



Inside a Thinking Cap

Michaela, Colette, Enzo, Aydin, Sofia, and Romeo

Collected Stories of the Home Scholars Writing Class

Instructor: Linda Carney-Goodrich

Spring 2016

Table of Contents

The Elfen <i>By Sofia Grabiél Butler</i>	3
The Other Side of Sleeping Beauty <i>By Sofia Grabiél Butler</i>	5
The Last Sprite <i>By Sofia Grabiél Butler</i>	10
Cracked <i>By Michaela Edwards</i>	13
The Hair Whip Bandit <i>By Michaela Edwards</i>	16
Upgrades <i>By Michaela Edwards</i>	19
Peter Pan: The Real Story <i>By Aydin Hodjat</i>	22
The Adventures of a Twelve Year Old Boy Named Dan (and, of course, his golf cart Flappy) <i>By Aydin Hodjat</i>	26
The Harbinger <i>By Aydin Hodjat</i>	30
Rainforest Adventure <i>By Enzo Pelletier</i>	33
Hansel & Gretel, The <i>real</i> story <i>By Enzo Pelletier</i>	35
Timmy The Kid <i>by Enzo Pelletier</i>	37
Clash of the Sky <i>By Romeo Pelletier</i>	39
Wanted: Goldy Locks <i>By Romeo Pelletier</i>	41
Story of Crime <i>By Romeo Pelletier</i>	43
Ariana’s Vacation <i>By Colette Stamatós</i>	47
A Slave's Diary <i>By Colette Stamatós</i>	49
Snow White and the Ten Chipmunks <i>By Colette Stamatós</i>	52

The Elfen *By Sofia Grabiell Butler*



Once upon a time, not too long ago, in a beautiful forest filled with hemlocks and oaks and maples and even some redwoods, a 261-year-old elf named Eshnook stepped out of his house. He had scraggly blondish hair that smelled mildly of hemlock boughs and his skin looked like a ripe peach; it became red when he was angry and pale white when he was frightened. Even though he was 261, he was still young for an elf as they usually live up to 10,000 years. He stood on his balcony, which was built on one of the top branches of a large hemlock tree. His home was also at the top of the tree, although it was inside the hollowed out trunk.

As he stepped back inside his house, Eshnook looked fondly at the Mini Lisa, a copy of the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci, only it was painted by an elf. The rest of his home was beautifully decorated with custom made furniture and other wonderful paintings on the wall. He sat down on an armchair adorned with dragons and other mythical creatures.

Wondering what to do for the day, Eshnook reached blindly for a book. When he finally managed to grab one, it was a bird book. Something clicked in Eshnook's mind and he knew what he was going to do. He was going to go for a ride, a ride on a bird.



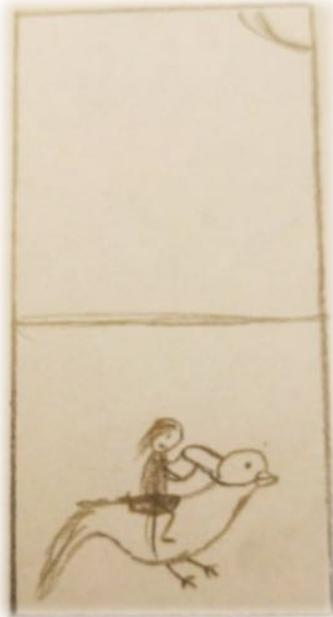
Eshnook got up from his chair and went outside again. He whistled, and a black-capped chickadee swooped down from the branches and stopped in front of him. It was the same chickadee that he had found injured, restored back to health, and eventually trained to carry him on its back. When Eshnook had found her, she had been in a terrible state. Her left wing was bleeding and her leg was limp. He had carried her to his tree, where he bandaged her cuts and put splints on her wing and leg.

Once she had healed, he began her training. Being a tree expert, Eshnook was not well acquainted with what different birds eat. He started out by whirling a great big piece of meat through the air. She was not interested. Realizing that chickadees were songbirds, he tried juggling sunflower seeds. She enthusiastically flew over and began gobbling each seed out of the air. A few months later he began whistling for her while juggling the seeds. Soon she could come when he whistled, and soon after she began to fly with him.

She was a normal chickadee, apart from the leather saddle, bridle, and reigns Eshnook had fit on to her. He said goodbye to his friends, who lived in the neighboring trees, and mounted the bird.

It was the first time he had flown after the chickadee had finished its training. It was fabulous. He could do almost anything he wanted! He swooped and swayed like a weeping willow. He made sharp turns in the air like a zigzag. He grabbed a cloud and flew in the pattern of his name while letting go of a cloud ...

ESHNOOK!



After flying what seemed to be forever, Eshnook spotted a clearing. His chickadee looked rather tired, so he guided her towards a tree in the middle for a rest. Something rustled in the bushes. Eshnook froze, not daring to move. He could sense that whatever was behind the bushes was not going to be good. All of a sudden, a human girl emerged! She had dark brown hair and lots of freckles. She paused, confused, for she thought she had seen a saddle on that bird in a tree. She started after it.

Eshnook was scared. He had never seen a human before! He didn't know if she was dangerous. He had heard stories about humans, how enormous they are, and the metal weapons they have to shoot and kill. He shuddered and slowly mounted his chickadee as to not attract attention, and kicked off of the ground.

As he steered away from the clearing, the girl could be heard crashing through the brambles. Eshnook's heart nearly skipped a beat. As fast as he was, the girl was faster. As he looked back, the girl was gaining on him. He dug his heels into the chickadee's sides and she put on a burst of speed. When he looked back, the girl was gone.

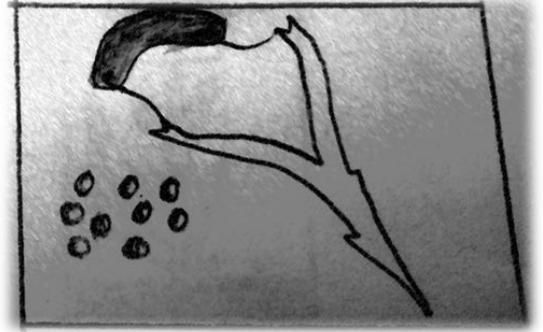
As his tree came into view, Eshnook had a moment of realization that he was the only individual, apart from the chickadee, who had witnessed his narrow escape. No one knew he had seen a human. Secretly, he hoped he would see a human again, but not have the human see him: hopefully not anytime soon.

Then again, maybe if he saw the girl again, they could be friends. Maybe, just maybe, the girl did not want to hurt him. Maybe she had been curious. As Eshnook climbed into bed that night, he closed his eyes and thought of the possibilities.



The Other Side of Sleeping Beauty By Sofia Grabiell Butler

What the king never says is that I'm his older sister. When we were kids, my brother and I were the naughtiest kids in the kingdom, even though we were royalty. We would dress up as servants and play tricks on people. We would jump out of the school window so we could shoot slingshots and play games. Because of this, my brother Amos and I both had dirty black hair around our blue eyes, though Amos' were more turquoise than blue.



Our strong relationship changed when Amos signed up for boys-only, full-time sword-fighting class. I was furious. We couldn't do anything together anymore. I refused to be in the same room as him. I decided to run away. If I ran away, I wouldn't have to put up with Amos. I packed bread, water, a compass, and a blanket in a bundle and went out the door.

Our kingdom was beautiful. When you stepped out of the castle, you came across a field. Beyond the field was a large river, where the toads and lizards would sun themselves. They had been our favorite slingshot targets. Beyond the river were the huts of the farmers that stretched all the way to the horizon. Hidden amongst the huts was the hut of Uresa the Witch, who was very strict and very dangerous, we were told. Beyond the huts was the sea, where, if you stood on the beach and squinted very hard, you could see the tiny does of the Niña, Pinta, and Santa Maria.

Unfortunately, as soon as I stepped out of the castle to run away, the guards saw me. They locked me in my room and told my father that I had tried to run away. My father didn't even try to understand why. He was too focused on my brother to think about me or to find out what was bothering me. I felt like I was just a problem. My father decided that before he died, he wanted to name his heir. He passed a law saying that if there were a boy in the royal family, he would become king. If there were no boys in the royal family, the current king would get to name his heir, which had to be a boy. It was clear; he had decided that Amos would be his heir. This meant that even though I was older I would never get to be queen. Of course, I was just furious. What does he think he's doing taking my birthright to be queen away just because he is a man? I didn't

know how to respond. I refused to come out of my room, except to go to school. When I took the route to school, I always walked right past the classroom building, and went on to Uresa's house to learn magic so I could get revenge on my brother.

If I wasn't going to be queen, what was the point of being royalty? I grew up trying to be as invisible as possible. I abandoned my royal title and became Estiah. I successfully ran away and spent all my time with the witch, learning her craft of magic.

At eighty one, my father died. Amos, being a boy, and as my father had declared, became king. After a decade of rule, my brother Amos married at age forty six to a woman named Eladrin. A few years later, they had a daughter, who looked almost exactly like her mother, the same golden hair, the same green eyes, and the same perfect skin. Upon her birth, Amos realized how unfair the law was that our father had created robbing me of my chance to be queen. If he kept this law, his own daughter would never be able to be queen. He didn't want her to be as angry as I was, run away or become a witch. He didn't want to lose her when she grew older like our family lost me. But we weren't the best friends we had been when we were children and so he didn't invite me to the birth ceremony. But I had heard about his change in the law. Everyone in the kingdom was talking about it. I realized I would be able to become queen, if my niece didn't become queen first. After all, I *was* the King's sister! I would have my turn! I needed to find a way to prevent her from becoming queen before me. With only a kernel of an idea of what I was going to do, I stormed into the palace at her birth ceremony. I declared, "*When the daughter of the king turns sixteen, she will prick her finger on the needle of a spinning wheel and she will fall into a sleep that will last one hundred years!*"

As soon as I said this, I realized I would have to make a full plan. I cast an everlasting spell upon myself, so that I could outlive my brother and become queen upon his death. Amos was panicked about what I had just said and trying to get rid of all the spinning wheels. The Queen cried and cried and cried until, sure enough, Amos had every spinning wheel in the land burnt. This cheered the Queen up a great deal. Of course, I never gave anyone my spinning wheel, so it wasn't burnt.

Sixteen years later...

I took out my spinning wheel and set it up. I took out some wool and began to spin. Fifteen minutes later, the princess came into my room dressed in a flowing blue gown.

“What are you doing?” she asked curiously.

I was sure she had never seen a spinning wheel before except for in pictures so she had no idea what I was doing. I also knew that Amos had never told her about what I had said at the birth ceremony. She didn't stand a chance.

“I'm spinning”, I said, “Would you like to try?”

She did want to try. Her hand slipped and didn't touch the tip of the needle, and she didn't get pricked. Still, she fell down onto my bed.

I quietly tried to get out of the castle before anyone caught me in the same room as the princess. That was unexpectedly easy because everyone else in the castle was also in a deep sleep. I was confused. I didn't mean *everyone* to fall asleep! My spell was only meant for the princess. I couldn't understand why this was happening, why my curse had malfunctioned and fell upon more people than I had planned. Maybe I hadn't finished my training as a witch. To make things worse, a large thorny rose bush started growing at an amazing rate around the castle.



I grabbed a piece of parchment and wrote the following:

To Whom It May Concern,

The princess of King Amos and Queen Eladrin had fallen into a sleep that will last 100 years. A large rose bush has grown around the castle enclosing me inside. In order to free us, please send someone to hack down the bushes surrounding us and awake the princess as none of us can wake her.

Thank you,

A resident of their majesty's kingdom

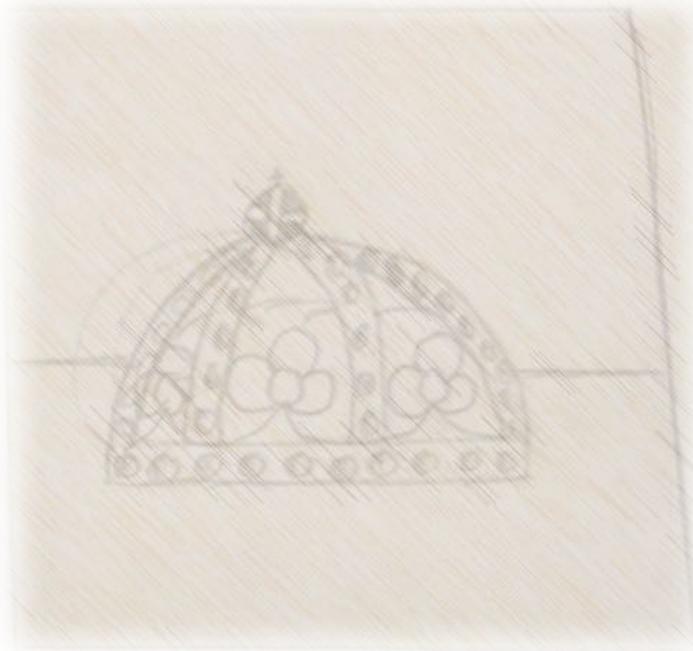
I wasn't sure this would work, because already my spell was doing things I didn't intend but I figured if someone could wake up the princess, everyone in the castle would wake up as well. If everyone woke up, my brother could live his life until he died, I could cast another spell on the princess (one that would work this time) and I could have another go at my turn as queen. Meanwhile, I had a whole lot of solo time in this castle of sleepiness.

