



House of Stories

Volume Two | *Part Five*

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Part Five



BOGONG

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FOREWORD

A picture is worth a thousand words, so the saying goes. But in this instance, I beg to differ. The words within these pages capture something profound, something different, something magical. House of Stories is a dazzling ode to the unbridled curiosity and the staggering reaches of imagination possessed by the young authors who attend weekly Story Writing Groups and Mentorships at Story Studios. Each story represents an incredible yet fleeting force of creativity and spirit that would otherwise be lost to time.

What would we give to be able to bottle the weird and wonderful fictions of youth? To preserve the worlds conjured and inhabited? To return to the way of thinking, humour and peculiar sensibility that exists for just a short while? Photos, videos, drawings and even other written stories can be kept, but are often buried and forgotten. Lost in chasms of clutter and carelessness. I have drawers and cupboards full of my 4.5 year-old's ever evolving art, and already no clue what to do with it all.

But these breathtaking books are a way to crystallise those intangible adventures in time in a form that will actually be celebrated, shared and treasured for a lifetime and beyond.

It is both humbling and reassuring to witness the journeys of these young authors, and this book is only the tip of that iceberg. The ideas, connections, bravery, and dedication on display every day in Story Studios sessions is incredibly moving. I've watched young writers create community, find their voice and confidence, develop

the skills to express themselves, and share enthusiasm and excitement in whimsical and honestly tear-jerking ways. I've gone on about how great this anthology is, but what makes it truly special is what's at its heart - the kindness, courage and creativity at play in this generation of young storytellers.

Bonnie McRae, Creative Director

House of Stories, the titular concept for our anthology series, provides an endless and evergreen array of frames for the stories held within. This year, we settled on 'windows' as a guiding idea for young writers as they worked and re-worked their short stories, offering us, the reader, delightful and often surprising glimpses through the windows into the worlds of their imaginations.

As a voracious reader, I have long loved the concept of "windows and mirrors" in reading, originally articulated by scholar Rudine Sims Bishop in her 1990 essay of the same name. The idea is that reading provides us with mirrors: spaces where our own identities and experiences are reflected and validated, and windows: opportunities to look into other worlds, granting access to lives, ideas and entire realities beyond our own. Here at Story Studios, we take this concept and apply it not only to reading but also to writing: the very act of creating stories.

We hope young writers in our community have discovered, through writing these pieces, that they can represent themselves, their wild and kooky imaginations, and the experiences that shape their daily lives. We also hope they have been able to place their characters (and thus themselves) in worlds and ideas that stretch beyond their

own experiences. This is the powerful work of stories in the world, and we trust that by investing in equipping young writers and storytellers with skills and inspiration we are contributing to a more empathetic, more interesting world, full of windows, mirrors and young people who are not afraid to look and see themselves, and worlds beyond, therein.

Hannah Nixon, Managing Director

MENTOR ADVICE

Imagine creativity as an ocean. The longer we spend underwater, the deeper we sink; the bigger, the more exotic, the more dangerous the fish become. - *Lachlan Rose*

Don't write for everyone. Write for someone you admire, someone you respect, someone you care about. Then when you make them smile. Write for the toughest critic of them all, yourself! - *Katherine Atkins*

Good characters aren't perfect and perfect characters aren't good. Give your characters lots of flaws and ways for them to grow and become better, because this will always make your characters more interesting. - *Jayden Nikolic*

Don't be afraid to add some humour. Even the darkest of stories need light. Humour is a great way to release tension before increasing it again. - *Adam Bigum*

Storytelling isn't just a means of escapism but also a necessary tool for understanding our lives, so always remember that any story you write can be an act of service as invaluable as a warm hug. - *Elliot Seidel*

Make it as hard as possible for your character to get what they want, even if it's just a glass of water. Whenever your character wants something, think to yourself: what's the hardest / funniest / scariest thing I can put in their way? - *Sil Fitzgerald*

Let yourself write something bad! Sometimes the weirdest, supposedly ‘bad’ writing become the funnest, most inventive, exciting stories. Keep going! Let your “bad” writing become your best! - *Miso Bell*

Unexpected combinations make for the best adventures. Bees and galaxies, dragons and portals, cults and light, maids who solve murder... Wait. I think some of these stories have been done before... - *Natasha Hertanto*

Editing is your friend! Making changes doesn’t mean what you originally had was ‘bad’ - it shows that you understand the world of your story even better now than you did before! Enjoy getting to know your characters better than you could have ever imagined! - *Kirsty Wilson*

Write the story you would be thrilled to envision, told in the way only you can tell it. - *Katherine Renda*

Push your characters, test them, make them struggle absolutely. Because if we don’t believe that they may truly fail, then we won’t believe that they earned a victory worthy of being told. - *Troy Harwood*

Take all your wonderful weirdness and strange, intense feelings, then pour them into every story and every character you write. The more abnormal they are, the more relatable they’ll be! - *Matt Bird*

Writing can look like putting pen to paper. It can also look like dictating voice notes, acting out an improvised scene or taking a long

walk to let your mind wander. Collect a toolbox of approaches that work for you. Learning how to collaborate with your own brain will take your creativity to new heights! - *Enya Daly*

Writing stories allows you to travel and explore both our world and worlds unseen, never forget the exciting opportunities that await you through words and creativity! - *Katarina Tobin-Spall*

The only thing you need to do to be a writer is... WRITE! It doesn't matter what, all that matters is you write, write, write. Every word, every sentence is invaluable - honing your skills more and more. - *Henry Silvey*

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THE OCEAN'S MEMORY

Hero Calligeros

The tide was low, dragging its silver hem along the darkened shore. Lena walked at the edge of the surf, her shoes dangling from her hand, her bare feet pressing into the cold, wet sand where each step disappeared almost instantly behind her. She thought there was something merciful about that, how the ocean carried no record of mistakes, only rhythms. The night was clear and the air was cool; moonlight stretched across the water in trembling ribbons. Waves whispered against her ankles, soft as breath, pulling at her, beckoning her closer. She came here because the world inland felt unbearable, because the house was too loud with the silence after her brother's laughter had gone. In the days since the funeral, people had spoken in polite, hushed tones.

"He was so close to following in his father's footsteps."

"His sister has no interest in the field of finance. How could *she* continue her father's legacy?"

She tried not to hear the dismay of having a daughter who wants to pursue journalism, as if it isn't enough for them. She knew that even if she did study commerce, it would still not satisfy the disappointed whispers.

She paused where the tide foamed white and cold, the hem of her dress brushing the surface. Every sound reminded her of him: the gulls' mournful cry like he used to call her name across the yard; the crash of water like his sudden laughter. Grief was not a heavy stone; it was water seeping into everything, staining each memory until even joy hurt to hold. Perhaps, she thought, he was part of

the water now, scattered among the currents. She crouched, fingers sinking into the sand, pulling up handfuls of broken shells. Each one was a fragment, sharp and incomplete, yet beautiful in its ruin. She held them until her hand was filled with tiny cuts, then let them slip back into the sea.

“Take them,” she whispered, though she wasn’t sure if she spoke to the waves or the memory of her brother. Her eyes started to well with warm, fresh tears, as salty as the sea.

The wind shifted, carrying spray across her chapped lips. Her hair whipped around her face, tangling it like matted nets that wash ashore. She closed her eyes and remembered where he would chase her around this very beach, daring her to leap over the rockpools as their laughs would linger across the surf. That moment, she thought she heard it again, faint and far, carried in the hollow waves. Her chest ached, but beneath that ache was something softer, not numbness or denial, the slow warmth of acceptance. What if she had told him not to drive that night on that winding ocean road when the storm drew near? The wind, the treachery of rain-slicked cliffs, stole him off the road, where he wouldn’t even have enough time to call for help. She kept turning over the words she never said, as if they could stitch back what the gale tore away. But she realized grief was not meant to be buried, nor carried like a weight. It was meant to be lived with, like the tide, always returning, always receding, teaching her the shape of absence, the resilience of return.

She waded deeper; the water climbed past her knees, tugging harder with each step. When the next wave rose, she let it wash over her waist and steadied herself against its push. She thought of him, his voice, his unkept promises, his capacity to make even shadow

seem harmless. For the first time, she let the memory sting without fighting it. The moon climbed higher, silvering her skin, gilding the waves until they were scattered with gleaming shards. Lena tilted her face upward, breathing deep, and felt the ocean pulse around her like a heartbeat. Part of her believed the world was alive, holding every story, every loss, every love in its vast body. When she finally turned back towards the shore, her footprints were gone, the sand smoothed clean. The sea erased her footprints but not her; she carried the memory now, not as an anchor but as a tide, something that would rise and fall, wound and soothe, return and depart.

At the edge of the beach, she slipped her shoes back on, her dress clinging damp to her legs. She felt steadier, as if the water had whispered something that she needed to hear all along: that absence is never empty, only changed, as what is lost does not vanish, but it transforms. Behind her, the waves went on speaking their ancient tongue, folding and unfolding. She didn't understand them fully, but it was enough to know they carried him and that in their memory, she would never truly walk alone.

TIED UP

Nina Gigovic

I haven't usually been afraid of things. Not the dark. Not movies, not anything actually. But being an assassin's next victim is far beyond my fear limit.

I have been locked up in an assassin's room for my pleasant school holidays. No, I'm not brave like Wednesday Addams, but like my father told me, crying just gives others power. And it's not like

I have a choice whether to be here or not. So, I may as well enjoy my time while I have it. It has been on the news at the moment that assassins might be around, and according to my father, it's turned into kind of an obsession. Which is terrible. I'm in a small, cramped, dark basement with no light. And I can hear when he comes in. When he does, I get the chills and pretend I'm asleep.

There's one other person in the basement. Laying very still. Hair brown, skin olive. What I kind of look like.

