



FINISH A STORY

**A collection of short stories
by Jamie Smurthwaite**

Illustrations by Anya Chantler

Hi there, Jamie here! I have been an English tutor for nearly a decade now and in that time I have taught creative writing to hundreds of children. And though they may struggle with creative writing in many different ways, one thing I have seen again and again is that many children find the hardest part of writing a story to be, well, simply getting started. Who will their main character be? What obstacles will they need to overcome? Who else is in the story? What kind of tone will the story have? Even with good planning, children often find themselves struggling to get their story going, and so come to resent story writing, as it is just 'too hard', or 'not something they are good at'. But this is often not true.

A few years ago I had a simple idea: what if I wrote the first part of the story for them? Establish the protagonist, set the plot in motion, but leave the story at a place they can confidently pick up from? Then my students can finish the story however they like to create a complete story that is uniquely their own. The result? Children who actually enjoy writing stories. Yes, by removing their greatest obstacle, my students can write without stress and begin to find the enjoyment in creative writing. And once they enjoy writing, technical improvement is sure to follow.

Having seen how well this technique has worked with my own students, it is now my greatest wish to pass it onto children outside of my own county. To that end, I have now written a book of 40 diverse short story introductions, so what you'll see here are just some samples of those story intros. Go ahead and show them to the budding author in your family, and hopefully you will see the same great results I have with my own students.

A Genius Plan



"I don't believe you."

"It's 100% true."

"It can't be. A magic stone? That's how you became a millionaire?"

"Well, not directly, but yeah."

"Huh. Okay. Well, can you at least elaborate a bit? Where did you get this stone?"

"From a beach. Me and my family visited one in France this summer. It's called Paloma Beach, on the French Riviera."

"Ouu, well la dee da, that sounds fancy."

"Sorta. It's just a beach. Not even a big one really. But it was on my last day there I found this unusual looking stone on the shore."

"Unusual how?"

"It's... hard to explain. In my hand it looks black but when I first spotted it it was shining with all the colours of the rainbow. I thought it was a trick of the light, like... well, I have this gemstone at home called labradorite that reflects light in this special way that makes it look like there's a blue light moving around inside of it. It's really cool. Anyway, I saw this stone gleaming on the edge of the water and I picked it up. But when I did it was just black. I wanted to see its lights again so I decided to take it back to our hotel. But still it didn't change. Then I took it home with me and put it in my bedroom and kinda just forgot about it for a while."

"Okay, so, when did it do, you know... what it did to you?"

"Oh, that was about three weeks ago. In the middle of the night I woke up to find it glowing, filling my whole bedroom with dancing rainbow coloured lights. And... it was making a sort of humming, pulsing sound. Not very loud, but still a sound. I got up to take a closer look at it and at first I just stared at it. But then I reached out to touch it. I just had to, y'know? That's when it happened. There was this big flash of light and everything went white. I actually fell down and I guess I must've somehow been knocked out because when I opened my eyes again it was early morning. I went back over to the stone but it was just plain black again."

"Did you think you'd dreamt the whole thing?"

"Not really. The thought crossed my mind of course, but the experience was way too vivid to be a dream. Plus, I know I don't sleepwalk, so how would I have ended up on the floor?"

"Okay, fair enough. So what did you do next?"

"What could I do? I got ready for school. It was only when I started my lessons that day that I realised that something was different."

"Different, like..?"

"Like everything was easy. Like, *really* easy. The first lesson was maths and every question had an obvious answer for me. That was odd enough, but then when we started doing history and geography I realised I knew the name of every city in the world, every historical figure, every significant event. I wasn't just *smarter*, I knew... well, everything. Everything about everything."

"No way! You've gotta be pulling my leg."

"The origin of the phrase 'pulling my leg' is unknown, but it was first mentioned in The Newark Daily Advocate in Ohio in 1883."

"...okay, I believe you. A magic stone it is. But none of this explains how you became an instant millionaire."

"Oh, well that was actually pretty easy..."

How did they become a millionaire?

What obstacles stood in the way of them becoming a millionaire?

What are some interesting ways this character could use their super-intelligence?

Book Covers



Nancy Dyers, a Year 5 student at Croxley Primary School, took great pride in having been named after a great literary detective. That detective was her personal hero. So whenever she was on a bus going to or from her school, she liked to observe children she did not know (most of whom went to Croxley Green Primary School, which was a few roads away from her school) and try to figure out what kind of lives they had. Contrary to what adults often told her, in Nancy's experience you absolutely *could* tell a book by its cover, if you just looked closely enough.

On this morning, she was looking (as casually as she could) at a boy sitting next to her but on the other side of the central bus aisle. This boy was a bit smaller than her, so probably in Year 4 of his school. He was Asian, so most likely Chinese, just based on statistic probability. Though short, he looked quite stocky, like he had some muscles - unusual for a boy his age. 'He must be training very hard', Nancy thought. Probably already a brown or black belt at karate or kung fu.

He was wearing a gold watch. A Year 4 kid, wearing a gold watch to school? Daring. His family must be quite rich, if they could afford for him to wear something like that to school, where it could easily be lost or stolen.

He had by his side his school bag. It was plain black, with the letters 'JL' stylishly written on the back of it in multiple colours. Clearly this boy was an artist, maybe a graffiti artist? But what did JL stand for? John Lewis? John Legend? Nancy decided there were too many possibilities to consider. But, satisfied that she had this boy pretty well figured out, Nancy moved onto her next person of interest, the tall blonde girl sitting in front of her.

(Authors note: John Lee was actually Korean, in Year 5, and was stocky because he spent his weekends working with his father on his farm, which was physically very taxing. He wore a gold watch as he had inherited it from his favourite grandfather, who had passed away the previous year. He never took it off. His mother had written his initials brightly on his school bag because his eyesight was not the best, so this helped him to find it at school more easily. John noticed Nancy staring at him on the bus and now thinks she fancies him. He will consider asking her out).

Does John ask Nancy to be his girlfriend? If so, how does she reply?

What could they talk about? Do they have any common interests? Will they see each other again after they get off the bus?

Displaced



Jimmy had known for quite a while that he had been adopted as a baby, but he was starting to suspect that what he had been told about his biological parents was not at all true. What other explanation could there be for him discovering he had a real, honest-to-goodness superpower?

The first time he'd used his power, he had been in his local park climbing a big oak tree. He had gotten up impressively high (or at least, he *thought* it was impressive), but then he had suddenly slipped and fallen, got his right foot stuck between two branches, then the next thing he knew he was hanging upside down. It was quite the predicament he found himself in. He was alone, but still he cried for help. No-one came. He cried for his mum and dad, even though they were both at home and there was *no* way they could hear him. The last time he cried for his dad though... he appeared. Out of thin air. One second Jimmy was alone, hanging from a high(ish) tree branch, the next his father was standing at the base of the tree, looking incredibly startled. After looking around for a few seconds, he had spotted Jimmy and helped him down. In that moment Jimmy realised something – his dad could teleport! His dad swore to him that this had *never* happened to him before, but Jimmy just figured that meant his dad was a superhero who was worried about his secret identity. Jimmy swore to keep his secret. They walked home, his dad still deeply in shock about what had just happened.

A week later he was at his local shopping centre with his parents and his five year old sister, Kara. Their mum and dad had popped into a café to grab them all a takeaway lunch, but had left Jimmy and his sister waiting outside. Jimmy talked to Kara about her favourite cartoon for a few minutes, but then his best friend, Eric, passed by and stopped to chat with him about a great new video game they were both playing. So into the conversation Jimmy got, he forgot all about keeping an eye on his sister... until he suddenly realised that he could no longer see her. He started darting about looking for her, but she was nowhere to be seen. Eric started to help him look, but he had no luck either. Jimmy shouted out her name at the top of his lungs... and she appeared before him, seemingly out of thin air. She thought this was pretty cool, and wanted to do it again. Jimmy's first thought was, 'wow, she can teleport too? Can everyone in my family do this? Can I?' But Eric, who had also seen Kara appear, had a different theory.

"Dude!" he exclaimed with excitement, "are you like, a summoner?"

"A what?" Jimmy replied, dazed from all the different thoughts rushing through his head in that moment.

"A summoner! Dude, you called out your sister's name and she appeared before you. What else would you call that?"

Jimmy had not considered this. He remembered now how his dad had appeared only when he called out his name. Maybe Jimmy *was* the one making this happen. “I... don’t know. Summoning, I guess.”

“Dude, how could you not tell me about this? How long have you been a summoner? Oh my god this is the coolest thing ever!”

“Erm, like, a week. I don’t really know.”

“A week? Right. So... what are you?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you’re adopted, right? So you’re probably, like, a secret government experiment, right? Or maybe a mutant. Or... oh hey, maybe you’re an *alien*?”

“I’m not an alien!” Jimmy shouted, partly trying to convince himself.

“Dude, no offence, but... how do you know?”

Jimmy realised that he *didn’t* know. He had no idea. But he knew he needed to find out what this power was before he could even think about using it in a positive way.

