What is it dad?" I asked. Everyone looked so sad. Dad said to me "Honey we have some bad news". "What is it dad?" I asked nervously. "Well, mom had an incident at work with a puffer fish and has been taken to the hospital." dad said. "Can we go see her?" I asked, feeling very concerned. "Of course", said dad.

We got in the car and went to the hospital. When we got to the hospital we went to the front desk and the nurse said "may I help you?". "We would like to see Amy Davenport," my dad told the nurse. We were shocked with what the nurse said next. "I am sorry to tell you this but Mrs. Davenport went into surgery about twenty minutes ago", said the nurse. "What? Why?, I heard myself say with tears in my eyes. "It appears there were some spike marks on her wrist which caused a serious infection", the nurse said calmly. "When can we see her?" said dad. "If all goes well you can take her home tomorrow afternoon." said the nurse. "Ok, so we can take her home tomorrow. That's not so bad," I said relieved.

"You are welcome to stay until she is out of surgery in a few hours", the nurse said, leading us to the waiting area. "What do you say dad? Can we stay?", I begged. "I don't know", dad said hesitantly. "Please dad!," I pleaded. "Well, we can but as soon as we know mom is out of surgery and resting well we will go home until tomorrow", said dad. "Fine with me and probably best too", I said agreeingly. The nurse showed us to the waiting room and said, "Have a seat. The vending machines are down the hall and someone will let you know when your wife is out of surgery."

About 2 and a half hours later we heard mom was ok and that we could see her. The nurse showed us to the room that mom was in and said, "You have an hour till visiting hours are over." As we entered the room dad said to me, "You have to be quiet with your mother. Ok?" "Yes dad," I said agreeingly. As we continued into her room we noticed mom's room was very nice. It even had a couch against the left wall and a t.v above the bed.



“Hello honey”, said mom wearily. “How do you feel mom? Are you ok?”, I asked. “Thank you for the concern but I am fine, really”, said mom reassuringly. “Are you sure mom?”, I said, not really believing her. “Yes honey I am sure, but on the other hand how are you and your father doing?”, mom asked with a concerned look on her face. “We are fine. Are you happy you can go home with us tomorrow?”, I asked happily. “Of course I am very happy to be going home with you tomorrow. Thankfully this was not a more serious issue”, mom stated.

The very next afternoon mom was ready to go home. When we got to the car mom decided to sit in the back with me because her head hurt. We got home and dad and I made dinner while mom rested. We all went to bed early still tired from all of the excitement from the last two days. We aren’t used to so much excitement happening in our sleepy little town. Little did we know, the excitement was just beginning.

“How are you doing?”, I asked mom at breakfast. “I feel fine and I have been cleared to go back to work”, mom said happily. “I’m looking forward to further examining the European Green Crab and finding out how he got here”, mom said as she finished her coffee. A little later, dad came sleepily walking into the kitchen and poured a cup of coffee. “Hi dad, how are you?”, I asked. “I am good other than the fact that I slept in too late”, dad responded. After about 20 minutes dad wished us farewell and went to work.

At 8:45am mom and I got into the car and headed to grandma’s house. Grandma always watches me when mom and dad are at work. “I will pick you up around 4:00 this afternoon”, mom said as she got back to the car and grandma and I waved goodbye. After grandma and I went back into the house we decided to play cards. “The weather is a bit humid wouldn’t you say Teresa?”, grandma asked me as we had lunch. “I guess so grandma”, I responded. After lunch grandma and I were listening to the radio and all of a sudden the emergency weather station kicked on and said “a level 3 tornado is heading towards your area. Please seek shelter immediately for safety purposes” and that was when the message cutout.

I looked at grandma as she quickly began to grab blankets and the emergency kit filled with food and supplies. “Grandma are dad and mom going to be ok?” I asked, horrified. “I’m sure they heard the tornado warning too and they should be safe, no need

to worry”, grandma said reassuringly. A few moments later, grandma and I ran outside to get to the shelter. The wind was blowing harder than I could have ever imagined. I was shocked to see trash cans and patio furniture swirling about. Over the wind I heard grandma say, “Dear head down the stairs and ...” but grandma didn’t have the chance to finish what she was saying because she lost her balance and slipped down the stairs and landed on her backside. “GRANDMA!!!!”, I shouted. “Are you ok”, I shouted as I ran down the stairs to her. “I am fine dear don’t worry”, grandma said. I didn’t believe grandma but she was a tough old girl and could handle a few little bumps and bruises.

As grandma and I got settled in the shelter I couldn’t help but worry about my parents. Suddenly, the shelter door swung open. In a panic, I dashed to close it but grandma was closer. The wind was harsh and grandma was still a little dazed from her fall. Grandma shouted, “I got it dear the storm is getting closer, get down and stay down!” As Grandma was shutting the door the wind swept her out of sight. In horror, I screamed and my eyes filled with tears. I was so surprised and scared I couldn’t move.

When I finally composed myself it was abundantly clear that I needed to take action to rescue my grandma. I needed to come up with a plan and fast. I was starving, trembling, and worried to death, not to mention I was alone. The sound of falling power lines and breaking glass was over so I decided to go out and look for my grandma after I quickly gathered some supplies. I grabbed a flashlight, the first aid kit and my coat. I gathered up my courage and tried to open the door to find it was blocked by a big fallen branch. Using all my might I was able to get the door open just wide enough to squeeze through. Everything was a mess and almost unrecognizable.

“Grandma! Grandma! Where are you? Are you here?” I shouted as loud as I could. I didn’t hear any response, not even a moan. I headed down main street and found that the roads were covered with tree limbs and shingles. I carefully ran down the road trying to avoid getting hurt. I noticed that the McCrory family was outside trying to push a rather large tree limb off of their car. I ran to them and asked in a panicked voice, “have any of you seen my grandma? She got pulled out of the shelter by the tornado and I can’t find her.” The McCrory family all gasped in horror! “That’s terribly dreadful! I hope she’s okay,” Rebeca McCrory responded. They offered to help and we



decided to split up to cover as much ground as possible. Sydney and her dad headed downtown toward the church and Rebeca and I headed towards my house.

As we carefully walked down the sidewalk shining the flashlight ahead of us we heard a dog barking and whimpering. We followed the sound and found a large black dog and a small boy sopping wet and crying. As we ran over to them we stopped abruptly when the dog turned towards us and bared his teeth. "Calm down Spot" the boy reassured the dog as he patted the dog's head. The dog calmed down and allowed us to get close enough to see that he had an injured back leg. Thankfully, Rebeca is an experienced veterinarian and knew just what to do. She decided to take the dog back to her house to get him cleaned up before heading to the animal hospital. The little boy joyfully thanked her and ran as fast as he could to get his parents so they could all meet at the hospital.

I, however, was determined to continue searching for my grandma and headed on towards my house. Rebeca didn't want me to go on alone but I insisted that I would be fine. I knew my house was only a few blocks away but as the sun began to set on our storm damaged town I couldn't help but feel a chill down my spine. I walked timidly up the last muddy hill that was between me and my house. When I reached the top of the hill I saw my house. It was not damaged surprisingly other than some shingles were missing. Suddenly, I heard a strange noise that made me jump. As I landed on the ground I slipped on a slick puddle of mudd. Screaming in shock I flailed my arms about trying to grab onto something, anything that would save me from tumbling painfully to the bottom of the hill. I managed to grab onto a small tree. Thinking the ordeal was over I sighed with relief. Unfortunately, a moment later the small tree became uprooted, which meant my uncomfortable journey down the hill continued.

As I finally reached the bottom, I felt a jolt of pain rising from my left leg. I looked down to see a gash below my knee. I was covered head to toe with mud and leaves. I knew that I needed to get inside and get cleaned up. I hobbled as fast as I could up the front steps and lifted up the welcome mat to get the key to the front door. As the door swung open I reached for the light switch hoping that the lights would come on. Thankfully, the lights came on so I could see where I was going. As I was just about to

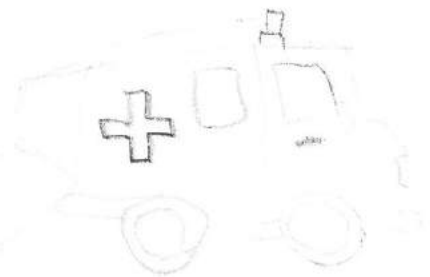


close the door I saw a familiar looking car hastily turn into the driveway. It was my mom's car!

Mom and dad, both came rushing up the stairs towards me with worried expressions on their faces. Dad looked panicked, and mom asked me what happened and why I was not with grandma. I started to cry as I began to explain the situation. Dad scooped me up and rushed me to the car with mom close behind. Mom sat in the back with me holding a towel over my leg while dad rushed us to the hospital. "What about grandma?" I asked. "We can't just give up looking for her!" I said strongly. "We can look for her later, and we have already called the police." mom said convincingly. I sighed in defeat. As dad pulled into the busy and crowded hospital parking lot mom began to help me up out of the car. While the hospital workers rolled out a wheelchair mom and dad assured me that everything was going to be alright.

As we entered the hospital I saw so many people. Injured people filled every chair and nurses hurried from patient to patient assessing their conditions and providing reassurance. I was rushed to a treatment room because my leg was bleeding so severely I needed a blood transfusion as soon as possible. My parents were told to stay in the waiting room and they reluctantly agreed, not entirely thrilled with the idea. Once I was away from all of the excitement and able to catch my breath I realized how painful the cut on my leg really was. It hurt so bad I thought I was going to throw up. Thankfully, the nurse gave me some painkillers and numbed the area to prepare for stitches. Even though my leg hurt really bad I can't help but worry about my grandma. I hope she is alright and we can find her soon.

The doctors and nurses worked fast and before I knew it I was being moved to my room with my parents following behind. The waiting area was still crowded and busy and I was glad to be headed away from the chaos. As they rolled me to the elevator I heard the nurse say, "We are going to have your daughter in a double room with another female patient because all of the single rooms are full." The conversation continued in the elevator but I didn't listen. I couldn't help but think about my grandma and how she could be suffering somewhere needing help. The elevator doors opened with a ding that startled me out of my trance and back to reality.

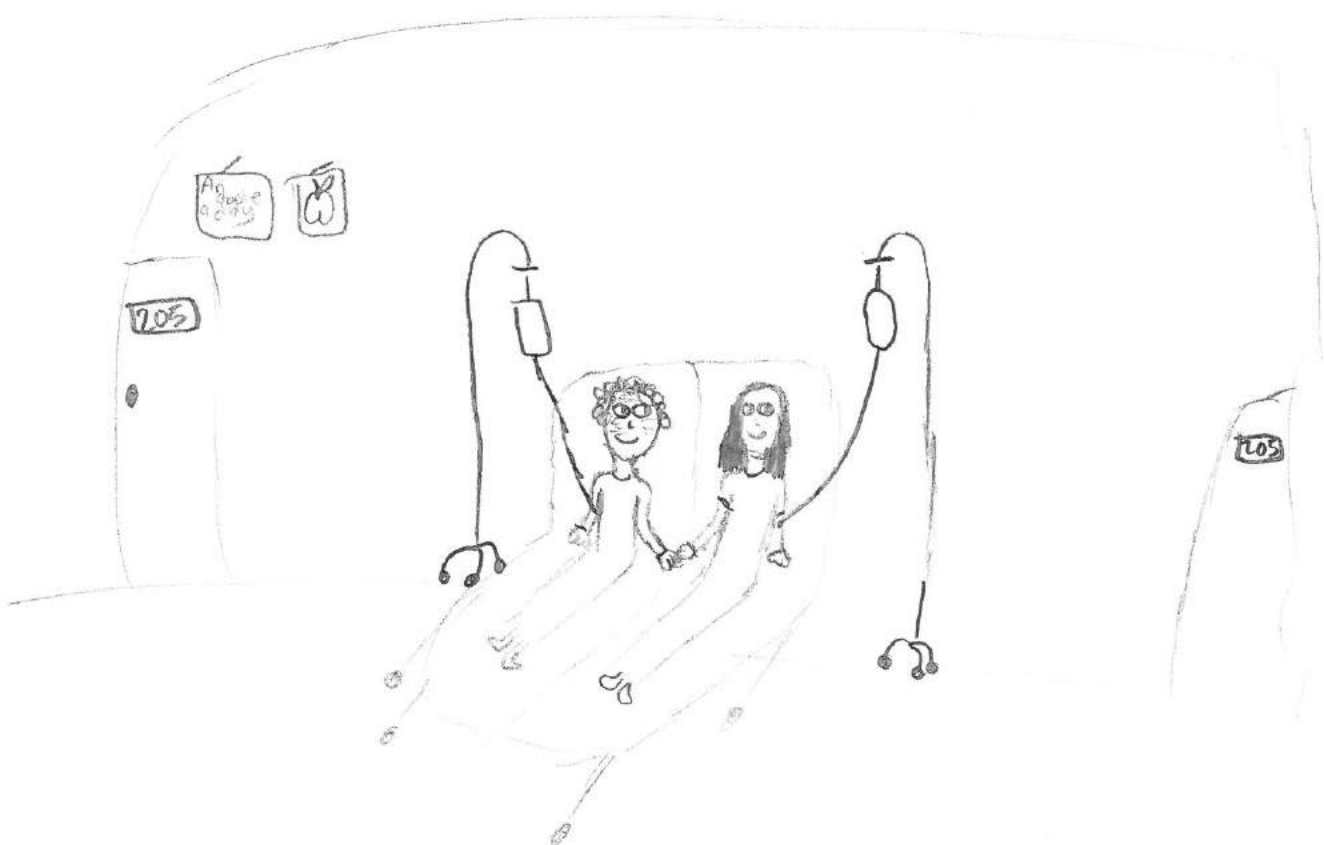




My room was half way down the hall. The curtain was drawn between my bed and the other patient's bed but I could hear heavy breathing. We entered as quiet as possible trying not to disturb the lady in the next bed. As I got situated my parents asked the nurse to bring me something to eat. While we were waiting mom and dad filled me in on their search for grandma. Dad had checked in with the police again while my mom called Mr. McCrory. Unfortunately, no one has been able to find her. When the nurse came back I was starving and scarfed down the mashed potatoes and jello. When the nurse brought in the food for my neighbor she pushed the curtain aside and my mouth dropped open. Mom and dad couldn't believe their eyes either. The woman in the next bed was my grandma! She has a broken arm, a boot on her foot and lots of cuts and bruises but she is alive and HERE!

