



QUIRKY QUERIES & QUESTS FROM THE YOUNG WRITERS OF STORY STUDIOS AUSTRALIA

# THE SECRET IN THE BASEMENT

ZACHARY CABACIS

“Hey, stop daydreaming and do the chores, Mat!” Uncle Harold’s voice boomed from the kitchen.

“Harold, be nice,” Aunt Ruby said gently, placing an egg sandwich on the counter.

“What do you mean, ‘be nice’? He’s been here three years and still causes problems!” Harold huffed, smacking his egg-covered hands on his lap.

Ruby sighed. “Just ignore him,” she said to me. “But... you have been here for three years, hon. You can’t keep dwelling on the past. I miss your mother and father too, but you need to move forward.”

I nodded silently and headed upstairs, the lump in my throat too heavy to speak. In my room, I pulled out a picture of Mum, Dad, and me from my drawer, hugging it tight as tears slid down my cheeks. “Why did you leave me? Why?”

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Three years ago, Mum and Dad brought me to my Aunt and Uncle’s house. I still remember Mum bending down to my height and telling me, “We need to go for a while, Pumpkin. But we’ll always be with you, in your heart. We love you.”

That was the last time I ever saw them.

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Downstairs, I overheard Uncle Harold’s voice. “When can we tell Mat?”

“We can’t,” Aunt Ruby replied.

“How do you think he’ll react when he finds out his parents are still alive and we can contact them?” Harold asked.

I froze, my heart racing. What?

“You’re right,” Ruby sighed. “He must never find out about the files in the basement.”

They knew all along? My chest tightened with anger and disbelief.

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That night, after they went to bed, I tiptoed down to the basement. My hands shook as I flicked on the light when I noticed a small wooden table covered with papers. I sifted through them, my heart pounding, until I found documents about my parents. I gasped. There was a phone number written at the top of one page.

With trembling hands, I dialled the number on the house phone.

*RING... RING... RING...*

“Hello?” A familiar voice answered. “Who is this?”

My breath caught. “It’s me... Mat. Your son?”

A stunned silence followed. “Mat? My Pumpkin? Is it really you?”

Tears filled my eyes. “Mum, why did you leave me? Why didn’t you come back?”

“We didn’t want to leave you, Mat,” she said, her voice trembling with emotion. “There were things we couldn’t tell you. We’ve always planned to come back, but it wasn’t safe.”

I wiped my eyes, my emotions swirling. “I missed you so much. Why did Aunt Ruby and Uncle Harold keep this from me?”

“They were trying to protect you,” Mum explained softly. “But now that you know... we’ll fix this. We’re coming for you Mat. I promise.”

I hung up, staring at the phone in disbelief. My parents were alive, and they were coming back.

As I closed the basement door and crept back upstairs, a flicker of hope ignited inside me. Soon, everything would change.



# STAMP TO THE PAST

KEISHA GARG

## PART ONE LETTERS TO MUM

Dear Mum, the letter read.  
That was the problem.  
I could only write that much.

And how could you?  
How could you write a letter,  
to a person who abandoned you years ago  
to be with their retro boyfriend?  
With only your dad looking after you,  
which basically feels like living on your own?

Sighing, I scribbled down some things that had happened  
(got braces, fell over in footy, blah blah blah...) and sealed  
the letter. Using the stamp I got last year,  
I stamped the date on it.

Unknown to me, it was wrong.  
The last time I used it was on my history essay,  
Which is why it said  
*3 Sep, 1987.*

I pushed the letter aside.  
Why had Mum left us?  
Were we not as important?  
Will she ever come back?  
This is how it feels to be me.  
Trapped, and feeling like no one was there for me.  
But as soon as my hand touched the letter, I fell, fell, fell.

## PART TWO TIME

Blinking my eyes,  
I look around,  
To see a cobblestreet alley.  
Lined with shops,  
and good vibes,  
but something wasn't right.