Will Jimmy discover how he has a super-power?

What will Jimmy do with this newfound ability?

Can you write about Jimmy in a way that gives him more personality?

Falling Fast



There was no doubt about it now: their plane was going down. Their captain had just told them so. And there was no guarantee they would all survive the fall.

Twin sisters Jenny and Rachael were on the plane with their parents, an uncle and two aunties, as well as three cousins. They were all flying to Hawaii to attend the wedding of Uncle Bob, who had been living there for the last five years. It had been an incredibly long flight, but now they were less than two hours away from their destination.

The trouble had started suddenly. The plane had shuddered as if it was shivering from cold, then dropped in the sky for a second - no more than a plane might in bad turbulence, but enough to get a few gasps and screams out of some of the sixty two passengers on the flight. Then, a few seconds later, the plane dropped again, but this time took three full seconds to recover. This time almost all the passengers cried out and the children began to cry, understandably scared. It felt like they were on a rollercoaster ride, but no-one was having fun. The captain's voice came over the plane's speakers, informing them that one of the plane's engines was malfunctioning and they were going to have to make an emergency landing in the sea below them. There was no time for the passengers to grab life jackets or make any other preparations, this was happening now. Everyone tightened their seat belts and braced themselves for the impact.

The plane's captain, William Burke, had been a pilot for over twenty years, and though he had never landed a plane on water before, he had done it in simulations hundreds of times and knew just what to do. The plane hit the water at just the right angle, but for the passengers the feeling of the impact was close to indescribable. Terrifying and uncomfortable in the extreme... but when the plane came to a stop, amazingly no-one was seriously injured.

The plane's crew acted quickly to get everybody into life jackets and off the boat before it could sink completely. But the sea water was absolutely freezing. Just when their prospects were looking grim, Jenny noticed something, far off on the horizon. It looked like... land! Captain Burke had joined the passengers by this point and looked to where Jenny was pointing. He had not seen any land from the air, so knew this could only be a small, uncharted island that was most likely uninhabited. Still, land was land, so he began to co-ordinate their efforts to get to it safely but quickly.

How will all the passengers all get to shore? Remember that some passengers might not be strong swimmers.

If they get to shore, what will the island look like?

Once there, what do the passengers need to do first to get give themselves the best chance at survival?

Freedom



Arthur had been kept indoors for what felt like his whole life. But today was the day that finally changed. He had spent so much time looking out of the living room window, watching people pass by, as well as squirrels and various kinds of birds. He longed to catch them all. He had seen his mum go out many nights and come back in the early morning. Where did she go? What secret places was she finding while he was stuck indoors? He had been told he was too young and that the world was too full of germs (some kind of dangerous bug, from what he could understand) and he had not had his 'shots' (whatever that meant) yet.

Well, a few days ago he had found out what 'shots' meant. Stabbing. Lots of stabbing. Someone came to his house to stab him and no-one - not even his mum - tried to stop them. He felt so hurt and confused. Had he done something wrong? Why was everyone okay with this? Why did he have to get stabbed before he went outside? Was it some kind of test, to see if he was tough enough? He did his best not to meow too much or scratch the human who did the stabbing, he tried to show them all that he *was* brave enough for outside.

It must have worked, because now the front door was open and his mum was standing outside, waiting for him to join her. He tentatively stepped outside. Whoa, it was kinda cold out here. The air felt funny, like it was moving around him. He stepped back a little, not sure if this was normal. His mum meowed at him impatiently. Okay, he guessed this strange air must be normal. Directly in front of the house there was a big room with a green carpet. And the ceiling was sooo high above him, and blue. His mum walked over to the carpet, so he followed. Whoa! This felt so weird! It wasn't all soft and warm like the inside carpet, it was... tickly. And smelled really nice. He loved it! He jumped about happily, rolled in it and chewed on a bit of it. He couldn't believe he had been missing out on this!

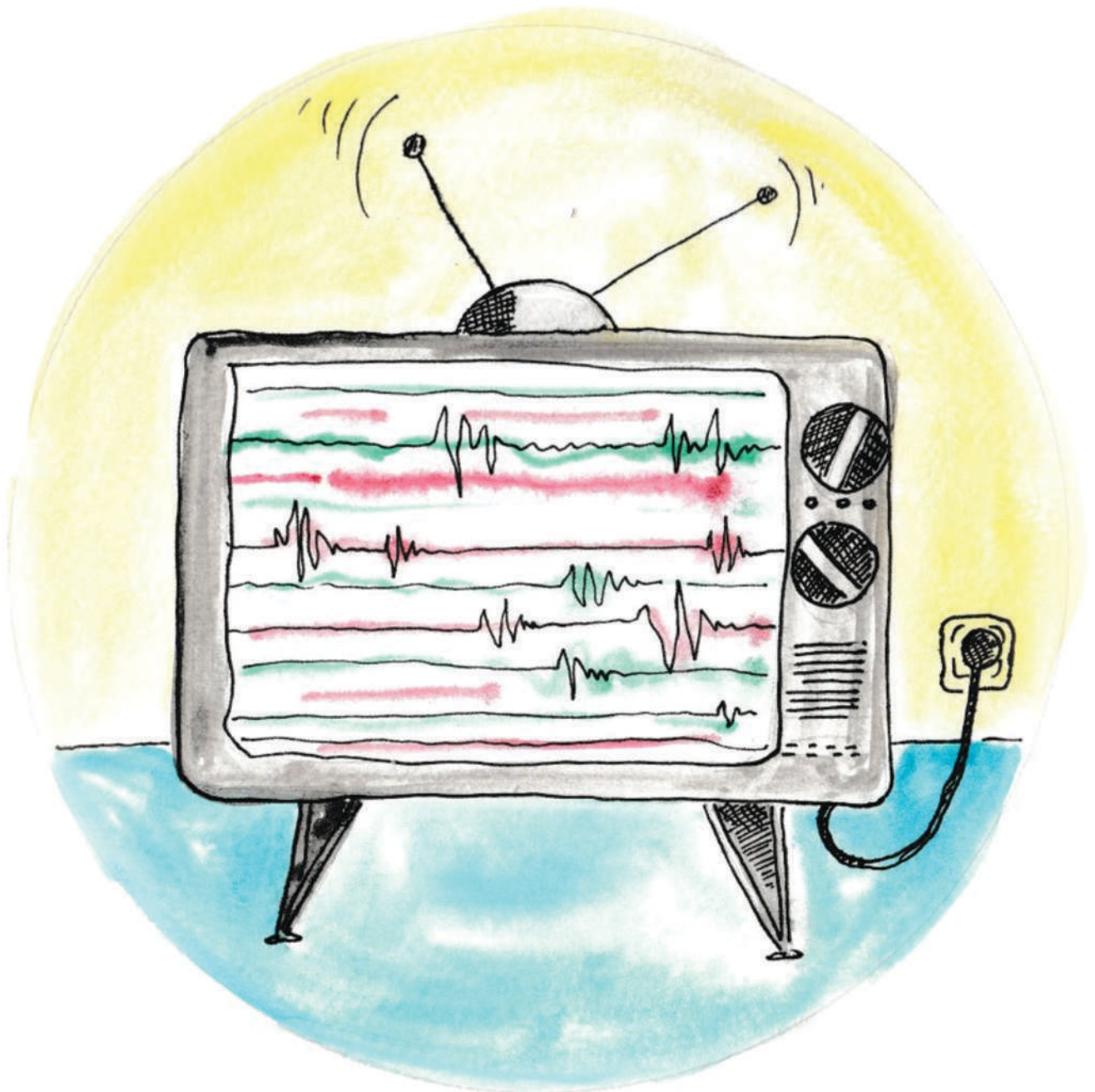
His mum meowed at him again. She wanted to move on but he wanted to stay here longer. It apparently wasn't up for discussion though. She started to walk off to the other side of the green carpet, so he followed, now really curious about what other amazing things he would see today.

Where will the kitten and his mother go next?

Will they meet anyone (human or animal) whilst they're out?

How long will they stay out for?

Help Me



John was watching a Netflix show on his TV one evening when suddenly the screen flickered and he heard a strange voice say "me", before the TV returned to normal. John was a bit surprised, but not stunned. Probably just a glitch on Netflix's end - even the biggest companies in the world occasionally have technical issues, after all. About ten seconds later it happened again, but this time the eerie voice said "help m..". 'Help me? What's going on here?' John thought to himself. Was his show being interrupted by a signal from another show? Maybe a sci-fi or horror, judging by the voice. It was so strange, sort of part robotic, part childlike, and with a slight echo behind it.

Now the picture on the screen completely scrambled, like in movies when someone's computer is being hacked. "Help me. Help *meeeeee*..." came the eerie voice again. Now John was starting to get freaked out. This was no TV channel glitch.

"Hello?" He said back to the TV, scaring himself more. Because now he was actually *talking* to a disembodied voice on his TV. "Who are you?"

"Visitor. Crashed. Hurt. HELP ME!"