Our cheers and shouts of joy started grandma awake. Grandma was thrilled to see us but when she realized I was hurt she began to cry. "Teresa, what happened to you dear? Are you ok?" Grandma said frantically. "I'm fine now grandma just a little cut." I said. Mom stepped forward cautiously and asked, "how on earth did you end up here? Everyone has been looking for you all over town." Grandma replied by saying, "I was being pulled by the tornado then all of a sudden it stopped and I was falling. As I got closer to the ground I noticed that there was a trampoline under me so I landed on that and then the people living there brought me here."

"The important thing is that we are all together again." Dad said lovingly. As grandma and I rested mom and dad called around letting everyone know that we found Grandma and how much we appreciated the help. A few days later we were heading home with grandma and happy to be united once again. Months later everything was back to normal. Grandma and I were playing cards like we always do enjoying the quiet. Remember at the beginning of the story when I said, "a sleepy little beach town?" Well that has changed forever.



THE END

# Christmas chaos

By Piper Symons and Emilee Grafe

One morning, in a small town in Alabama, there was a boy named Oliver and his sister Sophia. Oliver and Sophia were the best of friends, the only thing that was different about them was their age. Oliver was 12 years old and Sophia was 9. Both of them loved adventures. They always went on adventures in the lush forest behind their house. One time they went on an adventure and they found a bird. It was a very big, canary yellow bird so they decided to follow it. While they were following the bird they realized that the bird was going pretty deep in the thick forest. Sophia started to get worried but Oliver wanted to keep going. They followed the bird until it came to a stop near a small cave with a stone door. Sophia noticed strange lettering on the door. The bird started to chirp, then tweet, and finally it gave out a loud squawk! The stone door rolled open and the bird went inside. Oliver wanted to go inside but he knew it might be dangerous to go in a cave without any safety gear or any light source. Sophia was scared also so they waited til morning.

The next morning they looked for the bird again and they saw it perched on the rock. It was almost in the exact spot it was positioned the day before. It seemed to be waiting for them. They were prepared this time with flashlights and helmets in their raggedy old backpack. The stone door rolled open, and once again Sophia and Oliver were both hesitant. Oliver bravely went in first and Sophia followed. As they were walking forward it was pitch black so they turned on their lights. They went a little further in and felt a strong pressure hitting their bodies. They then saw colors spinning and felt a cold shivery sensation. Then they saw it. The siblings had found the land of Holiday Havoc. They stood there in amazement for a great period of time until Sophia mumbled, "What is this place?" Then an oddly squeaky voice below them said, "This is the town of Holiday Havok. And I'm the bird you followed. I'm actually the messenger bird but people call me Stanley. I came to your world to bring you back here. Lately there has been more havok than usual."

"Hold on, why is there havok at all?" interrupted Oliver.

"There is havok here because not long ago Santa wanted to start Christmas in November. This is problematic because in November is Thanksgiving and nobody likes it when you skip Thanksgiving, because Thanksgiving is a holiday for having a big feast. And that's why there has been so much havok here lately. That is also why I need you guys", replied the bird.

"What can we do to help?" asked Oliver.

"Well, you need to go and have a talk with Santa," explained Stanley.

"Why did you pick us over 7 billion other people in the world?" questioned Sophia.

"Well, because you love adventures and I knew you would not let a very important adventure go to waste", the bird said matter of factly.

"Okay that makes sense", said Sophia and Oliver simultaneously.

They made their way into the world of Christmas to find Santa. They passed through all of the holidays as they went to start their adventure; including the land of New Years, Valentines Day, Easter, 4th of July, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and finally they made it to the land of Christmas. They went exactly where the bird told them to go. The bird said to go left to find Santa's workshop, so they went left and soon enough they found it. They knocked on the door and standing there was....Mrs.Claus? "What was Mrs.Claus doing in Santa's workshop?" asked Sophia. "I don't know but we need to find Santa", said Oliver. They asked her where Santa was and she said she couldn't find him either, and explained that's why she was there. "So Santa is missing?" asked Sophia. "I guess" said Oliver. They offered to help look for him. "Of course" said Mrs.Claus. So they followed Mrs.Claus to Santa's bedroom. They slowly opened the door and said "Santa?....Santa? Are you there?" There was no answer. So they looked around the house...first the bedrooms, then the living room, and finally the kitchen. But still no Santa. "Where could he be?" Oliver asked. "I don't know, but we can't give up yet", said Mrs.Claus.

They continued to check all around the house and outside but, again, they still could not locate him. Suddenly, Mrs.Claus remembered they had not checked the laundry room so she went to look but he also was not there. They continued to look in the elves' workshop. First Mrs.Claus asked the elves if they had



seen Santa at all today, but they said no. There are only a few more places to check. There is Santa's garage where he keeps his sleigh, Candy Cane Lane, and the reindeer stables. "I want to go to Candy Cane Lane first!" shouted Sophia. So they continued on to Candy Cane Lane. About half way there Oliver asked what Candy Cane Lane was. Mrs.Claus said it was the path to get to the land of Thanksgiving and he may be somewhere on the path. They finally made it to the end but they didn't find him so they turned around. Oliver suggested they go to Santa's garage next. Once they got there they checked everywhere and even under Santa's sleigh. But he still wasn't there. Then Mrs.Claus said "The last place he could possibly be is in the reindeer stables." So they went to the reindeer stables thinking Santa wouldn't be there either and that it was impossible to find him.

They tiredly looked all around. Then they heard a noise. "Santa?!" Mrs.Claus walked over to Santa and told him they had been looking for him and were very worried. She asked why he was hiding. Santa said he overheard a few people arguing about Christmas being in November. "Well I really think you should just keep Christmas in December, it would be easier that way." said Sophia. "But I want a change, you know it's been pretty boring. I've been doing the same thing every year for thousands of years. I've always loved the colorful leaves, and not having to wear a thick jacket", said Santa in a sad voice. Then Oliver said "but all the boys and girls would be so sad if you changed your holiday. And don't you love the snow and your sleigh and your reindeer and the elves and all of the cookies and milk?" They stood there in silence for a moment and just then Santa's frown turned upside down. "I LOVE MY HOLIDAY", he proclaimed. Oliver and Sophia were both happy they convinced Santa to keep Christmas in December. They thanked Mrs.Claus for helping them find Santa. They decided to depart the land of Holiday Havok and make their way out of the forest and onward to their house. Arriving home, the holiday messenger bird was sitting on the rock. It asked them if they had completed their adventure and they both proudly reported, "yes!" and thanked the bird for such a great mission. Finally, they headed inside to eat dinner. "That adventure felt like a whole week," said Sophia. They both grinned and laughed.

THE END



# Destiny

Written by Addisyn Ward

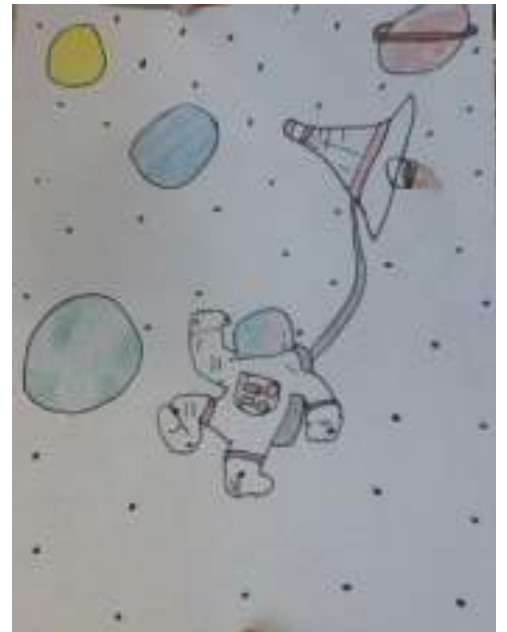
Illustrated by Natalie Renicker

Stella Wander, a high school senior at the Canton South high school, is about to graduate but she doesn't know what she wants to do. She is the only one who doesn't have their life all figured out. All of her friends already know what they are going to be when they grow up. Like her friend Amanda, she is going to Kent State University. Amanda is going there to become a teacher. Her friend Cassidy is going to be an astronomer and study stars for a living. Then you have Stella, who has no idea what she wants to be, she doesn't even know what she is going to have for dinner.

That night when Stella got home she told her mom her problem. "Honey it will be fine." her mom said, "You still have one month until you graduate." "But that's the problem." Stella pleaded, "I only have one month to figure out what I want to do for a living." "Just go get a good night's rest and I'm sure you will think of something tomorrow." Stella's mom suggested.

The next day was even worse, Stella was split between being a teacher or being an astronaut. Stella loved outer space. She loved all of the planets. Stella got so intrigued when her teacher talked about space and all of the planets in the solar system, but she was too afraid to tell her friends. She thought they would make fun of her because that was something little kids dreamed about doing like going to outer space. But, Stella also didn't like the idea of coming to school everyday and teaching kids about stuff that she already knew. Stella was torn. Stella felt the pressure to be a teacher because she wanted to fit in. Being a teacher was a common job that everyone was doing. But an astronaut wasn't.

It was Friday and Stella was ready for the week to be over. She went into class, and the announcements came on. "Today all seniors will be going on a field trip to the museum. Where you will see skeletons that archaeologists dug up and different kinds of minerals and rocks. You will also get to learn about planets and go to a planetarium." Stella's face lit up. "A planetarium, that sounds amazing. Getting to see all of those stars, planets, and constellations." When it was time to go, all of the seniors got on the bus and went to the museum. When they got to their destination, Stella ran off the bus and into the museum. The seniors went into the museum and the teacher reviewed their schedule.



**“First, we’ll go to the fossils exhibit, then we’ll go to the minerals exhibit, and finally we’ll go to the planetarium and the planets exhibit.”**

**They went to the first exhibit on their list. Their guide started telling them about how archaeologists found fossils of animals that were extinct. While the guide was talking about fossils, Stella wasn’t listening. She thought it was pretty boring to listen to people talk about stuff she could find out for herself. Then the guide took them to the next exhibit, which was about minerals. This time when the guide was teaching about different kinds of minerals, Stella completely zoned out! The guide asked Stella a question and it startled her. She didn’t know the answer so she just stayed quiet and listened to the rest of the lesson. Finally, they went to the planet’s exhibit, and this time Stella listened the whole time. She was so fascinated by all of the planets and all the things that she didn’t know about those planets. They went into the planetarium and Stella was so amazed that when the guide asked if they knew the names of the constellations, Stella shouted out all of them.**

**After the seniors were done with all of the exhibits, they went out to the bus and left the museum. When Stella got home from school, she told her dad about all the fun she had at the museum. All she talked about was the planet’s exhibit and the planetarium. She didn’t say a word about the fossils exhibit or the minerals exhibit. “You seem to love learning about all of the planets and outer space so why not be an astronaut like you wanted?” Stella’s father asked. “I just don’t know if-” Stella’s father cut her off. “I bet you that if you grow up to be an astronaut then you won’t regret anything.”**

**And he was right, Stella grew up to be an astronaut. Like her father had said, she didn’t regret anything. Even her friends were wishing they had thought about being an astronaut. They thought it was so cool that Stella could go into outer space and see all of the planets they learned about in school. She made many friends as an astronaut. Stella was satisfied because she lived her dream and knew that one day when she had kids of her own she hoped they would follow their dreams just as she did.**



# Empty Sheep's Origin Story

Written by: Brooke Inboden  
Illustrated by: Elsee Koury

There once was a sheep. He was tired of the same old same old on the farm every day. Every morning the rooster crows, the farmer shows up at the barn, he opens the pasture gate and the sheep mosey out into the field. The sheep wander aimlessly around the field chewing clumps of grass until the sun starts to set and Shep, the sheep dog, comes to herd them back to the barn. They settle in for sleep knowing they will start the same routine again tomorrow. Empty Sheep wants more.