Every day I walked along the edge of the bushes to look for signs of other people. Pretty much all I ever saw were skeletons of men who had tried to get through the bushes but had failed disastrously. This was not helpful.

One hundred years later...

In case you were wondering, I'm still alive because of the everlasting spell I cast. Unfortunately, I have to cast it every year. Queen of everyone, but everyone is asleep. I am still waiting for my chance to actually rule and have people do my bidding.

My niece was finally awoken by a not so handsome prince. Surprisingly, she didn't even mind that the first day she was awake she was marrying this stranger, who just happened to show up. I saw it as poor judgment for a future queen. But you know what you can do in a hundred years? You can perfect your magic. Her birthday next year is going to have to wait. I've got a spell to cast and a kingdom to rule.



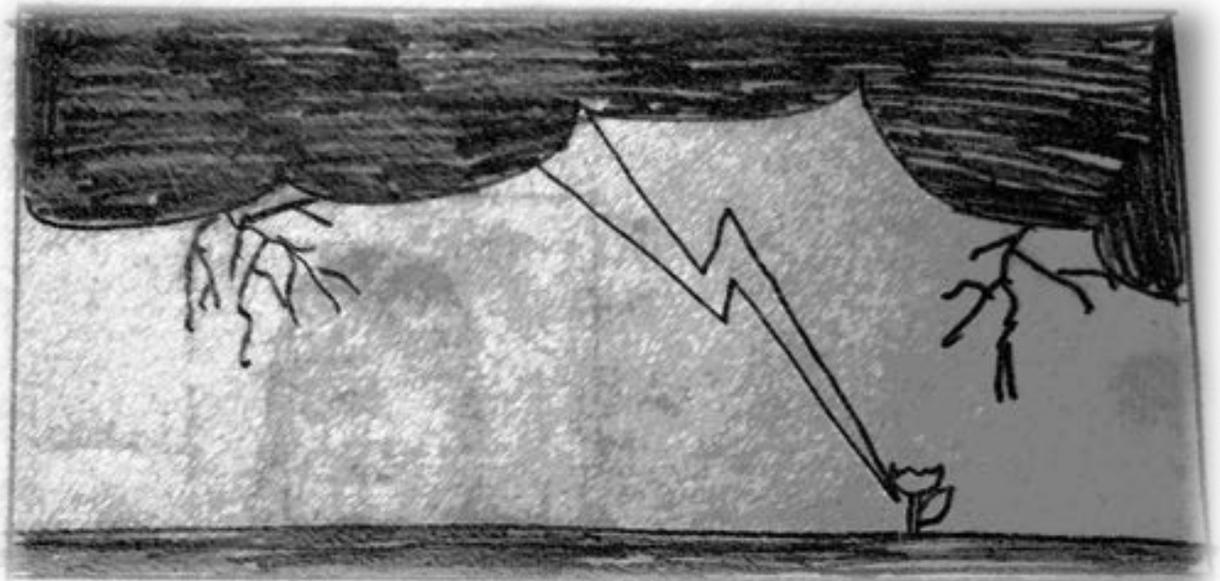
The End.

The Last Sprite *By Sofia Grabiela Butler*

A small bright dot sprang from flower to flower. Every one it came across was wilted. The sky became dark with clouds. The poor little dot knew it would be done for if it were rained on, so it jumped into a flower and closed the petals around itself.

Thunder boomed and lightning flashed. The thunder gradually became louder. A purple streak of lightning hit the ground with a crack. Where it had hit, a sizzling hole appeared. Within a minute, a fluorescent green sprout emerged. It continued to rain. The sprout became taller. It formed a fluorescent yellow bud. Within minutes the bud unfurled and revealed a golden rose. The rain stopped as abruptly as it had started, but the sky did not clear up.

The Disaster had occurred exactly twelve years, one month, two weeks, five days, and two hours ago.

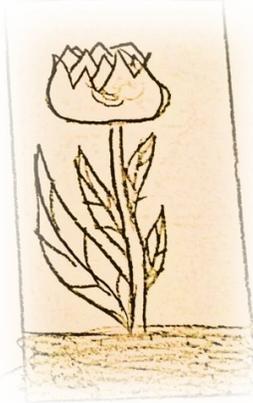


Humans had populated this planet, but now they were gone. Only the One Family had survived. They were sprites. The One Family consisted of a mother, a father and two children, a boy and a girl. The mother, father, and boy had tried to evacuate Earth one year after the Disaster. They had all failed. So there was only Lily left: Lily, the sprite. She was the small bright dot.

Lily knew she was the last sprite. She had scoured the Earth searching for another. Now she was back where she began. It had taken her exactly eleven years, one month, two weeks, five days, and two hours to cover the world. She had not found a single sprite, which was very discouraging.

The petals that held Lily fell away. She jumped out and her brown eyes scanned the landscape. She spotted a bright dot. She sprinted after it, thinking it was another sprite. When she reached it, Lily was disappointed to find it was a rose. Lily was too tired to go any further, so she flopped down on the dry grass and fell asleep.

New life was brewing inside the flower. Purple forces from the lightning were combining with the rain to make a form; the form of a sprite, curled up. The inside petals opened more and the sprite came out. The rose shriveled away until you couldn't tell that it had ever been there. The sprite spotted Lily and lay down beside her.



When Lily woke up she was very surprised to find him sitting beside her. She jumped back, startled. Here was another sprite! She was not alone on this disastrous Earth! Lily was overcome with happiness and tears came to her eyes. Through her tears she managed to stammer, “H-H-Who are you?”

“I don't have a name,” he replied. “What's the matter?”

“I'm just so happy!” she sobbed. Lily told him everything. How, before the Disaster, the humans had polluted the air so much that Earth had been too hot and how everything started dying, how only Lily, her parents and brother Peter had survived the Disaster, how they had tried to evacuate Earth and failed, and how she has searched the Earth for eleven years, one month, two weeks, five days, and two hours and came to be here.

“Where have you been living?” the sprite asked her.

“I haven't had one home since my family died,” she replied.

“Let's find a place to build a shelter,” he proposed.

Lily agreed with him. “Let's give you a name. How about ... Ash?”

He smiled.

Lily found a large clump of moss just big enough for them to sleep on. They were still tired so they lie down and fell asleep.

Only Ash couldn't sleep. Actually, he couldn't process what she had just told him, was there really no other sprites on this planet? Were they the only ones? He was here, resting on the moss with her in disbelief. He tossed and turned and eventually he fell asleep.

Later that day, Ash took a walk with Lily.

They were just about to turn around when Lily realized she forgot to pick berries for lunch. She ran off, leaving Ash to head to their new home by himself. Ash traveled back to their small moss clump only to find it was in ruins! There was berry juice splattered against rocks, moss torn and uprooted, and to top it all off, Lily was nowhere in sight.

“Lily!”

No reply.

“Lily, I know you’re hiding, please come out. “

No reply.

Ash let us gaze fall and it came upon a bunch of bird tracks on the ground. A bird had taken Lily!

Lily fell with a thud on a nest made of twigs. Two small faces with small stubby beaks looked curiously at her. They were a little too close for Lily. She stumbled backwards, the bald eagle chicks following her. Unfortunately, Lily had stepped out of the nest and she plummeted downwards towards the hard ground below.

Ash climbed the nearest tree and he scanned everything in his view. His gaze fell upon a tall tree with what looked like a nest at the top. He also saw something that made his blood run cold. Lily was taking a fifty foot drop from the nest!

“LILY!”

Ash practically flew from tree to tree, trying to catch Lily before she hit the ground.

“Ash,” Lily yelled. “Catch me at the forest floor!” And she disappeared from view.

“Lily! Wait!” Ash yelled. He was determined to catch her and he sped off, his red hair flapping in the wind.



Ash reached the ground and a moment later heard a sickening crunch and scream as Lily hit the ground. Ash quickly reached her and scanner her carefully. Her chest wasn’t moving so she wasn’t breathing. He put his hand on her heart and he didn’t feel a pulse. A knot tightened in his tummy. She was gone.

It took Ash a moment to take this news in. He simply refused to believe it. He just sat there, hoping she would sit up. But she didn’t. A feeling of complete gloom took him as he realized he was alone. He curled up into a ball and sat, unable to speak, unable to cry, and unable to move.

Many days later, once again, a small bright dot sprang from flower to flower. Every one it came across was wilted. The sky became dark with clouds. The poor little dot knew it would be done for if it were rained on, so it jumped into a flower and closed the petals around itself.

Cracked By Michaela Edwards

“You have to trust me,” he said again.

“But I just met you!”

“Come now or it will be too late!” The walls were cracked and the water was spilling in faster.



Earlier that day Julia’s parents unloaded the last boxes and finally drove the moving truck back to the rental company. Julia was still furious that she had to leave all her friends back in Colorado just because her dad got a stupid job. Especially right before her thirteenth birthday.

While they were gone she decided to check out the sunny waters of their new house on the coast of Florida. If she couldn’t be with her friends at least she could get a tan. She walked out to the beach and went into the water until it was up to her knees. She floated, splashed and jumped around in the surf, getting her almost white blond hair wet and getting salty water in her gray eyes. Then she heard someone scream.

“Tsunami!!!” She looked farther out into the water and sure enough there was a humongous wave coming toward her like a stampede of bulls. She sprinted to her door. She tried to pull open the door. Forgetting that it wasn’t the same as her door in Colorado, she pulled in the wrong direction making the knob fly off and hit the head of a seagull perched on the porch railing knocking it out, as she got jolted back unexpectedly.

“Help!” She cried.

“Over here. Hurry!” someone shouted. She looked around and saw a middle aged man with sand colored hair and dark green eyes. This must be her new neighbor, Mr. Brown. She’d heard her parents talk about him. She ran over and they hurried into his house.

“Hi. I’m Mr. Brown.”

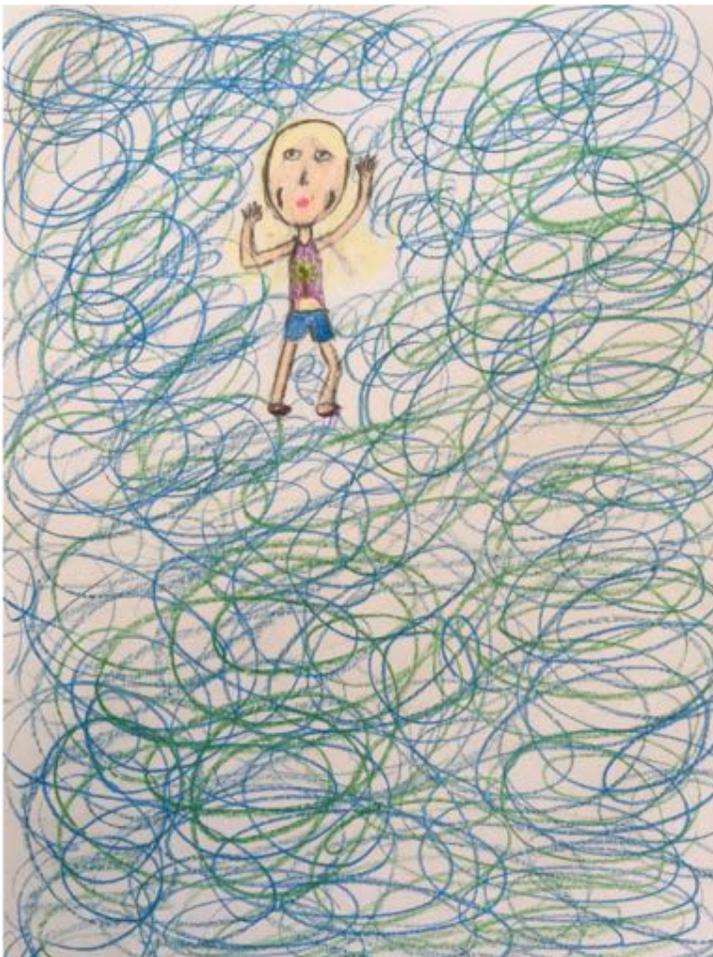
“I’m Julia. We just moved in next door.”



“That’s right.” He said, “Take a seat.” As she sat down, the floor shifted. They heard a loud

crack and it felt as though the floor was sliding forward. She stumbled over to a window and what do you know there were fish.

“We’re in the ocean!” She screamed. As the wave of the tsunami rolled out faster and more powerfully, they felt thumps against the old beach house that was being knocked around. As you know the waves of a tsunami are very fast and big so this was bad! They felt the house start to tilt, until the windows took place of the floor. Julia looked down and screamed. The darkness of the ocean surrounded them. The wall suddenly burst a hole and water started filling up at their feet. The room seemed to be getting smaller and smaller. Julia started to feel dizzy. The last time she was in a situation like this, was on her fifth birthday and she was stuck in an elevator for three hours. Ever since then she had serious claustrophobia. She started hallucinating the malfunctioning clicks of the elevator and its alarms. Mr. Brown tried to reassure her that it was her imagination.



“The water was up to their necks and every time that they breathed in they would taste salty damp air.”

The water was up to their necks and every time that they breathed in they would taste salty damp air. She started thinking of the things that she wanted to tell her parents but couldn’t because she knew that she was going to die right here, right now.

“Mmmmeeeeewwrrrrrrrrrr!”

“Whoa, did you hear that?” Julia asked Mr. Brown.

“Hear what?”

“Oh, nothing. I just never heard that in the elevator.”

“Heard whaaaat?!”