"A visitor? What do you mean a visitor? A visitor from where?"

"Not... here." replied the voice weakly. "Not this..." the voice cut out and all John heard now was static.

"Hello? Hello? Not this what? Where are you? I don't understand what you want!" John called back, feeling more terrified by the moment.

More static, then the voice came back... "Help me. Outside this... dwelling. Close... behind you."

John spun around and looked out of his living room window.

What will John see out of his window?

What kind of help does the visitor need? Will John help if he can?

Will the visitor get home? And how is John's life affected by the visit?

How to Bring Down a Giant



Ragnar the Stormborn - so named because he was born in the eye of a great hurricane - had a plan. He was going giant hunting... and knew how he could succeed where others had failed (and perished).

Ragnar was twenty five years old - old enough to be an experienced hunter, but young enough to still think there was no challenge he could not overcome. He was by far the best hunter in his village, but his village only consisted of eighty six people (including him), so it wasn't exactly an awesome achievement. There *had* been eighty *nine* people, but the previous day a sixty foot tall giant had come by and scooped up - and eaten - three of the villagers while the rest retreated into a nearby cave. Ragnar had wanted to fight the giant of course - it was a wandering giant, but still it attacked this village a few times a year - but he knew he was ill-equipped for the task. Swords and other weapons would only annoy it, like a kitten scratching at a human with its claw, and even magic - if Ragnar had any - might not be effective on such a huge target. No, if Ragnar was ever to rid his village of this menace, he would need a much bigger weapon... and he had just such a weapon in mind: a dragon.

In this whole world there only existed a few dozen dragons, so most of them were known and named. Fazarr, for instance, was a red dragon that had a whole island to herself, as she burnt to a crisp any living creature that came near her. Gondal, on the other hand, was a blue dragon that hibernated for most of the year, sleeping on a giant pile of gold. He rarely needed to hunt, as enough foolish humans came looking to steal his treasure that it was like he was having his dinners delivered to him. Minzet, however, was the dragon that lived nearest to Ragnar's village. He was a gold dragon, the only one in all the lands. He was considered to be the most intelligent of the known dragons - he understood every human language, even though his dragon mouth did not allow him to speak any of them. He mainly kept to himself high on a mountain, happy to just feed on the local goats and sheep. A few times in history he had chosen to help a human overcome some great adversity, but Ragnar did not know if a mere giant killing would be of any interest to him. Ragnar might need to sweeten the deal, offer the dragon something it could not get for itself. But what? What do you get for a being that is thousands of years old and probably the world's most fearsome predator?

Well? What *will* Ragnar offer Minzet?

Will Minzet accept Ragnar's offer, or ask for something else?

Will the fight versus the giant go smoothly, or will it be more difficult than Ragnar expects?

Human Behaviour



The robin considered himself to be an expert on human behaviour. He had lived for three full years (outliving many of his friends and siblings) and had spent much of his spare time studying these strange creatures. He was convinced that they were the gods that created the world he lived in, but their behaviour often appeared to be random and pointless. It had taken years of observing them to get a firm grasp on why they acted the way they did.

The robin spent the first few hours of his day finding and eating his first meal, then went, as he did most days, to visit the true king of his territory. The king displayed his power to his subjects by allowing the young ones (along with a few of their parents) to cross the road he chose to stand on whilst all the humans in cars stopped and watched. After everyone had shown their proper respect to him, he would leave. The robin was always impressed by this, and considered this human to be his role model.

A little later that day he was flying over a garden when he heard and saw two humans singing loudly at each other. He had once thought this was a mating ritual, but realised now it was actually a territorial dispute. Usually one would sing louder and longer than the other and the quieter one would go back inside the building, leaving the louder singer to claim the garden as their territory. On this day, it was the smaller (female, perhaps?) human that sang for the longest and the bigger one who retreated. Good for her.

A few houses away, he saw another two humans standing in a garden doing one of their strangest activities - sharing food. He had seen this many times before - they would put their mouths together and seemingly lick each other's teeth. The robin had had a mate before and had shared the occasional worm with her, but their beaks never got *this* close together. When humans cleaned food off each other's teeth, they were often *really* thorough about it. The robin could never tell which of the humans was sharing their food with the other, or if they were both sharing their food at the same time, or if they were just generally cleaning each other's teeth. Whatever the case, the amount of time they spent on this activity made the robin glad that robins did not have teeth.

Oh, but this was *far* from being the strangest human activity the robin had witnessed.

What was the strangest human activity the robin had ever witnessed?

How might the robin misunderstand what he saw?

How will the story end?

It's Just Not Cricket



Zeke and Mikey had been best friends since they were four years old. They had been put in the same reception class, and soon learned that they lived one road away from one another. Soon after that, their mothers had become best friends. Soon after that, their fathers had become best friends. Soon after that, their dogs had become best friends. The boys' older sisters never liked each other though.

When they were both nine years old, their teacher gave them a time capsule project. They had two options – they could bury their time capsules on the school grounds, or they could bury them in their own back gardens (with their parents' permissions, of course). Zeke had the bigger garden, so his parents allowed them both to bury their time capsules in it. There was little point in letting the boys dig up two gardens, after all.

In truth there was not much of value or historical significance in their capsules – some basic Pokemon cards, a can of Pepsi Max, a few superhero action figures – basically just stuff the boys had no sentimentality attached to.

They started digging in the back of Zeke's garden at midday on a Saturday, each with their own garden shovel. Zeke's parents had requested that the boys didn't dig too deep, but they were having too much fun with it, feeling like treasure hunters digging for ancient buried treasure. But they were utterly shocked when nearly one metre down into the earth, they actually *did* find something – a cricket bat! Mikey pulled it up out of the earth.

“Whoa, what's a bat doing buried in your garden, Zeke?” Mikey asked.

“I have *no* idea. Why would someone bury a bat?”

“I guess they were trying to hide it? Oh-my-god, what if this is a murder weapon?” Mikey dropped the bat on the word ‘murder’.

“A murder weapon? Please, ain't nobody been killed in this town since the second world war.”

“So? Maybe it's a really old bat, you don't know!”

“Well sure, but look, it says Puma on the side of it. I'm no expert but I'm pretty sure Puma weren't making cricket bats in the 1940's. Look, let's just clean it off and have a better look at it, okay?”

“Sure, whatever, fine.”

When it had been covered in dirt, the bat had looked old and worn. But once they washed it with the garden hose, they were shocked for the second time to find that the bat was actually very new looking. Pristine, even. Not a single scratch or dent on it. They both decided to leave their time capsule project for the time being and take the bat to their local park to try it out. Neither of them owned a cricket ball (as neither of them had actually ever played cricket), but Zeke grabbed a few tennis balls from his garage.

Zeke was the first to bat (as the bat had been found in his garden). Mikey threw a tennis ball directly at his head, but Zeke not only batted it away, he knocked it over sixty metres away. 'Beginner's luck' they both thought. A second throw, this time Zeke hit the ball over eighty metres away. Zeke felt incredibly comfortable with this bat in his hand. It was like he just *knew* exactly the right way to hit the ball, no matter what angle it came at him from. But how could that be when he'd never played before?

Reluctantly, he let Mikey have a go batting. To Mikey's surprise (but to some degree not Zeke's) Mikey also hit the ball far away on his first attempt. That confirmed Zeke's suspicion: this was no normal cricket bat.

What will the boys do with the special bat?

Will they tell anyone else about their discovery?

Will they find out where the bat originally came from?

Chosen



Julian's parents were arguing again. It felt to him like they were arguing every day now, but in truth it might 'only' be a few times a week. The arguments never seemed to be about anything important, but his mum and dad would shout at each other like their lives depended on them winning every argument.

Julian had learnt to give them a wide berth when they were arguing. In the past he had been shouted at, sent to his bedroom without dinner, grounded and worse, just for trying to say a few words (to one of them or both together). This particular shouting match was taking place at 2pm on a Sunday. It was mid-May and the weather was not exactly hot, but the sun was out at least. So Julian went out to his back garden to sit on a bench until the shouting subsided.

He was reading a new video game review on his phone when it happened. A ladybird landed on the back of his right hand. Julian was left-handed so his right was just resting on the bench, so he paid it no mind at first. But then the ladybird started to walk towards his wrist - which tickled ever so slightly - so he absent-mindedly shook his right hand to send it away. It worked, but the ladybird did a sort of loop-the-loop and landed back on his hand. That struck Julian as slightly odd, so he put his phone down. He had no desire to harm a ladybird of course, but he was in no mood to be crawled on by one either. He shook his right hand again. Again the ladybird flew off and came straight back to that same hand. Starting to feel a little irritated, Julian shook his right hand for a third time, but this time whilst the ladybird was in the air he put his right hand behind his back. The ladybird just casually landed on his left hand.