Empty Sheep went out into the pasture that morning with a mission. He went up to the cows and asked, "What do you do on the farm all day?" The cow replied between bites of grass, "We eat the grass." "Don't you ever get bored or wish for a purpose?" Empty Sheep asked. "Eating the grass helps us provide milk for the farmer. That's our purpose."





He went to the next animal who happened to be the horse. "Horse, do you feel like you have a purpose on the farm?" He asked. "Sure, I work hard for the farmer every day. I help him plow his field, I haul supplies and carry the farmer around the farm." Empty Sheep walked away feeling like he was the only one without a purpose.



Empty Sheep headed towards the pig pen. "Pig do you ever get bored rolling in the mud all day? Don't you wish you could do something to help out on the farm?" "I do help out on the farm, it's hard work eating all the family's leftover scraps. I roll in the mud to cool off after my hard work." Empty Sheep walked away disgusted, even a pig has a job on the farm.





Empty Sheep went back out to join the other sheep in the pasture feeling completely forlorn. Shep noticed that something seemed to be upsetting Empty Sheep. Shep went over to check on Empty Sheep, "Empty Sheep what seems to be the problem?" "I'm just starting to feel so empty. After talking to all the other animals it seems everybody on the farm has a purpose except me." "What do you mean Empty Sheep, everybody on the farm has a purpose. My purpose is to protect all the sheep and keep you safe. Your purpose is eating grass so your wool will grow nice and thick so that you can provide warm thick wool to the family." Empty Sheep felt hopeful for the first time in weeks!



The next day, Shep noticed that Empty Sheep was eager to be let out to pasture and that he walked with more pride. Empty Sheep said "I know what my purpose is! Everyone has an important role in life and knowing yours can make all the difference!"



# About the Author

Brooke Inboden is 10 years old. She enjoys drawing, writing, reading and playing games. She goes to Tusky Valley middle school. Her favorite subject is science. She loves animals. She enjoys watching anime. She has two siblings, a brother and sister. She is in 5th grade. She grew up in Bolivar Ohio.

# About the Illustrator

Elsee Koury is 11 years old. She goes to Tusky Valley Middle School. She is in 5th grade. She grew up in Bolivar Ohio. She has 3 pets. She plays a lot of video games. She likes to read and write. She watches a lot of TV. She is an all A Student. She is athletic. In 3rd grade the idea of "Empty Sheep" came to us.



# Finding Your Pack

Written By Claire Corder

Illustrated By Nicole Knous



# Forward

Amare lived in Algeria, Africa and Amber lived in Mauritania, Africa. They are African Wild Dogs. The African Wild Dog is an endangered species and there are very few left. Farmers often will hunt the dogs in fear for their livestock. African Wild Dogs are also very social and they live and hunt in packs.



## Amber

It was a great first hunt for me and I was looking forward to the next. Overall, the hunt had gone really well. We caught an antelope, our favorite food. The pups of our pack wriggled with delight when we got back to the den. Some of the adults walked to the pups as the pups squirmed excitedly. I could almost remember those days, when I had been just like those pups, always eager to fill my hungry stomach. Now, I am older and helping hunt for my pack. I held my head high with pride, knowing that I had helped my pack delay hunger another day. After feeding the pups, the adults retreated to rest. Of course, one adult stayed wide awake to watch for trouble.

## Amare

What a day it had been! It was my first hunt and of course, I didn't want to go. I preferred to stay behind and explore but then, of course, helping to hunt is one of my responsibilities. Since my parents forced me to go, I didn't try very hard, so the hunt was unsuccessful. We were reduced to looking for scraps. When we returned to the den, the pups were really excited. They climbed on top of each other, fighting to be the first to eat. That made me feel guilty. Maybe if I had tried harder, the pups would have gotten food. Since we had been forced to look for scraps, all of the food had to go to the adults, so that we would have enough energy for the next day's hunt. As my pack settled down to rest, I decided that tomorrow, I would try harder.



## Amber

It was my second hunt and I was somewhat distracted. I had a strange dream the night before. I had dreamt that something was going to happen. I didn't know what, but I knew something bad was coming. I was hoping it was just a bad dream, but I highly doubted it. "Take your positions!" our lead hunter, Ekon, commanded and I snapped back to reality. We all got into our positions, which was a long line, and we started prowling towards the antelope herd. Then, Ekon started to run and the rest of us followed his lead, running as fast as our legs could carry us. The antelope herd started to bound away as we stayed on their tail. Soon, one of the young females began to lag behind the herd and she became our target. Our hunt line started to surround the young antelope. By the time she realized



what we were doing, she was surrounded. Then Ekon went in for the kill. Finally, we ate the delicious meat in silence. Another great hunt.

## Amare

I was holding my breath, hoping that we would be able to hunt something down today. The pups weren't very happy last night. That made me feel awful, but today is a new day and this is the day that I have a chance to catch my own food for the first time. I ran after that antelope as if my life depended on it, and maybe, in a way, it did.





## Amber

I was reliving my dream about something bad happening when I heard the warning call. All of a sudden, my whole pack was running around like furry whirlwinds. I saw something coming, but I couldn't quite place what it was. Then, I realized it was a group of farmers. They were coming for us! Often, farmers would think that we were going to chase their livestock. Then, they would hunt us. The area was in total chaos! It had taken our pack by surprise. We needed to run. The farmers were so close I could see their faces, covered in thick, leathery skin, weathered by the wind and sun of the savanna. I turned and ran as hard as I could run but I tripped and twisted my leg. I couldn't walk so I had to wriggle my way to a nearby bush. I hid there, nursing my hurt leg, hoping the farmers wouldn't find me.

## Amare

We were relaxing at the den after a good hunt when we saw a big, gray creature coming towards us! It looked very strange but we thought nothing of it. Then, the thing started to come closer and closer. The pups were yipping loudly and there was a hint of fear in it. The ground began to tremble underneath us. Trees fell everywhere. We realized that the huge monster was clearing land and it was going to clear our den! By the time we realized this, it was so close we could smell the thick smoke coming from it. My pack and I started to run every which way. Then, I heard a snarl that caused my blood to turn to ice. A pride of lions was coming towards us, using the confusion as a chance to attack my pack! I looked

around and saw that I was the only one that had seen them. Oh, no! One of the lions spotted me! She charged at me and I turned and ran. I ran, ran and ran even more for good measure just to make sure she wasn't still following me. Finally, I stopped. I was exhausted. I lay down and fell asleep.



## Amber

I stood and looked around. My pack was gone and I knew they were all gone for good. Even the pups. An invisible weight seemed to be hefted onto my shoulders when I realized that I was the last of my kind. This must have been what my dream had been trying to warn me about. It just seemed so unreal. I mean, I've always known that my pack was the last African Wild Dog pack and until now, I've been fine with it.

## Amare

I rose from where I had fallen asleep and looked around at my surroundings. There was no one in sight and I knew in my heart that my pack hadn't survived. Knowing that made my heart heavy, and when I realized that I was the last African Wild Dog, it got even heavier.



## Amber

I wasn't sure how I was going to get food because we African Wild Dogs hunt in packs. I ended up finding a carcass that the vultures hadn't picked clean. It wasn't much of a meal, but it was all I could find. I settled down to sleep with my stomach still not satisfied.

## Amare

I was so busy feeling bad for my pack, that I didn't realize how hungry I was. When I finally heard my stomach's growl , I went to search for something to eat. There were some carcasses that I had to pick off what little the other scavengers had left. It was not enough, but it was getting dark and I needed to get back to where I had been sleeping.

## Amber

Today was another day of searching for scraps of food. I don't like this new life, without a pack. I'm starting to see that I might not be able to survive and if I don't survive, African Wild Dogs will go extinct. Just thinking about it makes me shiver. The idea of it is unbearable. But how am I supposed to go on like this?

## Amare

When I awoke, I had a strange feeling. The feeling told me that I had to leave where I was and go south, so I did. I've been traveling all day now, only stopping to eat, drink and rest. I am not sleeping tonight because I need to get out of this area. I have to stay on guard because this is hyena territory. Hyenas will attack single African Wild Dogs.



## Amber

I still can't believe that my pack is gone. It seems so unreal. Losing my pack has totally turned my life upside down. Every time I wake up, I look around me expecting to see them. Why did this have to happen to me?

## Amare

I had the second most scary experience of my life. The first one, being when I lost my pack, and the second one is being attacked by a hyena! I was traveling south when a hyena suddenly came up behind me. "Dinner is served." he snarled. I jumped and started to run! He came up beside me and lunged to bite me but I dodged it. Then, I returned with my own attack, attempting to bite him. He dodged every blow except for the last one. The bite got him right on the leg and it surprised him, so he retreated, limping, and hanging his head. It was a small victory, but I knew that he would be back with even more hyenas and then I wouldn't have a chance, so I high tailed it out of there.





# Amber

I was laying and mourning for my pack when I suddenly thought I smelled an African Wild Dog coming from the north. I stood and pricked my ears. There certainly was something coming and I did smell African Wild Dog. It had to be one, but I didn't think that was possible. I'm the last, at least I thought so. I followed my nose toward the puzzling sent as it got stronger. It seemed like it was traveling towards me. It was as strong as ever as I climbed up a hill and when I reached the top, I couldn't believe my eyes.

# Amare

As I ran up a hill, a new smell hit me. It was so strong that I wondered how I had missed it before. Then, once I realized what the smell was, I stopped in my tracks. It smelled like an African Wild Dog was near. I slowly approached the top of the hill and when I got there, I froze.



## Amber

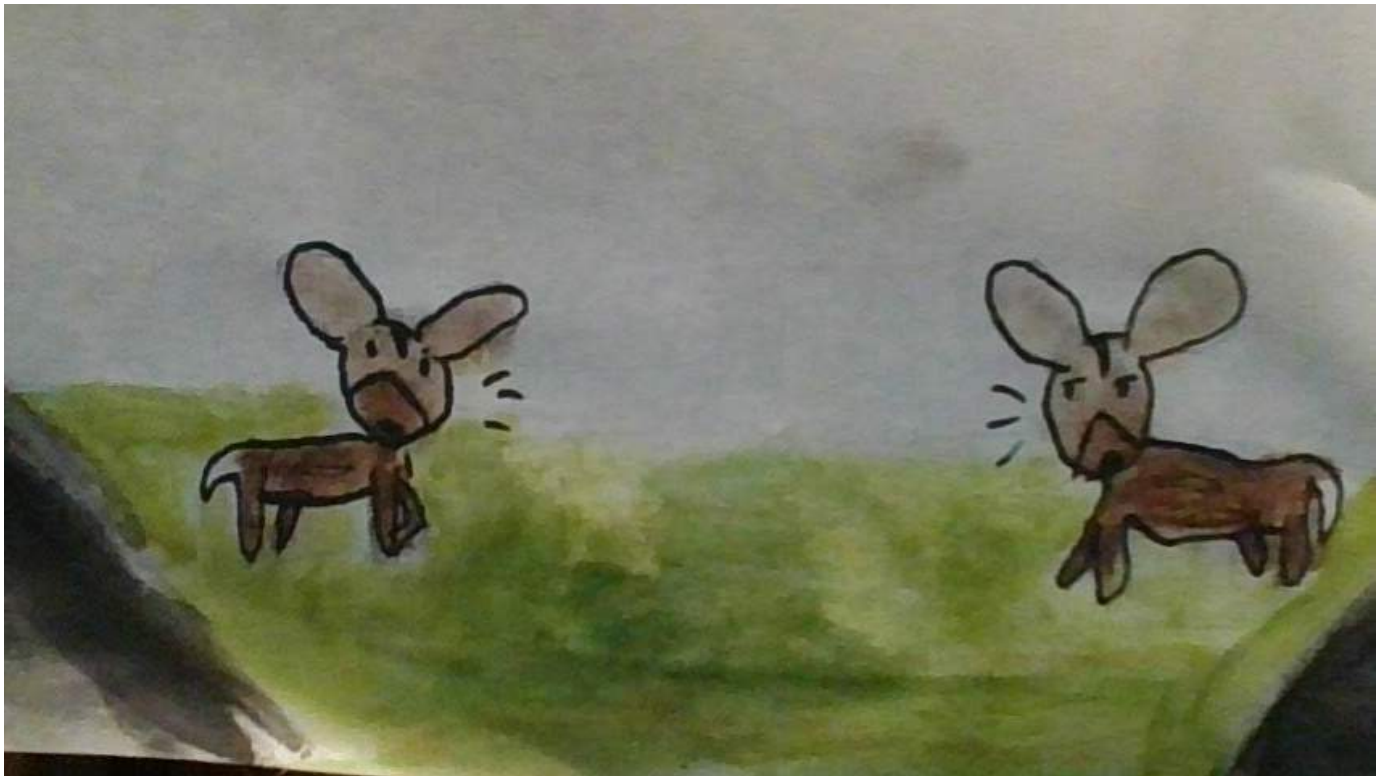
Standing on the other side of the valley was another African Wild Dog. I blinked. It couldn't be, but it was. I began to bound towards him in sheer joy! He seemed to be surprised to see me, but after he got over his shock, he started to come towards me.