“MMMMMMMMMMMMEEEEEEEEEEEEWWWWWRRRRRRRR!”

“That!”

They looked up and saw the hull of a large ship coming towards them.

“We’ve got to get up there,” yelled Mr. Brown. “Trust me.”

Julia stopped. “Absolutely no way!”

“You have to trust me!”

“But I just met you!” She screamed.

“Please, before it’s too late!” Julia looked out the window that was at her feet. They hadn’t realized it in the panic, but they had been rolling out for quite a while and were now deep in the ocean. If they didn’t go now there would be no chance.

“Fine!”

Mr. Brown grabbed her arm and they floated over to a bobbing wooden chest. “I almost forgot.” Mr. Brown said. He opened the chest to find his old scuba gear. Cracked.

“Now what?!” Julia cried.

“It’s clearly our only choice to swim.”

“That’s it. I’m dead.”

“We have to go, or at least die trying. It’s our only hope.”

He broke a window, took a deep breath, grabbed Julia, and swam through the opening. The water was freezing. They started to swim up. Julia could feel the pressure slam her downward and her heart felt like it was going to explode. Her lungs throbbed and her ears felt popped. She went back up and finally felt an amazing breath of fresh air. She looked around for Mr. Brown. When he finally surfaced, she sighed. That’s when she realized it wasn’t over yet. The boat was coming at them. They shouted and screamed, but it didn’t slow down. She closed her eyes, ready for the impact, when it stopped.

“Climb aboard,” a sailor said. As they climbed the rope ladder he asked, “What were you two doing out here?”

“Long story,” answered Mr. Brown.

The Hair Whip Bandit *By Michaela Edwards*

Once upon a time, there was an old woman named Maria. She had a stooped back making her seem smaller than she was, gray hair, black eyes, pale wrinkly skin, and a horrid crooked nose. She lived in the cottage of her childhood. It was built just outside Olde Town in the kingdom of Traggolina She was born there 83 years ago. Her family had lived there forever and once her parents died she stayed there alone. Everyday she would look out into the fields of grass and daisies that rolled in when she was a child. Next to her cottage was a humongous abandoned tower with ivy growing up the side.

One rainy evening, she was walking into town for her weekly shopping trip. Maria knew everyone in town and probably knew the area better than anyone, living there her whole life. On this trip she saw a family that she didn't recognize. They were on vacation. She bent down to say hello to the small boy. The mother quickly pulled her son back staring at Marias horrible crooked nose.

"Get away from our son!" the dad yelled.

That's when a shop owner came out at the commotion. "Oh, don't worry. Maria here is the nicest woman I've ever met. She would never do anything to cause harm." He smiled. "Well I best be back to the shop." Then he turned and walked away.

"Good day." She said to the family and walked away sadly.

As she walked to the market she passed a dark alley. In the middle of it was a wailing baby. It looked only a couple months old, no more than that. She walked past it and continued on to the market telling herself that the baby's parents were nearby and they would come back. But, when the rain started to pour and the lightning struck she had to turn back for the child. Just as she came upon the alley, she saw two people walking toward her.

"Is this your baby?" Maria asked.

"Yes." The mother replied. "We were just about to grab her and run home."

That's when Maria saw a flash of lightning and, felt the ground shake. She looked over and saw the parents on the ground scorched. She ran over to help but nothing that she tried worked. The last words that the mother mumbled were "Take our daughter, Rapunzel."

Many years went by and Rapunzel lived with Maria in the small cottage. As the years went by Maria noticed that Rapunzel's hair was special in a way. It was so bright it was glowing and the beautiful blond locks would grow about an inch a day. Rapunzel would never let Maria cut it. She would sit in front of the mirror for hours, combing it and talking to it like it was alive. She was more protective of it, than anything else. It matched so well with her cold emerald green eyes.

The part of the story that you usually hear is about the tower and the prince and that does still happen but for a different reason than you might expect. Maria was very hesitant to tell Rapunzel about why Maria had adopted her. She thought it would make her angry and want to run away. Rapunzel was very high tempered. Of course not knowing where she came from drove her crazy.

Because of all this rage inside of her, she would go around towns to rob stores and random people. She would swing around her hair, which would be in a tight and hard braid. She would make people give her whatever she wanted, even if they didn't have it. If someone refused she

would whip them with her hair until they cracked. She became known as the hair whip bandit. If someone was a tough cookie, she was tougher. She would just choke them to death with her hair and take from their pockets. Then she would lean over their dead body and say “Sorry, you shouldn’t mess with the hair.”



This routine worked every time except the one time it didn’t. Every time she touched the scar on her cheek she thought about the victim that had come up with a knife. Of course that didn’t stop her in the future.

One day when Rapunzel got home Maria was waiting. “Will this madness stop if I tell you how I found you?”

“Maybe. Depends on the answer.”

Maria decided it would be okay to tell her. She thought that it couldn’t get worse. She was wrong.

She explained the night that she had found Rapunzel. The alley, the rain, the lightning, and the final words. As she spoke the final sentence, Rapunzel ran out the door. Inside her head thoughts were bubbling and she wanted to punch something. She ran into town and grabbed someone.

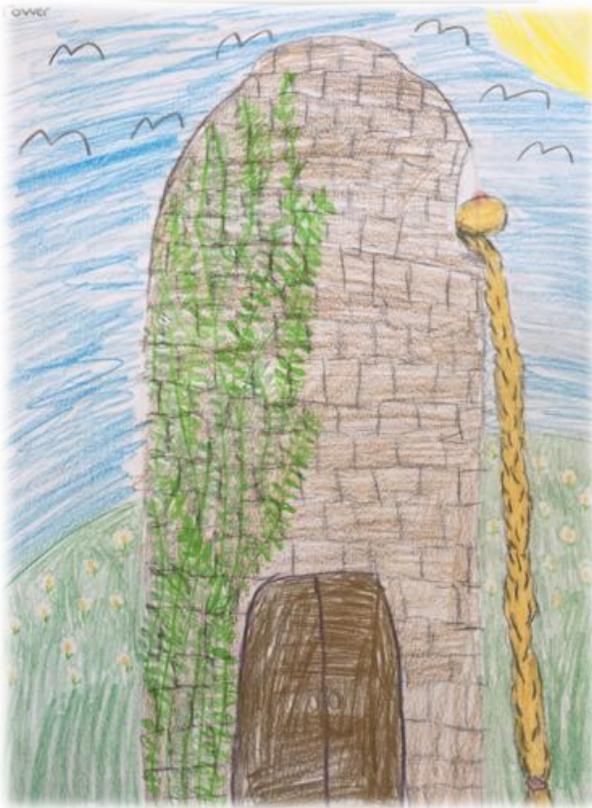
“Help!” he screamed. “Wait I know you.” He said with a look of realization and terror. “You’re that maniac who kills people with your hair.”

“You’ve got that right.” She said furious, and choked the man to death. “Sorry, you shouldn’t mess with the hair.” She smirked.

Maria rode into town on her horse and found Rapunzel. She grabbed her by the wrist and forced her home.

“That’s it!” She screamed. “I’ve somehow kept my temper with you for 14 years! You’ve promised me this would end but look where we are now! You are done with all of this, you are done living in this cottage and you are done being crazy! You may not now, may not ever but everyone else will thank me for what I am going to do next.”

Maria grabbed Rapunzel’s wrist and yanked her forward, ripping the rusty key necklace that she always wore off her neck. They staggered over to the tower and climbed the stairs up and up and up.



2 YEARS LATER:

“Rapunzel let down your hair.”

This is the part of the story your familiar with. As the long strands of hair came swinging down the side of the tower, Maria climbed up.

“Here’s your food,” she said handing a platter to Rapunzel as she climbed in the small window. She grabbed the food and sat on the bed they had pulled up through the tower window. Other than that there was a small oak coffee table and a few paintings on the wall.

“You can leave now.” She said coldly to Maria, putting her hair out the window again.

“Right.” Maria said sadly.

I’m sure you know the rest. The prince “rescues” her, they lock Maria in the tower and become king and queen. After that, Rapunzel lived happily ever after, but the kingdom did not. She kept her ways of whipping and choking even after all of those years in the tower. She

was the vilest queen in the land but of course that’s not what you heard about, for Rapunzel is the one who wrote all of those stories. And how do I know all of this?

Well, I am Maria.

Upgrades *By Michaela Edwards*

“Whoa!” exclaimed Ally as their spacecraft thudded to a stop. Ally and her twin sister Sara had just spent 5 years in space studying Mars. They launched when they were just 13!

Ally stepped out of the ship and looked around. “Uh...Sara, you need to see this!” They both looked out into the city they had landed in. They stared in confusion and amazement.

Sara took a step off the ship and onto the black concrete. “Is it really possible that so much has...changed?”

Their matching icy gray eyes looked out into destruction. Instead of the small city in Texas with only two or three small buildings and the nicest people you ever met, they stared upon chaos. There were giant metal buildings that were clumped together in no means of making it look good. All of the buildings were so close together that you could put your arm out the window and shake hands with someone in the other building.

The girls looked around for the people who were supposed to be taking pictures and greeting them. All that they saw was a clump of metal across the street. More like moving metal. Sara started to walk back to the ship but tripped over a piece of debris. She shrieked as the rough concrete tore her knees. As she stood the clump of metal all of a sudden rose and turned out to be five body-like figures. They stood still with their backs to the girls for a couple of seconds and then suddenly darted around and came toward them slowly. Then, in unison, the metal figures said in a robotic voice, “Upgrades. Upgrades saved the world. Now you must get upgraded. Then you will be like us and everyone else. Upgrade now!!!!!!”

Sara whispered to Ally, “Do you think that means these robots were once people? That seems impossible!”

“The upgrades made them robots I guess. Creepy!” Sara replied.

Even though the voices were robotic the girls heard two pitches. One was higher and one was lower. The girls guessed they were male and female. The robots’ mouths just moved up and down in rhythm not matching their words. They looked really weird. Not like robots in movies. They looked very geometrical and the male and female did look somewhat different. All of their limbs were two long lines with metal in the middle acting as skin, which came together at a point. Because of this any time they took a step it sounded like a needle dropping as the point of their foot hit the ground. The heads were square shaped until it came to the cheeks and then it went down into a point for the chin. The girls had a small metal house like shape on top of their heads as a bun. The boys had nothing. Other than that the boys and girls looked the same except that the girls were a bit slimmer. All across their bodies were triangles and squares. Looking down at their own pale skin (you don’t get much sun in a space ship), light brown hair and over all non-metalness, Sara and Ally couldn’t believe that these used to be humans.



The metal figures started coming at them faster and the girls ran back to the shuttle. As they were running a robot swished its hand and the door to the shuttle exploded into flames.

“Great!” Ally shouted as she realized there was nowhere else to go.

“Lets just give up.” Sara said “It’s not like there’s anything to go back to. Mom and dad are

going to be psychopath robots and so is everyone else. No point in trying.” So the girls finally stood still as the robots collided with them, knocking them down and out.

An hour or so later Sara and Ally woke up in a small room, surrounded by metal walls and a table and chair in the center of the room, right in front of them. Then, of course, there were the chairs that they were strapped to. Sara winced as she touched the raw slices in her skin. It felt as though she had been dragged through the streets of the city, which she had. A couple of minutes later they heard a door creak open. A short skinny man with silky black hair and a matching moustache walked in.

“Wait. You’re not upgraded. Are you saving us?” Ally asked hopefully.

“Oh no silly,” he answered in a raspy voice “I invented the upgrades. It’s your turn to get them.”

“But if you invented them then why don’t you have them?”

“Oh. I don’t need them. I created them for the rest of the world. It drove me crazy how different and imperfect everyone was. So now everyone’s the same and they do my bidding. So it’s a double thumbs up, for me anyways,” he laughed. “I can see your wheels turning. Why don’t I just tell you everything?” The girls nodded.

“Alright. One day I decided people are stupid, annoying creatures with no order. All different, and all imperfect. Except for me, that is. So after a while, with all my money and connections I more or less blew up all of the continents except for North America. Obviously, since you are on it. Anyways, this caused everyone to either die or scurry here.” He smirked as he said this.

“I convinced all of these clueless hostages to get upgraded or they would die. So they all got upgrades. I built all of my buildings like this so I could get more done and take over all the cities. That way when I think it’s time, I will recreate humans and be ready. To be honest though upgrades are just slapping the metal figures around the body. There are vents inside of it to burn out the flesh and guts and the human inside.” The girls stared in shock “So are you ready to do this thing?”

The director grabbed Sara and Ally tightly by the wrists. He yanked them into another room with a giant machine in it.

“You are just going to step in there and let the machine do the rest of the work. Also please refrain from screaming. I think I feel a migraine coming on.” The director said.

The machine started buzzing and the girls were put next to it on a platform. The surface that they were on started moving inward pulling them into the machine.

“Robot city here we come.” Said Ally as she turned away and closed her eyes. The metal plates that they had seen on the robots started coming towards them ready to encase their bodies.



“Hold it right there!” yelled a deep voice. Just then ten people-not robots but actual people-came crashing through the windows. One of them smashed the control panel next to the machine. The robot plates stopped coming towards the girls and they ran out of the giant machine.

“Dad!” the girls screamed realizing that it wasn’t over. “Wait, where’s mom?” Sara asked.

“She was on a business trip in Europe when...” He said sadly. “But this is no time to cry. We have to get you to safety.”