The time,  
It felt off,  
Like someone stole my watch  
and went backwards in time.  
I reach in my pocket,  
To find my phone,  
and check the time.  
But nothing was there.

## PART THREE RED HAired WOMAN

Someone finds me.  
When I'm looking around,  
I'm surprised to see things that are out of date.  
Like, 1987 out of date.

A woman  
With red hair,  
Comes bustling over,  
And tells me  
I'm on news paper duty,  
Like I know what that means.

I ask her the year,  
and she looks confused,  
Until I say,  
It's for school.  
1987 - she says slowly.

What? I think.  
That wasn't supposed to happen!  
The year is supposed to be 2024.

## PART FOUR JOBS AND NEWS

The job  
I'm supposed to be doing,  
Is to deliver news papers  
house to house.  
Like, who does that?!  
After I've done that,  
red haired woman  
Tells me to go home.  
The only problem is,  
I don't know where 'home' is.

## PART FIVE MY NEW HOME

My 'home'  
Is a large stone statue,  
With gardens considered royal,  
And everything there,  
Looks old.

The bedrooms have beds,  
That creak and groan,  
Like my dad when he gets up from bed.

Everything else  
Is the same,  
Just looks older,  
more antique,  
more decrepit.



PART SIX  
**NO GO**

By now,  
I should have learned,  
I'm not going home.  
But part of me,  
still hopes  
that maybe,  
*Just maybe,*  
I'll go home.

PART SEVEN  
**HOME**

After a few years,  
I honestly don't know.  
I find the stamp.  
Quick as a flash,  
I switch the stamp's date to  
*13 Dec 2024,*  
Stamp it on an envelope,  
seal it,  
then tenderly touch it.  
I feel a tingle,  
In my spine,  
Then *WHOOSH!*  
I'm transported back.....

**HOME!**

PART EIGHT  
**CAREFUL NOW**

Whenever I stamp on a date,  
I'm careful not to stamp  
The wrong date.

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## **ANTI-BOOK BEHAVIOUR?**

JASON JUSUF

Just now, a citizen of the great Book Empire has officially been interrogated for what the ministry calls Anti-Book behaviour, a form of behaviour which involves not reading books for at least thirty minutes a day, insulting the government, revolting against the schools, and worst of all, being the culprit of the disappearance of another citizen.

The interrogated citizen was a magician named the Amazing Adam who did a magic trick of making his partner disappear, and somehow, while he was performing his trick, what he and the audience found was a sign saying that he did not read books for the last three years, and that sign was in the exact same position as the partner.

The police force of the nation (called the 'Laze-Police') took him in for interrogation of whether he did not read books for the last three years, since the consequences of not anti-book behaviour could be extremely painful.

"I believe that this kind of behaviour cannot be tolerated since reading books is the only way to make sure our citizens become the smartest people of Asia", said the minister of justice, who was the one to control the laws of the nation.

Interrogations still continue to this day and it is still unknown whether the Amazing Adam really did not read books for three years and where his partner ended up.

We'll have to wait and see.

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## **AN ACT OF FREEDOM**

LEILA A. RAFFERTY-GOULD

To write, sometimes, is a little like flying and a little like drowning. It's a potent combination of beauty and terror both, of a raw, furious hunger that consumes you, all-devouring and magnificent in its glory. And what is magnificence without a tinge, a taste of fear?

Words flowing, not without effort yet not without love, either. Time goes past, an endless river that you hardly notice, for currents are a fickle thing and stories even more so.

You are soaring, running, the beat of your heart an echo in your ears, the sheer exhilaration a strange, giddy light that burns in your soul. Running from the inevitable moment when you crash back down into reality, where the colours seem just a little duller and the sweetness just a little bitter.

But sweetness without bitterness is cloying. Reality is beautiful in a different way to stories, and in order to speak the beauty that lives inside you must learn how to write the realness and live the magic.

For only then can the writer be truly free.