## Amare

I saw an African Wild Dog standing on the other side of the valley. Soon, she started to come towards me and I did the same. When we met, we just stood there, staring at each other as if we were waiting to wake up from a dream, but it was real. I was not the last of my kind.

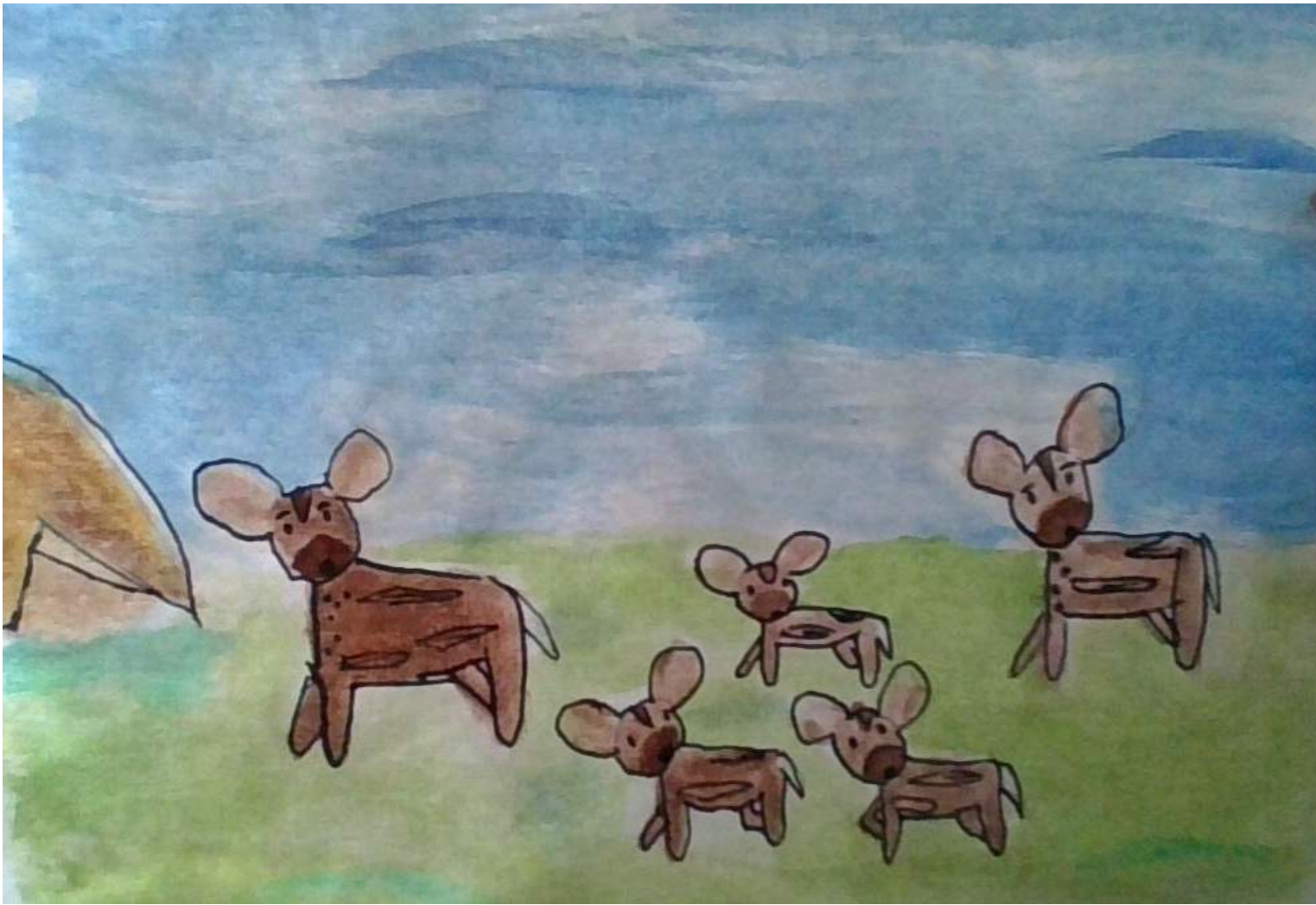
## Amber

When we met at the bottom of the valley, we just stared at each other for a while, not sure whether to believe it or not. Once our shock finally subsided, we whimpered at each other in true African Wild Dog fashion. "I thought I was the last." I said. "Me too." he replied. "I'm Amber." "My name is Amare." "I can't believe this!" I exclaimed. "Me either!" Amare agreed.



## Epilogue

Amber and Amare are now leaders of their own pack and are living an amazing life. They have a litter of pups and are raising them well. Good luck, Amber and Amare!





## Amber

I had a great life with my pack. A mother and father to love me, pup friends to play with, and plenty to eat. That is until it all went wrong.  
Horribly wrong.

## Amare

Everything was right in my world. I had family and friends. But one day that all changed, for worse.

Find out what happens in:

# Finding Your Pack

# Height

By: Gracie Penrod

Illustrated By: Alaina Jones

Hi! I'm Katie Laurence, I'm in 5th grade and already 5'4. It's kinda hard to make friends especially since we just moved. It's nerve racking to be starting a new school in Ohio, all I can think about is how many stares I will get or dirty looks. I just hope I can make it through the day.



Next morning..... okay first day of school I wonder what I should wear! I can't wear something fancy, nor something to bring out my height. I think i'll just wear some sweatpants and a cute shirt. The bus is here already!! I just got dressed, anyway I can not be late on my first day. Going on the bus was really awkward because everyone just looked at me surprised, so I just stared at the floor and sat in the back.

We arrived at school and everyone was just avoiding me and giving me these dirty looks all day. It didn't really bother me because I was used to it and my main priority was to just find my first period class. After a few of my classes was lunch, I sat alone, unsurprisingly, at the table closest to the smelly bathrooms. Sometimes I wish I could just be homeschooled instead or just move back to Maine.



It was the 3rd day of school and again I sat alone at the lunch table. Later after lunch I had science and we had to do a partner project. I hate group projects. I always get a nerd or the stinky kid, but this time it was different. I got partnered with the shortest girl in the grade!!! I went over to Ms. Rida's desk and begged her to just let me work alone, but she disagreed and told me it would be nice to make a new friend! It was so embarrassing my whole science class was laughing and giggling. Her name was Caroline Bozuko and let me tell you she is soooo short.

"Hi" I said nervously, she said hi back then she said, "If you want we can go to my house and do our work". I didn't know what to say so I just was like, " Uh sure!" I said with a stutter. There were so many things going through my head right now I couldn't even process it.



Later that afternoon, I went over to Caroline's house and we started on our project. It was really awkward at first, but then Caroline said, " You know a lot of people are talking about us being partnered." I just said, " Doesn't it bother you? I mean what people are saying." She hesitated for a moment and then she said, " Honestly no, because it's not that bad being short." "What about how everyone stares and makes fun?" I said confused. "It really doesn't bother me I love being short! For one, I can fit into small places. Which means I can always win a game of hide and seek" she said with so much confidence. At that moment I realized that her confidence is just what I needed.

When we were done working on our project I decided to ask Caroline if she would like to have lunch with me. " Aren't you worried people will stare?" she asked. " Like you said, who cares." I said with excitement! " Well then of course I will! " On the next day at lunch we sat together and you wouldn't believe how many dirty looks we got and how many people were laughing, but it didn't bother us one bit. We started having lunch together everyday and I soon came to realize that I never want to move again!

My name is Katie Laurence, I am in 5th grade and already 5'4. I have an awesome best friend named Caroline that is so supportive and inspiring! Yeah, we do get a lot of looks because afterall she is really short, but that doesn't matter to us. All that matters now is our friendship and self confidence!



This story is dedicated to anyone out there who feels insecure about their height or looks. I just wanted to let all of you know that it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks about you. You should love yourself for who you are! Instead of looking at the downsides in being tall or short, look for the things that you can do like if you're tall you can get items from the top shelf, you can probably run pretty fast too. Self confidence is key to being happy!





## Purpose

"Are we there yet?" "We'll be there the sooner you stop asking." Rubie's Mom replied. "UGH don't you know when to shut up Ruby?" That's 16 year old Kelly. Ruby's older sister. "Mom! She's being mean!" "Grow Up Ruby!" "Stop it, both of you or we're not getting a dog!" "Fine with me." "Be quiet and quit making smart remarks." Kelly stared out the window, watching every tree go by. She saw happy families playing outside. Her family was not a happy one. Her dad died in a car crash 3 months after Ruby was born. "Alright girls. We're here." Ruby darted out of the car and ran as fast as she could. Then they started looking for me. I'm Purpose their dog, but they don't know it yet.

"Aww look at this one! He's so cute! Look at this one! Mom can we get a Cat?" Ruby chattered on and on until she turned around, and saw me. I looked at her right in the eyes and wagged my tail. I rolled over trying to look cute. I had

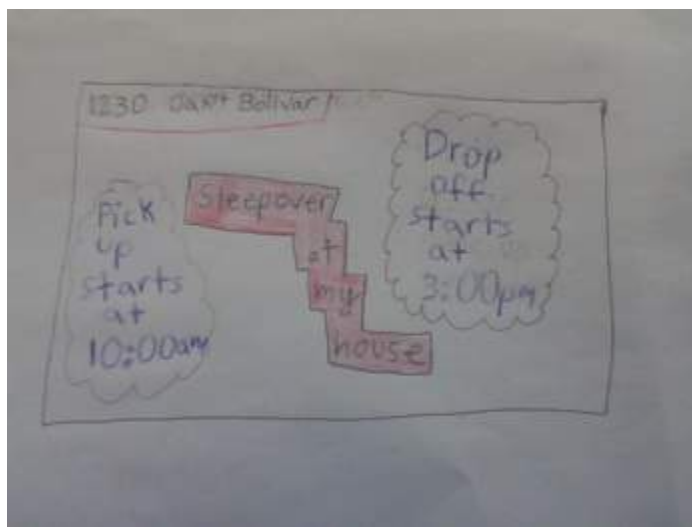
come from a home with several other Yorkshire Terriers, just like me. I had 6 brothers and 3 sisters. I had been the runt and my owner dumped me out! I was foraging on the streets, that is until these nice people found me. They picked me up and gave me food. Now when I see people come to this place, I know they're going to take one of us, and love us. "Mom! I know what dog I want!" "The stranger picked me up and carried me to another stranger. This was my chance! "I want this one! Look at his cute fuzzy face!" "Ok, Kelly is he fine with you?" "Yeah Whatever."



"I think I am going to name you Purpose because your purpose will be to snuggle with me and love me" "That sounds like a great name Ruby," replied Ruby's Mom.. "Are we going to the pet store to buy a collar for him?" "Sure Ruby."

"Look. At. The. Giant. Tortoise. Can we get him? Please?" Ruby begged. "No! of course not! They live for like 100 years and besides, I just got you a dog." Replied Rubies Mom "Fine."

"Alright girls go show Purpose the house I will get the mail." "Whatever. Don't think I have much of a choice." "Kelly. Behave. Ruby is really excited about Purpose so don't ruin her day. Understand?" "Because I totally had a choice." Replied Kelly sarcastically as she walked away." Then their mom heard a voice. Or at least she thought she did but she could have been going crazy. From this day on she could have sworn she heard her husband's voice saying, "I love you." She smiled and walked inside. "Ruby, your friend Louise has invited you to a sleepover this weekend." "Oh Boy!" Ruby replied excitedly. "I would love to go! Can I?" "Sure sweetie." "Yippee!" shouted Ruby. "Go to your room and start packing your bag." Rubie dashed up the stairs to her room. "So Purpose, it's just me and you then. Wanna play fetch? Good you can play by yourself then,"



said Kelly very rudely.

"Bye Mom. I'll miss you." "Love you sweetie." "Love you too." "So Kelly we are going to talk about your attitude" "Oh no." "Oh yes," said Kelly's Mom, giving Kelly the stink eye.

Kelly checked her texts one more time, pulled on her pajamas and laid down in her bed. She looked at the ceiling and thought about the talk she had with her Mom. Her thoughts then drifted to her dad. She remembered when she was five, her favorite memory with him. She had said a funny joke and his drink spit out of his nose and hit her Mom in the face. Mom was not happy Kelly thought. She then slowly closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep. Little did she know what was going to happen next.

"Alright girls bedtime" "But Mrs. Miller!" "No buts Louise." "I wonder how Purpose is? Should I call?" "No, I guarantee he is fine." Replied Louise's Mom.

Kelly suddenly awoke to a loud shrill bark. She looked beside her bed to see Purpose. He barked really loud this time. Kelly checked the clock 2:46 A.M. "Purpose, what do you want?" "ARF!" he barked really loudly. He then started tugging at Kelly's pajama pants. "WHAT COULD YOU POSSIBLY WANT AT THREE AM IN THE MORNING!" Kelly shrieked. Just before she could smack him he started running. Kelly started chasing after him. "GET BACK HERE!" She screamed. Then Purpose led

her into her Mom's room. She chased after him until he stood by a large outline on the floor but Kelly could not make out what the object was. She went and flipped on the lightswitch and stared in horror at what she saw. "Mom?"