I sit back and think. How can I break out of here? I nudge my chair forward and peek through the peephole. A window opened. Perfect. But first, I need to untie myself out of this mess.

I look around. The woman has a ring on her finger. It's a diamond and is quite sharp. It's perfect. I slip it off her finger. I feel a bit bad taking someone's ring, but I can't really see anything else I can use. And it's not like she'll need it. I use my hands to try and use the diamond to cut through the rope that's holding my wrists together like handcuffs. But then I hear a creak.

A creak of a door, rolling of a trolley. The Assassin. I gulp. I flop back towards the chair. I pray to Jesus, even though I never have before. The assassin opens the door to the basement. He pokes me. I don't move. He sighs. I peek my eyes open just enough to see him grab something shiny.

"I'm sorry," he says, not knowing I can hear him. "I'm sorry that you'll have to end up like your mother."

"Your mother. Your mother? My mother?" I hold the diamond ring hard in my hand. As my father says, don't cry.

He holds something sharp in his hand. I take a deep breath and lunge myself forward. Not tied to the chair any longer, I pin him

to the ground.

“How?” He says, shaken. “How did you escape?”

“I untied myself five minutes ago,” I say calmly. “Hands and all. But the real question is, where’s my mother? And how do you know her?” I say, sternly. He raises a finger and points to the woman.

“How could you do this to her!” I cry. “How could you do this!” I grab my school backpack and knock it into him, making him stumble back. I slump down, head in my hands and cry. I have always been very polite and would never hurt someone on purpose. I shouldn’t have done what I did. I should have just turned him in. But it was either him or me.

After a while, when I was dragging myself home, I realised something terrifying. If my mum had been missing for years, maybe she wasn’t gone after all. I had all this time to save her, but I assumed she was lost.

When I came home the next day, soaked in tears, my dad told me the whole story. The story of how he and the assassin fought over my mum fifteen years ago. And when my mum chose my dad, he was furious. It wasn’t any of their choices; it was my mum’s. He shouldn’t have hurt her, and he shouldn’t have come after us either. I wasn’t even born when it happened.

But my dad did say the assassin warned them. Warned them that he would come back for them. And that they would regret it.

PETALS IN THE DARK

Emily Takacs

I felt an overwhelming sense of dread. My footsteps were heavy and laboured every time I attempted to take a step. Each step dragged the world deeper into darkness. And, as if possessed, I stopped in front of a glowing plant. A corpse flower. A loud beeping noise went off in my head, over and over until I clutched my ears and suddenly snapped awake.

5:47am. Too early... but not unfamiliar. These dreams always found a way to curve into my night. No matter where I go or what I do, they never seem to disappear. It's almost as if I need to see these distressing dreams. Or nightmares, in my case. I tried to go back to sleep, but it was almost impossible. I couldn't. I wouldn't. The only thing I remember in each dream is that there are always different flowers. Each more disturbing than the last. First, it started short and sweet. A meadow of roses. Then, soon after, they took a dark turn. Doll's eye. Venus flytrap. Corpse flower.

I looked around my room, taking in the familiar sense of warmth. It was dark but comforting. And it felt better than being in those strange dreams. I checked the time once again. 5:50am.

I was part of a not-so-average town. This was because of the fact that we came across an ancient scroll, stating the First Ones would come back and conquer our village, cursing us until they did their part. Everyone was endowed with a power, which eventually divided us into two. The Kefi and the Devils. If you were a Kefi, you were blessed. Powerful. And if you were a Devil, you were a disgrace. You can't help what you become, either. It's your destiny

that you play your part. And when the First Ones resurrected once again, the Devils would be their slaves for eternity.

I am a Devil.

I looked outside. It was raining, yet I still saw people playing. I still saw Kefi playing. I wish I could go out. But Devils aren't allowed to go anywhere besides Home. "I can't sleep..." I muttered. So instead, I got up to wash my face. I packed my bag and brush my hair before walking around the block, with a simple book in my hand.

But the book wasn't interesting. I kept thinking about anyone who would want to trade roles with me. But no one wants to be a Devil. They want to be privileged. Not deprived of their power.

...Until I heard tall, cocky strides towards me. "Still dreaming about being a Kefi?" I could almost hear his smirk. Slowly, I turned around. *Jack*. Of course. He was a Kefi, but he wore his title differently. More like, he was ashamed of it. Which was silly, since I didn't know anyone who wanted to be a Devil more than he did.

"Go away," I muttered, clenching the book tighter to my chest. "I've got to go to school."

Jack's smirk widened. "It's six-thirty. Where could you possibly go?"

I stayed silent, realising he was correct. It was too early to run to school, but too late to run back home.

"You want to be a Kefi, right?" he asked, smirk disappearing as he leaned in closer.

I nodded slowly.

"I know a way. You just have to be desperate enough."

My stomach dropped to the floor. "You- You want to trade

positions with me?" I beamed.

He shook his head. "Silly girl. I want you to do me a favour. Then you can be a Kefi, just like you've always wanted."

My smile disappeared almost as quickly as you could say, 'Jack'.

"No," I said, walking off.

Jack strode in front of me quickly; blocking my way. "Meet me tomorrow in the Alley, at 9pm. Don't be late, or the deal is off." I ignored him, but silently considered his offer.

Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea...

I arrived at the Alley; my heart beating with anticipation.

All I had to do is hope Jack would be there. Devils weren't meant to be here, let alone after school.

"Well, well, well. Look who decided to show up," he smirked.

I glared right back at him. "Jack. I'm here only for your powers, nothing else."

He placed a cold finger to my mouth, shushing me. "I want to know about your dreams. Do you have them too?" he removed his finger, gesturing for me to speak.

"I... I do."

He nodded slowly. "As I expected..." He glanced at me, worried. A look I'd never seen on him before. "Can I get rid of them?"

I shook my head. "If I could, I would've months ago. It's our destiny, remember?"

THE MURDER IN THE RESTAURANT

Kamara Ike

Charlotte Langley was only fifteen, but her mind was sharp, her eyes full of dreams, and her dreams were always whispering in her mind. By day, she worked as a maid at the Luxury Estate - dusting endless bookcases, ironing clothes and scrubbing marble floors until her arms ached. But by night, Charlotte devoured detective novels under her blanket, flashlight in hand, memorising every trick Sherlock Holmes had ever used.

Her dream? To be the best detective in the city - no, the world. But in 1996, young girls with aprons and dry hands weren't often invited to crime scenes.

Until one day, something happened. Right in front of her.

The mystery began...

It was her lunch break, and Charlotte slipped away from the estate to the bustling Harper's Breakfast Café. She'd been saving up for a slice of waffle with strawberries, blueberries and lemon-flavoured whipped cream. It was noisy as always - the clatter of forks, waiters calling out orders, the rich scent of gravy and roasted potatoes, all filling the air. Hmm... she could taste the delicious aroma filling her nostrils.

But just as she steps into the café, something feels off.

The café was quieter than usual. Unusual. Immediately, Charlotte spotted the reason: a man lay slumped on the floor in the corner, his teacup shattered on the floor, bright red blood spattered across his white suit.

Dead. He was dead.

She knew the man Jason Williams, the popular non-alcoholic man. He drank no wine or alcohol. A teetotaller.

A small crowd was beginning to form around him. The body.

The manager shouted, "Nobody leaves! The ambulance is on its way!"

Waiters tried to hold people back, but Charlotte lingered near the back corridor, curiously interested. That's when she heard them. Two hushed voices, coming from behind the storage door.

"You're nothing but a hooligan," said a man's voice.

"I told you that when he's a goner, we can do *all* the crime we want."

"Sorry, sir," said a quiet and frightened man's voice.

"Alright, but you better not muck this up!"

Charlotte's heart skipped. She held her breath, backing away silently before the door opened. Two people emerged: a sharply-dressed man and a man with a cigarette in his hand.

She memorised their faces instantly... Jordan Robinson and Anthony Anderson, cousins.

Back at the crime scene, Charlotte began to observe like the detectives in her novels.

- *The man's tea had a strange colour - possibly poisoned.*
- *A dropped handkerchief near the table bore embroidered initials: T.P*
- *A dropped letter*
- *The man had a wine stain on his sleeve - but he never ordered wine.*
- *Jordan Robinson and Anthony Anderson probably killed the man.*

Charlotte noted it all.

Then, she found the letter crumpled under the table leg. Half-burnt, but legible enough to read one line:

“If you tell anyone what you saw at the docks, you’ll regret it.”

A motive. Blackmail.

Charlotte smiled to herself.

Outside, the ambulance workers finally arrived. The medics began bumbling around and red-faced, trying to make sense of the scene. She approached them, her heart pounding, her apron slightly stained, and her voice was quiet but steady.

“Excuse me, sirs,” she said, holding out the letter, “I believe you’ll want to see this, and I have a theory about the death of the man.”

They blinked, surprised.

“Who are you, then?” one asked, amused. A maid with a theory. Funny.

“Charlotte Langley,” she said, lifting her chin, “maid for Mr and Mrs Walker Anderson.”

And with just that simple introduction, the murder case began.

THE QUEST

Penelope Bell

Elara dodged the blunt spear and grabbed an arrow, using it to cut through the vines ahead.

“Get deeper in, you need to *survive*, Elara!” Ordella called. Her friend Ordella had been training Elara for, well, everything really. Her father, Patrick, wouldn’t bother, because he hated her. Elara’s

mother, Nyx, had died on a quest long ago, when Elara was just four years old. Patrick had blamed Elara, and he still did, so Ordella had to help.

“Come on, you’re throwing *spears* at me!” Elara called back, picking up the spear and turning it around in her hands.

“Hey, only blunt spears,” Ordella protested, “but I get it.” She threw another spear at Elara, who dodged it.

“Do you know when we’ll have to complete the quest?” Elara asked. Ordella shrugged. Since Nyx had failed to complete the quest, Elara had to do it, alongside Ordella. So, they both had to train.