# THE GALVAN STOLEN!

MICHAEL UREN

If you haven't read yesterday's *QUARTERLY QUILL* (out now for two ronbie), Galgor is now on the brink of war with Vanloria, and a generalised mobilisation has been called. Fighting is expected to begin soon. What hasn't been made public until now is that the Galven, crown jewel of the Galgor, has been stolen!

Forty-eight hours before mobilisation was declared, a mysterious figure entered the palace, making it past the sentries trained for years not to let this happen. He then went on to sneak through a maintenance shaft, bringing him but one hundred meters away from the bejewelled relic, where he knocked out a guard with a taser.

The assailant, with a clear view of the trinket, sprinted at it, stuffed it in his backpack and escaped like nothing happened. The authorities are now searching rigorously for the culprit so that the border may close for a time.

The government has confirmed that the robber was a Vanlorian sympathiser and that the enemy must pay. "We must regain this relic of Galgorian faith, tenacity, and hardship at any cost! Vanloria will hand it over or face the might of Galgor! Vanloria has until the end of the month to return it, or we will call a major military mobilisation!" says the Prime Minister.

The world looks on anxiously for Vanloria's answer, hoping that the two superpowers won't engage in war.

# DOGGY DETECTIVE: CASE OF THE CAPYBARA RUN

RYAN SENDI

"Sergeant, we've nearly reached the detective."

"Affirmative. We can tell him about the black shadow."

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It was a normal day. I was relieved after finishing my last case and –

*MY DOOR!* I heard a low sounding rumble that evolved into a loud crash, demolishing my front porch, door and wall!

It was twenty capybaras.

"Detective..." one muttered, sounding breathless, "...short black shadow, long chase, Jimmy gone."

Another capybara stepped up and said, "There was a black figure terrorising our town, so we escaped to tell you about it, but Jimmy is now missing. Can you please figure this out."

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My first thought was Meow Meow, but she's in jail. So, this might be another threat.

I went to Capybara Village to find evidence, but I only found one thing: a black robe. It was probably the shadow's one. But then it hit me, literally: it was something small and furry; it was dark. **THE BLACK SHADOW!** I chased after it for a while.

I reached over but only a robe came off. It was **JIMMY!** I brought him back to his parents and he told me he just wanted to play a prank. The people of this strange town will never learn!





## SCHOOL (ACROSTIC POEM)

KIMAAYA GUPTA

Students exploring new ideas each day,  
Classrooms buzzing with curious minds at play.  
Happy moments shared with friends all around,  
Outdoors, kids running free on the playground.  
Orange chairs that brighten up every room,  
Laughter and kindness in full bloom.

## OUTDOORS

ZARISH AWAN

I can see the blue sky with its clouds looking at us  
and the beautiful sun pushing this light to us. I can  
hear zooming lawnmowers and honking cars. I can  
smell the beautiful pollen and the air. I can feel the  
breeze blowing onto my face and the grass tickling  
my toes. I can taste the air going into my mouth and  
out through my nose.

## ZEEMAL

ZARISH AWAN

Zeemal is a kid,  
she has a citizen's voice and forbids.  
I must do as she says,  
She even opens my lid.