Julian was really starting to find this odd, but thought rationally that maybe the ladybird was just too tired to fly anywhere else. He stood up and walked over to the small fish pond they had in the centre of their garden. He put his left hand on the ground right next to the water. The ladybird showed no interest. At that moment Julian noticed something - the ladybird was facing towards him, almost like it was looking at his face. Testing a theory, he turned his hand ninety degrees right. The second he stopped moving his hand, the ladybird turned ninety degrees left so that it was once again facing him. It was only then that the thought occurred to Julian that perhaps this ladybird had not landed on him randomly. Perhaps it had chosen to come to him and now did not want to leave him. But why? What could a ladybird want with a twelve year old boy who was only sitting in his garden because he was hiding from his parents? He lifted the ladybird up to about eight inches in front of his face. The ladybird fluttered off his hand and began to hover directly in front of his face, all the while keeping eye contact with him. Julian was astonished, but realised that he needed to accept what

was happening here: this little ladybird was trying to *communicate* with him. But how could it? And if it could, *why* would it?

How intelligent is this ladybird?

How will Julian and the ladybird manage to communicate if the ladybird can't speak?

What does the ladybird want? And why has it chosen Julian?

Mummy



Ben, a ten year old boy in Year 5 of his school, thought that all in all he had a pretty good life. Sure, not every kid at his school was nice to him and sometimes he struggled with maths, but that could be said of any kid. He lived in a nice four bedroom house with two younger brothers (one was eight, the other six) and two really great parents. His mum was a doctor and was the smartest and nicest person he knew. His dad was a mechanic who was the wisest and funniest person he knew. Ben had plenty of games and video games and enough good friends to play them with. The only part of his life that sometimes bothered him was that he had amnesia - he could not remember a single thing from the first four and a half years of his life.

One day when he was four, he had woken up in a hospital with no memory and an aching head. He did not remember his parents, his home, or even his own name. He remembered how to speak English - apparently that was quite normal for people suffering from amnesia - but otherwise he was a blank slate. To Ben, it was like he had been born that day. It was scary at first and his parents had to home school him for his first school year, but by the time he joined a public school at the start of Year 2, he found he was actually ahead of his classmates in most subjects.

One night he was lying in his bed, listening to the storm outside of his window. He tried to get to sleep, but every time he started to doze off, lightning would flash through the sky, shortly followed by some almighty thunder. He was too old to be scared of lightning (or so he told himself), but something about it was really bothering him. He really *felt* like he had been out in weather like this before, but knew he never had been. When finally he did drift off to sleep, he began to have a very vivid dream...

He was on a boat - or was it a yacht? He looked down to see he was wearing a life jacket. He was on the deck with a woman he sort of recognised, but only from some other dreams he had had before. The sky was full of dark clouds, rain and lightning and the boat was rocking violently. Suddenly, the yacht (yes, it *was* a yacht) jerked to the right and Ben, attempting to hold onto the left side's railing, was flipped over it and plunged headfirst into the icy sea.

"James!" screamed the woman from the boat. "James!"

"Mummy! Mummy! Help! Help me, mummmyyyy..!" Ben cried back. But it was no use. The boat had already sped off into the darkness. Ben was alone in the dark ocean now, freezing and terrified.

"Mummy!" Ben woke up screaming. A moment later, his mother came rushing into his bedroom.

"Yeah, I think... no. *Seemed* like a nightmare, but it wasn't. I'm... pretty sure it was a memory. I saw... my mum." A startled expression crossed both their faces at the same moment. "So... Mum... who are *you*?"

So it seems Ben / James is adopted. Why didn't his parents tell him this?

What happened to Ben / James's biological parents? Why does he have amnesia?

Can his biological parents be found? Will his adopted parents want to help him find them?

An Out Of This World Experience



At 15 years old, Jerry, Dmitry, Noah, Lars and Niko were about to become the youngest ever humans in space and the first children ever to visit the International Space Station (ISS).

The year is 2030. Space tourism has become a regular thing for people who are rich enough and fit enough to do it. All in all, nearly a thousand people have visited the ISS in the last 30 years. But they have all had one thing in common: they have all been adults. In 2024, Alyssa Carson became the youngest ever astronaut at 22 years of age, and that was certainly an impressive achievement. But in 2029, a new space tourism company called Rise Up claimed that they had built a spaceship so safe, even a child could travel to the ISS and back in it. Most regular folks were sceptical about this – surely children’s bodies were not strong enough to endure the rigors of space? So Rise Up created an international competition to find the best possible candidates for proving their bold claim true. As the ISS was a joint venture between five space programs (America’s NASA, Russia’s Roscosmos, Japan’s JAXA, Europe’s ESA and Canada’s CSA), Rise Up would take one competition winner from each of those countries (or continents, in Europe’s case). But what would the competition be? A triathlon. Yes, Rise Up claimed that their spaceship was safe enough for children, *but* those children had to be 15 year old world class athletes, all able to run, swim and cycle at an elite level. They had to be 14 years old to enter (as the competition was taking place one year before the winners would actually go to space) and be reasonably fluent in English (so they could easily communicate with each other during their mission).

Jerry Sandler was the winner of the American triathlon. At six feet and one inch tall, he was taller than most adult men and a giant for his age. His impressive cardio served him well during the swimming and cycling portions of his triathlon, but in the running portion his long legs gave him a huge speed advantage. He was actually only semi-interested in going to space though – he just loved beating other kids in competitions.

Dmitry was the winner of the Russian triathlon. His father had been an Olympic gold medallist in wrestling and expected Dmitry to follow in his footsteps. But Dmitry loved speed. He trained to do everything *fast*. And blasting off into space sounded very fast to him indeed.

Noah won the Canadian triathlon. He had been a farmer his whole life but only dreamed of traveling to the stars one day. The triathlon he won was the first he’d ever competed in, but knowing this was his one and *only* chance to achieve his dream, his passion and determination somehow pushed him to victory.

Lars was from Sweden and won the European triathlon. This might have been the most difficult competition to win, as he had had to win both a national and international triathlon. He was a gifted athlete who excelled at every sport he tried, but he most loved overcoming his own fears, so extreme sports were his jam. His next fear to overcome? Space travel.

Niko won the Japanese triathlon and was the only girl to win any of the triathlons. But Niko had been breaking records her whole life. She had already achieved seven Guinness World Records in her short life, and being the youngest ever female in space was about to be her eighth. Once she got to the space station, she hoped to set at least two more records.

These five teenagers were strangers to one another the day they boarded their spaceship together. But the harrowing experience they were about to endure would make *four* of them friends for life.

What will be the ‘harrowing experience’?

Why will it bond together only four of the five young astronauts?

How will the five children’s unique personalities play a part in the story?

Run



Will had been at a bar in London, attending the birthday party of one of his best friends. The only thing was, he had got a little bit carried away with the celebrating and spent all his money - including the money he needed to get a taxi home. He could have borrowed the money from one of his friends of course, but he was too embarrassed to ask. So he said his farewells and walked out into the night which, just his luck, was windy and rainy.

He walked along the high street, coat collar pulled up around ears that were already dripping wet. If he kept to the main roads, he would get home in about twenty five minutes, but if he took a short cut through some alleys that ran behind some houses, maybe in less than twenty. But the alleys were dark and a little creepy, even for a grown man like Will. Just as he was considering this option though, a bus drove past him and through a deep puddle of water, which rose above him like a tidal wave before crashing down on top of him, soaking him from head to toe. He stood stunned for a moment, not able to believe he had gone from being bone dry to soaking wet in a matter of minutes. Feeling pretty sorry for himself, he grudgingly headed into the nearest alley. At least it would give him some protection from the now chillingly cold wind.

Will had walked through this network of alleys during the day, but never at night. He knew the general direction to go, but it was still unnerving walking with so little light to guide his way. Then, from somewhere behind him, he heard a gravelly voice.

"Run." it said.

Will spun around and saw no-one. "Who said that?"

"Run." the voice came again. It sounded to Will like the voice had come from around the corner he had just passed. He went back and looked around it with more than a little trepidation. But there was no-one there.

"Run!" The voice came again, louder this time and from the direction Will had just backtracked from. Now he was starting to be very afraid.

"Who is that? Show yourself! I know karate, so if you don't stop messing with me, you're gonna be in big trouble!" Will shouted into the night, lying through his teeth.