The next day, the mayor read out the news.

“The king declares that Elara and Ordella must set out on their quest to steal Larkora Castle’s battle plans, TODAY!” Elara and Ordella glanced at each other...wow. Today!? The mayor continued.

“They must go to the blacksmith to collect weapons, IMMEDIATELY!”

Elara and Ordella both chose a weapon. Ordella chose a spear, having used them a lot, and Elara was good with a bow and arrow. Then, with heaps of waves and good-byes, although none coming from Patrick, they were off. Ordella was skipping happily ahead of Elara, singing a song, but Elara stayed a bit behind, glumly thinking about her father.

She had hoped that just once, before this big quest, her father would have said ‘Agh, no! Elara, *stay with me!* I need you here, and I know that sometimes I yell at you, but I *need you!*’ But he hadn’t. He’d just let her go, let his daughter go on a journey that his wife had died trying to complete. Elara sighed.

“Are you coming?” Ordella called from up ahead. Elara sighed

again and followed her.

The next day, they came across a waterfall. Elara walked straight past it, but Ordella pulled her back.

“We’re never going to find Larkora Castle if we walk past things like that!” she cried. Elara was confused, but Ordella walked up to the waterfall and walked straight through it. Elara gasped, wasn’t there stone behind it?!

“Come on,” Ordella’s voice called from inside the waterfall, “it’s safe.” Cautiously, Elara went up to the waterfall, took a deep breath, and walked through. She looked around...it was like a castle in here...wait! CASTLE! She turned to see Ordella leaning against the cave wall.

“This is-”

“Larkora castle, I know,” Elara turned to look behind Ordella. “Look-” she grabbed Ordella and hid behind a boulder near the edge of the cave entrance. “*Guards.*” Two guards patrolling turned their way and, to Elara’s horror, walked towards them. She and Ordella started backing into the waterfall, but it was too late. They were captured.

Elara and Ordella were thrown into a dark dungeon. Murmurs from the other prison cells echoed around.

“Stay!” the guards yelled and stormed out, their footprints echoing on the cold stone floor. Elara shivered.

“...Elara?” croaked a voice which Elara knew...a voice that belonged to Nyx, Elara’s mother. But that couldn’t be possible, could it?

“Mother?” Elara gasped, peering into the shadows. “MOTHER!” It was definitely Nyx. Elara bundled into her mother’s arms.

“Where were you?” Elara asked. Nyx smiled.

“I definitely failed my mission, but I didn’t die...Ordella’s mother spread the news that I was dead, didn’t she?” Elara nodded. “I wasn’t dead. I wasn’t even a prisoner.”

Elara paused. “What?” Nyx paused, before changing the subject completely.

“How’s Patrick, your father?” Elara frowned.

“He’s...ugh...nice. Really nice...” Nyx laughed.

“I know, he’s a bit mean, Elara. He’s not your father.”

“WHAT?” Elara gasped. Nyx nodded.

“Your real father is here. The king of Castle Larkora. But no time for explaining! He has turned against me; now we must escape!” Ordella, Elara, and Nyx formed a plan.

Two guards marched past, and one thought he may have heard something.

“Probably a mouse...” he shrugged and kept walking. Elara and Ordella jumped out from two nearby columns, ambushing the two guards and stealing their weapons. Meanwhile, Nyx snuck towards the headquarters for the battle plans.

“After all,” she had said earlier, “that is what we were here for, anyway.”

‘Got it!’ Nyx thought, grabbing the scrolls and sneaking away. She met back up with Elara and Ordella, and they escaped through the waterfall to begin the journey home. Elara didn’t know what would happen next, but walking beside her mother and her best friend, she felt like anything was possible.

THE TRAPDOOR

Amaira Sengar

Maya bolted past the dusty old bookshelves of the library. The air smelled of pencils sharpening and old paper. Her sneakers squeaked on the clean, polished floors. She huffed and puffed. Maya wiped the sweat off her brow.

Maya was in Grade Six but still suffered the consequences of nasty, mean, cruel bullies. Maya ducked and dodged people and stacks of books as she rushed past. She vowed to herself to disappear. Finally, she found a little cranny. She squeezed inside.

To her shock, something was stabbing her back. But right now, she didn't care. She pushed back. Boom! The trapdoor had fallen backwards, and she found herself in a cobblestone tunnel. It had lights on the ceiling. Moreover, it looked like it was lived in.

She scrambled to her feet and ran. Her heart thumped and her body trembled. She ran as fast as lightning. She wanted to find something to help her get out. But then again, the bullies were still chasing her. Suddenly, she found a room. Not a normal one.

It was filled with potions, crackling and colour which shone so bright it almost blinded her eyes. The wooden, cracked shelves were occupied with various weird and unusual ingredients and mixtures. In the middle of the room lay a table, and on top of it lay a beautiful book. The embellishments looked like they were in gold. It had an old-school leather cover.

As Maya picked it up, she felt the beautiful leather become ragged, old and dusty, which sent a shiver down her spine. The gold embedding suddenly looked a dull yellow. She opened the elderly

book. Dust flew around, filling the air. A spell called her. It was called Dragnet. She read it out.

Suddenly, whirls and swirls of purple and green in many shades raged around the room. Soon, all the colours swirled into shape. And the shape soon became a... dragon!

It roared as loud as a million thunderstorms. Its fire heated the whole room in under a second. Maya's stomach dropped. All her thoughts disappeared. Except one: Dragons are real.

Her hair whipped as she flipped around. She ran out as quickly as a cheetah with the book. She found a piece of wood on the outskirts of the door. She slammed it on the frame and bolted it down with her back. She heard the death of the dragons' roars. The smell of fire and burning filled the atmosphere. Her heart was jumping like a kangaroo as she wished this were a dream, even though she knew it wasn't.

She looked at the book, the book she had forgotten about ever since she read the spell. She gripped onto its ripped leather and flipped the vintage pages as fast as she could. She had found it. The reverse spell! For once in her lifetime, she trusted her guts, not out of curiosity, and said the reverse spell in a mutter.

She hoped. And hoped. And soon she heard a...*THUMP*.

She cautiously removed the black plank of wood to find the dragon was gone. The room was reduced to ashes, and Maya was glad it was so no one could go into her situation. Well, maybe those nasty bullies could. She took a breath. Everything had changed so quickly.

Soon, she took the half-burned plank to the opening she fell through. She planted it on the ground slanted so she could crawl

on top of it. The wood's surface felt like sandpaper on her knees, but she dealt with it anyway. When she got back up, she covered the hole in the wall with the plank and some books. It was camouflaged enough.

A few minutes later she heard footsteps and her name being called. A flashlight flung her way, the light shining as bright as a million moons with a tint of grey.

She had been found.

THE OUTWORLD

Chloe Gao

'Where am I? Is it home or somewhere else? I don't know, I think it's home maybe?!' Lilly thought.

"Hello, are you awake?" asked a familiar voice.

Lilly gets up from bed and sees a figure. "Oh, it's you! Mia... where is Poppy?"

Mia replied, "At the outside beach! Haha!"

'She's so cute,' Lilly thought.

"You know I like everything to do with the outside," said a tired voice - Poppy.

"Yes, I know, sis, but why spend lots of energy outside?" said Lilly.

"I like it!" said the tired voice again. Lilly, Mia and Poppy were siblings. "Are we going to the scary, brown, ugly, muddy, dangerous place again?" Poppy asked nervously.

"YES!" exclaimed Lilly and Mia, all together happily. This happened every day. They went to the scary, muddy, brown, ugly, and

dangerous place, which was an abandoned factory.

“Stop being a baby, Poppy, it’s fun!”

“Okay,” she replies nervously.

They went to the scary, muddy, dangerous place. “Okay, you know what to do, so get started now!” Lilly said quietly. They should have gone in groups because they get stuck up and out of the human world, and they landed each in a little cage!

They looked at the light orange glass carefully, then they examined where they were. Poppy found a little puzzle with hard writing, and it said, “Why doesn’t the day end each day?”

They realised that they had to solve an extremely hard puzzle. They worked very hard and said, “The day doesn’t end because when there is a sunset in one part of the world, there’s sunrise happening too in another part of the world.” They finally got out of the cage and found a teleportation device to teleport back to the human world.

Then they found they were back in the scary, brown, ugly, muddy, dangerous place. They ran out quickly and made it back home, but it was already 1:00am! They were really tired and went to sleep.

The next day, Lilly and Poppy went back to the scary, brown, ugly, muddy, dangerous place while Mia stayed in bed. But the scary brown ugly muddy dangerous place was not there.

“Where is the scary brown ugly muddy dangerous place!” yelled Poppy.

“You finally like the scary brown ugly muddy dangerous place!” cheered Lilly.

“I don’t like it, I’m just saying, where is it?!” Poppy said strongly.

“True, it’s gone probably,” said Lilly softly.

“GONE! YOU LIKE IT AND YOU DON’T CARE THAT IT JUST DISAPPEARED IN THIN AIR AND YOU SAY PROBABLY!” screamed Poppy.

“Wow, Poppy, why did you shout so loud, and that’s not your normal voice.” Lilly said, surprised.

“I don’t know, I think I like the scary brown ugly muddy dangerous place now,” Poppy whispered.

Lilly and Poppy never spoke about it again.

HELP SAVE AFL

PJ Kandilakis

Hey! This is the start of an epic tale. My name is Harley, and I am fourteen years old. I am currently in Year Eight at high school. Life is great living at home with my mother Sophie, my father Ron and my sister Lulu. She is seven years old. My Grandma Joy has been living with us since the sad passing of Grandpa George.

It was a Saturday. Mum and Dad were both at work. Grandma Joy was in charge, and she had allowed me to visit my best friend at his house, which is only one street away.