## SPRING (ACROSTIC POEM)

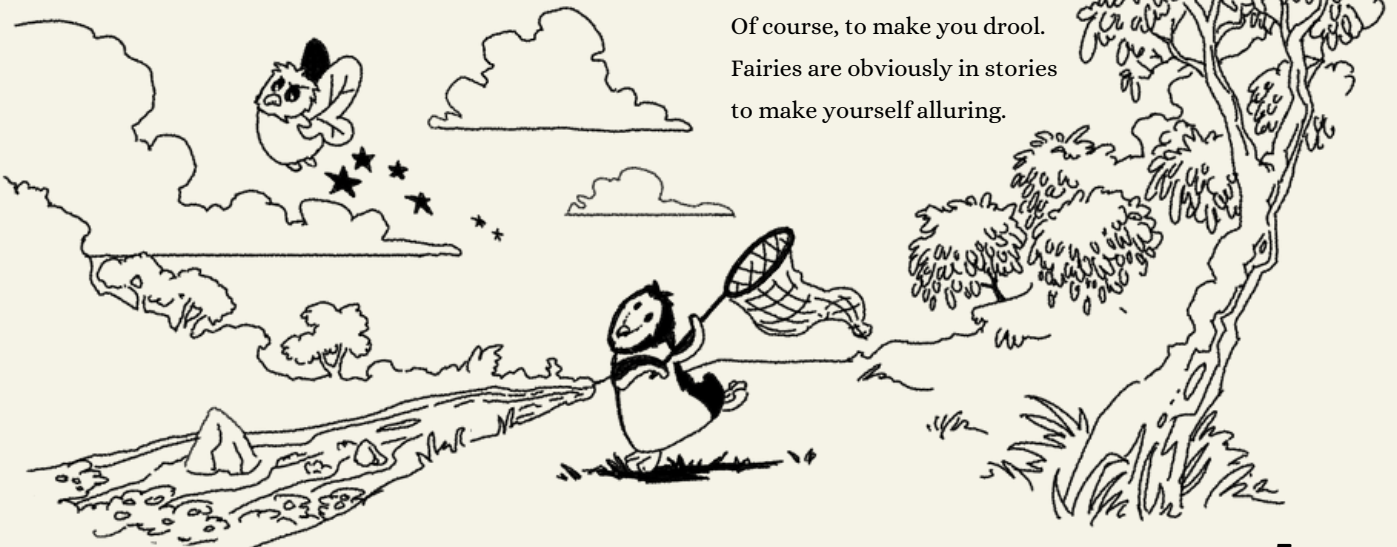
KIMAAYA GUPTA

Sweet scents of blossoms fill the air,  
People laugh and dance without a care.  
Respecting nature in its radiant bloom,  
Insects flutter, buzzing with life and room.  
Nature awakens, full of energy and cheer,  
Green sprouts of veggies, fresh and clear.

## FAIRIES

ZARISH AWAN

Fairies are very magical  
To make everything so tragical.  
They are very mischievous too  
Like making the sky so blue.  
Fairies are so cool  
Of course, to make you drool.  
Fairies are obviously in stories  
to make yourself alluring.



# THE SMUDGIE POOFF

*(Smoo - jee - poof) A fantastical species of sub-demon*

ORLANDO DETERING

The smudgie pooff is a small colourful floating ball of fluff with large eyes, highland-cow-like horns, large cute eyes, large paws, whiskers and a large bushy tail. If you saw this little creature sleepily floating around the park you would probably take it home, right? Well... you'd regret it.

Smudgie pooffs are actually a type of sub-demon and will most probably rip out your heart in the middle of the night. If you want to get nightmares and learn how they eat their prey, then read on.

While a humanoid is sleeping, the smudgie pooff will reveal a barbed stinger from their fluffy tail and paralyze its victim. Do you know why smudgie pooffs have such large paws? It is because they have long retractable claws (approximately about 25 centimeters long) for ripping hearts and then eating them.

Smudgie pooffs are nocturnal (meaning they are only active at night), this is why they are sleepy, clumsy and innocent looking during the day because they are really half asleep.

Smudgie pooffs don't just eat humanoid hearts, they prowl around during the night (using their Tails for balance) looking for a meal (a humanoid heart is their favourite treat and can last them a week without eating)! They use their bright colours to make them easy for predators to see at night so when the predator comes... You can probably guess what happens next.

Believe it or not this gruesome sub-demon has a role in the ecosystem. Because they only eat their victims heart, they leave the rotting corpse, which cultivates the soil and provides havens for fungi.

## RECIPE REVOLUTION

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# MIDNIGHT MADNESS

JOANNA FRANCIS

The potion lay on the debris-covered ground, as silver cobwebs were hung on corners of the room. This is the room where the potion master created the ingenious potion.