Suddenly, eight or so robots came running out ready to fight. BBBBAAAANNNGGG!!!! Someone shot a robot. Then all of the other ones. Finally, when he didn’t have his protective wall of robots, someone shot the director.

“It’s over.” The people cheered!

EPILOGUE:

“We did a good job,” Ally said to everyone. They had been taken to a safe house for humans. But with all of the hundreds of rescued people it was now a safe city. Everyone gazed upon the trees and the nature. After traveling around the country and disposing of all the robots and doing a pretty darn good cleanup job the country was more or less back to normal. And from now on everyone was just going to have to let nature do its thing.

Peter Pan: The Real Story *By Aydin Hodjat*

Peter Pan groaned and rolled out of bed. He *hated* it when he was awakened in the middle of the night. He dragged himself to his specially made party detector (who knows where he got that from), which was playing that song from “Frozen”, and -- wait. “Frozen”? Peter slammed his hand on the “off” button for the detector.

“Tinkerbell!” he roared. “Get over here!”

A small light darted out from under Peter Pan’s bed and said “Yes?” This was Tinkerbell, supposedly Peter's best friend, but she wasn’t anything like the stories say. Tinkerbell was Peter’s only cousin. They shared a relative in the legendary Captain Hook, who was Peter Pan’s evil father and Tinkerbell’s uncle. Peter didn’t like to think about that, especially because Hook had killed Peter’s mother. Like Peter, Tinkerbell was a born trickster. However, she was not immortal like her famous cousin, and she was not as powerful as him either. She was also evil. Peter was housing her because she couldn’t find a house of her own to live in, and Peter decided that family must help family, no matter how different the family was. Tinkerbell had promised not to play any tricks while living with Peter, but lately she had been going back to her evil habits. She was up and trying to trick him every chance she got, and once she had even made an attempt on his life, forgetting his immortality. This trick with his party detector, as small as it was, was the last straw.

“You’ve been messing with my party detector!!!” Peter screamed.

“Your rock music is too violent!” the light protested. “It’ll spoil your ears!”

Peter’s eyes flashed with anger. “And that song from ‘Frozen’ is better?” he growled. The ground seemed to shake. “Listen here, I’ve lived a long time. Did I tell you I passed college-level academics before I turned eleven? I’ve never needed anyone to tell me what’s right and what’s wrong. I’m tired of living with you, trickster. Time to move out for you! Go somewhere. I don’t care where. Go to Neverland!”

Tinkerbell gasped. “But-but only you know the way to Neverland! And even you’re too scared to go! The one person who tried to get there-your mother-died in the attempt!”

That did it. Although it was true, Peter bellowed, grabbed a lamp from his nearby nightstand, and bashed the fairy so hard her light went out. She shrieked and flew out an open window. “AND DON’T COME BACK!!!” Peter yelled after her.



His anger evaporated instantly. He smiled. Now, the party detector was honest, unlike Tinkerbell. If it rang, it rang for a reason. So there was a party about, eh? Time to investigate.

In five minutes, Peter Pan had changed from his nightclothes into his only outfit: a green shirt, jeans and camo combat boots, with an iron chain necklace, complete with a gleaming silver sword hanging from a black leather belt, which had a cold steel buckle. His shining black eyes, tousled red hair, and dark tan skin went perfectly with his outfit. When Peter had turned seventeen, he had decided to stay that age forever, so he looked fresh and young for someone who had lived as long as he had. All in all, he made Justin Bieber look like an ogre. He grinned, displaying blinding white teeth, then did a backflip and soared out the open window.



The house hosting the party was pretty easy to find, seeing as how it was the only castle with disco balls hung up outside. Also, it wasn't usual to even *have* a castle around, so it was a prime place to look for a party. The castle was only a few miles away from his mountain treehouse home in the North London woods. As Peter Pan approached the castle, he decided to enter through a castle window. He shot up to the window, reared back his fist, smashed the window, and flew in.

"Ta-da!" he cried. Then he noticed there were only three kids in the room. "Oh," he said.



The three kids weren't too big. The biggest was a blond girl. She wore a yellow T-shirt and sweatpants, and was in the middle of fighting two identical twins, sporting black hair, green eyes, and red shirts. One of the twins had the girl in a headlock and was trying to throw her to the ground. The girl was kicking and punching and screaming. "Take that back! My daddy is not a cheat!"

She had the other boy in a chokehold and was busy trying not to get her eyes gouged out by him. Everybody had frozen when Peter Pan entered through the window. He had that effect on people. The girl shook herself free from the twins and asked Peter, “Who are you and what are you doing here?” in a snobby tone.

“Um, Wendy, I don’t think--” one of the twins started.

“Who are you?” Peter interrupted.

Wendy would have said something, but then she noticed Peter’s fierce glare and his awesome sword. She gulped. She had to admit, even though he had crashed her party, he did look pretty athletic-punk cool, if there is such a thing.

“Well, um... I’m Wendy, and those two are John and Michael. They’re twins whose dad owes *my* dad loads of tax money.”

Wendy gestured to the two boys, who each said “Hi” to Peter.

Then Wendy’s face became stubborn and her voice became snobby again. “Now who are you?” she demanded. “You invaded my party and broke the window! I’m going to tell my daddy and you’ll be sorry. My daddy’s a rich man, you see, and he’s just downstairs, partying with the grownups...”

“Your ‘daddy’ is a slimy cheating brat who lives on tax money,” Michael muttered.

“Yeah,” John agreed.

“Shut up or you’re dead meat!!” Wendy screamed. “The new boy’s on my side and he has a sword!!!”

“I’ll take the twins’ side. You complain too much,” said Peter.

“Hey!” Wendy wailed. “That was mean! You need to do something nice for me. You owe me something now!”

“Okay,” Peter said. “What do you want?”

Peter Pan agreed to give Wendy what she wanted in the hopes that she would forget about telling her dad. It seemed to work. Wendy smirked. “I want a vacation!” she declared. Peter blanched. He *could* do vacations, but he had hoped she would want something smaller. He should have known better with this kid.

“Well, um... where do you want to go? Puerto Rico?”

“No” Wendy said.

“The Bahamas?” Peter asked.

“No!”

“Virgin Islands?”

“NO!”

“Philippines? Dominican Republic?”

“NOOOO!” Wendy exclaimed. “I want to go somewhere no one has ever gone!” Uh-oh.

Peter Pan knew a couple places like that. He was too cool not to. However, the closest one, Neverland, was way too dangerous for a whiny kid like Wendy. As soon as one got there, one could get her head taken off by a rogue cannonball. Huge birds the size of airplanes ruled the skies, and radioactive robot zombie tigers prowled the earth next to acidic oceans filled with giant mutant alien leeches. In every safe hiding place stalked a branch of the Lost Boys, bloodthirsty terrorist children who killed anything in their way. In the only safe waters, that swirled around a snow-capped mountain, were the pirate fleets and armies of Peter's father, Captain Hook who would kill a person before she even got near.

"Well, I know a place like that, but--"

"Then take me there!" Wendy insisted. "Or I'll tell my daddy."

"Please, take us too!" chorused the twins.

Well, what choice did Peter have? He took the three kids to Neverland, where Wendy eventually joined Captain Hook's pirate armada and the twins became the leaders of the Lost Boys, who, under the influence of John and Michael, changed their scales and became Hook's main enemy. Peter Pan went back to his house after assassinating his villainous father. None of the adventures in Neverland went the way the stories tell it. Why? Well, if the stories were told any better, Peter Pan would rule the world. Not everybody would like that. In fact, *I* wouldn't like that. It's harder to avenge yourself when your enemy is in a seat of power. So I, yes, I, wrote those stories. For do you not know who I am? Three guesses. No, it's not Hook or Wendy. Give up? It's Tinkerbelle, and I want my revenge on Peter Pan.

The Adventures of a Twelve Year Old Boy Named Dan (and, of course, his golf cart Flappy) *By Aydin Hodjat*

It was a bright, sunny day on a hot June afternoon. People ran about in parks, laughing and having a good time. For Daniel Woods (Dan for short), the son of *the* famous Tiger Woods, the whole twenty four hours were to be wasted on golf. The day, June 21, should have been an awesome day for him. Not only was it his twelfth birthday, it was also the day of his last soccer game of the season. This game was very important to him since it was his team's first national championship game. It was even *more* special, because he had secured the championship spot for his team by kicking an epic fifty-yard goal past the other team's goalie, who was feared throughout the league as a legend. However, Dan was to miss the game as his renowned dad had wanted to go to a golf tournament on that very day. Daniel had protested, but his father had said, "You will have other silly soccer games. This golf tournament is integral to my staying in shape." Daniel had no idea what the word integral meant, so he had shouted and yelled and called his dad an idiot. That had resulted in his being grounded. Now they were at his idiotic sensible dad's tournament, and Daniel was absolutely bored.

"Seven," Dan now muttered to himself. This was a habit he had of doing whenever he was angry. It kept him awake like a charm. Maybe the number was magic. He watched as his dad swung back and crushed the ball. As the ball reached its peak height, it suddenly stopped and hung in midair. Dan blinked. He turned to his mother.

"Are you seeing--" he began, and then broke off. His mother stared vacantly past him. "Mom?" he asked. He turned to his dad. He was frozen in place, his golf club high in the air. The crowds of spectators behind him were statues, their eyes blank. The whole golf course was silent. Not even the birds sang. That was when the goblins showed up.

The goblins seemed to come from nowhere, but at the same time from everywhere. They came from behind trees, from under bushes, out from vending machines. (Those came out holding snack bags filled with junk food.) Some goblins just materialized out of thin air. They all carried thick oak clubs wrapped in bronze. They were in a force of a hundred or so, menacingly displaying horned helmets, green skin, lumpy V-shaped armor, rotting teeth, and bad breath. A huge seven foot goblin that looked like the leader stepped forward. He had his club in one hand and a spray cheese can in another. He pointed at Dan.

"PREPARE TO DIE!!!" he bellowed.

"Uh, uh," Dan stammered. "Can we reschedule my death for another time? Like, uh, twelve thirty tomorrow afternoon at my place? I could make tea."

"WE CANNOT RESCHEDULE YOUR DEATH FOR ANOTHER DATE!!!" the goblin roared. "We have come from the core of the earth, where creatures like us live. We have lain dormant for years. Now we have come to invade the upper world. It is cramped where we come from. Also, you *Homo sapiens* have good snacks!"

The goblin raised his spray cheese can, and the goblins roared in approval. "We have cast a spell on your brethren causing them to fall asleep. *You* have not fallen under the sleeping spell! Somehow, you managed to cast a spell deflecting ours!"

An electric shock jarred Dan. His old charm of saying “Seven”... Could it be real magic? Sadly, he did not have time for wistful thinking. “GET HIM!!!” The goblins roared again and charged. Dan did the natural thing, the thing that any of us would gladly do in his situation. He turned and ran.



Dan went for the largest shelter nearby: the gift shop. He kicked open the doors and frantically looked for a place to hide. Just then, a horde of goblins crashed through the roof. They growled menacingly, and carried clubs and dynamite. They growled, but they weren't that scary due to the fact that they had Cheetos crumbs all over their faces.

“Uh-oh,” said Dan. Then he saw something in a corner that saved his life. Why the heck would there be a pitching machine in a golf shop, Dan never figured out. Once again, he did not have time to sit down and meditate on the subject. He grabbed the pitching machine and turned around to face the goblins. One snarled and stepped forward, his club raised. Dan let him have it. He blasted the goblin in the gut with a ninety-five mile per hour fastball from the pitching machine. The goblin soared backward into his comrades, knocking them down like dominoes. Nearly half of the goblins were knocked out. While the goblins were recovering, Dan looked at their dynamite and thought of a plan. He ran through the gift shop, grabbing golf clubs, tanks of gasoline, a drill, matches, golf balls, and duct tape. When he went to exit the shop, a goblin stood in his way. The goblin leapt at Dan and Dan nimbly sidestepped him. The goblin went flailing into the pile of his friends, which quickly escalated into a huge free-for-all. In the chaos, Dan sprinted out the shop door, lugging his pitching machine with him.

Dan's destination was pretty close to the gift shop. The golf cart garage was only about four hundred feet away, after all. Dan got into the fastest looking cart. Luckily, the keys were in the ignition. He took out his stolen drill and drilled a hole through the windshield. He stuck the nozzle of his pitching machine through the hole, then got out of the cart and taped golf clubs to every inch of the cart. He glanced behind him. He saw the gift shop explode, and when the dust cleared, Dan saw the goblins standing there. One held a stick of dynamite, grinning maliciously. Dan jumped into his customized golf cart. He rolled up the windows (yes, this golf cart had windows) and taped the doors shut. Then he turned the keys in the ignition, and put the pedal to the metal.

The golf cart leapt forward. It shot toward the garage doors and smashed through them. Dan watched the speedometer (this is a fancy golf cart!) go from 0 to 60MPH in seconds. He flew onto the golf course after taking a sharp left. The speedometer climbed higher and higher. After about a mile, he saw a huge sand hazard right in front of a water hazard that looked like a lake. He turned the cart around and saw a force of about ten thousand goblins in golf carts, escorted by even more goblins on foot. Per-fecto! Dan thought. Now, if anyone else thought that, they would be considered mentally deranged and a doctor would label them with some psychological disease that had a fancy name, but this was Dan. And Dan had a plan.! He drove toward the army of goblins, yelling insults and braining them with baseballs from his pitching machine. He came at the army head on, ready for a collision. He counted down in his mind. Three seconds until impact, two, one...*BANG*.