His name is Nick. Nick is a tall and lanky kid, but he has a left foot on him that is like a dart when he kicks the footy at me. Nick and I are inseparable. He is my best mate and we would do anything for each other. He is also fourteen years old, precisely three months older than me.

We were kicking the footy in the backyard. We’ve always dreamed of being in the AFL.

The town we live in is called Summerville. It is a beautiful and sunny town. It never rains in Summerville. But today felt different. Something wasn't quite right, and I'm a little confused. The skies are a dark and haunting grey. A storm is brewing. The town's name is Summerville, right? It literally has the name 'summer' in it, and for good reason.

"Take a look at the clouds, Harley," Nick shouted over a boom of thunder and a flash of blinding lightning.

"Nick, do you see that? It looks like a vortex or something! Wait, do we go in?" I was standing in front of a giant portal. Nick was standing there with great hesitation. His knees were wobbling, his teeth chattering. He was horrified!

"Don't be scared, we can do anything together, Nick!" I explained.

"You're right!" Nick replied, suddenly more confident. So we jumped into the symmetrical, floating, round and colourful hole. The experience was like going through a vacuum cleaner!

When we got to the other side, it was like a magical wonderland! But all made of blocks, I suppose it wasn't the real world after all. "What is that? It looks like a shadow. Is it a person?" Nick's curiosity was growing.

"Let's check it out!" I exclaimed. When we looked around the corner, we saw a person. Not a regular person. It had a funny block-looking head. But then, suddenly, it turned to look.

"Aaaahhhh!!!!" we screamed.

"What the heck was that?" Nick yelled in disbelief.

"Um, let me look it up!" I had already pulled out my phone...

"Oh! A magical villager!" I exclaimed. "Magical villagers, by definition, are very interesting. They remain calm, caring and are a

spectacular kind of being. They are loyal and friendly. But do not dare to double-cross them, for they may use their magic to punish you with twice as much anger.”

“Geez! I wouldn’t want to do something to upset one of those guys,” Nick laughed as we hid behind a big, dirty block of mud.

“Wait, Nick, look at this... TAKEOVER AFL!”

A man’s face appeared on the screen. There was a title on the screen just below his evil-looking face: ROBERT DE LEO.

“I will take over the AFL forever!” He broke out in an evil laugh. “HA HA HA!!!”

I gasped with fear. “What do we do?” I wondered.

“There’s only one thing to do,” said Nick.

“What? Go help! Wait, what do I do?” asked one of the villagers.

“Um, I guess you can. Wait, do you know how to play footy?” I questioned.

“Hell yeah! Let’s go! Hang on, we definitely need way more players. Let me think...hmmm... I have loads of friends. Let’s go find them!” exclaimed the villager.

One by one, we kept knocking on villagers’ doors. Eventually, we found thirty-five more villagers! “Let’s go to the portal! Not everyone can go at the same time. Go in sevens,” I requested.

“We’re here!” yelled Nick, standing in the middle of his enormous backyard.

We all made it through the portal. We looked behind us, and the portal had disappeared. It was nowhere to be seen. Robert De Leo was also nowhere to be seen. Had he been left behind?

“He didn’t make it!”

“Yes!” screamed all of the villagers.

“We did it. We saved the AFL! Robert De Leo will never do any harm to this town ever again!”

Nick and I slept a little lighter that night, knowing we had saved the AFL and brought happiness back to the town of Summerville.

BILL

Eddie Fisher

Once, a boy named Bill sat with a suction cup gun in his hand. The suction cup gun, if you aim it at something and pull the trigger, will pull you there, straight away.

Suddenly, a big shadow scraped across the city. Bill looked up at it. ‘What was it?’ he thought. ‘Oh!’ It was a big suction cup, and a villain named Ben sat in its cockpit.

Bill aimed the suction cup gun at the big suction cup and pulled himself up. But then realised it was all covered in even more suction cups, except the top door! Then, Bill got pulled in by the suction and got spat out and fell to the ground - ouch!

Now he had an idea. So he ran to the top of the tallest building, and he aimed the gun at the door at the top of the big suction cup. A few seconds later, he was at the door and going through. At first, Ben didn’t notice him, and then he heard a clanking of metal that Bill had knocked down.

“How did you get in here?” Ben yelled furiously.

“With magic!” Bill replied.

Ben started running at Bill with his eyes closed and his fist in front of him, so Bill aimed his suction cup gun at the ‘OFF’ lever

on the console behind Ben and pulled the trigger.

The cup flew through the air, hitting the lever! The cup tried to pull him, but he yanked it back, turning off the big suction cup. At the last moment, he got a rope and wrapped it around Ben, and tied the rope. He then left Ben for the police to deal with.

Later that night, the city put on a big party for Bill.

TIME TRAVELLING TO THE TITANIC

Emily Yeh

April 10th, 1912

Young Max and Bella waved goodbye to their parents, tears filling their eyes. Max gripped Tilly's leash as Bella tugged his hand. "I want to go!" Bella protested. With an effort, the tips of Max's mouth twitched into a smile. "You know Mum and Dad can't afford to take us," Max explained. "They are going to America to look after Grandma."

Bella nodded. "I know, she is really ill," Bella said.

They stood in sombre silence as the Titanic departed. The siblings watched as the ship got further away until it was a dot on the horizon. "Let's go home," said Max, "Aunt Dahlia will be cross if we are late."

Devastation hit, three days had passed. The daily paper had been delivered. Bella read it aloud: "Titanic sinking: An unexpected and heartbreaking event has occurred; the so-called unsinkable Titanic hit an iceberg and sank to its doom along with hundreds

of passengers aboard it.” The cold hand of grief clutched Max and Bella’s hearts.

Max jolted awake to their cruel aunt shouting, ‘Get up, you lazy rats, and take that pesky dog of yours out of the house too!’

The two grief-stricken siblings and their beloved dog walked up the hill to their favourite spot, the ruins. Bella absent-mindedly drew a picture of the ship on the sand, tears smudging the drawing. They both sobbed and exclaimed, “We wish we could save Mum and Dad!” Suddenly, a fierce gust of wind surrounded them, blurring their vision. When the wind calmed, they found themselves on a ship.

Max, Bella and Tilly stared dumbfounded at the grand hall of shining, polished oak and pine wood. Groups of people dancing in glorious gowns and slick suits. The servers brought trays of drinks and fancy canapés. Suddenly, Tilly jolted away, disappearing into the crowd. The duo raced after her and found her being petted by a couple. “Mum! Dad!” shouted Max and Bella in unison.

“What are you doing here?” asked Mum. Suddenly, a sense of urgency dawned on her. They had to save the ship!

“The iceberg!” Bella exclaimed.

Max grabbed Bella’s hand and started running. He looked back and shouted to their parents, “We’ll explain later. Look after Tilly!”

The children managed to dash to the pilot’s room just in time to bring his attention to steer away from the iceberg.

Two years later...

A catastrophic war was happening. Streets were in a mess, houses destroyed, people hiding in bunkers, and fear was in the air. Max

and Bella huddled in a corner along with other children. Ever since they saved the Titanic, the world has turned chaotic. Their parents were cruelly ripped away from them again, along with their beloved dog.

Max realised that time travel is not something to be meddled with. Deep inside, Max knew what they must do. He just did not want to tell Bella. She would be devastated.

That night, Max lay on his sheet, his thoughts fighting for a place in his mind. Soon it became too loud for him, and he pushed his thoughts away. After a while, his eyelids became heavy, and he fell into a deep sleep.

In the morning, the destruction returned. Max took a deep breath and said, “Bella, I’ve got something to ask you.” He spoke. “I have a feeling...” he was cut off by Bella.

“You want me to agree to let the Titanic sink?”

“Yeah,” said Max.

“Well,” she said, her arms firmly crossed, tears welling in her eyes, “I’m going to have to agree.”

“I am sorry, Bella.” said Max thoughtfully.

Together they ran to the ruins, quickly drawing the Titanic in the sand and exclaimed, “We wish we had never saved the Titanic!” The strange gust of wind gathered and swirled around the siblings.

In the blink of an eye, they found themselves on the ship once more. They looked around frantically and spotted themselves near the pilot’s room. “Stop! Don’t do it!” yelled Max. Past Max and Bella looked bewildered at their own doubles. “Saving the Titanic will create the butterfly effect, which led to millions of deaths across the world!” rushed Max.

“Mum and Dad still died in the war...Tilly too.” whispered Bella.

Suddenly, they felt a jerk. Within a short time, the ship was tilted and was sinking. The four children huddled together, shivering with fear. “It’s ok...” whispered Max. “This is the right thing to do.” Slowly, the ship sank to its doom along with the courageous children.

Max awoke in the ruins, rubbing his eyes as he contemplated what had happened. Bella woke with the same confused look. Out of the corner of their eyes, they saw Tilly running towards them. They started laughing, with tears in their eyes.

“We did it!”

THE PLANE INVESTIGATION

Nethaka De Zoysa

One sunny morning, Mike woke to his noisy alarm. He grabbed his suitcase and ran to the school just at the end of the street. Today was his excursion overseas. He had been waiting for this for three years. He didn’t like being late to school because he would get in trouble. Today, he arrived at school ten minutes before it started. His school would start at 8:30am and end at 3:00pm. He had to stay for seven days in Europe. His mum and dad gave him \$1000 to buy things for himself.

After the teacher did the roll, they got their suitcases and hopped onto the bus that was taking them to the airport. When they arrived at the airport, they did body scans and checks. They finally boarded the plane. After ten minutes, they took off. Mike slept for one hour

on the plane. The next hour he was eating and talking with his friend Max. They had been close friends for over nine years. Mike couldn't wait; only Year Six students could go on this trip, and today was the day he was finally in Year Six.