The gravelly voice began to laugh, a horrible sound that seemed to come from all around Will. Then the laugh stopped abruptly. "Run!" the voice screeched, sounding almost inhuman. Will could not bear to hold his ground anymore - he began to run. He hurtled straight ahead down one alley, then

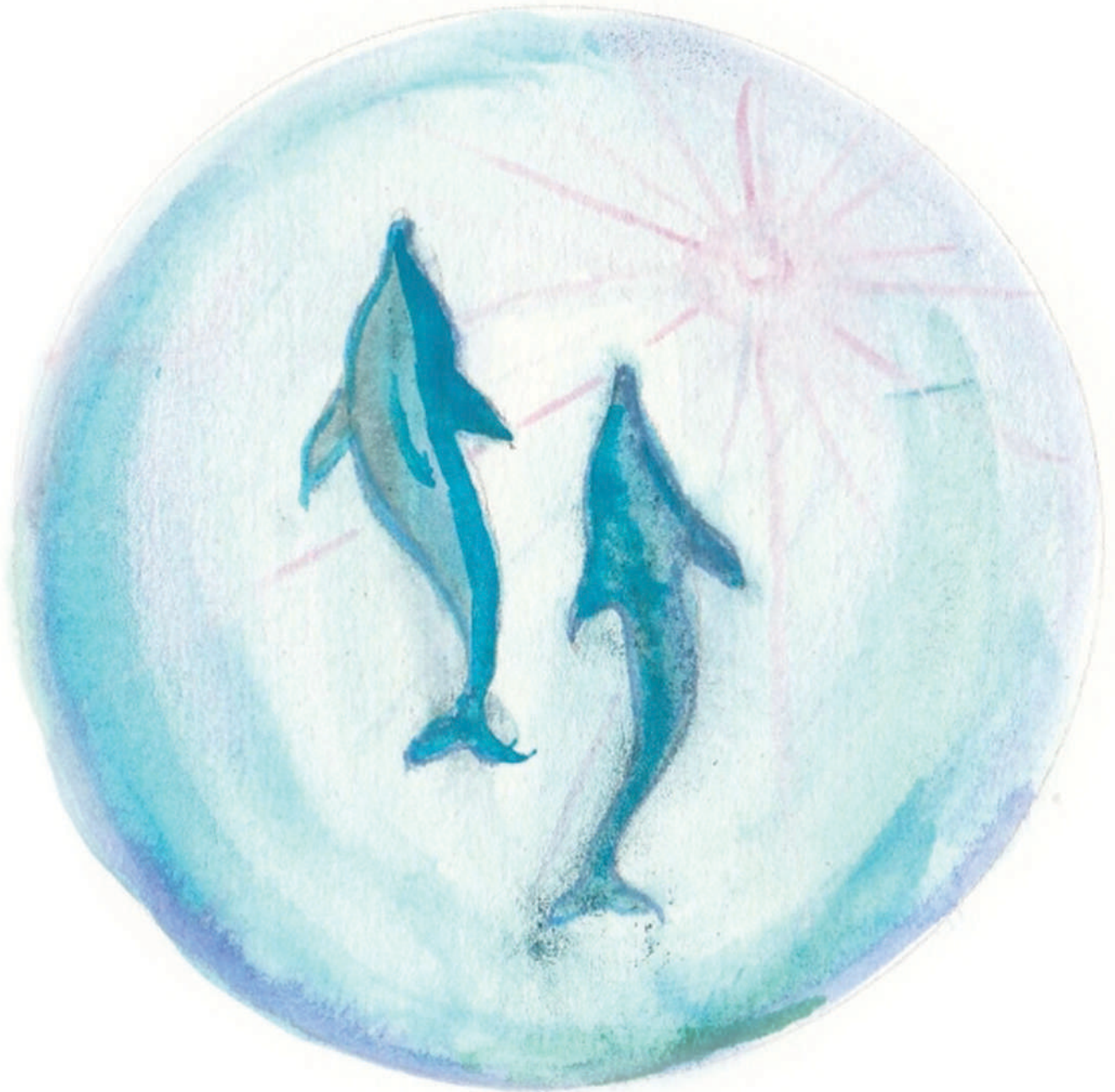
he took a left, then a right... which about ten metres in he realised led to a dead end. Cursing his luck, he turned to look behind himself. No-one was there. Was the man he'd heard even chasing him? Was he lying in wait somewhere to ambush him? The possibilities were terrifying, but there was one thing Will had no choice about: he would have to go back the way he had come.

Who – or what – is the owner of the strange voice? Or will that remain a mystery?

How will Will get away from him?

How can you create further tension in this story?

saved



Eeo and Lee were swimming a few miles away from one of their favourite tropical islands in all of Hawaii. They loved the water here, it was so warm compared to where their pod usually roamed. Most dolphins didn't venture so close to where humans lived, as they were so wildly unpredictable – some humans were known to be really friendly and even helpful, but others could be cruel and dangerous. Most of the other dolphins in their pod chose not to take any unnecessary chances and steered well clear of human settlements, but Eeo and Lee were young teenagers and more full of courage than wisdom. So they had snuck away from their group while they were all sleeping – not an easy thing to do, considering that dolphins sleep with one eye open - and headed for land. They knew that eventually their group would come looking for them, but they figured it would take them at least a day to find them. That would be a day spent in warm, soothing water, and the trouble they would no doubt get in with their parents would be totally worth it.

Lee was playing bite the tail with his sister when he saw something dark out of the corner of one of his eyes. He quickly used his echolocation skill and confirmed his fear – a shark was fast approaching them, and based on its shape it appeared to be a very dangerous one: a tiger shark! Eeo spotted it at the same moment and they started to swim as fast as they could away from it. If the shark hadn't noticed them before, it certainly did now. It began to chase them.

Lee had always wanted to fight a shark. As a group his pod had fought off many over the years, but he had always been protected and not allowed to help. Now though, far away from his pod, he knew his chances of defeating a tiger shark alone were poor, and wasn't willing to risk his sister's life by attempting it.

So they swam away, faster than they had ever swum in their entire lives. But the shark was still gaining on them. They tried zigging and zagging, but the shark copied their movements exactly. They tried jumping above the surface of the water to confuse it, but it didn't work. Closer and closer their pursuer drew until it was just a few metres behind them, snapping at their tails. Lee was a slightly faster swimmer than Eeo, but he swam at *her* top speed, keeping his tail just slightly behind hers. If the shark was going to get either of them, he would at least make sure it wasn't his sister.

Just as the shark lunged at Lee with its jaws wide open, something whacked it hard on its nose. Something that resembled a tail fin but was bigger than a dolphin's. Lee risked turning all the way around to look properly, and could hardly believe what he saw. A merman had positioned himself between the tiger shark and him and his sister! Lee had heard tales of

merfolk being spotted in this area, but he had never seen one with his own eyes. Now one had seemingly come to their aid, and was readying himself to fight the vicious tiger shark. Only slightly deterred, the shark charged at the merman.

How long will the fight last? Will the merman sustain any injuries?

What will the merman have to say to Eeo and Lee?

After this incident, will Eeo and Lee head back to their pod, stay in the warmer waters or go have further experiences with the merman?

Squawk and Crow



Squawk was a one year old raven, living in New Forest, England. It was a wonderful place for a bird of any breed to live. They had it all - a place to call home, plentiful food, shelter when it rained, very few natural predators and, mostly importantly, freedom. Squawk just had one tiny little problem - he was afraid of heights. Oh, he could fly well enough, he just preferred to take off from the ground and land on the ground. And not fly much higher than an average sized house.

Squawk didn't fully realise it, but his fear went back to when his mother first taught him to fly. Like most ravens, he started learning to fly by taking off from the ground. That hadn't been his problem. His problem had been landing. One windy day he had tried to land on top of a tall redwood tree, but had missed the branch he was aiming for and tumbled down through the tree, hitting branch after branch after branch for what felt to him like an eternity. When he finally reached the ground he found he had miraculously not broken either of his wings, but he had gotten several cuts and bruises and his poor little body ached for weeks. Worse, his brothers and sisters had seen him fall and found it hilarious. After that, he did not try to land on tall trees anymore. Even once he got better at landing, he was still fearful of flying too high. What if he encountered a hawk and was flying too high to find the cover of trees? What if he got hit by lightning? What if a fly flew into his eye and he lost control of his wings, causing him to plummet to his death? No, best to stay low, stay safe.

His brothers and sisters may have laughed at him - and continued to laugh at him every time they saw him sitting on a much lower tree branch than the ones they were sitting him - but Squawk still had a few friends. His best friend, Craw, had been trying to help him overcome his fear for months. He would often fly with Squawk at his low altitude, but then very slowly ascend, coaxing Squawk to follow him. They would usually start off well, but by the time they got up to about 25 to 30 metres, Squawk would get too scared and head back down. It was frustrating for both of them.

One day, Craw had a new idea. He had found a line of trees where each one was a little taller than the one next to it. There was a 10 metre tall tree, a 15 metre, a 19 metre, and so on, right up to a 51 metre tall redwood. The idea was simple: fly with Squawk from the top of one tree to another. Short distance, short ascent, somewhere to land when Squawk inevitably got nervous. They didn't have to do every tree in one day, they could build up Squawk's courage over a number of days or, if necessary, weeks. Craw refused to give up on his best friend, no matter how long it took.

On the third day of training, Squawk got up to the top of the 38 metre tree. He was actually quite proud of himself. But then it all went very, very wrong.

What goes wrong?

How will Squawk and Crow handle the situation?

By the end of the story, will Squawk have overcome his fear of heights? If so, how?

Still



Jacob and Maria were students at the University of Hertfordshire. It was their third year there, and had been dating since they had met early in their first. They planned to after university get a house and a dog together (with the dog being the higher priority, of course).