"Do you remember when Monica fell off the slide and landed on her head?" "Yeah" replied Louise. "Do you guys want to go to bed now?" "Sure" muttered basically everyone. "Night" Louise got a few replies but most of the other kids had already fallen asleep.

"Mom? Come on wake up. Come on!" Kelly grunted in frustration. Then she thought, *what if mom isn't okay?* Kelly quickly ran to her room, grabbed her phone and dialed 911. "Hello this is 911. What is your emergency?" "Hi my name is Kelly and I think my mom just had a heart attack."





Kelly waited 15 minutes for the ambulance to arrive. When it did, the driver said she could come. But Kelly brought Purpose with her too.

When they arrived at the hospital, Kelly's mom was immediately taken to the emergency room. They asked Kelly for her mom's information.

An hour or two later Kelly's Mom woke up. "Mom!" Kelly said. "Mom." she cried. "Purpose told me something was wrong! If it wasn't for him you wouldn't be here!" Then softly Kelly's mom replied "Thank you Purpose."

# The Creepy Corn Maze

By Xavier Olbeter and Henry Dixon

Knock, knock, knock. Garold knocked on the door of Gary and Larry's house to go trick or treating. "Ready for trick or treating?" Garold says. "Yes!" Gary says, "I'm thinking of going to Michael's house for trick or treating first because they always give out king sized chocolate bars." "Great, let's go there." Said Larry. "I like your costume, Larry." Garold said as they were walking down the street. "We are finally here!" said Gary. "Wait a second, it's usually packed down here at this time of night." "But right now it looks like a ghost town!"



“Then how will we get our candy?” Said Garold. “Awww, but I really wanted those king sized candy bars.” Said Larry. “I know me too!” Said Garold. “I guess we should move onto the next town.” Said Garold. “Let’s hurry though because our parents said to be home by ten thirty.”

“Did you guys see that?” Said Gary as he trembled in fear. “Wait was he holding candy!?” “Yes, that looks like Michael’s dad.” Larry stated in excitement. “Let’s go ask if he has candy, maybe he has those giant sized candy bars we wanted.” presumed Garold. “Great idea!” So they walked over to the man.

“Why hello little boys, what are you guys doing here at this time?” Said the man in an ominous voice. “We saw you holding candy, so can we have some?” “Yes I am holding candy, but first you must enter my corn maze.” “Okay!” Said the three children as they followed him into the corn maze.



“Woah this is a big corn maze!” Larry mumbled under his breath. “No kidding, this is the biggest corn maze I have ever seen!” Screamed Garold. “It sure is. Now go find your candy.” Said the mystery man as he shoved them into the deep dark maze as it closed in.

He’s being really mean! Said Garold. “No kidding, he acts so mad that I feel like his head is gonna blow up any second now.” “It’s like he wants us to go in the maze.” I mean, it is for candy, right?” “Yes but he is really impatient. Should we go?” Questioned Garold “Of course we should go because there is candy involved! Said Gary as he licked his lips in excitement.\*maze closes in on them\* “I guess we have to go in right?” Said Larry in a frightened voice.

Once they started to walk in, they looked for the candy bars. “Let’s hurry because we really want those candy bars. And once again we need to be home by ten thirty.” Said Garold as he hid behind Gary. “I found the first candy bar! Horray!” Okay!!! “Wait how much did we need to find?” “He never told us how much there was.”

“Wait, I found a lantern!” Gary said in excitement as he picked it up.

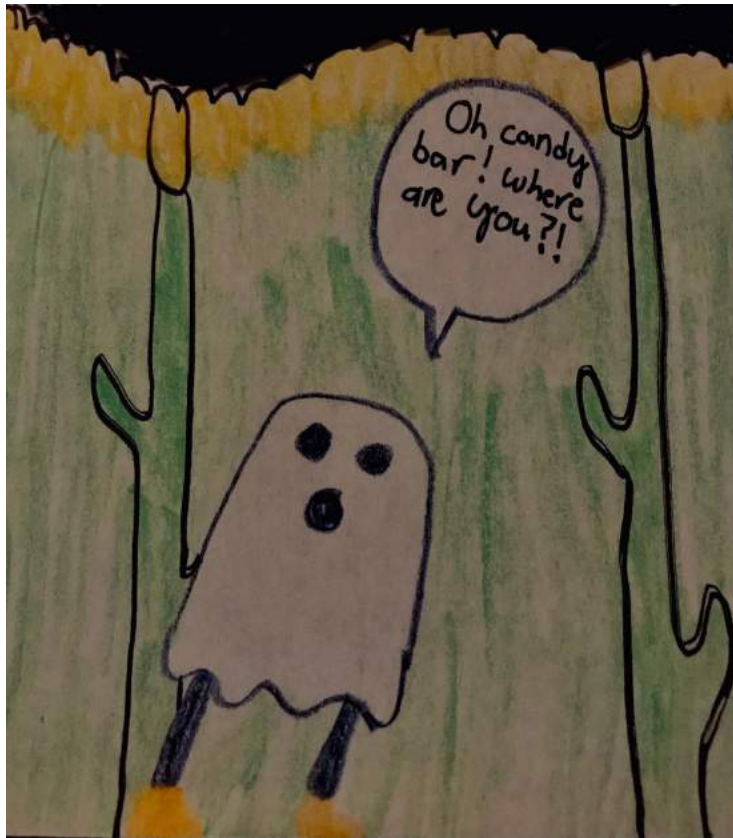


“It seems like there are a lot of different things around the maze to help us get to our candy bars.” “It’s like an escape room.” “I know right! It feels like I’m in my favorite escape movie and I’m the main character.” Said Garold. “That sounds cool, but I’m kind of scared and want to get out of here.” “And escape rooms usually get very dangerous in the movies.” “That’s exactly why I want to get out of here.” Said Lary in a shook tone.

“But can we please find one more candy bar?” “Sure, but we really need to get out of here. This is starting to make me very creeped out.” “Okay, we’ll split up.” “Gary, you find the candy bar and me and Larry will find the exit.” “When we find it, meet us in the middle of the maze. We will track our steps back to the exit.” “Okay!” Gary says in an exciting tone.



“Oh candy bar! Where are you?!” Gary says in a scared voice.

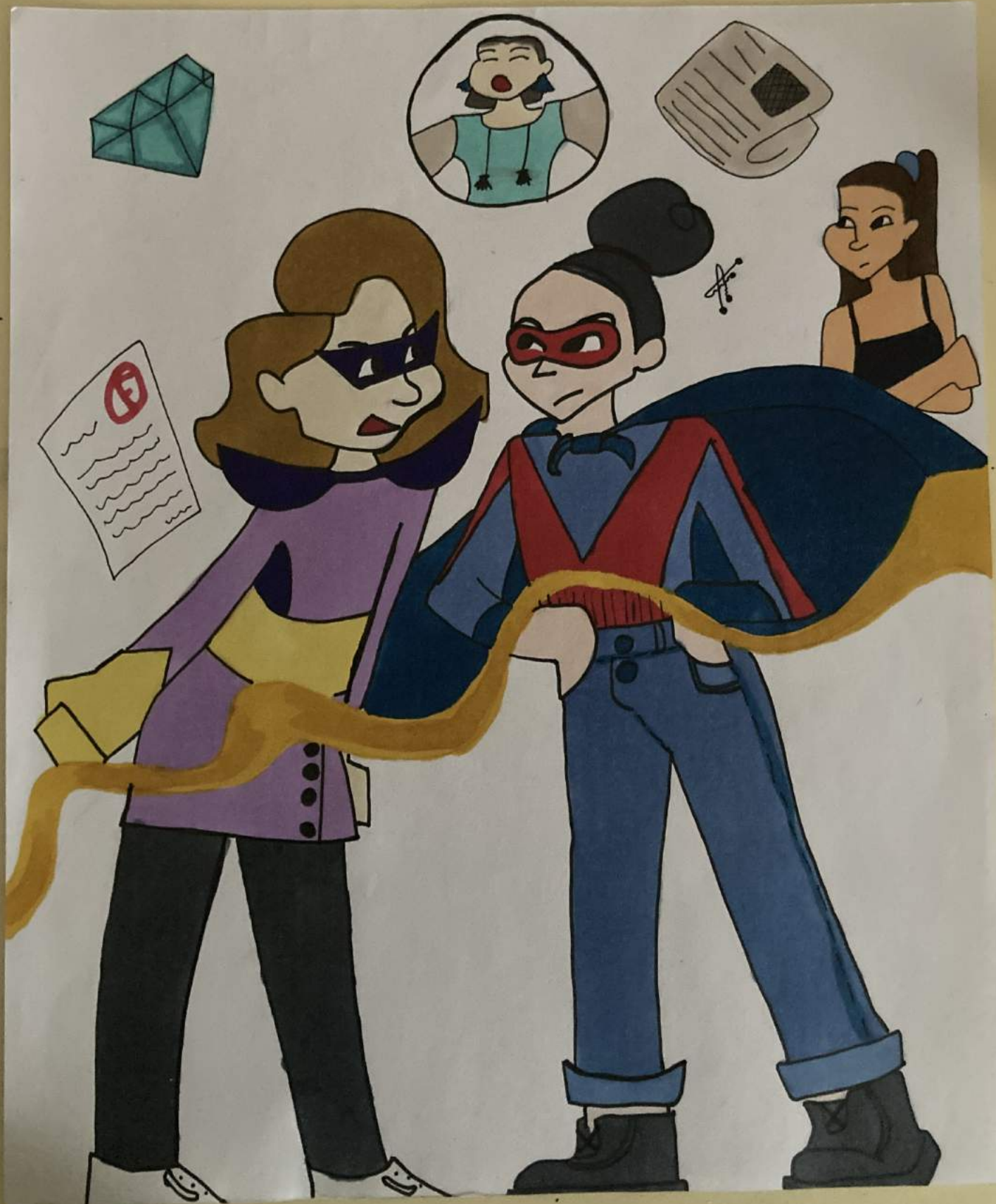


“I found two giant sized ones!!! I have to tell Larry and Garold”  
“Garold! Larry! Where did you go?” Then he heard a faint voice.  
Heeeeelp! That sounds like Larry! All of the sudden Gary hears  
footsteps and sees Garold running toward him. “We have to save  
Larry! He got captured by the mystery man!” Said Garold.

“We have to go take out the mystery man so we can save  
Larry!” “Good Idea!!” “There's his hideout!!! We can go there and  
find him! There he is!” You have to distract him Garold! Okay!” Said  
Garold.

“Chicken dance!!!” Says Garold “What are you doing you pathetic little child?” Says the Mystery man in a disturbing voice. “Run now Larry!” “Okay!” “Come on Garold! We have to get out!”

Then the three kids run home and tell their parents, and their parents call the cops on the mystery man. They later found him and arrested him, and he turned out to be a criminal that’s been on the loose for three years.



## A Villain's Best Friend

Streetlights illuminate the shiny pavement with dramatic intensity. What was more dramatic was the light creating dark shadows under the cheekbones of two masked men. One with a dark blue cape and bright red mask. His heroic stance gave him away. He was far out of his element. The man hostilely at his opposite was dressed in purple with sharp shoulder pads that mimicked his dark face mask. His villainous posture, the way he held himself gave him away. He was in his perfect element.

His voice almost hissed when he spoke.

"Tonight you're a household name."

The man with the cape looked over the newspaper held to his eyes. "No, what have you done? Why would you do this?"

The snake like voice returned "To ruin you. The whole town thought you to be the hero in our narrative. Now they know the truth."

"We had friendship once. There wasn't supposed to be a hero and there wasn't meant to be a villain between us, but sometimes we make ourselves into the bad guy."

The screen faded to black and credits rolled down the screen. The girls sat on the couch in shock and amusement. Their laughter shook away the silence.

Summer bounced and managed the words "That was T.V. drama at it's finest."  
Oakly surveyed the movie case. "Was that a really bad action or a really great comedy"

When the entertainment wore off the two faced each other, understanding that it was time to get serious.

"I'm worried about highschool. You know how concerned I am with people's impression of me. What if everyone's risen above my level?" Aspen's eyes widened. "Or worse what if they think that I think I've risen above them?!"

Summer's eyebrows raised. "You act like we're going back in the morning. We have like three months until school starts."

"That'll go by fast and I'd rather be hit with these thoughts now than the night before."

“Relax, what we should be worrying about is how I’m going to get through highschool. I’ve heard the rumors about the excessive detentions, the hours of homework, and the impossible tests. My grades were hanging on by a thread last year. I don’t know what I’m gonna do.” Aspen did relax, and she did take solace in the fact that the school season was in the distance. The pair put on another movie and prepared to breeze through the rest of the summer before their freshman year.

The morning came when dreadful students would put their feet on the floor to brush their teeth for another first day of school. When Aspen heard her alarm clock ring she did just that. She slumped in and out of the bathroom and dropped her robe at her closet, and reached for a sleek blazer, red top, and jeans. Her hair went up into a tight bun. She slid in one more bobby pin to keep it in place, and dropped down the stairs to eat breakfast, and hop into the car.