When they were seven hours into the flight, they all heard a noise that sounded like it was coming from the suitcase holder. The co-pilot and engineer sprinted to the suitcase holder but saw nothing. Mike and Max thought about looking at it themselves because the co-pilot had seen no suitcases in the holder. Mike sprinted as fast as he could to get there. Max tried to catch up to Mike, but he was a bit too slow.

When Mike got to the suitcase holder, he was confused about how the luggage had gone missing when no one had been allowed to get out of their seats. Not even the flight attendants were allowed to leave their seats. Everyone had left their money in their suitcase. It was a big investigation for Mike.

This was one of a hundred cases that he had solved. But there was a tiny problem, it was in the air, and it would be hard to solve the big problem. Max finally arrived and brought a magnifying glass. Mike took it and looked to see if there were any footprints, but there was nothing. Mike was getting a bit frustrated because he was in the air. He'd never had a problem in the sky and had limited investigating tools. But Mike still didn't give up. He needed to get the luggage back.

The first thing Mike needed to know was whether it was stolen on the ground or in mid-air. First, they had to land, but there were several hours left of the plane ride. So, in that time, he would gather as much information as possible. But then Mike realised where they

would put the suitcases if they were stolen mid-air?

The next second, he found himself searching for things that might have fallen out of a suitcase when the thief was taking them. Or maybe the suitcases were delivered to the wrong plane. While Mike was searching for something that had fallen out, he found a piece of cloth. Then he asked everyone on the plane if the piece was theirs. After a while, he figured out it was Max's T-shirt. So that meant the suitcases were transported to the correct plane. That meant someone had stolen them either while the passengers were getting on the plane or just after the suitcases were loaded onto the plane.

But then what was the weird noise in the back of the plane? Maybe something like a bird had hit it, or the pilot accidentally did something that caused the noise.

When he was going to the cockpit, he saw more clues leading to the second floor of the plane and saw a small closet that was usually locked. But it was unlocked. Mike walked carefully toward it to see if there was anything inside, like a suitcase and inside were all the suitcases, stacked as if they were trying to escape. So, he figured out where they had been placed.

But it wasn't over yet. Who had placed them there?

Mike checked for the most recent fingerprint and compared it to the crews' and passengers' fingerprints. After a while, he figured out who had stolen them. He was really confused about why this person had stolen the suitcases.

It was the PILOT! Everyone was shocked and confused. Why would the pilot steal the suitcases? But when they landed, the pilot was arrested.

Mike liked the trip, except for the plane investigation. He did

buy a huge amount of stuff with the money his mum and dad gave him to spend in Europe.

TOM VERSUS TINA

Stella Dickinson-May

Tom and Tina were both foods, and they had just come back from the outside world. They had convinced everybody in the world that they were the best food. Except...

Each other!

"I'm much yummier than you," said Tom.

"No, I'm much yummier than you," said Tina.

"No, I am!" said Tom.

"No, I am!" said Tina.

"Okay, for the last time, I am!" said Tom.

"Why, I need at least three reasons to prove it," said Tina.

"Three?! I can think of thousands!" said Tom.

"Okay. Name them," said Tina.

"Fine," said Tom. "One. Round food is the best."

"What?! That is terrible information," said Tina.

"Well, if you can tell me some information that *you* are better than *me*, go ahead.. I have my patience on today," said Tom.

"Fine," Tina said. "One. Sweet is what I am. Plus, who doesn't love sweet food?"

"ME!" yelled Tom.

"You don't know who you're messing with," hissed Tina. "I can wait here for... the rest of the day probably! I am covered in

patience,” Tina calmly said, even though she was not calm!

“Fine.” Tom slowly but madly said. “Two: I’m healthy. Grown-ups love healthy food, right?” he insisted.

“Yeah, but kids hate healthy food.”

“Three,” Tom said, *completely* ignoring what Tina just said. “I can totally be eaten in any meal.”

“Yuck. Tomatoes for breakfast... oh! And snacks, dinner and lunch,” said Tina, making a disgusted face.

“Four,” said Tom. “Red is the best colour and I’m red.”

“Yeah, I’m red too,” Tina said.

“Five,” Tom muttered.

“NO!” Tina screamed. “I’ve heard enough!”

“Okay, Tina. Tell me three reasons why you are better than me,” Tom said importantly.

“Three?! I can name millions!” Tina said.

“Do it,” said Tom.

“Fine. One. I am bigger than you. Which means I am better and tastier than you.”

“You know that bigger doesn’t always mean better,” said Tom.

“Two,” said Tina, who hadn’t even listened to Tom. “I am dark red and you are light red. Light red is the colour of blood, eww!”

“Actually, dark red is the colour of blood.” Tom argued.

“Three. I squirt from a bottle and you don’t.” Tina said.

‘What is so good about squirting from bottles?’ thought Tom. ‘Nothing,’ he replied to himself.

“Four,” began Tina.

“NO!” yelled Tom. “I’ve heard enough!”

“Okay. You name what you think,” Tina said.

“Five”, Tom said. “I have a thick layer of skin to keep me warm in the cold fridge.”

“That’s true,” Tina admitted. “But... Five! People put me on hot dogs! And everyone loves hot dogs,” Tina loudly bragged.

“I hate hot dogs!” Tom screamed.

“Be quiet, Tom!” yelled Tina.

“Six.” Tom hissed. “I’m tasty.”

“Seriously?!” Said Tina.

“Yes, seriously,” said Tom.

‘Weird’ thought Tina. “Six,” she said. “I’m bigger than a pea. If you are bigger than a pea, you are delicious.”

“I’m bigger than a pea, too!” said Tom.

Then there was a long silence.

“Hang on!” Tom finally said. “We are practically the same.”

“True,” said Tina. “We are both bigger than a pea. We are both red.”

“We are both healthy,” Tom added.

“Hoorah, hoorah!” said the food in the fridge.

“We have found the best foods in the world,” said Wise Old Celery.

And they got a trophy for being the best.

The next day they played tag with their friends: Baby Broccoli, the raspberry triplets, the strawberry twins, the blueberry only child, and we can not forget...

Grandma Cauliflower!

Tom the tomato and Tina the tomato sauce are the very best of friends.

THE LIFE OF SPORTY CLAMFACE

Ryan Castenmiller

Bounce, bounce, bounce. Three, two, one, plop, swish. The scores were seventy-three to seventy-one, then Sporty Clamface scored a three-pointer on the buzzer to get into the finals of basketball!

Sporty Clamface is a twenty-four-year-old man who is good at sports. You heard it right! He is good at basketball, but he is also super good at AFL, where he plays half forward. When he plays soccer, he plays central midfield for Melbourne United. He also does athletics such as the one hundred metres and relay. Sporty Clamface never liked losing, and his dream is to be the best sports and athletics player ever. Well, he is up there, but his temper is terrible. He has a secret which he won't tell anyone...

The story is that when he was a kid, he accidentally fell into an alligator exhibit at the zoo. But he got rescued by a random person on a parachute who saved him and got him out of the exhibit. Whenever he loses, he gets brought back to that moment, and that's why he has a bad temper. The zoo was a bit spooky, especially in the bathrooms. Two of the toilet cubicles were locked by themselves. Apart from that, it was a normal zoo. It has normal animals like snakes, tigers and lions, but there was one animal that was different from all the animals, the rhinaf. The rhinaf is a rhinoceros and a giraffe combined. It had three rhino horns and one long neck. The body is a normal rhinoceros body, which has little spots like a giraffe.

It just so happens that now he plays for the Rhinafs in basketball. The Rhinafs got into the grand final of the World Champions Cup. His next game was against the Lions, who never lost a game.

Sporty Clamface was going to play against Darwin City in soccer. In AFL, his next game was against the Mythical Reds. His team, the Rival Blues, were rivals of the Reds. Sporty Clamface was also in the relays and the hundred metres in athletics. The races were in two days, and the other sports were in one week.

Shake, shake, shake, went his building. Sporty Clamface didn't know what happened, but he thought it was an earthquake. This made him angry because he was brought back to the moment at the zoo.

The athletics came around, and he got ready for the hundred meters. He was a bit scared. He was off as fast as lightning; he was coming second, and at the last bit, he got in front and tied for first place. In his relay, his team got off to a good start, and then it was his turn, and he got second place. The person who tied with him in the hundred meters was the same team that won in the relays. He lost because he was still so angry.

He was still exhausted the next day. The only thing that he had this week was basketball training and AFL training. At basketball training, he was sweaty as always, and his teammate sprained his ankle, but other than that, it was normal. His AFL training was the same as always. Finally, the basketball grand final came around. It was a close game, and Sporty Clamface scored twenty-three points, but it was tied with one minute to go. When it was five seconds to go, he got fouled and had two shots. He missed the first one and the last one he scored; everyone went crazy, and he bragged about that in his friend's faces. They weren't happy with that.

The final of the soccer game came around, and it was tied all the way with Sporty Clamface missing some shots. It went all the way

to extra time, then penalties. But no one could score until it was his go... He scored! The other team missed, so Melbourne United won. He was so proud.

The AFL game came around, and the other team was leading by ten points, but he scored a goal in the last minute. He wanted to be like Nasiah Wanganeen Milera, scoring the last goal to win the game, and he marked the ball on the siren. He kicked it, but he missed, so the other team won by three points. He felt terrible. His friends got revenge by laughing at him for missing. From then on, it taught him to be nicer to his friends. His friends reacted in a forgiving way, and they all got along with each other from then on. Even one of his friends joined his basketball team. So the message that he learnt is to be kind to his friends. But his dream never changed.

SPIKE'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE DEEP, DARK FOREST

Sheldon Randall

Spike has black hair and brown eyes. Spike loves to dance, sword fight and draw. Spike once had a sword fight with George, his friend, and ended up chopping his arm off. Spike also had a dance with a hippo and a drawing competition once.

One windy day, Spike was sent to gather food. He cut rainbow marshmallows off the trees. Spike chopped mushrooms off the moss pads, freed springy roll-ups from their cracks in the coco mountain and stacked chocolate bars into his backpack.