Jacob was trying to get a science (physics, chemistry and biology combined) degree so that he had the option of becoming a pharmacist, environmentalist or medical researcher. Maria was taking a degree in engineering, as she hoped to build boats and yachts for a living (with her ultimate goal of course being to build one for herself one day). They were both determined hard workers, but they also knew how to enjoy themselves, with some of their favourite activities being mini-golfing, rock-climbing and going to theme parks together.

One summery Thursday afternoon, Jacob and Maria were walking through their local high street together, headed for their favourite restaurant to have a late lunch together. The street was fairly crowded, mainly with people walking but also with a few cyclists and two cars passing by. The happy couple were just discussing a TV show they had watched together the previous night when *it* happened. Everyone and everything around them stopped moving in the exact same instant, all now as perfectly still as if the world had become a photograph. It seemed that only Jacob and Maria were unaffected. They noticed the change instantly.

“What the...” Maria exclaimed, almost jumping out of her skin.

“No waaaay...” Jacob gasped at almost exactly the same time.

“No. No no no no no no!” Maria shouted, unable to hide her terror.

“Okay, okay, let’s try not to freak out honey.” Jacob suggested, definitely freaking out.

“Don’t freak out?! Jacob, we’re... frozen in time! This does not happen in real life!” she shrieked at him.

“Well, apparently it does. Or at least it is now. Happening. I mean, look, yeah, this is bizarre, this is pure science fiction. But... let’s just try to figure this out, okay? Or maybe time will restart in a minute. Or maybe time hasn’t stopped, maybe we’re just going really fast... like the Flash!”

“Oh, the Flash? You think you’re a superhero all of a sudden?” Maria retorted.

“No of course not, I’m just saying that... look, we’ve both seen this kind of thing happen in movies and TV shows, right? But always for different reasons. So first thing’s first, we should figure out what *kind* of frozen time this is, right?”

“What kind? Jacob – honey – you really think we can figure out what’s going on right now, here, in the *real* world... based on your knowledge of sci-fi movies?”

“I mean, do you have a better idea?” Jacob replied simply, shrugging his shoulders.

“I...” Maria started. Then she stopped herself and looked around at all the immobile people surrounding her. “No. No I guess I don’t. Sorry, I’m really scared right now, you know? What if this is permanent somehow?”

“We can’t think like that. Come on, take a look at this.”

He went over to a cyclist, a man in his forties wearing a blue denim shirt and red shorts. He was frozen mid-pedal. Jacob nudged him with his right forefinger. The cyclist did not move even a millimetre.

“See? Gravity is suspended too. This man should have fallen down, but he’s as immovable as a statue. But gravity feels normal for us. Whatever is going on... we’re special somehow. I think whatever this is... it’s about us.”

What *is* going on? Why – and how – did this happen?

Will there be any other characters in this story, or is this story only about Maria and Jacob?

Will they figure out how to return the town / country / world to normal or will they need to learn how to live this way?

Sunrise Shootout



This story takes place in the year 1892, in the small American town of Beechwood, Arizona. It was a town like many others in the old west, closer in size to a modern village than a modern town, a place where most of the town folk lived in their place of business, whether that meant living above a barber shop or a general goods store.

The town had two saloons, one on either side end of the town - so less than a mile apart. One of them - Billy Bob's - was reasonably family friendly, it was where you would go to have a good lunch or dinner, or meet up with a old friend for some good conversation over a drink. The other one - The Bull's Horns, was... well, not for children. It was a den of gambling, hard drinking, frequent fights and even the occasional shooting. To a fifteen year old boy named Jimmy, it sounded like the coolest place on Earth.

Jimmy lived on a ranch on the outskirts of town with his parents and two younger sisters. He was a good boy, almost always listening to his parents and rarely getting into trouble. They forbid him from ever going to The Bull's Horns though, knowing that he would only find danger there. But of course, no matter how good of a boy he was, being forbidden from going somewhere naturally made him incredibly curious about it. From what he had heard, this was the place where men went to be men... and no-one told them what to do.

One night, his curiosity just became too much for him. He waited until the rest of his family was asleep, then, as quietly as he could, snuck out the house, got his horse out of the barn and rode into town.

By the time he got there it was 11:15pm. He tied up his horse outside the saloon and walked through the saloon doors. The place was busy that night, at least twice as busy as he had ever seen Billy Bob's be.

As he headed to the bar to buy himself a drink, he heard someone behind him call out his name. He spun around, surprised to be recognised and hoping it wasn't a friend of his parents. But before he could see who had called his name, he bumped backwards into someone. He turned back around and immediately felt panic grip his heart. Not because the man he had bumped into had spilt the beer he was carrying all over his own shirt, but rather because he recognised the man from a wanted poster he had seen: this was William Walters, AKA Bronco Bill, a notorious bank robber!

"Boy, what did you just do?!" the outlaw shouted at Jimmy. "My mother bought me this shirt, and you've ruined it!" He pulled out a pistol and pointed it at Jimmy's chest. "I should shoot you right here..." He hesitated for a moment. "...but I don't think my mother would like me *killing* a boy. Hmph,

I'll tell you what. I'll give you a *chance*. Pistols at dawn! Yeah, that's right, you and me, outside this saloon at sunrise. Best shooter lives. So go say goodbye to your mummy and daddy, and don't make me come find you!"

As Bronco Bill pushed past Jimmy and strode out of the saloon, Jimmy stood frozen to the spot. He had never shot at a man in his life. What chance might he have against a famous outlaw? How would he get himself out of this?

What will Jimmy decide to do? Go to the duel, run away or get some kind of help?

Who called out Jimmy's name in the bar?

If Jimmy does decide to go to the duel, how can he possibly survive it?

Surely He Is Not
Qualified For
That



Stanley Cupper was the kind of boy that constantly questioned adults. Not for the sake of being rude or rebellious, but rather because he genuinely disagreed with some of their decisions and thought that it was his right as a human being to say so. When, for instance, his parents would tell him to turn off his gaming console and go to bed, he would argue that studies showed that most children his age sleep for more hours per night than they really need to, whereas video games help to develop cognitive skills and hand / eye co-ordination. So surely it made sense for him to stay up later playing his favourite online game, right? His parents did *not* agree. Still, he didn't give up trying to convince them.

With his teacher, he was worse. One day his teacher was trying to teach her students about the solar system when Stanley put his hand up. When asked what he had to say, he said that everything she was saying might not be true because the earth might be flat. She said that that was nonsense, of course the earth was not flat. Stanley asked her if that was a fact. She confirmed that it was. He then replied that since there are plenty of people who think the world *is* flat, the world being a sphere *can't* be a fact, but rather only an opinion, and opinions shouldn't be getting taught as facts in a classroom. She asked him to end this line of questioning, but he persisted so she sent him to the headmaster's office to be spoken to.

"Mr.Cupper," the headmaster began once Stanley was sat opposite him, "what is it this time?"

"Well sir, Mrs.Haskins was trying to tell me what I can and cannot believe in. I was standing up for my beliefs and she told me to be quiet."

"Really?" replied the headmaster, now concerned, "she tried to tell you you weren't allowed to believe in Christianity? You're parents *are* Christians, yes?"

"Yes sir. But no, she told me I wasn't allowed to believe the earth is flat."

The headmaster had been taking a sip of his morning coffee and nearly spat it out in shock. "What? That's preposterous! You can't possibly believe that!"

"Oh, so you're going to mock my religion too?"

"You're religion?!" The headmaster shouted.

"It might be. Not for you to say, is it sir? At least that's what the school board says - that all students are free to practice any religion we choose. Oh,

and while I am here, I've been meaning to ask you about changing the school's vending machines."

"The vending machines? What about them?"

Well, they are not very safe are they? I have a nut allergy and they sell nuts. What if I pressed the wrong order number and got nuts rather than crisps and I opened them without looking and took a bite? I could be killed! You know, I really feel you are not doing the best job of running this school, sir."

The headmaster was utterly speechless. But after a moment, he got up, walked over to his secretary and told her "Ms.Barnett, from tomorrow I will be taking a one week holiday. I will be leaving Mr.Cupper in charge."

"Stanley Cupper?" Ms.Barnett gasped. "But... he's ten, sir. Surely he is not qualified for that."

"Of course not. But he clearly thinks he can do better than me. So let him try. Whatever ridiculous decisions he makes, I can always reverse upon my return."

What will be Stanley's first order of business?

Will his changes actually improve the school, or will his changes only improve his own school experience?

How will the other students and teachers feel about having Stanley in charge for a week?

Tai Chi Boy



As it happened, that day Kai was doing some solo tai chi training in a garden outside of that sick monk's quarters. Doctor Stern had gone inside but had asked Charlotte to wait outside. As she waited, her eyes were naturally drawn towards this curious boy doing these strange movements. Strange... yet somehow beautiful. He moved with grace the likes of which she had never seen. And though he was clearly one or two years younger than her, with his bald head and baggy robes he looked oddly like a little old man to her. Yet no old man she'd ever met looked as strong as this boy did, standing on one leg or one hand seemingly with equal ease. And what concentration! She was standing not much more than ten metres away from him, yet his eyes had not once turned towards her. Though she knew she probably shouldn't disturb him, she just *had* to speak to him.