The potion was originally used for tricking enemies into enduring endless pain and suffering. But if desired by the master the potion may cause many other side effects. For example, turning into a wolf at the stroke of midnight.

The potion was made in ancient times by a cruel wizard who hated his fellow villagers. The wizard reinforced the rules to ensure happiness to his villagers. He was a king, he was a happy chap, everything was sunshines and rainbows. Just kidding. After all, he got humiliated by an enemy kingdom and got nothing but disrespect from his subjects.

The potion contained a secret ingredient the villagers were proud of - it was called a 'sprinkle of midnight'. It also had a shell of a snail for extra crunch (my personal favorite), the eye of a toad, the tongue of a snake, and a monkey's tail.

If it were up to me, I would make it sweet. But that cranky old wizard probably wouldn't let me.



## WHIMSY, WIT & QUIRKY QUIPS

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ALEXANDER KOEATMODJO

**Q:** Why did the cheetah get rid of his spots?  
**A:** So he wouldn't be spotted!

**Q:** Who is the smartest owl of all time?  
**A:** Owl-beret Einstein

**Q:** What do you get if you wash a blue dolphin in the red sea?  
**A:** A wet dolphin.

**Q:** What do snakes learn at school?  
**A:** Sss-cience

**Q:** Why did the cow cross the road?  
**A:** Because it was going to Beauty and the Beast the moo-sical.

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# THE EARTH APOCALYPSE

JOANNA FRANCIS

## Day 1 of the of Earth Apocalypse

My name is William and I was thirteen years old when the world ended right in front of my eyes in absolute chaos, destruction and despair.

Here's how it happened. It was a typical Monday morning. I was sitting in my typical math class. The numbers on the chalkboard scrambled around while kids were throwing paper airplanes behind the teacher's back. The teacher went on and on about silly fractions. Her voice echoed through my head. My head lolled sideways as my eyelids flickered in and out of sleep. I fell into a deep sleep.

A sharp pain went through my ear. "Owww"! I exclaimed loudly as I pulled a paper plane from my ear. The class sniggered and the teacher turned and looked at us crossly. The world should have ended there but unfortunately it didn't.

I walked home from school. I sighed as I walked towards the house I always dreaded to cross. The dog house they called it. Outside the house were two pitbulls with teeth like daggers looking at me with hatred chained to the fence growling. But something was off. They were not growling at me. Was it the sky? It was as though they sensed something. Something like danger...



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## OWLBURTA'S OWL-XCELLENT RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Books:

For younger readers: *The Girl who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of her Own Making* by Catherynne M. Valente. Running away from your parents is rather naughty. Leaving one shoe behind is most inconvenient. Getting made a prisoner of an evil fairy queen? Now that's a proper pickle. 4/5

For older readers: *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* by Susanna Clarke. A fantasy set in Napoleonic Times about a gentleman who rather fancies himself the best there is at magic - and another man who actually is. If you've seen *Amadeus*, it's that, but wizards. There's fairies in this one too - again, not the nice kind. 5/5

### Films:

*Nanny McPhee*. Not all witches have green skin and pointy hats. No shade tho. Those witches are fine. Anyway, this is the kind of witch that'll come round to your house and fix your children for you. Written by and starring the inestimable Emma Thompson. 4/5

*Dungeons and Dragons: Honor Among Thieves*. A comedy set in the mystical *Forgotten Realms*, the official *D&D* world - unless you actually play the game, in which case you probaby invented your own world ages ago . Starring Chris Pine thinking up plans, Michelle Rodriguez kicking butts, and some awesome druids and elves and whatnot doing what they do. Also there's a really fat dragon. 5/6

### TV Shows:

For younger viewers: *Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur* . Whip smart, cheetah quick, your-auntie-falling-into-the-pool funny. A banging soundtrack. Cool gadgets. A genius girl accidentally summons a T-Rex through her homemade time machine. They become best friends. She roller skates. Need I go on? 5/3.14

For older viewers: *Arcane*. A lush, gripping and utterly beautiful animated steampunk epic starring Hailee Steinfeld and Ella Purnell, set in the world of *Runeterra* from the popular *League of Legends* video game. Sweeping political drama, mindblowing action and sooo well written. We like that round these parts. 7.5/5

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## NOW AVAILABLE!