She allowed herself one more nervous breath until she calmly and swiftly opened the door to reveal a lobby full of children. Most of them were in groups, pairs, or clumps, but there were a few stragglers. To relieve her nervousness Aspen decided that the people leaning coolly against the wall with their head down were playing a random Iphone game, or texting their moms with shaky hands. Her eyes sweep the room and finally land on Summer. They held eye contact for a moment until their pride kicked in and jerked their heads away. Aspen was instead greeted by Oakley. A willowy brown haired girl with a pointed nose that kept her company for the end of summer.

When the bell rings students shuffle into their classes and almost suspiciously, Aspen observed put themselves into their seats. When the class settled and the teacher began her introduction Aspen’s mind wandered and landed on Summer. “A lot of nerve she had to wear the skirt she borrowed from me” she thought. She ran through their falling out in her head. She remembered when Summer began to distance herself, and just when Aspen began to suspect a problem between them she received a text that would confirm Aspen’s suspicions and separate them for the rest of the summer. When she turned her head to tune into class the teacher was beginning to dismiss the students and soon everyone popped out of their seats to the sound of the bell.

Aspen slowly walked into her second period. It was a club for the writing of the school newspaper. She looked over the room and when she noticed Summer’s dirty blonde hair she pressed her lips together and nodded her head. Under her breath she whispered to mother nature. “Yup, perfect timing. I hope you find this amusing”. Aspen saw the humor in the situation. It was as if it were staged, wonderfully just for her torment.

She swallowed her disbelief, and tried her best to sail into the classroom unphased. Aspen tried to focus on the teacher in the front of the room. The teacher’s notable appearance made this



easy. She had pale skin, dark brown hair that was blunted cut inches above her shoulders. She wore a turquoise blouse with sleeves that became wide at her wrists.

When she spoke her voice was riddled with drama and her chin was tall. “We’re going to jump right into it scholars. We will hold a weekly after school meeting to brainstorm article ideas. We will also use this time to assign these articles. Your writing will be printed into the school’s newspaper.”

The rest of the class time was filled with questions and soon the bell rang. The writers eased out of their seats and began out the door. Aspen followed until she had one more question for the admittedly strange teacher. She turned in the hallway and dodged the other highschoolers shoving past her in the opposite direction. When she made it to the classroom she peaked her head in, expecting to see the teacher. Instead she saw Summer rooting through her desk and eventually pulling out an answer sheet. Just as Aspen turned herself away to hurry down the still busy hallway, Summer lifted her head only to see someone that she couldn’t make out race away. Summer ran to the door but only saw a large bustling crowd. She quickly folded the answer sheet into the pages of a book and tried to inconspicuously drift to her next class.

Aspen and Summer went the rest of the day without running into each other. They floated in and out of classes, sat separately when lunch came for the first time since the day they met in kindergarten. They finished their day and before they knew it had wrapped up their first day of high school.

Aspen was sat in her room doing the bit of homework assigned on the first day when her dad called her from the kitchen for dinner. Her family went around the table telling how their day went. When Aspen was asked she told them that “the most interesting thing that happened was I saw Summer in one of my classes.”. She decided to leave out what she had seen her doing after class.

“What happened between you and her anyway?” asked her nosy sister.

“I’m not sure I guess we just grew apart.”

“That’s weird, I remember you two being quite close.”, her mom added.

“We were. ”, Aspen paused for a second to recount what had happened again but picked up her thought, “Alright I’m ready to go to that meeting, thanks for dinner Dad.”

“Alright future poets let’s begin our first brainstorming session.”

Everyone went quiet and put on a focused face. Aspen wracked her brain and tried to think of something to impress the writers that had sat in that room far longer than she had. Some people

brought up what was going on in the news, some suggested trends that were circulating the internet, then Summer raised her hand.

"I heard around that an answer key to a test was stolen."

Aspen's eyes widened and she attempted the silent gesture that she always gave Summer to let her know that she'd said too much. It went unnoticed. Aspen thought that maybe the teacher wouldn't want to include a rumor, but instead she encouraged the idea.

"I think that would be a very interesting article, would you be willing to write it Summer?"

Summer nodded and Aspen had a definite feeling that this would not end well.

The next day at lunch Oakley and Aspen walked through the cafeteria together. Their heads were turned to each other Aspen and Summer, walking in opposite directions, crashed into one another. On the ground amongst apple slices and fries laid the "missing" answer key. Aspen quickly dropped her jacket on top of it before Oakley, who had been known to gossip, could see. When Summer realized what Aspen knew she scooped up the jacket along with the packet of papers, took Aspen's arm and dragged her into an empty classroom.

"It was you at the door last night, wasn't it? Why didn't you tell someone? Why are you covering for me?"

Aspen debated her answer and decided that Summer wouldn't want the girl she'd made an effort to cut out of her life trying to protect her.

Aspen tried to casually shrug and say, "I don't know. I just figured it wasn't my business."

Summer shook her head, shoved the jackets back into Aspen's arms, and stormed away. Aspen eyebrows scrunched to the middle of her forehead as she tried to replay what just happened. She wondered when the next spout of drama would take place.

When the writers met again everyone read their work aloud. Butterflies soared in Aspen's stomach and her body tightened when it was Summer's turn.

"You may have heard rumors about an answer sheet that went missing. This scandal has definitely stirred up the school. Everyone is wondering who took it, and what would happen to them if they were caught. Well I have a few of those answers..."

She was interrupted by the loudspeaker. A message from the principal to send "Aspen Andrews, and Summer Hill to the office."

They both went pale and in hostile silence walked to their doom. The outside was quiet but their minds were racing. Aspen wondered what kind of looks she would receive from the gossiping students, and what conclusions Oakley had drawn and was spreading around the school. Summer panicked over the possibility of receiving an automatic F on the test.

When they got to the door with the words “principal Jackobs on it they turned to each other. Aspen saw the hallway melt into a dark alley, and watched their school clothes turn into costumes. The bright lights faded into dim street lights. She felt a cape floating behind her and saw a mask cover half of Summer’s face.

Summer’s lips curled when she spoke “You saw me. Why didn’t you turn me in?”

Aspen was too angry to make something up. She was ready to defend herself. “You said that your grades needed to do well this year! I didn’t want to get in the way of that!”

“We aren’t friends, you aren’t supposed to protect me anymore.”

Tears were stinging Aspen’s eyes “We were bestfriends Summer. That doesn’t just go away. All of the secrets we’ve shared, all of our vulnerabilities? You don’t forget that stuff and when you’ve cared for someone that deeply you have a choice; to keep helping them out or” she pointed to the principal’s door “hurt them with it.”

The door ahead of them opened and the dramatic lighting, dark colors, and brooding faces dropped.

The principal sat behind a desk and punished them with a week of detention. To be done together.

They began their week-long sentence to the library after school the next day. Aspen sat with her arms folded and her jaw tight. Summer looked around and swallowed her pride.

“I’m sorry for all of this.”

There was no answer.

“And I’m sorry for what happened over the summer”

Aspen visibly loosened herself a little. Summer smiled and felt safe to make a bit of conversation.

“So did all of this remind you of those bad superhero movies we used to watch? With the perfectly timed plot twists and over the top drama?”

Aspen jerked her head, surprised, and gave Summer a smile”

# Fear Fear

By Brynn Blickensderfer

Art work

By Anika Walter

I woke up in a cold sweat. My skin felt hot under the blankets, but my arms freezing out in the cold air. My breathing was heavy; I felt my heart thump in my chest. I forced myself to calm down. *It was only a weird nightmare*, I told myself. *It doesn't even make sense.*

Sunlight peeked through the gaps in my blinds, illuminating my messy bedroom. Books and clothes lay sprawled across the floor, my little brother's action figures stood in their frozen positions, and my unfinished school work sat in piles on my desk. I sighed. Just how I left it.

I sat up in my bed, attempting to recall what my nightmare had been about, but, as with all dreams, it had slipped away. Now, only bits and pieces of it remained.

My alarm clock read nine o'clock. I stretched and sluggishly moved from my bed. I ventured to the kitchen, in search of breakfast. I passed through the hallway with family mementos on it, one being a family picture of my parents, brother, sister, and I. While I looked like my mom, with curly red-brown hair and bright green eyes, my little brother got looks from our dad; dark brown- almost black- hair with brown eyes. Our sister had yet to be determined, still flaunting the gray-blue eyes and tiny wisps of hair all newborns have.

Another thing my parents had in this hall were white pictures framed on the wall. Each of the three frames had tiny handprints of newborns. One handprint- mine- was orange. Underneath was my name written in a fancy cursive style: *Austin*. Next to mine was my brother's in blue and my sister's in pink. Their names *David* and *Sarafina* were written in the same handwriting. I stopped to look at them for a minute before getting back on track.

Once in the kitchen, I got out all the things I needed for a bowl of cereal: bowl, milk, spoon, and the box of Bat-O's, only the best bat-themed cereal there was. I poured out the cereal and milk and did what I enjoyed most about this cereal. I counted how many bat-shaped marshmallows I had.

I got to twenty-three marshmallows- a new personal record- before I noticed something strange about one of the marshmallows. Instead of the usual white, bat-shaped marshmallows I always had, there was one red bowtie shaped marshmallow.





I singled it out on my spoon, lifting it to eye level for closer inspection. Touching it reminded me of every other milk-soaked marshmallow. I put my spoon into my mouth. It tasted like any other marshmallow.

I looked back down at my cereal bowl to scoop up another bite of cereal, only to find the entire bowl packed to the brim with red, bowtie shaped marshmallows. I looked around in shock for anything that could have caused this.

A laugh-a chuckle really- echoed throughout the entire house. I looked frantically for anything out of the ordinary but again saw nothing. I felt my heart racing in my chest and the blood drain from my face. "Mom? Dad?" I looked into the living room. "This isn't funny!"

There was more laughter. I felt it mocking me. I stood violently from my chair and darted for my room. There was no way I was going to be killed by an intruder with an odd sense of red marshmallow humor. In my room, I jumped for my phone, except it wasn't there. I, instead, frantically searched under piles of dirty clothes and piles of homework for it. Nothing.

More laughter, this time sounding sinister rather than mocking. Leaving my room messier than it already was, I decided to leave the house. Right as I reached for the doorknob to swing my door open, it disappeared. I pounded on the door, kicking and screaming in panic. The laughter mocked me more and more. My heart was in my throat, and I heard it in my ears. My hands dripped in sweat and my breaths became short and panicked. "Who are you?" I screamed at the laughter.

The laughing finally stopped. For a moment, I heard nothing. The doorknob reappeared on my door. I felt myself relax. *It was all over.* My heart slowed and my breathing went back to normal. I took a sigh of relief. I sat up against the wall, confused as to how this could have happened.

Then, I fell. My stomach dropped. The room around me rose out of sight, as I fell deeper and deeper into darkness. I screamed, closing my eyes in fear.

It was all over. I no longer felt as if I were falling. I opened one eye to see nothing but darkness, but I felt a floor beneath me.

Opening both eyes, I stood. I spun in a small circle to see nothing. "Hello?" My voice echoed. "Where am I?"

"You want to know who I am?" A voice asked. Then it laughed in the same mocking tone as before. "I'll tell you who I am."

A spotlight appeared in the darkness. An invisible crowd, seemingly from nowhere, began to cheer. "Should I tell him who I *really* am?" the voice asked the

crowd. The crowd got louder. They cheered their praise and whoops of joy. “You heard them, kid. You are gonna find out who I *really* am.”

A stage appeared. More specifically, a game show stage. Purple curtains hung in the background with stage lights close by. A massive spinning-wheel was set off in the corner. The spotlight illuminated a small circle of the old hardwood floor. I stood below its elevated platform.

Then, a different, deeper voice spoke. “Ladies and gentlemen, this is the moment you all have been waiting for. He’s the master of scare, the *king* of nightmares! He’s tonight’s host! Here isss... *Fear!*”

A man appeared on stage. His face was sharp and angular but still looked boyish in a way. He wore a grey two-piece suit with a sparkling sequined red bowtie. His hair was the strangest of all. It was split into six different colors: blond, brown, black, red in the front, and pink and silver in the back. He wore a cocky and mischievous grin. He waved to the crowd, which appeared in the now visible room in front of the stage. The crowd screamed and cheered at his appearance. “Well hello, everybody! As you all surely know, I am Fear, tonight’s host,” he said off into the crowd. His voice echoed as if he were talking into a microphone. “I love you, Fear!” shouted a random voice from the crowd. Fear laughed. “I love you too!”

Fear then caught sight of me. “And here is our first contestant!” he gestured down at me. “Come on up here, kid.”

I sheepishly did as he told me. On stage, the lights beamed down at me, making it nearly impossible to see until my eyes adjusted. I felt my forehead getting hot from a combination of nerves and the hot lights.

Fear held a microphone to my face. “Tell us a bit about yourself,” he told me.

I didn’t remember him having a microphone, but I spoke into it anyway. “My name is Austin.”

“And how old are you, Austin?” Fear asked

“Sixteen. I just started my second year of high school.”