"Erm, excuse me? Hi!" she called as she approached him.

Kai couldn't believe it. He had never seen a girl in person before. When he'd seen her and her father approaching Master Windu's quarters, he'd done his best to act cool, as though her presence was no big deal to him. But he'd started to do more advanced techniques (such as standing on one hand) with the hope of impressing her. And now she was speaking to him! He did his best to stay calm.

"Greetings." he replied to her, bowing a little.

"Hi. My name's Charlotte. I'm here with my father... erm, he's a doctor. What's your name?"

"Kai." he replied, instantly regretting it. He should have said something

cooler sounding, like 'the wind does not need a name, it just is'. Well, too late now.

"I'm pleased to meet you, Kai. What was that you were doing?"

"The wind does not need a name, it just is." What? What did he say that for? Surely she would think him rude now. What was he thinking?

"Oh... okay, cool."

"But... we monks call it tai chi. Would you like to try?"

She very much did. For the next twenty minutes Kai showed her a few basic movements... after which his life would never be the same again.

Why does teaching Charlotte a little tai chi change Kai's life?

Will Kai ever see Charlotte again after this day?

What affect does meeting Kai have on Charlotte?

The Big Favour



We all pick our noses from time to time, don't we? I know *you* do. Yes, I'm talking to you, dear reader! When no-one is looking and you get that irritating little itch inside one of your nostrils, what do you do? You scratch the itch directly, don't you? Maybe remove the mucus that's blocking your airway slightly? And when you do, don't you just feel *better*? But then... what do you do with the bogey? I'm sure you, dear reader, go to find a tissue, wipe your finger off thoroughly, throw the tissue in a bin then wash your hands. Good for you, dear reader! But did you know that *some* people – not you, of course, but some people - *don't* get a tissue? No, they just rub off that bogey on whatever surface is nearby. The underside of a table or chair, the side of a couch or *anywhere* on a blanket, and that's just at home! Oh, some people will dispose of a bogey *anywhere* they think it will not be noticed. But have you ever noticed that those bogies have a way of disappearing once you have forgotten about them? No of course not dear reader, *you* would never leave a bogey just lying around in the first place, but people who *do* never see those bogies again. And that is all thanks to The Bogey Monster, AKA The Booger Monster, AKA the Snot Monster, AKA Larry.

Larry's job since the beginning of civilised society has been to collect every single discarded bogey in the world. When you - I mean, people who do *not* dispose of their bogies cleanly - are sleeping, Larry will appear out of thin air, absorb the bogey into his body, then disappear. This happens in a tenth of a second, so even if you were wide awake, you would never catch him in the act. And in case you were wondering, yes, The Bogey Monster does essentially look like a six foot tall, roughly man-shaped booger. Because of this, Larry has always had trouble making friends. Tooth fairies, Jack Frost, elves on shelves... they are all grossed out by him. He looks horribly slimy and doesn't smell too pleasant either, if we're being honest. There really is only one person in the whole world nice enough to speak with Larry, and that's Father Christmas, AKA Santa Claus.

Father Christmas and Larry are both super busy all year round though, so they only ever meet whilst 'on the job'. Once a year, Father Christmas will visit a child's house that Larry is also visiting, and though Father Christmas usually visits over a hundred homes per second, he'll slow down to just ten a second so that he can speak with Larry for a minute or two as they flash from house to house. Now one or two minutes to you or me would be a rather short conversation, but to beings who move as fast as Larry and Father Christmas, it can feel like a very long conversation indeed. And oh, how Larry looked forward to his chats with Father Christmas. He never got a present from him – those really are for well-behaved human children only – but this year Larry intended to ask him for a favour. A big favour. Probably his request would be turned down flat, but it couldn't hurt to ask, right?

Their paths crossed this year at 14 Platensgatan, Motala, Sweden. After some pleasant small talk, Larry asked his favour. "Mr.Christmas, do you think that this year, you could maybe...

What do you think Larry will ask Father Christmas for?

Will Father Christmas grant Larry's request? If not, why not?

What new characters could you add to the story?

The Burning Question



Mia woke up coughing. Sleepily, she looked over at her phone, which was charging on her bedside. It was 11.45pm, less than thirty minutes after she had gone to bed. So why was she awake so soon? And what was that smell? It smelt like a bonfire... fire! The moment the word popped into her head, she jumped out of her bed, completely alert. She opened her bedroom door and a wave of heat hit her so hard it spun her around. 'Stupid!' she thought to herself - she had not even checked if the door handle was hot before touching it! Being in the line of work she was, she should have known better.

There was definitely a large fire raging downstairs, she could hear it now. It was uncomfortable, but she had to push through the heat to get to the stairs to see if she could get out of the house. When she got to the top of her stairs, she was dismayed to see that her entire downstairs hallway was engulfed in flames, from the wooden floor to the walls on either side of it. The heat here was even more intense, her eyes burned from the smoke and she began to cough uncontrollably. She retreated to her bathroom, closed the door behind her and quickly ran a bath cloth under the sink tap, then covered her mouth with it. How could this be happening? Where had the fire started? How had it spread so fast and why didn't she wake up sooner? These were questions she had no time to consider right now. She had to push all these questions aside and push all her thoughts towards what she should do next to save herself.

Pushing through the fire downstairs to get out the front door seemed like a bad option. It was likely she would suffer at least some burns, and she risked passing out from inhaling too much of the thick smoke. Her next thought was to go to one of the bedrooms and simply jump out of a window. But in doing so she would almost certainly break a bone or two. Not very appealing. In the movies people always tied bed sheets together and lowered themselves down, but she had no idea how to do that quickly. She could, she supposed, just hide under a blanket on her bed and wait for the fire brigade to arrive. But then she realised she had not yet called the fire brigade. No time for that now, every second might count. If she was lucky, someone else might have seen the fire and called. One last idea occurred to her. She could go up to her attic. It was further away from the fire and smoke, so doing this might buy her some time, but if the upstairs hallway caught fire she would be trapped up there. What was the right choice? How would she save herself?

What is Mia's job and how might her job skills help her here?

What will she decide to do next?

Did anyone call the fire brigade? If so, how long until they arrive?

The Gnome and the Werewolf



It's not easy being a garden gnome. They spend most of their lives standing outside, in all weather and temperatures, often getting bothered by cats and dogs that are suspicious of them, no matter how lifeless they stand. And they can only come to life on the three nights of a full moon - a bit like a werewolf actually. And as it happened, one particular werewolf was the owner of a gnome. This gnome - named Bob - had been purchased by the human Eric about twelve years previously, when Eric was fifty-five years old. In Eric's younger days, he had been a dangerous hunter in his werewolf form, which is why he lived in some deep woods on the outskirts of a small town. As a human, he worked as a bus driver and had many friends in his community, but when the moon was full he stayed near his home in the woods and hunted anything that moved, be that a rabbit, fox or deer.

But as Eric got older he found that the hunting was getting harder and harder, and he had begun to enjoy it less and less. When he returned to his human form in the morning he always had lots of aches and pains in his muscles and joints. He grew tired of these aches. So one day he decided to buy himself a gnome, knowing full well that a gnome's life cycle matched his own. So instead of going out hunting on full moon evenings, now he would stay at home with his gnome.

They did not become friends instantly though. Bob was initially very wary of Eric, thinking that at any moment he might give into his hunger and gobble him up in one bite. But Eric always resisted that urge. Over the years they became as close as two friends could be - they played chess and poker together, rocked out to heavy metal music and had many discussions about (magical) life in general. And Eric always took good care of Bob - when the moon was not full he kept him inside the house and far away from any nosy cats or dogs.

But one night, when Bob came to life for the first time that month, Eric was nowhere to be found. Not in the house, not outside anywhere near the house. Bob was a little worried, but thought that maybe Eric had just gone out hunting for old time's sake. But in the morning he did not return. Now Bob was very worried. Was Eric hurt? Had he been caught and captured somehow? That evening he made a hard decision - he would go out looking for him, first in the woods around their home, then - if truly necessary - into the human town. Bob knew the risks. But he owed his friend too much to not at least try.

Will Bob find Eric in the woods? Or will he need to look for him in town?

Why hadn't Eric come home?

**What other characters might Bob meet whilst searching for Eric?
And will those characters help or hinder him?**

The Guitar



Jaiya loved guitars. She loved everything about them. The way they looked, the way they felt when she held them between her chest and right arm, even their faint smell. But most of all the sounds they made. Every note, every string pluck sounded to Jaiya like a harp being played by an angel. The only problem was, she didn't own one. The only time she had even picked one up was at her local musical instrument shop.

Jaiya's parents were very poor. They lived in a studio apartment, with her parents sleeping in a double bed whilst she slept on a couch. They had no computers and no TV. Her parents knew of course of her love of guitars and had promised to try to save up for one - maybe for her next birthday? Jaiya knew though that this was definitely not a sure thing.