The collision with the goblins was totally awesome. As Dan drove through the army's ranks, the golf clubs taped to his cart acted like battering rams, knocking goblins and golf carts aside with impunity. The whole time, Dan had the windows of his cart down, throwing gasoline tanks at the enemy. Dan finally crashed out of the army from the rear guard. He gunned his golf cart's engine, and went a ways before swerving around again. The goblins were in utter chaos. It was the perfect time to strike. Dan took out some golf balls. He loaded them into his pitching machine, but not before lighting them with his matches. Hoping that the pitching machine would not burn, he took aim at the goblins in front of him and fired. What a sight. Dan saw it as if in slow motion. The squadron of flaming golf balls erupting from the pitching machine, the flames on the golf balls flickering, as they struggled to keep alive, the gas-drenched goblin's eyes widening as they realized Dan's plan, the golf balls making contact...A fiery ball floated into the air, quickly rising into a gray mushroom cloud that blotted out the sun. Then the sound wave reached Dan, roaring through his ears and flattening everything within a half-mile radius. The noise slowly died away, until everything was quiet. Then Dan spoke.

"Yo!" he cried. "That was, like, so cool!"

Dan grinned as his family's van pulled out of the country club's parking lot. Things were getting better and better for him. His parents and everyone else had awakened right after the explosion. No one suspected Dan as the cause of the massive crater in the middle of the golf course. In fact, his mother thought he had been abducted at the time of the big bang. As a result, he was no longer grounded and he had even been able to keep his custom golf cart. His dad's tournament had been canceled, and now they were headed to his soccer game. This day is not so bad after all, Dan thought. Boy oh boy, if he had seen the dragons circling overhead, he probably would have taken that back.

Twelve years later

September 1st 2028

Location: Classified

Dan ran up to his commander in the midst of battle.

"Commander!" he gasped. "The right flank is in serious trouble. They say they are being attacked by goblins eating French fries!"

The commander swiveled around to face Dan. "Then hold them off, blast it!" he screamed. "You are a private in this army for a reason!"

"Yes, sir!" Dan saluted his commander and ran off in the direction of the flight hangar.

Dan had been in this situation many years before and he knew what to do. He walked into the hangar, and swept the cover off a machine in a corner that was his pride and joy. Flappy 2.0. Dan slid into the driver's seat as the cart came to life. He pressed a button on the dashboard and heavy depleted uranium sheets grew all over the machine. Huge wings slid out of the sides. Where a pitching machine used to sit, a machine gun rested, the barrel sticking out of a perfectly sized hole in the window shield. Missiles were lodged in the cart's wings and in the headlights. Dan pressed another button. Flappy 2.0 rose into the air, hovered for a moment, then shot off to combat the goblins. Anybody else who goes off to fight a horde of junk-food addicted goblins may be considered crazy, but hey, this was Dan, and Dan *always* had a plan.



The Harbinger *By Aydin Hodjat*



Hello! Come in! I'm not going to tell you my name. Names don't really matter. Oh, and don't step on the doormat. It'll blow up. Also, avoid the wolf head on the wall. It bites. Uh-oh. I see my pet cottonmouth has bitten you before the wolf head got a chance. Come have some champagne, then. Don't worry. The champagne is only mildly poisonous compared to the snakebite you received. While you're screaming in pain, waiting for it to all "end", I'll tell you a story. A story about a boy living in Cornwall, London in the year 1915. A boy who dared to go where he shouldn't have and do what he shouldn't. And... well, I'll start from the beginning. Hopefully, you won't die before the story ends. Now what are we waiting for? Let's begin!

Dark mist hung around the old abandoned house like some evil thing, as if waiting for the chance to descend upon some unknowing passerby. The wind howled, and it sounded like all the old forsaken dead, the hangmen and the suicide cases and criminals and those accused of witchcraft, were howling together, waiting for revenge on our puny mortal world. Everybody was sleeping, ignorant of the world around them. There was a light in the old abandoned house, an electrical light. There had not been a light of any kind in that house for centuries. And yet, now there was. Fourteen-year old Thackeray Johansen stood in the attic of the house, searching it with a flashlight, all alone in the night. He was a collector, an explorer. He collected things, from rocks to raisin boxes, from tea mugs to tapestries, and, once, even a bottle of poison. He had come here looking for old relics. This would be the perfect spot for collecting and exploring. A place where no human had stepped for years... But his hopes were unfulfilled. There had been nothing in the whole house. Even in the attic, there was nothing but cobwebs and old vines growing in through a shattered window. Then he saw an old gravestone with the words **HARBINGER** on it... Thackeray walked over to the grave. A medium-sized cylinder sat on top of it. It glowed a dull red and yellow, and had a rusted lid. Thackeray picked it up and unsuccessfully pried at the lid with his hands. He took out the crowbar he carried while exploring and used it to get the lid off. A scroll of paper lay inside. On it was inscribed:



Dark mist hung around the old abandoned house like some evil thing, as if waiting for the chance to descend upon some unknowing passerby. The wind howled, and it sounded like all the old forsaken dead, the hangmen and the suicide cases and criminals and those accused of witchcraft, were howling together, waiting for revenge on our puny mortal world. Everybody was sleeping, ignorant of the world around them. There was a light in the old abandoned house, an electrical light. There had not been a light of any kind in that house for centuries. And yet, now there was. Fourteen-year old Thackeray Johansen stood in the attic of the house, searching it with a flashlight, all alone in the night. He was a collector, an explorer. He collected things, from rocks to raisin boxes, from tea mugs to tapestries, and, once, even a bottle of poison. He had come here looking for old relics. This would be the perfect spot for collecting and exploring. A place where no human had stepped for years... But his hopes were unfulfilled. There had been nothing in the whole house. Even in the attic, there was nothing but cobwebs and old vines growing in through a shattered window. Then he saw an old gravestone with the words **HARBINGER** on it... Thackeray walked over to the grave. A medium-sized cylinder sat on top of it. It glowed a dull red and yellow, and had a rusted lid. Thackeray picked it up and unsuccessfully pried at the lid with his hands. He took out the crowbar he carried while exploring and used it to get the lid off. A scroll of paper lay inside. On it was inscribed:

*Nine days hence the full moon rises,
Then evil of all shapes and sizes,
Gathers into one frightful body.
The body of a witch, and with her birth
Comes the destruction of our sacred earth.*

Thackeray yawned. He had never been one to believe in the destruction of the world and super-natural stuff. He looked at his watch. It was getting late. His parents would be getting worried if he stayed much longer. In fact, he realized, his parents didn't even know where he had gone. They were unknowingly sleeping, dumb to the fact that their son had sneaked out into the deadly killer world of the night, the world that we all would like to pretend does not exist. He pocketed the scroll, but left the glowing canister on the grave. There was something otherworldly about that canister. Something dark and evil--and menacing. Thackeray walked down the attic stairs, to the empty living room, and out the door, leaving the house in utter silence.

Nine days later, Thackeray Johansen was awoken by a shaft of moonlight shining down on his face in the middle of the night. He sat up. It was a full moon outside in the night sky, more luminous than anything Thackeray had ever seen. There was a low humming in his ears. It was coming from the old abandoned house, two blocks down the street. Oh no, Thackeray thought, feeling sick. He rolled out of bed and put on his blue robe. He put his Swiss Army knife and crowbar into his robe pocket. Then he quietly sneaked out of his room. He could hear his parents snoring across the hall. He went to the front door, slipped on his boots, and walked out of the safety of his home.

Thackeray tried to steady his heartbeat, which was hammering like a drum. He fervently hoped the cool night air would calm him down. The house was not humming, he tried to reassure himself. Houses don't hum. There was no indication of life in the town, Thackeray noted. There were no lights in the windows, no occasional late night drivers. Even the late-night stores, like the pub down the street, were closed, metal window-blinds hanging down over the panes of glass. Was it some magic wrought by the house, he wondered? Even though he tried to avoid the old house, a nagging feeling inside him drew him towards it. He could still hear it humming, louder and deeper than before. As he approached the house, he could see it had some kind of aura now, a blood-red force field which had the acrid smell of day-old vinegar. The evil aura flickered and sent sparks shooting off of it. The nagging sensation drew Thackeray inside the house, and as he stepped through the aura, a horrible burning sensation filled him, and he nearly cried out. A feeling of dread washed over him as he walked up the house's stairs, grasped the doorknob, and opened the door. He slowly walked into the old house.

The humming sound was coming from the attic, which was emitting a soft yellowish light. Thackeray wanted to hide. He wanted to curl up into a little ball and die. He couldn't care less if that was brave or not. He barely managed to climb the stairs, his knees shaking and clacking together like empty skulls falling on a cold marble floor. Thackeray crept into the attic and looked across the room. His mouth fell open in a silent scream, and then he quietly ran over to the gravestone in the corner of the room and hid behind it.

The canister, which Thackeray had discovered days before, had rolled across the floor. It was glowing even brighter than before. But the worst part was the yellow ghost-like figures oozing out of the canister. They drifted over to the center of the floor and curled up into balls, which packed

themselves together, one by one. They started to form the shape of a human body, first the legs, then the upper body, then the arms, then the head, until the body was complete. Then it turned and saw Thackeray, hiding behind the gravestone, and Thackeray realized with horror who it was. The witch Thackeray's scroll had spoken about. She could barely be called a she, more an it. She was gruesome beyond imagination. Maggots crawled from her skin, squirming around. Her eyes were like misshapen coals, blazing like fire. Her hair was translucent, and the most nearsighted person could see blood, red blood, in it. Thackeray yelled and ran straight out the shattered window. His legs churned even as he fell through the air. He hit the ground running. He didn't know where he was going, only knew he had to get away. He turned to see if he was being followed, and gasped. The house was rising into the air, on fire and still not burning. He saw the witch's face in the broken window, a dot in the immenseness of the rising goliath. And then the house imploded. Thackeray screamed as light invaded his vision. Pain flared behind his eyes and he was thrown backwards, sailing through the air, and crashed into an already disintegrating garage door, his neck snapping instantly. He was still screaming as he fell into darkness, never to return to the realm of the living.

The world lay in ruins. The strongest forts had crumbled to dust, and the mightiest nuclear reactors had fallen. People lay dead by the masses, slaughtered like cattle. Some had tried to escape their destruction, running from the death around them. Some had accepted their fall, peacefully waiting for their lives to end. Either way, the thing we call humanity had come to an end. The boy called Thackeray Johansen had only been the first. And in a way, he had been the most important. For he had been the one chosen by Fate to trigger the human's demise. His neighborhood was the one with the most rubble. The blast from the explosion of the house had been big enough to wipe out all life. It had been strongest in this town. The human death here had not been so bad. All the dead in Cornwall had died with peaceful expressions. The blast had reached and killed them so quickly they had not had any time to change their facial expressions, cry out, or even move from their slumbering demeanor. The mysterious old house that Thackeray had been exploring had obviously been blown apart. All the pieces had been vaporized. Or had they...? The final resting place of Thackeray Johansen was not a good one. He lay in a pile of sand, his snapped neck lying crooked on a wooden plank that was as battered as his broken body. A gravestone lay cracked near him, a glowing cylinder next to it. The cylinder seemed to emit a reddish light. The light shone on the gravestone, revealing the words: *THE HARBINGER FULFILLS... HE FULFILLS*. Then the words melted into the face of the grave, and all was silent under a setting sun.



Rainforest Adventure *By Enzo Pelletier*

2019 Feb 7

Thump, thump, thump. He jumped over the concrete block as he heard the hairy tramping feet behind him. He ran harder, his blond hair streaming behind him. Thinking of the thing's beady red eyes did not help. His name was Gregggy and he was 34. He was an explorer and he had been separated from his exploration group in the Sinharaja rain forest in Sri Lanka.



As he ran, a spider web fell on his face, and as he tried to take it off, he felt something, about the size of his hand, with many hairy legs sink its fangs into his arm. He felt the poison of the spider's fangs rush through his body like hot water. He fell to the ground; the strength being sucked out of him. Just before he blacked out, he heard those monsters—Rabgens, probably, he thought (a monster he'd been studying recently), coming up behind him.

He woke up staring into a big glob of Rabgen spit. It splatted on his face, going into his wide open mouth and up his flat nose.

The monster tried to grab him, he dodged and ran as fast as he could. As Gregggy ran, he felt pebbles falling from the rock ceiling, as if something huge, bigger than anything he thought could fit in the tunnel, was above him. Suddenly, right in front of him, the ceiling caved in.

It turned out that the *very big thing* was a giant mosquito. Its main body was about 20 feet long and its wings blasted Gregggy back a step as they buzzed. It charged at him (probably taking revenge for all the times he had used the fly swatter on them). Gregggy, at first, did what any sane human that was being chased by a 20-foot-long mosquito would do: he ran as fast as his legs would take him,



screaming at the top of his lungs. After a nice scream he suddenly had an idea, so he did what any insane human would do: he jumped onto its giant proboscis and ran onto its back. It soared off out of the cave and right over the rainforest, with Gregggy hollering on its back. As it buzzed over the forest, Gregggy dropped onto a tree and climbed down. His legs were very stiff and his vocal cords still hurt, and it was also getting dark, so he unrolled his sleeping pad and went to sleep.

The next day he took out his compass and set off in the direction of his camp.

As he was walking, a horde of flying coconuts with small white wings burst from a shrub, carrying him off his feet.