"HOUSE OF STORIES" AND "A FIELD GUIDE TO THE RÖTENSUNG ARCHIPELAGO"  
ANTHOLOGIES BY THE YOUNG WRITERS OF STORY STUDIOS AUSTRALIA  
[WWW.STORYSTUDIOSAUSTRALIA.COM.AU](http://WWW.STORYSTUDIOSAUSTRALIA.COM.AU)

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

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And just like that another year done and dusted! This year we have truly seen our studio grow and expand in so many new ways, and we have seen many new and old faces come and go through our glass door. As Assistant Editor in Chief to the Quarterly Quill and Studio Host to the Story Studios Australia, it has been an honour to work alongside these talented young writers, and see their creativity blossom under the tutelage of our talented writing mentors.

However no one has had more of an incredible year than our two head editors, Owlbert and Owlberta. Please find below a letter written by the pair of them and sent to us by pigeon (not owl!). — *Tilde*

To the talented children of Story Studios Australia,

We wish you a HOOT of a Story Celebration! We can not believe that many of you published a story in a book, how owl-credible. For some of you this is not your first story published, but for many of you it is, and for some of you, your first story published may happen next year! While you may not notice it, Owlbert and I are always watching and admiring your talent and dedication. Each week you turn up and discuss all things writing and story, and are then able to come up with new, unique ideas every time! We know it is not always easy, we are all haunted by that pesky Writer's Block from time to time, and sometimes life is so overwhelming that it can be difficult to access our creativity. However each and every one of you have achieved something this year, whether that is a story in the new anthology, or an article in the Quill, or if it was simply turning up to your Story Groups and testing out your creativity! Owlbert and I have been on a journey of our own, and we hope to be back in time for the Story Celebration at Fed Square. We have been exploring the Himalayan Mountains together, for you see, I am a Snowy Owl (yes, like Hedwig. No, we're not related) and I have been trying to search far and wide for my family. My trusty pal Owlbert came along for this journey. We are yet to find them, but boy do we sure have stories to tell when we return! Anyway, that's all from us now, have a HOOT of a time and we'll see you all (owl, ha get it!) soon!

Much love,  
Owlberta and Owlbert

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## BECOME A PUBLISHED WRITER!

### SUBMIT FOR THE QUARTERLY QUILL'S SEVENTH ISSUE!

*Are you interested in submitting to our next issue of the Quarterly Quill?  
Well there's no time like the present!*

Here are the sections...

- **Featured Fancies** (for non-fiction, creative fiction, memoir, and more) 500 word limit
- **The Write Stuff** (for any and all reviews) 500 word limit
- **Muddling Mysteries** (for investigations and crimes reportage) 500 word limit
- **Poets of the Quill** (for poems of any kind) 12 line maximum
- **Flash Fiction** (for super short stories) 100 words maximum
- **Curiosity Corner** (for bizarre advertisements) 200 word limit
- **Recipe Revolution** (for recipes) 500 word limit
- **Super Sport Section** (for fictional sports news) 300 word limit
- **Wacky Weather** (fictional weather reports) 300 word limit
- **Whimsy Wit & Quirky Quips** (for jokes) 5 jokes max
- **Owlbert's Advice Column** (questions for our wise and wonderful studio owl and Assistant Editor - Owlbert) 200 words max



**Submit via our website:**

**[WWW.STORYSTUDIOSAUSTRALIA.COM.AU/THE-QUARTERLY-QUILL](http://WWW.STORYSTUDIOSAUSTRALIA.COM.AU/THE-QUARTERLY-QUILL)**