When Spike got back, his mum wasn't there!

‘She had probably ducked out to the shop to get some more food while he was away,’ Spike thought to himself.

So Spike waited and waited and waited. Finally, Spike could wait no more. Spike had a tantrum! He yelled so loudly that the whole house shook violently, and the roof nearly caved in.

Suddenly, out of the corner of his eyes, Spike spotted a sticky note on the fridge. The note read, ‘I have been taken away by skeletons! Love, Mum. P.S. There’s some pizza in the fridge.’

Spike was heartbroken. Instead of crying, Spike took the pizza from the fridge, grabbed his backpack and said, “I’m going to find my mum.”

As Spike stepped outside, a strong breeze swept his pizza out of his hand. His pizza floated into the forest. Right where it landed, Spike saw a muddy three-toed footprint squashed into some mossy rocks. Spike had to follow them just in case they were a clue. Spike quickly ducked behind a tree and followed the footprints unseen.

Rustle, rustle.

Suddenly, someone came squeezing out of a bush! It was George, Spike’s best friend.

“Oh, hi George.”

Another rustle from Spike’s left, and another person squeezed out of a bush. It was Ben who had tested a texter on Spike’s arm.

Crash.

A tree had just fallen. The three of them ran over to where the tree had fallen down and realised that it was just another one of Zack’s experiments going off. Zack was one of their best friends. They all used to play pranks on younger kids who were nearby. None of their pranks had gone off till now.

Then out of nowhere, Zack jumped out from behind the tree.

“Boo!” Zack shouted.

“Ack!” Spike, George and Ben screamed.

Moan, Moan, Moan.

A moaning sound was coming from the back of the woods. Spike, George, Ben and Zack knew not to go to the back of the woods. Some people said there were zombies. Others said there were phantoms. But everyone knew that if they went to the back of the woods, they could die. Everyone who went into the back of the woods never came back alive.

But they were still very curious about it... so Spike, George, Ben and Zack marched together through the forest.

Suddenly, fifteen zombies surrounded them! Ben quickly fumbled through his lab coat and took out a small, black, prank wand.

“Good thinking, Ben!” said Spike. “We could draw a hole and explode it with the joke wand.”

Zack drew a hole big enough to fit all four of them, and Ben zapped it. Quickly, Spike, George and Zack followed Ben into the hole. They sped quickly through the hole and made it out of the other side, far away from the zombies. Quickly, they all kept running through the woods.

Suddenly, they ran right into a phantom. It felt so icy. Luckily for them, it was not alive.

They still kept running until they made it to an abandoned castle. Well, that’s what Spike, George, Ben and Zack thought anyway. The second they stepped inside, they wanted to run back out again because there before them was a giant, black, furry, spider!

They instantly got trapped in the middle of the room because

they had been trapped in sticky, white, gooey webs. Zack reached into his coat and pulled out a small knife.

“This is a pocketknife. I borrowed it from a local butcher who traded it for two golden eggs and a few green blueberries,” Zack said.

Zack quickly sawed at their webs, and they tore up and out of them.

Suddenly, they all heard a scream coming from upstairs. They bolted upstairs and found Spike’s Mum dangling from the ceiling, getting lowered into a spike pit. Around her were a couple of big black skeletons.

“Hey dumb dumbs!” Spike said. That made them all turn and look at them.

“Intruders,” said one of the skeletons.

“Get them!” said another one.

“Cut the rope, George. Grab my mum before she falls into the spike pit, Ben. Zack, you come with me to fend off the skeletons. Let’s go!” Spike yelled.

It was over in only two minutes. After that, they all set off home.

THE RYFT

Holly Holmer

They called it the Ryft.

At first, it was a small dark spot at the edge of the maps, a blot between starfields. Sailors who drifted too close said it looked like nothing - no light, no background, just a darkness that swallowed stars whole.

Ana found herself pulled in directions that were not about strategy: to break up fights, to drag injured children from collapsed stalls, to argue with a magistrate who wanted to close the gate for good.

The military wanted a rescue mission. Ana volunteered. She did not have a plan to vanquish the Ryft; she had only the ship and the trust of some pilots who owed her favours. One of those pilots was Joss - a veteran of wreck-fields with quick hands and quieter laughter. He'd flown with Ana before and trusted her instincts. The other was Kor, a quiet scholar who risked his tenure to show her a model where field seams could be coaxed to close. The mission was thin: slip a small craft among the wrecks, pull survivors, and recover anything that might help the labs.

They found survivors huddled in a broken hold, faces blue with cold and fear. She tied lines, slung people aboard, and watched as the dark brushed too close.

Back on the dock, the argument did not end. The scholars demanded the wreckage for study. The soldiers wanted it melted for scrap. Each decision birthed a hundred small cruelties.

Together they built a small plan - not a weapon to strike the Ryft, but a way to make choices that cost less. They proposed a network of light buoys - cheap, bright beacons meant to anchor the edges where the Ryft thinned. They launched the first buoy under the cover of night.

For a long minute, nothing happened, and then the buoy shivered and held. The small patch of space around it glowed-a ring where field seams stopped opening. A rescue boat slipped in and came back with survivors.

Months passed. The buoys did not stop the Ryft. They did not

make it kind. But they turned its appetite into a slow affair.

On a windless morning, a new council resolution arrived: the city must either abandon its buoys or reinforce them with something that could take the blows.

Meteors began to fall like a second sun collapsing into fragments. The first that struck the sea was geysers high as towers; the first that struck a buoy sheared its moorings and tossed it like a toy. Sparks rained from the sky.

Ana's craft rode the crest of the first wave. Joss's hands were steady even when the instruments died; his voice cut through the alarms in patient, clipped bursts.

As each buoy's reactor hit resonance, the harmonic plate overrode the local field seam for a breath. When the timing was right, seams would fold in on themselves and betray the Ryft's pattern-spitting back a barrage of smaller debris instead of collapsing inward.

But the Ryft adapted. Where the seams had inhaled, they were now jagged outward. Alarm bells went red, and the craft shook wildly.

Metal screamed. The tone sang that made the Ryft's seam claw back for an awful, luminous instant. The meteor's trajectory bucked, the shard arcing away on a hair's breadth. The hull held long enough for Joss to spin, and Ana hooked a line to a drifting life-barge. They were lucky; two crew members were gone, but more were saved.

The battle stretched until dawn bled odd colours into the sky-greens and bruised purples that had never belonged to that place. The last of the meteors tumbled past, and the Ryft's breathing slowed.

The heavens held a shaky peace. When the council gathered

-smaller, humbler-the fight became a new kind of proof. The military insisted their rams had been decisive; the scholars insisted the harmonics were the real weapon. Evacuation leaders argued the cost had proved them right. And the city, as always, found a way to make politics out of survival.

STORMS START AS DRIZZLES

Weini Xiong

The world is a grey one.

In my wide open eyes. Out the small, blurry windows of a dark tunnel.

I see my chestnut eyes stare hopelessly in the reflection of the pane; it is dotted by evidence of the clouds' sorrows, like tears gliding down cheeks.

Dregs of storm clouds succumb to the embrace of a sullen sky. Earlier, there was a slight drizzle of rain that planted kisses atop trees and grassy hills. In the sad reflection of a puddle, I catch Asel's star-glazed eyes that I love. Lisea's forehead is lined with creases as she stares into the distance.

Two colleagues, one a lover, one a close friend. All my years of working for our government have been spent with the two, who both manage to make my little world brighter and laughter filled.

Lisea had announced to me, "Minni, a new mission has come in," her tone strained, "Classified documents have been leaked to an unknown individual. Our assignment is to recover the documents before they reach the public, and dismantle the credibility of this

so-called ‘hacker.’”

Such a mission is lethally dangerous. But the government needs us to accomplish it. After all, if we don’t finish our missions, we are punished. That is how a government keeps agents in order. All in the name of embracing a golden world where kindness is key.

My attention is brought back to the bitter reality of such a cyclical world. A hollow emptiness echoes through the tunnel as we inch towards the end. I spot Lisea staring at her watch, the red light shines off the screen, symbolising that we’ve successfully tracked down the location of the files.

Rusty doors open, and we step into a ginormous circular hall. Like on cue, claps of lightning whip across the sky. My eyes scan the area, searching. Just in the far left corner, barely visible, stands a small rectangular file, printed documents poking out.

But such a discovery is accompanied by ominous ticking.

Warning us to run.

Tick, tick, tick.

Run, run, run.

The door is now closed, hinges squeaking as if to apologise. Even it knows, it’s too late to turn back now.

Asel turns toward me, eyes wide in rigid fear, and I feel it in my own heart, reverberating solemn beats of terror. Lisea reacts fast, running toward the files first.

What had started as a slight drizzle has turned into a raging beast, slashing, screaming and sobbing with tears pouring down. My breaths turn shallow as we race towards the corner. Lisea reaches forward, but I snatch the papers first. For a moment, tension flickers across her face - then vanishes. The ticking grows louder by the

second, and we haven't found an exit yet.

A terrifying thought surfaces. I try to push it away even as Lisea's eyes land on the documents, even as she catches my eye and looks away.

Lisea points towards a locked door,

"I know the password to that exit, follow."

She grabs our wrists, leading us towards the door. But I wrench free, my gut twisting in terror. I turn toward Asel, eyes pleading,

"Asel, come with me, she's lying. There's another exit, we'll make it in time." I pull him, trying desperately to drown out the ticking.

Tick, tick.

Asel's eyes burrow deep into trouble.

"Asel? Come on." I drag his arm, but he stays still.

He wrenches his arm away from my grasp and his eyes catch mine for a moment... His gaze drags away from me, and he turns, catching up to Lisea's side. A smile tugs her lips.

A blade is in her hand. Where did she get that?

Cruel.