"Oof!" he gasped, as the air was knocked out of him. Gregggy grabbed a coconut and hung on.

Minutes later, Gregggy on his coconut, and all the rest of the coconuts, entered a tiny claustrophobic cave, where thousands of flying coconuts flew around.



In the center of it there was a massive throne, and, in all its royalty, sat a shriveled old coconut with spoiled milk spilling out.

“Is he like some kind of an old Gandalf or something?” Gregggy asked a coconut that was passing by.

“No.” it said in a sloshy voice, “That’s our king, and he will sacrifice you!”

“But what did I do?!” Gregggy asked

“Nothing, we just haven’t had a sufficient sacrifice in a long time” then laughed jollily to himself.

“Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! I...” said Gregggy, but the coconut zoomed away. “I object, I object!” he yelled at the coconut. He was brought to an altar and saw a huge hammer being lifted above him.

“Are you going to kill me?!” he was going to say, when suddenly the giant mosquito burst through the wall.

“It’s very good at smashing walls,” Gregggy thought as it charged at him, “and it’s very good at chasing me!”

As it flew around swerving and diving at him, he ran for his life. He dashed for the exit just as the mosquito crashed right above him. As he ran out into the jungle, he saw a little curl of smoke in the distance. He ran in that direction and soon found out it was his camp.

Four hours later, he was boarding the plane back to the U.S.

While the plane took off, he patted the head of his little pet flying coconut, Flying Gregggy II.



Hansel & Gretel, The real story By Enzo Pelletier

Once upon a time, there was a poor old woman enchanter in New Zealand. She had a stoop, but she could still work as hard as any three foot, 9006 year old could. She wore a mud-stained old shawl and bonnet. She lived in a hollow tree for all of her life, until she bought the candy house from a salesman in Florida. She liked it there, even if the house was drafty, there were three-foot-tall, stinking red-eyed, yellow-teethed rats scurrying around, grubs in her bed, fleas and weevils in the food, spider eggs in the jelly and, all in all, not very tidy. Every morning, she would step outside, breathe in the fresh air, let her white hair snap in the wind and then walk her two pet giant mutant talking hamsters, Fredrickpicklson, golden with brown speckles and Thendofftinkerson, silver, who had fallen out of the sky in an asteroid shower. Most of the time, the hamsters were kept in a giant cage.



The older the woman got, the worse her eyesight got, until she could hardly see anything. So, before she fed her hamsters, she would feel their fingers and arms to make sure that they weren't too fat. If they were, they would radioactively combust, throwing shards of magma glass in the air and make it rain rainbow chickens. She had one other pet, too- a turkey named Herbert, who looked like a normal turkey, but could be killed and eaten. He would then grow back from the bones in the morning.

One day the two hamsters ran away. The old woman was so upset she never slept. She tore out what left she had of her hair, would stress eat and every morning go outside and put out their favorite food- cooked Herbert with purple lettuce and square apples. A few weeks later, she heard two voices outside. "Finally," she thought, "They're back."

"This is chocolate!" She heard one of them say in a squeaky little voice.

"And this is icing!" said the other.

"STOP EATING MY HOUSE!" the old woman screamed.

She heard a small kid's voice say, "Go away stupid old lady."

The hamsters could sometimes change their voices.

"OH, NO YOU DONT!" she yelled back. Grabbing them and taking them inside, she thought it was strange that they were so thin, that they seemed to be wearing clothes and they were now a little on the round side.

"Stop it, old hag!" yelled one of them, "We are Hansel and Gretel! And we're kids!"

"Oh, don't trick me with that, you stupid hamsters! Saying you're kids! BAH! Get in the cage, now!"

As she pushed one of them into the cage and told the other to do the housework, (and yes, mutant talking hamsters *can* do housework) she felt how thin they were.

“You need food!” she said, then, calling to her turkey, “I’m going to eat you tonight!”

“Okay,” said Herbert (he could talk, too). “My therapist says, 'Being eaten every day keeps the doctor away!'”

The next day she went to her hamsters and said, “Now let me feel your finger!” She felt a finger that felt suspiciously like a chicken bone.

She did that for the next week, until one day she said to Herbert, “I’m going to cook you for supper...” When she trailed off and said “Boy!” (one of the hamsters was a boy, so it sounded like, “I’m going to cook you for supper, boy!”)

“Go see if the oven is hot!” she said to the hamster out of the cage.

A minute later it came back and said, “I can’t tell if the oven is hot or not!”

The old woman said some very un-grandma-y words and went to look. Suddenly, she felt a giant push on her rump and went tumbling into the fire.



Since she was a mild enchanter, after she died, she could make her ghost fly around, letting off massive magical charge, which gives young kids chest hair and makes gumdrops turn into something you would rather not know that slinks to somewhere you would rather not go. She watched from above, giving Hansel and Gretel chest hair and thinking, “If only I knew they were kids!”

She watched one of them set the other free, put a padlock on the oven door to make sure she was grandma-crisp, take all her money and ransack her house.

Moodily chewing on a piece of her house, she floated above.

Epilogue

Her two hamsters, Fredrickpicklson and Thendofftinkerson were last seen at Linda's house, locked in the fridge, and are known to bang to get out.

The End

Timmy The Kid by Enzo Pelletier

The sun's first rays streaked over the horizon as Timmy went out to get a pail of water, his stubbly blond hair rustling in the breeze. He was a short boy with bushy expressive eyebrows and a pinched mouth. As he was walking back to his Wild West town, a hairy hand that smelled and tasted of old cheese covered his mouth. He turned his eyes back and saw a fat man with dusty brown hair wearing a ketchup-stained shirt, bringing a little club on the back of his head. The last thing he heard was, "Sorry."

He woke up in a long metal hovering box with cushioned seats and buttons and gadgets in the front, where a robot was driving and viciously swearing at other robots in other boxes. Timmy looked out his window and fainted... because he had just seen the future New York City.

He woke up again in a white room with people rushing everywhere. He leapt out of bed and ran out of the room into a conference room, which had hundreds of important-looking people in it. They were staring at him because he happened to be in his underwear.

"Hello, Mr. ... Timmy, I believe?" said an old man with a long beard and a wrinkled face. He was wearing a blue coat and pink tie.

"I'm Timmy da' kid!" Timmy burst out, "And my pa'll string you up for kidnappin' me!"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, sonny!" said the old man, "we need your help!" Then to a man next to him, "Why did you have to pick him, of all the cowboys?"

"W-why do ya need me?" asked Timmy,

"Because electro organisms of your time period have passed through ours making..." The old man was interrupted by the

same man who had knocked Timmy out, but now he was holding a hotdog.

"To make long story short, some alien dudes that look like you cowboys, but evil, are goin' to come down from the sky and kinda attack us in three days, and you're the only one who can tell us how to fight them, cuz' you kinda know them. You got me?"

"Well," said Timmy, thinking hard, "I wouldn't want you nice fellas' gettin' hurt or nuttin', so I guess I'll help you."

Three days later

"OKAY!" bellowed the old man, running through the ranks of soldiers, "ALL ELECTRO CANNONS READY! ALL NANO GUNS READY!" He ran around on his long spindly legs, his white hair getting singed from the lightning shooting out of the cannons. "I'M TOO TIRED FOR A PEP TALK, ssSSOOO! LET'S DO THIS!"

The men yelled back, as hordes of evil cowboys rained from the sky.

Bang! Poof! Spliffy!

BOOM!

Bang! Spoof!

CLANG!
Bang! Boof!

The electro cannons blasted through the cowboys, and the guns left them just a puddle on the ground. At first it was looking good for the soldiers, but as time passed, they saw that the remaining bits of the cowboys were starting to re-form into cowboy-ish looking things. Most of them had their heads in their butts and their feet coming out of their... well, never mind.

Finally, an hour later, Timmy suddenly knew what he had to do. He leapt into the crowd of cowboys. Immediately, he was shot in the gut about three hundred times. As the light faded, he saw the cowboys seemingly evaporate into the sky.



Then, he died.

When Timmy woke up in the morning, he remembered he had had a really weird dream, something about big cities, cannons and guys eating hotdogs. He was thinking about it when his pa called him and told him to go get a pail of water. He slipped on his shoes and walked outside..... The sun's first rays streaked over the horizon as Timmy went out to get a pail of water, his stubbly blond hair rustling in the breeze...



Clash of the Sky *By Romeo Pelletier*

The night was unnaturally stormy for mid-fall.

James looked out his bedroom window and over the Rocky Mountain landscape.

The clouds started swirling and churning into a strange and ominous shape.

“Alex!” James called to his older brother, “Do you think that skull-shaped cloud looks natural?”

Just as Alex got up and stumbled over to the window, two bolts of lightning shot out from the skull's eye sockets and blasted the house. The last thing James saw was a chunk of the ceiling getting too big, too fast. Then darkness.

James had flashbacks of the past year. He and his family had moved from Chicago to Glenwood Springs, Colorado, because the crime rate had been too high in their neighborhood.

James woke up and his jaw hit the ground. Alex was staring up, too. Up in the stormy sky, a cloud knight battled a cloaked skeleton made entirely of fog. The skull warrior

knocked away the knight's weapon and was about to stab him, when suddenly James felt a surge of energy. A cloud horse appeared under him and a vapor sword in his hand. Without really knowing what he was doing, he gave a shout and charged up through the air towards the battle, Alex, with spear in hand, riding beside him. The skull warrior turned just in time to see a spear lodge itself in the skull warrior's side (courtesy of Alex's good throwing arm). It screamed in pain. Together, the two brothers smashed into the skull warrior (amazingly, it was solid). Alex pulled out his spear. The end was smeared and dripping with the deepest, gloomiest fog you could imagine.

The skull warrior turned on the boys and attacked. The battle was on! As James slashed and parried, Alex dodged and stabbed. James had never been very good at stick fighting, but now he was amazingly good, as was Alex.

Eventually, the two suddenly and amazingly gifted young warriors became too much for the skull warrior. Spewing fog like a nitrogen tank, it let out a shriek like a thousand birds of prey, turned and galloped off into the clouds.



James and Alex stood stunned and panting. Their weapons and horses were gone. The knight walked over to them, clapping his hands.

“Marvelous! Absolutely splendid!” he cried. “May I have the pleasure in knowing your names?”

“I'm James and he's Alex,” said James.

“Well, thank you so much! You saved my life!”

“Uh, yeah, no biggie,” said Alex.



“Oh, my, where are my manners?” said the knight. “My name is Sir Runningwind.”

“Hold on!” said James. “Who was that, and why was it trying to kill us?”

Sir Runningwind scowled, “That was the Skull Lord. It haunts the sky in these parts. They say it was created from pure anger, grief and fear-- but by who, nobody knows. It was trying to kill you because—you may not know it, but—you two have very special powers. That's why you could create a mount and a weapon purely from imagination,” said Sir Runningwind.

“Well, you should probably be getting home.”

Yeah, I guess we should,” said Alex.

“Good-bye!” said Sir Runningwind.

All the clouds around them dissolved, and the next thing they knew, they were standing in front of their house.

“Wait, wasn't our house just blown up?” asked James.

“I don't know,” said Alex, “but compared to what happened to us, I don't think it's so strange.”

They both looked up into the sky and saw a knight and a horse made entirely of clouds waving at them. The boys turned to each other.

“We will not speak of this,” said Alex.

“Never happened,” said James.

The two brothers walked together to the house and to their beds.

THE END

Wanted: Goldy Locks *By Romeo Pelletier*



Goldy sprinted as fast as she could, her short-cropped black hair flapping around her ears. She heard dog barks and gunshots behind her.

Goldy Locks—that was the name she had given herself after she broke out of prison. She gave herself her first name because that's what she stole for a living. She chose her last name because it's what she broke best (besides the law) to live up to her first name.

Parkour (running, jumping and climbing) had always been her obsession. It was very helpful in her career as a thief. The fact that she was a thief was her best-kept secret, except one other; she was an orphan. Her parents had been killed in a fire, so flames were her only phobia. A few years later, on a cold night, she broke out of the orphanage and went rogue.

Goldy's only enemies were the super rich, from whom she stole, and the police, from whom she hid.

Goldy's green eyes searched ahead over the dry Western Texas prairie land. The sun blazed overhead. There was no cover, except for a few cactuses, a fenced-off pasture with a herd of cattle inside, the farmhouse that should have been there was absent, and off in the distance, a small cottage.

Goldy decided to go for the cattle yard and try to lose the sheriff in there. She ran straight for the fence. She could hear the dog barks and shouts coming closer. She vaulted the fence just in time. A bullet exploded against the fencepost that she had just jumped over. Another bullet zinged by her head and busted open a cactus on the opposite side of the pasture. She began weaving through the cattle, and finally found a well-hidden place in the center, where the cows seemed to be thickest. She stopped and crouched down. She was only five feet tall, fairly short for fourteen. Goldy heard dogs sniffing around in the yard, and footsteps tramping around.

“She was just here, Jim. I see her jump over the fence, run into the cattle yard and *poof*, she's gone,” said the sheriff.

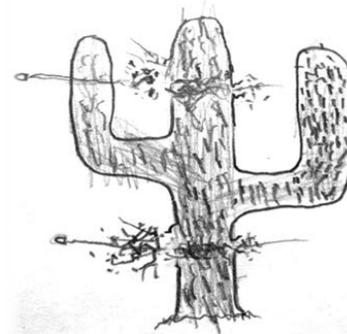
“I don't know, Jeb,” said the deputy.