“Everyone give a big round of applause for Austin!” Fear shouted. The invisible crowd did as he told. I heard a couple of people chanting my name. I gave them a weak and nervous smile, forgetting that all of this shouldn’t be happening.

“Austin,” Fear said to get my attention, “how this game works is that I will give you three challenges, each harder than the last. All you have to do is complete them.”

I thought about this for a moment. I felt myself getting more and more excited. “Is there a prize?” I asked in anticipation.





Fear laughed. "Is there a prize?" he mimicked. "Of course there is a prize! But you'll have to wait until the end to see!" Fear snapped and a lever jutted out from the floor. He takes it in a large stance and swings it back dramatically. In an instant, I am sprung up into the air. I flew off into the darkness above me. Then, similarly to my fall, it all stopped.

I opened my eyes to see a great expanse of light blue. I looked down to see a skyscraper stretch below me. My stomach dropped. I tried to back up, but my back was already up against a thin window sill. I tried to turn my head to see through it, but I couldn't see anything but the blue sky. My heart pounded as I watched the cars on the streets drive by like tiny ants. I froze in place, not wanting to fall.

Fear appeared upside down in front of my face, nearly scaring me off the edge. "What's going on!?" I shouted at him. "Get me down from here!"

Fear laughed. He turned himself right side up by flying in front of me. "No, I won't get you down from there," he told me. "The way this works is that you need to face your fear of heights. *Jump.*"

"What?! Jump?! But I'll die!" I screamed. I adjusted my footing so that way I couldn't fall off if he tried to push me.

Fear looked at me curiously. "But, Austin, that's how you play the game," he gave me a devilish grin. "It's pretty simple really. All you have to do is jump and you win this challenge! It's only a hundred feet, Austin."

"You're crazy!" I screamed at him. "An absolute madman!"

Fear did a small bow. "Thank you, thank you. No need to flatter me."

I looked down at the zooming cars below me. I swallowed the large lump in my throat. "Tick-tock," Fear said. "You don't have all day. Did I mention if you don't jump, your family will have to pay the consequences?"

I looked at him in shock. I didn't know what he meant. How could I know what he ment? I've never jumped off a hundred foot building before.

Then, I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I felt that my body was still frozen in place, preventing me from falling. I forced myself to move. I felt my feet fall out from under me. My stomach and my body both plummeted towards the ground below me. I saw the ground below me get closer and the cars get closer and closer. Everything went black

I felt my feet hit the ground. There was no pain like how I'd expected there to be. *I must be dead*, I thought. I opened my eyes to see a blinding light. *So I am dead.* I





heard the crowd cheer and clap. My eyes adjusted, and I saw Fear standing in front of me.

“So you finally jumped,” Fear sneered. “Good for you.”

I looked around. The crowd still clapped and cheered for me. I saw a two-inch platform behind me as if I had jumped from that instead of a hundred-foot skyscraper.

I heard Fear snap again. The platform disappeared. At this point in the show, I didn’t even question what was going on.

“I should say, you were pretty brave,” Fear said. “But from here on out, it’ll only get harder and harder.” He snaps and the lights dim. A spotlight appeared on a tall, yellow box with purple polka dots. “Inside there are all the members of your family. If you fail to complete a challenge... well, let’s just say they won’t like their new home.” He snaps again and a projector screen unravels from above. An invisible projector plays a video of stunt dummies being thrown into a volcano.

“You’re lying!” I accuse him. “You don’t have my family trapped!”

Fear snaps yet again. The tall box opens, dropping its four sides into a ‘t’ shape. There stood my mom and dad, my mom holding my baby sister and my brother hidden behind my dad’s legs. I gasped. I saw that their eyes were grey. They all stared off into the distance, neutral expressions masking any emotions they might have had.

“You monster!” I screamed. “Let them go this instant!”

Fear chuckles. “No, I won’t.” Before I could react, he pressed a button, causing the floor beneath me to fall away. I fell into darkness for a second time that day.

When I opened my eyes, I found myself in my homeroom class. I looked around and saw other students sitting quietly at their desks. All of them faced forward and stared into the chalkboard. Mrs. Dunningbate, a tall woman with a red beehive hair-do and purple reading glasses, stood in the front of the room.

I heard her talking, occasionally pointing at complicated equations and formulas on the board. I couldn’t understand why her words made no sense. I saw her lips move and I heard noises, but I couldn’t make any sense of it. Occasionally, I’d hear words I could understand, like ‘quantum physics,’ ‘non sequitur,’ and ‘obfuscate,’ which only made me more confused.

I felt a sinking feeling of dread fall into my stomach. I looked around at my peers, who were scribbling notes and drawing graphs in notebooks and on pieces of loose-leaf paper. Whenever Mrs. Dunningbate said something and paused, they would nod their heads in agreement. Occasionally, a student would say something like ‘that





makes sense,' or 'will this be on the test,' and even splurt out something that I can't understand.

Mrs. Dunningbate smacked her pointer on the chalkboard, making me jump. "Austin! Have you been paying attention at all!?"

My focus snapped back to the front of the room. I felt all the kids in my class turn in their seats to look at me. I looked down at my own blank loose-leaf paper and perfectly sharpened pencil. "No, ma'am," I whispered.

She hit her pointer onto her chalkboard again. "You know very well that you need to know this stuff for your unit test tomorrow!" She went over to her desk and had a sip of water. "Now, come up here and solve number seven from your homework."

I knew to never argue with Mrs. Dunningbate. I knew if I said one word back to her, I'd be in a world of trouble. I remembered what happened to the last kid to talk back to her and what happened to her. I shivered.

I slowly got up from where I sat. I felt the students' eyes on me all the way to the front of the class, where a complicated equation was written on the board. As I lifted the chalk to write, I wondered how I was ever going to solve this.

My heart started pounding in my chest. *I can't solve this! I can't even understand what they were saying!*

I took a deep breath. I steadied my shaking hand and studied the equation. It made no sense to me once so ever.

"Get on with it!" I heard a boy from the back of the class shout. I heard a few kids giggle and snicker at me.

Sweat dripped down my forehead. My heart rate sped up again. My breaths came in quick intervals. *No no no. This can't be happening.*

I felt something hit the back of my head. At my feet lay a crumpled up piece of paper. Then I felt a pencil hit my back. Before I knew it, I was being bombarded with paper and pencils, erasers, notebooks, and even- most confusing of all- a rubber chicken.

I quickly wrote the first number to come to my head on the chalkboard. "The answer is seven!" I shouted.

Once I had, the students stopped throwing things at me. I turned around from the chalkboard.

I gasped. The kids in the class were changing. Their heads slowly morphed their features to look like Fear.

“Haha!” one of the Fears shouted. “He got it wrong! The answer was really rubber chicken!”

My head felt lightheaded. The room around me spun. I heard the mocking voice of Fear all around me. I closed my eyes and ran from the classroom as fast as I could.

Everything went silent. I opened my eyes to find myself back on Fear's stage. I stood at center stage as if I had just come from backstage. The world around me was still slightly spinning. All the noise around me was muffled by a distant ringing in my ears.

I felt my body being shaken. I saw Fear. “You can’t quit now! I still have ten minutes left of air time!”

Anger rushed through my body. My body was pumped up with adrenaline. “*Air time?! I’ll show you air time!*” I swung a left hook at him. He swiftly ducked under it. I tried a right hook, but again, he dodged. I shoved him, using the full force of my body.

I fell to the ground. I looked behind me to see Fear standing where I should have shoved him to the ground. “Wha- what?” I stuttered.

“Nice try, kid.” A bow and plunger-tipped arrow materialized in Fear’s hands. He nocked the bow and pulled the arrow back, aiming it at me. “But it’ll take a lot more to get rid of me.” He released the arrow. It flew toward my face. Darkness flooded my vision.

I opened my eyes to find myself in my bedroom. I was tucked into bed as if it were all a dream. I saw that my room was neat and tidy- the opposite of how I keep it. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and stretched. I stood from my bed.

I heard muffled voices from downstairs. They sounded angry. Investigating, I found my parents there. They shouted curses at each other. “I HATE you!” my mom shouted.

“Well I hate YOU more!” my dad shouted back. He stormed out of the room. He stopped in front of me. He violently jerked my shirt collar, lifting me off the ground, so we were eye level. His blood-shot eyes were filled with rage. “You’re staying with your mom forever, *punk*.” He shoved me to the ground. “We’re getting a divorce and I never want to see your ugly mug again!” He stormed into the kitchen.

I walked shakily to my mom. “Is he telling the truth? Are you really getting a divorce?”



“Yes!” she huffed. “And good riddance too! I hate him and I hope I never see him or your brother ever again!” She plopped herself down onto the couch and drank a sip of her apple cider.

“Is David going to be staying with dad from now on?!” I shouted.

“Yes! Your annoying little brother will finally be *out* of my life once in for all!” She screamed. She took another sip of her apple cider. “How do you feel about getting a dog?”

“You can’t replace David with a *dog*!” I screamed. “He’s my brother! I love him!”

“Well, I don’t, so deal with it.”

I shouted at her. I screamed swears that my little sister would usually be protected from. I screamed bloody murder until I broke down in tears. I was defeated.

My body shook with fear, anger, and sadness. Tears pooled on the ground. I could hardly breathe.

Then, I heard clapping and cheering. I looked up and saw the familiar expanse of darkness. I looked to my right and saw Fear clapping as well. “Woohoo!” he cheered, “Excellent show you put on, Austin!”

I looked at him in shock. *None of it was real. It was all just a show.* I couldn’t say anything. I sat there in shock and fear.

The invisible crowd stopped clapping. Fear looked at me with curiosity. “Well, now this is awkward,” he mutters. Then, he cleared his throat. “Congratulations! You won my show! Your family is now free to go, and your fabulous prize awaits you.” He snapped his fingers. His entire body turned into a blue, slime-like liquid. It fell to the floor, then bounced back up with incredible speed. It disappeared into the darkness above me.

I woke up in a cold sweat in my bed. My blankets were drenched. My heart pounded in my chest, and I was breathing heavily. *It was all a dream. A nightmare.*

I saw something written on my hand. My heart dropped.

*It wasn’t a dream. Also, you should see what I did to your other hand!*

I looked at my other hand. An outline of a hand turkey and the words “*Look! A turkey!*” decorated it.

The ink slowly disappeared from my hand, leaving it as clean as I first left it. I remembered about the prize.

I looked around my room for any stacks of gold bars or piles of money. I didn't see anything at first glance. I kept looking, getting more and more frustrated when I couldn't find it. I looked under my bed, to see boxes of old and forgotten toys. I looked in my closet to find piles of half dirty clothes. The only thing I saw out of the ordinary was a tiny, Fear-shaped bobblehead.

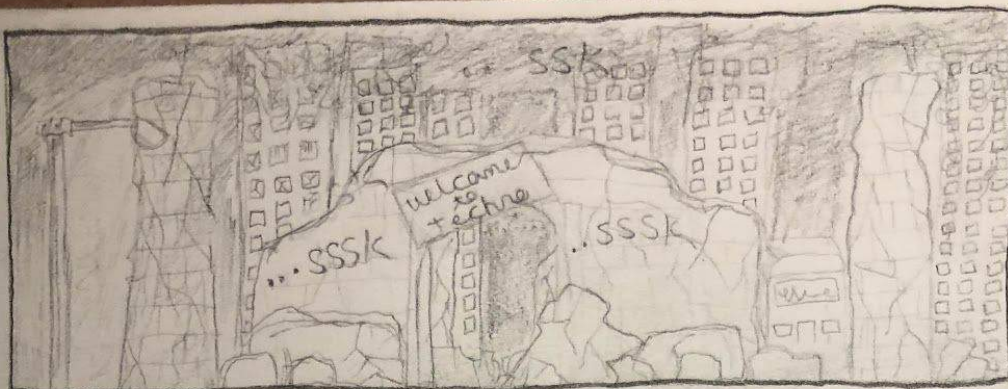
I picked it up to read the tiny gold plaque on its base.

*"Winner!  
Austin Slabinski"  
-Fear Fear*

What a bogus prize.

A  
Girl to  
be  
remembered

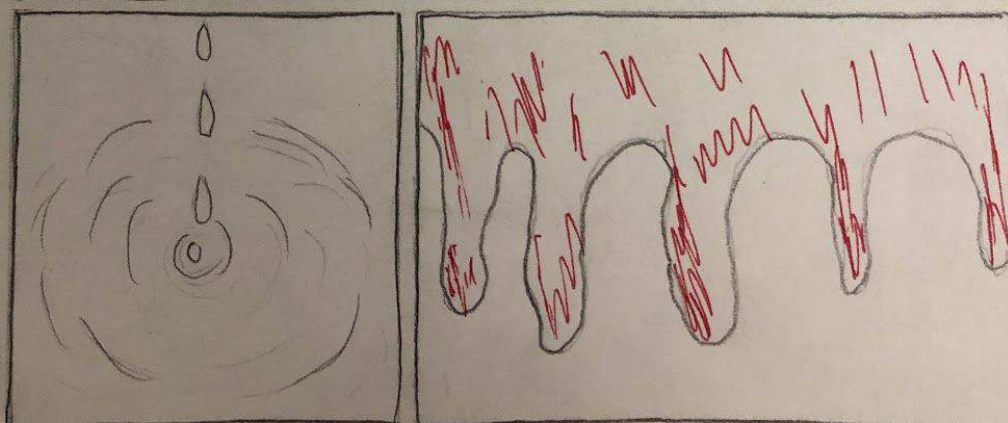
Illustrations: Julianne Tzip



The world has never heard peace  
because war is always the first  
thing you hear...