"Please." My mouth opens, and a scream of plea erupts, my head explodes inside. Tears arrive late as my ears finally recognise the echo of the ticking. I turn my head around to see the door far across me.

My eyes blur; I run so fast that each step feels so slow. The door is both near and impossibly far.

Tick.

With its last warning, an explosion erupts, and I collapse onto the floor, rolling onto wet grass. The door shuts, and I stagger away.

Red, orange, and white are behind me.

I prop myself onto high ground, watching. Hair soggy and matted, sticking to my clammy skin. Drenched in tears identical to the ones sliding down my face, desolate and trembling, sitting atop a hill, where we used to sit. Star-struck memories glaze over my mind even as I desperately try to push them away, lost in despair.

The world is a grey one.

In my half-open eyes. Through the frame of the vast navy sky.

I feel my own eyes close and tingle from the drip of my last tears, gliding down my cheeks.

THE WOLFIE TRIES AGAIN!

Radin Heidarpour

HUUH! Principal Tracy was so angry at Silly the wolf that he was about to push a pie in his face. So, Silly planned what he could do to make Tracy happy again.

‘I saw a present up on a hill two years ago... but I am not sure if it is still there. Also, I do not know if I can climb up the steep hill,’ Silly said to himself, ‘but I’ll try!’ So he went up to the hill, but he couldn’t see the present when he was at the base of the hill.

“Ok! Here I go to climb up the hill...I can’t wait to get the present. I hope it’s up there!” Silly said. When he was close to the apex, he accidentally fell down and landed next to his school.

“Noo... ouch! I fell down!” he shrieked. There was no one to help Silly. So, he hobbled back to his home, which was a stone’s throw away from the hill. Then he took his powerful jeep out of his home garage and drove to the apex of the hill... and after all, he found

out there is no present up on the hill! So, he began thinking about what else he could do to make the principal happy.

“OH! I have an idea!” Silly excitedly said. “I can make my own present, with a magic power, so Principal Tracy can be a superhero,” he said. So, he went home and made a toy with a big magic power, but it didn’t look nice because he didn’t have enough materials. So, he got his money and went to a shop called ‘Hard materials’ to purchase some eye-catching materials. He only had ten dollars in cash, but the hard metal material was one hundred and forty dollars!

“I have a gift card from my birthday from my dad. Perhaps I can use it now?” The salesperson checked the balance on his gift card.

“You only have ninety dollars, and you still need an additional forty dollars to buy this material,” the salesperson said to Silly. Silly was thinking about how to resolve this new problem. He got an idea.

“I can make my own money by drawing two twenty-dollar notes!” So, he planned to make his own money. The principal was at home, so Silly still had time to work on this new idea. Silly made the first twenty-dollar note successfully, but his pencil cracked suddenly when he was making the second note. So, he had to use his money to buy a new pencil. He went to a stationery shop to purchase a new pencil. He was about to give the twenty-dollar note he drew earlier, but the person working at the shop realised it wasn’t real money.

“This is fake money. I cannot see the old president on the note,” the person working at the stationery shop said. The disappointed wolf went back home to get some money from his mum, but even his mum didn’t let him have real money because he was only six years old. So, he sat thinking, again and again and again.

“I’m going to be up the creek if I don’t have any new ideas.” He

tried very hard to come up with a new plan. He called his friend, Lucky, for more advice.

“I’ll get you a big crystal with magic powers for Tracy! It costs one hundred dollars,” Lucky said.

“Okay!” Silly nodded. “Yay! I can get the crystal because now I have enough real money,” Silly said and laughed with glee. Silly gave his gift card and his ten dollars to Lucky and bought the magic crystal.

The following day, Silly went to school to hand in the homework that he had been doing in the past days. He politely gave the crystal to the principal. Tracy was so happy that he almost cried. When Tracy went home after his busy day, he put the crystal next to his bed and slowly closed his eyes. One hour later, he woke up and saw thousands of presents around his bedroom!

“WOW!” Tracy said. He was so excited to open the presents before going to school in the morning. Among the presents, there was a science kit that he had been waiting to have for a long time. “I should thank Silly for such a wonderful present,” Tracy said.

The next day, Tracy went to his school and said to Silly excitedly, “Thank you, I loved all of the presents, especially my favourite one, the science kit.” Silly was so happy to hear this. He was the most joyful kid in his school. Thereafter, Silly and Tracy had amazing moments together. They lived happily ever after, and Silly was never a silly kid at school again!

DNA DISASTER

Evan Chan

“Aaaaaaahhh!” Harry cried.

“Darn it!” Luke cried

“Hey, Harry, do you have any spells that can make us levitate?”
asked Luke

“No,” Harry answered.

“Okay.”

“Can’t you use the Force to help us levitate, since you can use the Force?” Harry asked.

They were in mid-air and falling fast and soon enough -

“Oof!” Luke had fallen.

“Ow,” Harry mumbled.

As they looked around, the chilling wind caught their faces.

“Come on. We should camp for the night.”

“I agree.”

“Come on, let’s sleep.”

“Mhrh,” came a strange noise

“Aaahh!” the boys both screamed - a strange figure was towering
above them.

“Stop, I’m not a villain, I’m a survivor,” said the Stranger.

“Okay...” Harry said uncertainly.

“Can you help us complete our mission?” Luke asked.

“Maybe...what is your mission?” the Stranger replied.

“To defeat Ugly Guy.”

“You shouldn’t do that, Ugly Guy is too powerful!, exclaimed
the Stranger. “Oh yeah, I forgot to mention my name’s Koala Kid,

and I can morph.”

“We *have* to do the mission.” Harry told Koala Kid; Luke nodding vigorously.

“Fine,” sighed Koala Kid.

“We should sleep now.” Harry said happily.

Six hours later, the sun was up. Harry, Luke, and Koala Kid were ready to go. But something was not right. What could it be?

“Hey, guys, have you seen any clues yet?” Harry asked.

“No, not yet.” Luke replied

“Oh, hey, I found a trail!” Koala Kid exclaimed

“Nice,” Harry said.

As they followed the trail, they found out that it led to a cave. They went deeper into the cave and saw that it split into two paths. They decided to split up. Luke and Harry went down one path, and Koala Kid went down the second path.

As Harry and Luke went on, they hit a dead end. Harry accidentally bumped into a rock, and like a door, the huge flat surface swung open. They walked in and were flabbergasted at what they saw.

“Hey, Koala Kid! Come over here!” There was no answer.

“Koala Kid?”

“Haha, he can’t hear you from here,” said a familiar voice from behind them.

“What did you do to the koala kid?” Harry shouted.

“Nothing.”

Harry used a spell - there was a loud scraping noise and lots of smoke. When the smoke cleared, Ugly Guy was laughing.

“Haha, that doesn’t do any damage!”

Just then, a huge tiger came out of the ceiling, crashed, and

landed on the Ugly Guy.

Koala Kid, Harry, and Luke all cheered.

But Ugly Guy just threw Koala Kid to the floor. When he hit the ground, he wasted no time morphing back. Luke used his lightsaber to try to slice Ugly Guy, but the only thing it did was cause three scales on Ugly Guy to fall off.

Then Ugly Guy teleported behind them and kicked them all in the back. They went flying.

Koala Kid tried morphing into a tiger again, but Ugly Guy just punched his chin. Harry used an exploding spell, but Ugly Guy blocked it and threw it straight back. The wall behind them exploded, and there was a big hole in the wall.

They tried to go through the hole, but Ugly Guy pulled them back. They hit the wall on the other side, and by the time the three had got up, Ugly Guy had teleported above them and threw them at the ceiling.

They fell and hit a pile of sand. They were weary and tired, and all hope seemed lost.

Then Luke remembered the scales. He crawled to one and touched it. There was a blinding light, and Luke transformed into an Ugly Guy. They were fighting in the air.

Koala Kid and Harry did the same. Soon, there were four Ugly Guys in action. The real Ugly Guy was struggling.

Koala Kid morphed into a dragon, as the cave started to break down. Soon the sky was visible. Koala Kid blew fire at Ugly Guy, but it just seemed to make him stronger.

“Hey, wait a second! If fire makes him stronger, maybe water makes him weaker!” Harry cried out.

“That makes sense to us,” the others replied.

“Okay,” Luke said. “Let’s go!”

They were close to a lake, and they were so distracted that only Koala Kid saw Ugly Guy flying off. “He’s getting away!” Koala Kid cried.

Then, out of nowhere, a wave of water crashed down in midair and landed on Ugly Guy.

“Yay!” they all chanted.

Planes started flying towards them, splashing heaps of water on Ugly Guy. Then he stopped.

“Look, guys, I’m sorry,” said Ugly Guy. “Can I join you?”

The three looked at each other uncertainly, but then shrugged.

“Yeah.”

“Okay.”

“Sure.” They all agreed.

THE CLOSE ESCAPE

Helga Heidi Herath

‘Can we go to the zoo?’ Riana and her sister asked their parents. Their parents said that on the very next day they could go to the zoo. So, Riana and her sister rushed to their bedrooms and wrote a list of the animals they wished to see at the zoo.

That night, they couldn’t sleep properly because they were too excited about the trip to the zoo. They loved animals, especially baby ones, but they didn’t like the crocodiles or the alligators because they always snapped their jaws at all the people who were fascinated by

how large they were.

They always thought that they would get eaten by the crocodile or become its lunch or dinner. They told their parents the next day about the crocodile fear, but their parents said it was okay because once when they were little, a crocodile had escaped from a zoo and they still all turned out okay.

The next day, they went to the zoo, and Riana and her family were so excited to see all the animals. The first animal they saw was a cockatoo. It had a yellow beak and beautiful white feathers. In the next enclosure, they saw a big komodo dragon, and it was sticking its tongue out at the whole family. Riana thought that this was very funny, so she stuck her tongue out back. It looked like they were having a funny conversation with each other.