The sheriff was a quite round man, as was the deputy, so they weren't the best at catching fast criminals (they tended to black out).

The two men walked up and stopped right next to the cow she was hiding behind. She heard a dog's sniffing sound coming closer and closer to her. Very quietly, she pulled a pebble out of the ground and, as discreetly as possible, threw it as far away from her as she could. It landed with a satisfying crunch.

“Whassat?” yelled Jeb. They both turned and ran off, the dogs at their heels. That was Goldy's moment. With her heart pounding, she made a break for it. She sprinted toward the cottage in the distance.

The sheriff and deputy realized the trick too late; Goldy was already fifty meters ahead of them and still running. The two men were not very athletic—the town they worked in was fairly quiet—so they could not keep up to Goldy's breathless pace. They still tried, but they both got no farther than thirty feet, before they fainted again.



When Goldy finally reached the cottage, it looked deserted, but then she smelled something very nice coming from it. All that running and jumping had made Goldy very hungry and tired, so she went inside.

She stepped into a small kitchen. On the table were three bowls of Cocoa Puffs— a big bowl, a medium bowl and a small bowl. She thought the big bowl looked best, so she tried from that first. The cereal felt soggy. “Gross!” she said, and pushed the bowl away. She went on to second bowl. It felt hard and dry. “Water! Water!” she croaked. The cereal had practically dried up her throat.

And so, as a last resort, she went to the small bowl. Having learned her lesson from the other two bowls, she ate one Cocoa Puff. She smiled, “This is just right.” She ate the entire thing.



Goldy had been so exhausted and starving that she wasn't quite thinking straight. She did steal gold, but only from the super rich. She would never steal food.

After she was full, she decided to sit down and take a rest. When she turned around she realized she would have to choose between three things: chairs. She saw a huge armchair and immediately flopped down on it. It was as cold and hard as stone. She moved on to the next chair, medium-sized, and she almost touched the floor, the seat sagged down so low. Then she moved to the tiniest chair, which was practically a cushioned stool with a back and two armrests. But when she sat down it was amazingly comfortable. Goldy thought, “What is wrong with this place? They have three of everything, two of them are bad, and the good one always appears to be the worst.”

After sitting in the chair for a few minutes, she got extremely tired. She thought, “There must be some kind of three-bed arrangement around here.”

She went upstairs and she saw three beds: one big, one medium and one small. “I know what to do with this,” she thought, and immediately went to the small one, which, as she expected, was perfect. As soon as her head hit the pillow, she was out. When she finally woke up, it was to the sound of growling in three pitches: deep, average and high. She half-opened one eye and saw, standing next to the bed, three looming shaggy silhouettes: one big, one medium and one about her size. The little one was standing right over her.

“Well, well, well, here she is,” it said in a high-pitched voice.



The End

Story of Crime *By Romeo Pelletier*

“Come on Ryan!” said Jake, his blue eyes flashing. The cops are here! What do you want? We have to get out of here!” Sirens wailed outside.

“Hold on,” said Ryan. “Someone told me there's something here. Something better.” Just then, the house door burst open. Two cops ran in. One was a heavysset man with blue eyes and curly back hair. The other cop was a tall woman with her red hair tied up in a bun and her brown eyes getting lit up by her flashlight beam. The two cops walked through the dark mansion. Ryan and Jake froze. The money pouch slipped out of Jake's hand and landed with a thud. Both of the cops looked up, then dashed up the stairs, pistols drawn. They rushed into the room where the two criminals were hiding.

“Freeze!” they shouted. Ryan and Jake slowly raised their hands.

The woman pulled out her walkie-talkie and started talking into it.

“Hello,” she said. “Yes, this is Officer Smith. The two burglars are in the upstairs study. They each look about thirty years old. One seems about five feet nine, with blonde hair and green eyes.” She pulled the walkie-talkie away from her mouth and asked, “What's your name?”

“Ryan O'Sullivan,” he said.

She put her walkie-talkie back to her mouth and said, “His name is Ryan O'Sullivan.”

Then she asked Jake, “What's your name?”

“Jake McCarthy,” he said.

She spoke back into her walkie-talkie, “The other is named Jake McCarthy. He is a bit taller than the other one and he has brown hair and blue eyes.”

The two criminals took that moment to make their move. They leapt to the side and tackled the cops. Jake and Ryan took on one cop each. Before the police could react, the two criminals grabbed the pistols out of the cops' hands and knocked them over the head with them. The two officers crumpled to the ground. “Sorry, officers, but it's for the good of the city,” said Ryan, tucking the pistol in his belt.

Ryan ran over to a computer that was sitting on a nearby desk. He pulled out a USB stick and plugged it into the computer. He clicked a few buttons on the screen and then sat back. A little loading bar appeared and showed 1%... 2%...3%...

“Come on, Ryan, what are we doing here?!” Jake screamed.

They heard clomping feet downstairs and a voice saying, “Sir, I think we have a few vandals robbing your house.”

Another voice said, “Thank you, officer, but I think my bodyguards can take care of them.”

Ryan blanched. “They're here.”

“Who's here?” Jake asked.

“I'll explain it all when we get back to the hide-out,” Ryan said, “but right now we've got to load this USB and get out of here.”

They heard heavy footsteps coming up the stairs.

"I'll hold them off." Jake said, pulling his pistol out from his belt. Ryan handed him his pistol and Jake ran towards the stairs. He ducked behind a post and started firing down. More gunshots came up, blasting giant holes in the hall and splintering the stairway.

That same voice from downstairs started yelling, "Watch it, you buffoons! You're destroying my house and wrecking my priceless mahogany stairway!"

A deep voice said, "Sorry boss, I didn't mean to cause any harm, just tryin' to get 'em, like you ordered me to."

Meanwhile, Ryan was sitting by the computer, hurriedly closing little warning signs, while watching the numbers very slowly go up: 78%... 79%... 80%...

One of Jake's pistols ran out of ammo, and in desperation he hurled the pistol down the stairs. There was loud *Chunk!* and a deep voice said, "Ow, he hit me!"

Then there was a loud *Thud!*

Ryan looked over towards the shots and he saw Jake retreating into the room and several big heads coming up the stairway. He also saw several big machine guns. The men were huge and hulking, each over six feet tall. In the midst of them, there was an average looking man. He was wearing a fedora, a black overcoat and sunglasses.

The man seemed to be ordering the guards around. He pointed and said something to one of the guards, who nodded and pulled a machine gun off from his back. He aimed it right at Jake.

Jake jumped to the side just in time. He ducked behind a dresser, the machine gun blasting a hole through the wall behind him.

"Aaah!" screamed the fedora-wearing man. "Can't you aim right?!"

The guard hung his head in shame. "Sorry, Boss."

The guards seemingly hadn't seen Ryan by the computer yet. Just then, the loading bar hit 100%. He snatched out the USB stick and yelled to Jake, "Come on, let's go!"

They ran towards the window and jumped down into the bushes below. They started running as fast as they could, vaulting over fences and benches and ducking behind cars whenever the closely following guards fired at them. Eventually the guards started to fall behind.

"I think we finally lost them," said Jake.

"Okay, good. Let's go to the hideout." said Ryan.

They looked around, making sure no one was watching them, and went over to a house. Ryan picked the lock of a cellar door and they snuck in. They both went over to a corner and pushed aside a shelf. There was a small trap door underneath. They quietly opened it and both dropped in, closing it behind them.

The hideout was a smallish room with crumbling plaster and stone walls. In the center of the room there was a table with a few computers and two chairs.

Jake turned to Ryan, "All right, you promised you would tell me what you were doing back there as soon as we got back to the hideout. We're here, so tell me."



Ryan sighed and sat down in a chair. “Do you remember that man we saw back there, surrounded by bodyguards? He's a notorious drug dealer and Mafioso. He's basically 2015's Al Capone, only not as famous and in New York. I knew that on his computer he has a software code for an app that will let him instantly take all the money from every bank in New York, completely undetected, at the press of a button. I didn't want to take a lot of extra time looking through his computer data, so loaded it all onto this USB.” He waved it in the air. “Now I can search through it safely and send the software to the government.”

Just as Ryan plugged the USB into a computer, a loud *CRASH* came from the basement above.

Several minutes earlier: “Get a move on, you nincompoops! We've got to get them before they deliver that software!”

The boss had had been screaming orders for the whole time that the guards had been tracking the two thieves. Ever since Jake and Ryan had gotten away, the guards had followed their footprints in the dirt. Those footprints lead them right to the basement door.

“Hey, Jake,” said Ryan.

“What?”

“Do you still have some ammo in one of your pistols you got from the cops?”

“Sure do!”

“Will you do the honors?”

“Yes sir!”

While Jake, once again, ran towards the guards, brandishing a pistol, Ryan began scrolling through the data he had downloaded. What Ryan hadn't realized was just how much data he downloaded; there was a ton.

Meanwhile, Jake was firing away with his pistol, but it wouldn't hold off the guards for long. Just then, a bullet hit Jake in the arm. He collapsed to the ground, clutching his injury. The guards stepped past him. One guard aimed at Ryan. He ducked just as the guard pulled the trigger. The bullet ricocheted off two walls before clattering to the ground.

“None of you are any good at aiming,” said the drug man, “so I'll just have to shoot them myself!” He pulled a pistol out of his pocket and pointed it at Ryan. A guard grabbed Ryan from behind, preventing him from moving. Ryan closed his eyes, bracing himself for the shot. However, all he heard was a shout of surprise from the drug man and a gunshot. The bullet grazed Ryan's leg and hit the guard behind him in the foot, who hopped of, howling in pain.

Ryan opened his eyes and saw Jake wrestling with the drug man on the ground and trying to take the gun with his good arm. Another guard charged at Ryan, bellowing at the top of his lungs. Ryan dodged him and ran towards the computer. He quickly went to his email, set up a page to the government and copied onto it what he had taken from the USB. He was just about to hit “enter” to send it, but a guard came up behind him and shoved him away. Ryan fell and saw two guards closing in on him. Ryan had just enough time to grab a bullet shell off the floor and desperately throw it towards the keyboard. Time seemed to slow down as the bullet sailed across the room. With a “plunk”, it bounced off the “enter” key and hit the floor. A little sign popped up on the screen saying, “Sending message” then “Your message has been sent. [View message.](#)”



“We did it,” Ryan thought. “We actually did it. We sent the software to the government!”

The drug man had finally been able to point the gun at Jake, but just as he pulled the trigger, Jake reached out and pushed the gun backwards. The back of the gun hit the drug man in the head, knocking him out cold. At the loss of their leader, the guards

stopped what they were doing and ran as fast as they could from the hideout. Jake collapsed to the ground, clutching his arm. “Oh, yeah,” said Ryan. “I forgot about your arm!” He pulled out his phone and called an ambulance.

A few weeks later, at the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.: President Obama walked toward Jake and Ryan holding their awards for *Service to Their Country*.

“Jake McCarthy and Ryan O'Sullivan, I am proud to award you with these medals for service to your country.”

He hung the medals around their necks, then everyone cheered and applauded. A block away, Jake and Ryan could see flashing lights and a small figure being led into the police car.

“Serves him right,” said Ryan.

“You said it!” Jake replied.

Jake and Ryan each took a bow.

THE END

Ariana's Vacation *By Colette Stamatos*



Once upon a time, there was a small girl. She was born very small for a baby and her parents were always worried about her getting hurt. When she was eleven years old, she was still small for her age. Her parents still always worried about her, but it was not their choice this time that she was going on a big trip with her grandfather and grandmother to Pennsylvania, Michigan, Florida, Georgia, Virginia, and Washington D.C. If it were her parents' choice, they would say no to the vacation. This girl's name was Ariana Pine, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Pine. She was very excited the day they left for two reasons. One, she was going to drive to all of these places and two, she was going to Florida and who is more excited about that? As she got in the car and after her parents said goodbye, her grandfather turned the key along to their first destination.

Her grandfather was sixty-seven and had a gray beard, ugly and broken old eyeglasses that looked like they were stuck to his face. Her grandmother had short gray hair and always wore a gray work jacket with a light green shirt under it.

As they drove on, Ariana looked at all of the sights. There were big green pastures filled with herds of fat cows and white sheep. There were forests filled with colors, because it was autumn and the leaves were just starting to fall. When they got to their first destination, Pennsylvania, they got out and walked into the Cauldron Hotel.

"This is the weirdest hotel I have ever seen," said Ariana, "and what is with the name?"

"Uh," said Grandfather in a deep voice. "That is a good question."

When they got to their room, room 307, they all flopped down in bed. The next morning, they had witch waffles and slug fries, according to the menu.

"No wonder it is called the Cauldron Hotel," said Grandmother. "These waffles taste like witch feet, and don't ask how I know how those taste." This is the part of this book when Ariana did not talk to her grandmother until they got to Michigan. After two days, they left the Cauldron hotel. They would have stayed longer, but Grandmother did not like the breakfast. While they were driving to Michigan, Ariana asked how Grandmother knew what witch feet tasted like.

"Well," said Grandmother. "Let's just say that my mother was a terrible cook and did not know carrots from witch feet."

"Okay, that is gross," said Ariana.

They were staying at a friend's house in Michigan and when they got there and knocked on the door, nobody answered. Her grandparents found out that the friends had misunderstood and were on their way to the grandparents' house in Boston.

"So much for Michigan. I guess we have to go straight to Florida," said Grandmother.