In a world where it can hurt you...



- Riane Rine

Shimek 5-6

Creative Writing Fiction

*A Girl to be Remembered*

9/25/2020

In a world where peace goes unheard of, and where war is mostly known except we also live in a world, where soulmates exist, where you can't be hurt by your soulmate but everyone else can hurt you.

I was 14 when the war broke out. . . now I'm 21.

It's been a long 7 years of a raging war, my father and my older brothers served in this bloody war and now it's my turn, I've been training since I was 17 but I've known how to fight since I was 10. My father was the commander of the army, so I spent most of my time at the army base slowly efficiently learning to kill, I was like their hidden little weapon. I wasn't the strongest but I was the smartest and most powerful. I trained in hand to hand combat and weapons I was a deadly bomb ready to explode in this nasty war.

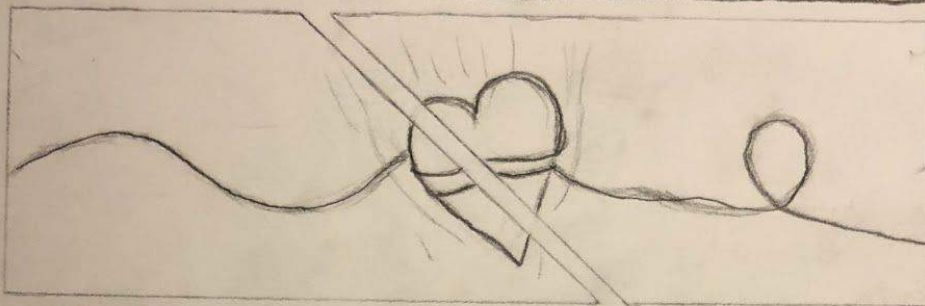
They called me "their secret weapon" I wasn't very fond of the name at first but I learned that a name like that will get you rank in the army. I was feared among the outsiders looking in.

Ten days later. . .

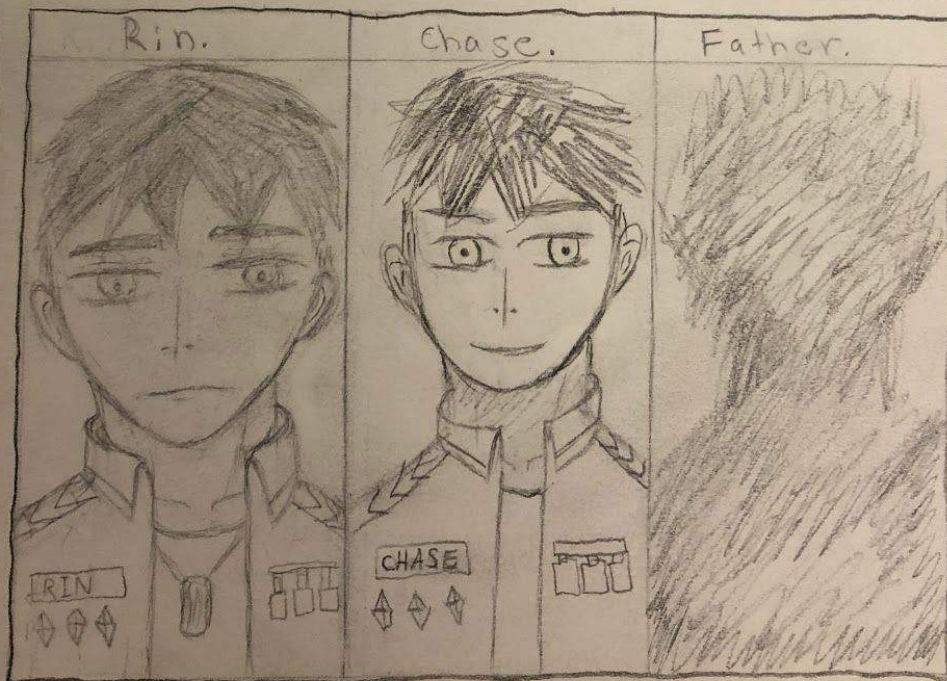
October 12th



Soulmates are the only ones  
that won't...



I was 14 when the war broke out.  
7 years of raging war.  
My father and older brothers served this  
war...



The war was normal that day, the scent of blood lingering in the air from the previous day, and the cries for mercy ringing in your ears. Sleep and death trying to claim their victims, you might close your eyes not knowing which one would claim you. I on the other hand was talking to the General trying to come up with an idea for the next attack.

“General you can’t be serious!” I spat at him “We’ve almost won this war!”

“I know, you think I want to talk about treaties Akira? I’d rather storm over there right now and take what’s left of their filthy land.” He was yelling now

“Then let’s do that! I’ll take a troop with the strongest men and I will end this war!” I stand up from cleaning one of my daggers my older brother Rin gave me.

“You know your father would disapprove of that.” His tone turned quiet and gentle.

“ Yeah, but he isn’t here anymore, and it’s time I take the role I was meant to play the secret weapon right?” I storm out gathering my men this time my name will be the one remembered not fathers.

One day later. . .

After traveling through the night I decided to set up camp in a heavily wooded area so we weren’t easily spotted. I gather some leaders of my men to discuss our tactic plans “I’ll be the diversion, they won’t resist a woman in need of help that’s all alone, heh, Although I’ll have to find a way into their fort.” I looked up to the sky and smirked but it sooned dropped as I sighed. Tomorrow was going to be a long day, but in the long run it would be worth it.



I have trained and spent most of  
the time in the army.

I was "their secret weapon".  
Feared by outsiders

Name: Akira  
age: 21  
gender: Female  
... secret weapon...

October  
12th.



I couldn't sleep at all. I was tossing and turning all night, nervous of what tomorrow might bring if it would succeed or go wrong. I sat up in my cot and walked outside to look up at the stars. "Hey, Rin and Chase I don't know if you're listening up there" I looked up to the sky pulling my blanket around me tighter as I felt warm tears start to fall down my face. "Please help give me some confidence and help me lead these men to victory" I felt small sobs escape my mouth as I cried. Remembering Rin, Chase, and I running around like kids playing with fake swords I missed my brothers there the only ones that cared for me and took care of me. I walk back to my private tent, tears escaping my eyes. I lay down letting sleep claim me.

When I woke up I knew that today was going to be the day where my name would go down in history as the person or even a woman who finished this bloody bloodbath of war. As I marched out of my tent to the meeting tent to discuss the final plans when the realization hit me I could be sitting at home tomorrow with my little puppy Nellie. The thought of that made me smile.

An hour later we finally arrived at the enemy's base. We got everything set up and I got into positions as the trojan horse. Right now was my time at least.

Ready.

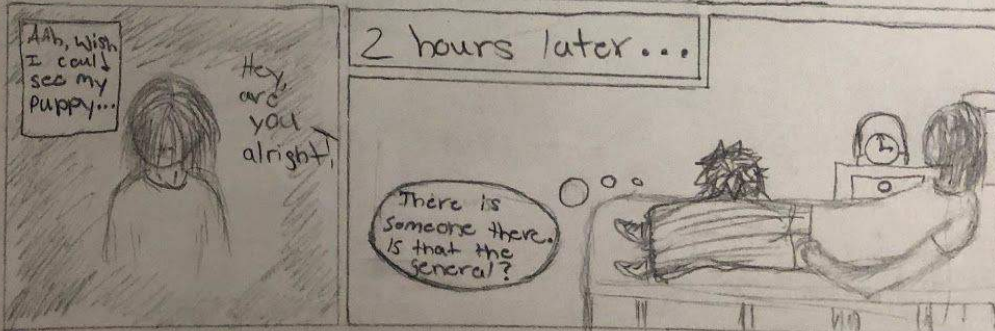
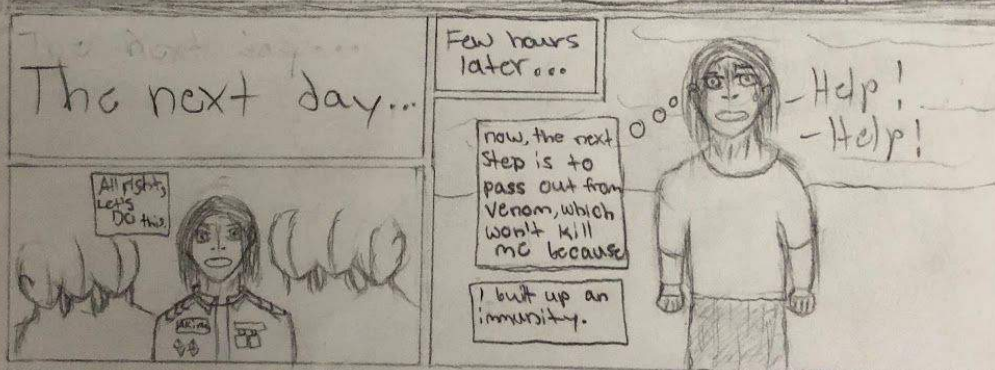
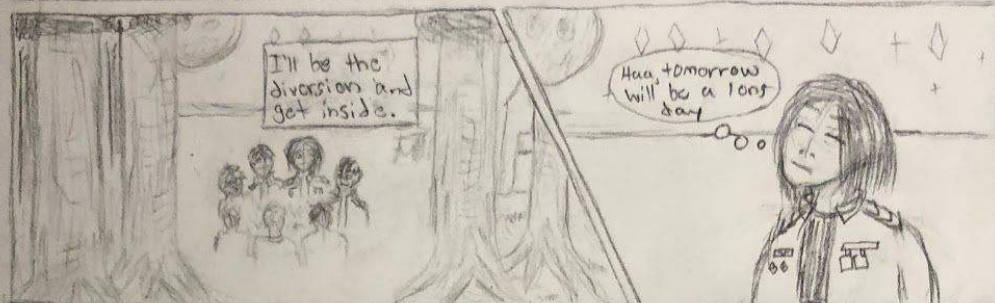
Set.

Go.

"Help!Help!, Help!" I screamed running out of the forest acting like someone or something was chasing me. "Sir please help me! The beast!" I shrieked. The look on that man's



In the forest at night...





face said it all heh fool. And for the grand finale of my scheme, I would pass out due to the poison of viper venom which I had a small vile placed under my tongue. Such a small dose would typically kill someone but since I had been trained as a young child to build up immunity it wouldn't kill me but it still knocked me out. I felt the man catch me and then everything went black.

Two hours later. . .

I woke up in what looked like the general's room. I pulled off the covers to see that my clothes are still on. "Oh thank god!" I sighed. I looked at the clock to see I was out for two hours. I should have only been out for one hour. I guess my tolerance is low. I scan the room to see the sleeping general in a chair as I go to sit up the bed creaks and the general shot up. "Oh! You're awake." he said sitting down beside me I scoot away." I'm Liam" he put his out for me to shake it.

I grab the small derringer pistol from my holster on my thigh under my dress and pointed in between his eyes." heh foolish man, it's man's world but the women do all the hard work." I taunt him while pushing the pistol further against his forehead

"Darling, I wouldn't do that if I was you," He says while backing up against the wall.

"And who said you could call me darling" I pushed him to the wall

"Well you see-" Right then i pulled the trigger

. . .

BANG!

The bullet fell to the ground flattened and shriveled "H-how? Who are you!"I gasped

“Darling this is what I was trying to tell you! We’re soulmates!” He beamed as if he earned an achievement. I fire more bullets.

1.

2.

3.

4.

My pistol is smoking now and all the bullets are flattened like the first one. I hear a loud crash. I'm guessing my men have heard my shots and that's them. I ran out of the tent, the cold air hitting my face. I see my men, I run to them, I rip off my over skirt so I'm left in a pair of trousers and my top.

The final stages of the war going on around me bloodshed filling the streets. This was my legacy. I ran up to the bell tower up the flights of stairs reaching the top where I overlooked the city that I had conquered. I put my name into history. Laughing hysterically I stepped closer to the edge until I felt someone hug me and I felt something warm running down my stomach. I look down and see the blade of my father's sword sticking out, its gleaming sterling silver tip covered in my garnet blood . I choke out blood collapsing looking at the person you did this. “How dare you! I. . .I trusted you!” I cough out more blood. I could feel the warm liquid with a hint of an iron taste work its way up my throat into my mouth overcoming my senses, resisting my urge to vomit yet the urge was overpowered.

“Sweet, naive little girl. Trust is for children. You, my dear, are a soldier.” I see the general crouched down to my level as he caresses me sting pale cheek he whispers ever so softly

into my ear “You know you remind me more and more of your father each day.” His breath lingered only for a second. ` And with that my legacy ended.