In the very next enclosure, there were so many cute monkeys that were hanging and swinging in small trees. At the zoo, people were allowed to go into the enclosure and hold the babies. They were so furry and cuddly. When their time was over, they moved on to the next enclosure, hoping they could see the monkeys again.

In the next enclosure, there was a deadly and furious crocodile that was always snapping its jaws at all the people who came to look at the enclosure. Riana and her sister hid behind their parents' backs. Riana's parents tried to take a photo of it, but it rushed up to the glass and, with one big bite of its jaws, broke the glass, which hit a few people and cut them. Luckily, Riana and her sister didn't get cut.

Riana's mum and dad picked them both up and ran. An alarm was going off, and the family had to run for their lives! There were lots of people screaming. They rushed to the gates of the zoo, panting. There was a very, very big queue lining up to escape, so

they hid behind a bush, and the furious crocodile narrowly missed them. It chased a few people around the enclosure, and there were screams and cries from people who came to the zoo.

The crocodile was caught by the zookeepers and put safely into a brand new cage that was too strong for the crocodile to snap its jaws at and break the glass, but the crocodile was not really that happy to be there.

They were so relieved! All the people who were in the zoo were scared but also really, really relieved that the furious crocodile had not eaten them.

“I am never going to go to that zoo again,” said Riana’s sister.

They had to go to school the next day, and once Riana and her sister told their friends, the news spread around the school like wildfire.

There were people asking questions about the crocodile escape, and others inquired about Riana and her sister’s test and lesson schedules, which became annoying.

At dinner at home, Riana and her sister told their parents about what had happened at school and even mentioned that they had been on the news because of the zoo escape. They might even be famous one day.

It was cold that night, and Riana and her parents chose to drink some warm hot chocolate in their beds since they were freezing cold. The next day, it was the holidays, and Riana and her whole family were looking forward to having a break after the escape, but the whole family chose not to go to the zoo in case the crocodile escaped again.

They chose to go on a holiday to a tropical country because they

thought that would be the perfect place to be. After all, it would be safe without any crocodiles there. But what if there was a tsunami, an earthquake, a flood, or even a mudslide?

What would happen to Riana and her family then?

THE SUN SHINES ON TOMORROW

Juniper Sandeman

“IRENE PERSEPHONE JOURNEY. DID YOU LEAVE YOUR LAUNDRY IN THE DRYER, AGAIN? Maybe I should be glad you’re moving out.” Isabella peeked around the wall from the laundry, glaring at Irene.

“Well, it’s not my fault; it doesn’t make a loud enough noise.” Irene set her tea down on the coffee table, watching the steam float lazily into the air.

“Maybe set an alarm next time?”

She scoffed. “It says it spins for an hour, but it always lies and takes however long it wants.”

“Well, don’t annoy Liam so much that he decides not to live with you anymore.”

Irene rolled her eyes. Bella made eyes at her but turned back around into the laundry, kicking a box out of her way as she did so. The mug of tea rattled slightly in response, the liquid reflecting light that poured from the window through the sheer curtains.

The curtains were a couple of years old, and the purchase was debated for about a month before. It was back and forth, but eventually they settled on some expensive, but pretty, cream curtains,

as they were the only ones Bella would agree to. For a while, they were a subject of conflict; despite not being blood-related, the two certainly argued like sisters, but eventually they became a joke. Every time they disagreed on a small thing, the curtains were brought up, and laughter always followed.

Her new house didn't have sheer curtains, nor did she share the joke with Liam.

Desperate to escape the thought, her eyes flicked over to the electric piano sitting in the corner, gathering dust. Bella came home with it one day, promising to practise it. Irene ended up using it more; she had taken lessons when she was fifteen and still remembered some. Now and then, she would play along with an old CD that Bella loved, but recently she had been too busy.

There would also be no pianos moving out with her.

Irene decided to get up and relocate herself to her room. She wandered down to her door, but it was already open. And the mattress was on its side against the wall. And all her belongings were packed away. All that remained now was a single pathetic 'Pink Floyd' poster, its corner falling off.

Tears pricked at her eyes as she remembered what her room used to look like at this time of day - it was still what she expected when walking in. The light was always perfect, and while the sun still shone today, it didn't have the same effect as it did in a full room. Lived in.

Her heart emptied. It reminded her of the room she had in her parents' house - lifeless. With her parents, she couldn't be herself. Her freedom felt limited. She was suffocating; that was the whole reason she moved out into this apartment - it was hers.

But contradictorily, it felt more freeing to share the apartment with Bella. It hurt Irene to have to leave her here, alone. Bella was susceptible to loneliness, and without someone else in the house...

Her rambling thoughts were scattered with a loud knock on the front door. Two knocks, a pause, two more. It was Liam, coming to take her away from the apartment. Her stomach hollowed, and her limbs froze.

"Irene - get the door already!" Bella called out from the laundry. After a pause, Irene pried her feet out of the glue and pulled her empty limbs toward the door. She dragged the door open.

Liam stood there with a full smile and warm eyes, but his face fell as he saw her expression. Immediately, he silently wrapped her in a hug.

"Do you want to stay a bit longer here?" he said, releasing her from the embrace.

"I just need to get my stuff." She turned around, wiping her tears away. She shouldn't be crying over this.

"Oh, Irene!" Bella called out, running to the living room. "Take your CD." She brandished the shiny disk with a smile. It contained the song Irene could play on the piano. It was her and Bella's favourite song.

Picking up her bags and taking the CD, she remembered something. She wasn't only taking her belongings and the CD with her - she was also taking all the memories she made in the apartment.

And she was moving out with Liam, and Liam cared, and she wouldn't be alone. She wasn't leaving Bella behind; she was just going someplace else - she could visit Bella every day if she wanted to.

She faced Liam with newfound confidence, "I'm ready now."

They left out the door, hand in hand. Irene didn't look back. She didn't need to.

ENDED UP DIFFERENT

Smiha Bangar

Amy hurried as she tried to butt into her friends' conversation. The girls walked on the grey carpet. They rushed past the seating rows in the boarding lounge.

"HURRY!" exclaimed Emma. Her yell echoed through the airport. The loud and clear echo slowly flew Amy's sensitive ears. Amy smelled the food from the small food courts, but she knew she had no time for it at all. The girls were going to miss their flight; they were attending a netball game. There were four girls in the middle, but Amy was meant to be the fifth one. Everyone dangerously pushed her to the side. That group used to be friends together, until Emma miserably arrived to unfortunately invade it. As a fool, the three girls obeyed what Emma said and soon became a group of four. On the other hand, she even tried her best to be helpful, to gain some more courage...

"Gate Eight, we are now boarding." The speakers made the girls jump. They talked behind Amy's back, making her feel soulless. All she wanted to do was lie down on the floor.

She already struggled in the past, as her trustful mum was actually her stepmum. Her biological mum had had to leave. Amy still didn't know why she left; she didn't pass away or anything, she just left. She couldn't stop thinking of her beautiful, calm voice, the

voice that healed Amy's struggles. Well, her stepmum was still lovely, but not like her actual mum...

"Hun, why don't you sit with me? I know those girls are making you uncomfortable," her coach did her best to make Amy breathe normally.

"Oh no, I can sit with Claire."

"Oh, sorry, I'm with Sara," her voice creaked as she spoke, almost like a witch.

"Hannah?"

"Are you serious?"

"Oh, what about you, Jess?"

"Oh s-sorry, I'm with Layla."

The moment of truth came, and she wanted to be friends with Emma, even though all of this had happened; it somehow felt like she was... popular. Amy asked Emma to imitate her. "Hey, uhh, wanna sit with me?" Amy felt purely embarrassed.

"Sit with you? Oh, of course I wouldn't sit with you!" Emma's voice travelled through the airport. She pretended to swipe the dust off her chest.

"Oh." Amy tried to hold in her tears while everyone stood there watching her, laughing and giggling behind her back, leaving her upset. They didn't care about her, even though she was the best netball player in the group, but everyone else would ask the coach to be in good positions, like: Centre, Goal Defence, Goal Attack, and Amy would just stand there, being Wing Attack or Defence. All she remembered was jump, throw, nothing else, because no one would pass to her, even though there was speed to be remembered.

They sat in their assigned seats, and Claire looked outside with

an excited expression on her face. “We’re so gonna’ win!” Amy knew that no one was going to forget her creepy voice.

An hour later, Amy quietly got up in ease as no one sat near her. Emma saw her with a wide eye, determined to see what she did, or to even bully her further. Amy walked to the bathroom with a hairbrush and a couple of hair ties in her hands. She slowly and carefully brushed her hair and tied up a perfect ponytail.

“Ow! What was that for?” Amy elbowed Emma as she snatched the hairbrush out of her hands.

“Ha!” Emma grinned with an attitude at Amy, holding the hairbrush in her hand. Just as she did, she fell over and terribly bruised her head, as if striking a bizarre pose. Amy fell over too.

The lights flickered, leaving the girls speechless. “EVERYONE TAKE COVER!” The passenger was stressed; in fact, everyone was. Were they going to survive? Amy’s thoughts gathered together, leaving her worried. Amy then saw Emma, and she grabbed her sweaty palms as she was about to slip out of the plane.

“Hang on!” Amy bought out a random rope that was previously tied to the luggage, hoping it would help.

“HELP! IT’S DELICATE!” Emma pulled herself by Amy’s knee and lay on the shaking ground.

“You good?”

Emma nodded at her, feeling puffed out.

Amy looked around the plane to help until a majestic-looking woman caught her wide eye. Brunette hair, soft blue eyes, red lips and a stressed face on her. She wore an old pair of familiar sunnies on her head. Amy looked at herself, knowing she looked exactly like her. The same eyes, except lighter, the same hair colour, along

with the same facial expressions. She only had one person in her mind as she stared into her eyes...



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