"Yay!" said Ariana. After they called one more time to make sure that their friends were going back to their own house, they left for Florida. They spent eighteen hours driving and driving and driving. When they finally got to their next hotel in Florida at 5:00 o'clock in the morning, they were all pooped, so again they flopped down in bed. This time the hotel did not have free breakfast so

Grandmother was happy. They all went swimming in the giant heated pool, which tasted like salt water. They went to five pools and to an awesome beach. There were so many palm trees, and, to Ariana, it looked like paradise. After three days of fun, they left and went to Georgia.

“Four hours of driving, and not a morsel to eat,” said Ariana.

“Oh, you have been eating too much anyway,” said her overprotective and superstitious grandmother. When they got to Georgia, they went to get ice cream. They saw a giant octopus with a missing leg at the aquarium. Even though her grandmother fainted, it was still awesome to Ariana. After a day in Georgia and another gross breakfast, they left on their way to Virginia. They drove for 8 hours. (There was a lot of traffic.) Then they finally made it to their last hotel.

“Yay,” said Ariana, “this is so cool!” They went sightseeing after they put their stuff in their hotel. They saw snow topped mountains and lots of beautiful fields of green grass and white flowers. They slept in the hotel and were smart enough not to stay for breakfast.

When they left to go to Washington DC Ariana shouted, “Woo hoo, DC here I come.” As you can see, she is a very excitable girl. Anyway, when they got there, she ran straight for the Washington Monument.

“I touched the monument!” Then she said, “Oh yeah, I just saw the White House.”

They saw lots of things, like the President Lincoln monument and much more. They did not stay long in D.C., but it was everyone’s favorite part of the trip. They left that night and went back home.

“Guess where I went for the last week and a half,” said Ariana to her parents after she got back. “This is where...” And she told the whole story.



A Slave's Diary By Colette Stamatos

October 8, 1849

I was walking in a small wood in Maryland with my little brother to pick blackberries for a pie we were not even going to get a piece of. We were slaves of a very mean old merchant who was very mean to all his slaves, including my brother and me. He never called us by our real names which were Sadie and John. He just talked like a pirate and called us "scallywags" and "dunce buckets." Now, he sent my brother, who is only six years old, and I out into the woods. He told us that just because we stopped to get a drink of water, we had to skip dinner and get food for him. See what I mean? Cruel, right?

The only person I count as my friend is my diary. It has smooth animal skin stretched across the front page to make it look like it had a cover. I made it myself. The merchant and his maids would get me in big trouble if they knew I could write. No one knows about my diary, except for me, not even my brother knows. He is the only living family member I have. My parents died when I was little. When my brother was one-year-old, my father was sold and died at the new place. My mother died soon after. All she left us was the two beads she always wore in her hair. She was a lovely woman with a beautiful voice. Now that she is gone, my brother and I wear one bead each around our neck. My brother and I are very different, when we tell people we are siblings, they are always surprised or even call us liars, if they don't believe us. For example, my brother has straight light brown hair and dark eyes and is very adventurous and usually gets into trouble. I am a curly haired girl with soft brown eyes and very dark skin, I am a dreamer and I usually stay out of people's way. Are you wondering what I, a regular eleven-year-old slave dreams about? **FREEDOM**, as all slaves do. Maybe I will be free someday, but for now my catch-phrase is still, "*I work for a bum.*"



October 12, 1849

Today we got great news, our master passed away and now we are all legally free. I just don't know where we will live. We ran away into the forest right when we got the news. And then we dug a deep hole and we put leaves on the bottom so we could sleep. We put sticks across the top of the hole so it was a roof. To eat we got food from the nearby stream, we caught fish and gathered berries. And I wove bowls out of long slender bendable sticks.

November 1, 1849

We lived here for many weeks. As time went by, it became winter and we had to find shelter in someone's house. We walked through the forest trying to find a road. An hour later we came to a

lonely pink house on a small road, we knocked on the door and a skinny, curvy backed, gray haired old lady with a cane and eyeglasses opened it.

“Hello children is there anything I can do for you?” The lady asked us. My brother answered right away

“Yes please! We would like some shelter!”

I wasn't so sure about this lady yet, but she welcomed us in kindly. I guess she was okay after all.

“Would you like something to eat?” The lady asked.

“Uh... OK, thanks!” I said.

Maybe this is an okay place to stay, I thought to myself. After we ate the food, she gave us a spare room to stay in. It wasn't the cleanest room we had ever seen, but it was definitely enough for two dirty slaves.

“Good night,” said the woman. “Oh and I do realize that none of us have stated our names,” she said. “I am Sue Ellen, high mistress of this house,” she said. “And you are...?” She looked at us.

“Uh, I'm Sadie and this is John,” I said.

Sue Ellen is the owner and farmer of a farm full of horses, mules and vegetables, such as cucumbers, tomatoes and carrots. The barn is right next to the house. She gave us some new clothes and a warm bath the next day. I decided to tidy up our room, too. John was not much of a help, but I scrubbed our room, (it had a lot of dirt). I found some paint in the old closet, painted the room red and put in the pink curtains that Sue Ellen gave to me. My new clothes are mostly dresses that come with pretty pink hats that all match. John has brown overalls and lots of shirts. Our slave clothes were washed and repaired by Mary, the maid of Sue Ellen. Mary taught me how to sew and Mary's husband taught John how to use a tractor, the kind pulled by horses and mules.

November 20, 1849

Last week, I started to go to church on Sundays with Sue Ellen. It was very busy on Sundays. Sometimes Mary would come too. I heard a couple stories from the Bible and learned a few songs. The first time I went to church I did not understand anything of what was going on, but afterwards Mary told me what it all meant. It is actually considered the best church in the town.

December 2, 1849

My favorite maid is Mary, although she smells like rotten eggs and ketchup. She is kind and very helpful. Once, I fell and cut my knee (it didn't hurt), but she babied over me anyway.

She has dark straight hair and beautiful eyes and lips. I found out that she is in her early 20's from her husband who has been married to her for 3 years. He has blond hair and no beard. He is very strong from working on the farm. They do not have any children so far, but they talk about it. In their free time Mary and her husband, Max, teach us games, like checkers, that we liked to play in the evening. Sometimes Max takes us to the stables and teaches us how to saddle and ride a horse. Once, I fell off but I was not hurt. John is a great rider, because he rode before, when we were slaves.

I met another black girl at church and her mother. We went to their house once after church, but we took a horse drawn carriage, because their house was too far to walk. Sue Ellen and Mary knew them for a long time. The girl's name was Liz and her mother was Kate. I do not know her father or his name. They said we were welcome anytime and they gave us a cup of tea each. Liz did not go to school either. She was eleven years old, just like I am. Christmas is on its way and I am getting ready. I have presents for everyone, my brother, Sue Ellen and Mary. For John, overalls. For Mary, a beautiful bow that I knit myself and finally, for Sue, a bejeweled hair brush that used to be my mother's.

January 3, 1850

I and my brother wanted to put our slave days behind us, but that was hard since we had three rude boys, Alex, Ray, and Marco living a little ways down the street from us. They called us terrible names as in: Dum Dums, Poo Brains and Ugly Butts. But let's not forget that we can just go back home or ignore them. I went to Liz's house today and had lots of fun. she can make dolls and blankets. She showed me some of them. Her house is very beautiful on the inside and outside. The outside is painted light blue and she has white lace curtains on all the indoor windows. The walls were just plain brown, but it was still pretty. After we left, we saw the three rude boys, but we just ignored them. When we got home, Mary met us at the door.

"You're late for tea," she said.

"Sorry," said John. "We were visiting Liz."

"Oh alright" said Mary. "Come in."

I kind of realized after we had tea, that Sue Ellen sort of treats us like we are her kids. we went outside to play on the wooden swing that Mary's husband built. It creaked a little bit but it was still fun to play on. We loved Sue Ellen and Mary so much, that we decided to live there all summer and for our whole lives.

June 1, 1850

It's very nice here in the summer and I have been especially happy, since the mean boys down the street moved away. Liz has gone on vacation, so everything is nice and calm and quiet. It's just the right type of day to sit on a broken rocking chair, fall down, yell at your brother and then take a nice long nap.

The End

Oh and by the way my new catch-phrase is, "I wear too much pink".

Snow White and the Ten Chipmunks *By Colette Stamatos*

Once upon a time there was a little girl wandering in a woods. The woods were home for many animals, including rabbits, deer, and a wolf family. The girl's name was Snow White. You might have heard of her. She had pale skin, wore a red dress, and she had an evil aunt that had taken her away from her parents. Her parents were the king and queen and she was taken when she was just a baby. If you're wondering why she is in the woods, well you know, she IS a princess and this IS a fairy tale. What good fairy tale doesn't have a princess in the woods?

In this Snow White fairy tale her aunt wanted to kill her so she could become queen when her parents died. Thankfully Snow White's not dead. Why? Well it's because the ugly old aunt with a wart on her nose and tangled gray hair sent a chicken to kill her. This isn't any old chicken, she sent the chicken chopper which is a chicken with an axe. Too bad for the aunt the chicken did not do it. Why? Chickens don't speak English! Gosh, and I thought you knew that. Anyway, when Snow White overheard the news from the aunt's maids she ran away in fear that the Chicken Chopper would learn English.



So now Snow White is out in the woods not exactly sure where she was going. She knew she could be eaten by wolves any second. Meanwhile half a mile away, 10 chipmunks were going back home from mining in the mountain for gold "Wow it's a hot day!" said a chipmunk named Jimbob. "Of course" said another. A third chipmunk said "There is an ember of the sun on the ground!" Now of course, being chipmunks, they did not know that the "ember" was really Snow White's red silk dress. As the chipmunks walked closer one said "I think it's a girl!" Snow white heard the talking chipmunk and turned around. "Oh, talking chipmunks I thought they were extinct!" "We are not extinct!" exclaimed all the chipmunks. "Our names are Donny, Onny, Lonny, Conny, Tonny, Ronny, Fawny, Bonnie, Jonny Jackson and Jimbob. And you are....?" They looked at Snow White. Snow White thought to herself "Maybe I should change my name, just to fit in." "OK" said Snow White to the chipmunks. "My name is Gerty Dumpster but you can call me Gert" and that's how the chipmunks came to know Gert previously known as Snow White.

"Hi Gerty Dumpster!" said all the chipmunks "where do you live?" "Nowhere" said Snow White. "Well we live in a hollow tree by a beautiful lake that has lots of birds and frogs" they said. "You have such a cool name do you want to live with us?" "How big is this tree, will I fit?" Since she had nowhere else to go, she decided to live with them.

Meanwhile back at the castle the chicken chopper was taking English class. Dramatic music plays, dun da dun da dun duuum! After 2 weeks of taking English classes the chicken remembered something the ugly old aunt, who turned out to actually be a witch, had said, "Get Snow White and chop her head off." "Oh no" thought the chicken. "I practically disobeyed my master!" "I'll go find Snow White, who is probably in the woods living with talking chipmunks." The chicken chopper hit himself atop his own head "Oh stupid chicken!" he said to himself "talking chipmunks are extinct!"

Meanwhile, in the chipmunk's hearty home Snow White was having the time of her life dancing, singing, and having lots of fun with all the chipmunks. Even a nice chicken had come to join them. Of course this chicken was the Chicken Chopper, come to kill Snow White. The problem was he did not know what she looked like and he was very surprised to see talking chipmunks.

“Hey!” the chicken said to one of the chipmunks, Jonny Jackson.

“Yeah?” Jonny Jackson said.

“Do you know Snow White?” the stupid chicken asked.

“No, the only girl I know is Gerty Dumpster,” said Jonny Jackson.

“Darn,” thought the chicken, “so close!”

Suddenly a ginormous log fell from the ceiling. Luckily, no one was hurt, except for the chicken, who lay there dead, for the log had fallen right on his head.

“Too bad for him,” said one of the chipmunks.

“Who wants Thanksgiving early?!” “Yaaa!!!” everyone shouted. Snow White hadn’t seen any of this happen so she just thought that maybe someone went to the store to buy chicken when she wasn’t looking.

Well, back at the castle, the aunt witch heard from the messenger that the Chicken Chopper lost his head.

“Arg!” said the aunt witch.

“Why did my servant have to be so stupid?”

“Uh, good question,” said the messenger.

“Shut up!” said the witch. “And go away!”

The messenger went. Suddenly, the door burst open and there stood Snow White aka, Gert and the chipmunks.



“Charge!” said Gert. There was the sound of lots of little feet then “pop” the witch disappeared.

“And don’t come back!” said Gert.

“Yay!” said all the chipmunks, “she’s gone!”

If you’re wondering how Snow White knew the aunt was evil, well I’ll tell you. She had recognized the badge that was put on the chicken after he was cooked. It was the “Best Chicken Chopper” award that the aunt had given the chicken. The rest was mostly just Snow White guessing that the chicken chopper must have been there to kill her, so my aunt could be queen. So Snow White went back to the palace feeling brave and excited. She made the queen want to disappear by sending a bunch of chipmunks to charge at her.

Now the princess was rightfully the queen, with the chipmunks, Donny, Onny, Conny, Lonny, Johnny, Ronny, Fawny, Bonny, Jonny Jackson and Jimbob as her best and most loyal friends. She lived her whole life unmarried with no children (but if she did have a child, she would have name her Gerty Dumpster). She gave money to the poor and helped the lost. She was the kindest queen that the village had ever had.

The End