But Jaiya was a bright and determined girl. She would not wait until she had a guitar of her own to learn to play. She found a large piece of cardboard and cut the shape of a guitar out of it (based on some measurements she'd found on the internet). She then drew on it the sound hole, strings and frets, all as close to the correct distances apart as she could manage. Then she borrowed her mum's phone and used YouTube to teach herself to play. It hardly mattered to her that her cardboard guitar made no sounds - she knew the sound of every string and note so well she could hear them all in her mind.

Eight months passed. No guitar for her tenth birthday, much to her parent's shame. Jaiya understood though. Food and running water were more important. But in that eight months Jaiya became a superb cardboard guitar player. One day her best friend, Rashmi, came to visit her and offered to record her strumming her favourite song, 'Motown Rain', whilst it played in the background. Jaiya agreed, and the video came out really well. It really looked like Jaiya was playing the song's guitar music. Rashmi suggested that they put the video on YouTube, but Jaiya was quite against that idea, knowing that her school mates might tease her mercilessly if they saw her playing a cardboard instrument. But... when Rashmi got home she found that she just couldn't resist. She posted it anyway. To her, Jaiya's playing was incredible and beautiful, and more people should be able to see it.

Well, more people certainly did see it. Within two weeks the video had over 82,000 views. One of those viewers was a local rock 'n' roll legend named Rick Rolls. He was the lead guitarist for a band called Twisted Metal, and was known for being someone who could play *any* song, no matter how complex.

In the comments section of the YouTube video, he wrote of how impressed he was with Jaiya and asked if he could be e-mailed her address so that he

could send her a gift. Jaiya probably would have politely declined, but Rashmi – whose account the video was on – did not. Two days later, a package arrived for Jaiya at her door. Recognising its shape instantly, she tore open its packaging - it was a guitar! And not just any guitar, this appeared to be Rick Rolls' legendary first guitar!

With her parents out of the flat at that moment, she didn't waste any time trying to play it. She played the first twelve notes of her favourite song... then the guitar played the next twelve, all by itself! Was this some sort of trick? Jaiya looked at the guitar more closely. No electrical wires, no computer, nothing out of the ordinary. Which only left one possible explanation. She tentatively played the first sixteen notes of the hardest song she could think of... and the guitar played the next sixteen. There could be no doubt about it now. Rick Rolls' first guitar – and now Jaiya's guitar – was magical.

What will Jaiya do with this amazing gift?

Will she tell anyone else the guitar's secret, or keep it to herself?

Will she use the guitar to help others somehow? Or just herself?

The Hero's Sanctuary



Erik Hardmark was a woodsman. He lived in a cabin in a large stretch of woods, where he cut down trees for timber and planted new saplings in their place. Every Sunday, he would take a cart full of his timber to a market in the nearest town, some seven miles away from his home. A little over two years ago, whilst on one of these visits, an oracle approached him to tell him that on March the 3rd, 2023, he would be visited at his cabin by a young hero, whom he must help on his journey. Today was that fateful day.

Erik was mostly a solitary man. He had never married and had little desire to. The closest thing he had to friends were the other regular merchants at the market he frequented, with whom he would occasionally have short conversations. But Erik loved his peace and quiet. He had grown up in a big city and worked in an industrial factory from the time he was fourteen years old, but it had taken him until he was thirty-two to save up enough money to buy his own home in the woods, away from all the noises he'd grown to hate.

The week before he left the city, he bought himself a magnificent axe. Bigger and heavier than a traditional woodcutting axe, it allowed him to cut down trees in half as many swings. It took a significant amount of strength to wield such a tool of course, but Erik was nearly two metres tall and big boned. This particular axe was an incredible feat of craftsmanship, so even after twenty years, Erik was still using it to chop his timber.

No matter how much Erik cherished his solitude though, he couldn't help but be excited to be taking part in a hero's quest. This would truly be a great honour for him. He'd read a lot of adventure books and knew that there was almost always that one kind stranger that the hero encountered on their journey, one that helped them by allowing them to rest up before their final trial. Often that hero would have just narrowly survived some dangerous situation, or perhaps just slayed some terrible beast. They would stumble to a stranger's home, exhausted, and find a friendly face waiting to give them food and shelter for the night. Perhaps that stranger might even impart some wisdom to them that also helped them with their quest in some fashion. Today, it was Erik's fate to be that kind, wise stranger. He didn't actually *feel* particularly wise, but he at least felt prepared in the hospitality role, having bought a wide range of medical supplies and enough food to feed any hero five times over.

All morning and afternoon, Erik waited on his front porch in his favourite rocking chair. Just as dusk approached, he heard a fearful yell come from the woods, maybe a hundred metres away to his left side. He stood up and squinted in that direction, scanning for movement. He didn't need to look for long, as he soon saw a young man - maybe thirteen or fourteen years old

- come charging into the clearing that encircled Erik's cabin. From behind the boy came a great roar, and Erik saw trees in the distance being (incredibly) knocked down, though he couldn't quite make out by *what*.

"Sir! Help me, please!" the boy shouted at Erik the second he saw him.

Though he had not been anticipating a fight, Erik did not hesitate. He picked up his trusty axe and stepped forwards to join the hero.

What kind of creature is chasing the boy?

Will they need to fight it or might they find another solution?

What are the details of the quest the boy is on?

The Last Snowboarder



'Snowboarding is life!' That's what Rachel McCoy thought as she went over a half metre hump and took to the air for 2.4 seconds. The wind in her hair, fresh white powder beneath her board, tearing down a slope at 30 miles per hour... *this* was all she needed in her life. This was all she wanted to *do* with her life.

"The centre will be closing in 15 minutes. Please leave the slopes now. Thank you and we hope to see you again soon." Rachel hated hearing that Tannoy message. But there was no fighting it, time to go home was time to go home. The centre usually closed much later, but it was Christmas Eve, so the centre was closing at 6pm so that the staff could get home to their families earlier.

Rachel had been coming here alone since she was 13 years old, as her house was only an 8 minute walk away and her parents trusted her to stay safe. For her 14th birthday her main present had been a one year membership to the centre. She had used it for 114 of the last 132 days. She preferred to go as late in the day as possible – one of the nice bonuses of snowboarding on a cold slope was later warming up in a cosy bed until she fell asleep.

As she was getting out of her boots in the changing room, she got a text from her best friend, Carole. Her boyfriend had just broken up with her. Oh boy. Rachel wanted to call her to let her talk about it, but she had forgotten to charge her phone and only had 15% battery left. So she texted Carole that she would be home soon and would call her then. But Carole just messaged back, listing off all the ways that her EX-boyfriend had never deserved her anyway. Now Rachel's phone battery was down to 12%. She decided though that it was best to let her friend vent, even if that meant completely draining her battery.

By the time Rachel was back in her outdoor clothes, there were only a few customers left in the centre. Rachel just needed to pop to the bathroom quickly before heading home.

As she sat down on a toilet, she saw that Carole was still sending her texts, and now her phone was down to just 7%. Typical Carole...

It was nice and warm in the bathroom and Rachel felt a wave of tiredness come over her. She knew she should get up and get home, but her eyelids were suddenly feeling really heavy. Maybe if she just closed them for a minute or two, she would get her second wind...

Rachel awoke with a start. Where was she? In a bathroom stall... in the ski

centre! It all came back to her in a few seconds. She tried to stand, but quickly realised that her lower thighs were quite numb. How long had she been sitting on this toilet? She tried to check the time on her phone, but found that it was completely out of battery. Riiight, Carole...

Rachel got up and rubbed the back of her thighs to get some feeling back into them, then headed out of the bathroom. She was surprised to see that most of the lights in the centre had been turned off. How long had she been in the bathroom for? She looked at the clock above the reception desk and saw that it read: 7.37pm. She couldn't believe her eyes. She'd been asleep for nearly two hours? And now the centre was... closed?

The moment the word 'closed' crossed her mind, she ran to the front door of the centre. It was locked.

"Hello?" she called out nervously. "Is anyone still here? I think you've accidentally locked me in! I'm a customer!" No reply. The centre was as silent as it was dark. Rachel couldn't believe this was happening to her. She began to search for another exit.

If Rachel can't find another way out, what will she do all night?

Does she find being locked in alone frightening, or does she see a positive side to it? Could it be both?

Will her parents come looking for her if she doesn't find a way out quickly?

The Littlest Cruiser



Laura's parents had dreamt of going on some kind of cruise together since before they were married. But they could not afford to do it for their honeymoon as the wedding itself had cost them all of their combined savings. Then a year later Laura had been born and their dreams changed. Now they spent all their extra money on whatever made *her* happy. But when Laura was eleven years old and three weeks away from starting secondary school, they knew they wanted to mark the occasion by doing something truly special for her, something she would remember for the rest of her life. So for the last two years they had not gone on any family holidays at all, just so that now they could afford to go on this one trip together: a five day Caribbean cruise!

They had to board the cruise ship in Florida, so the flight from their home in England was very long. By the time they got to the ship's port they were all rather tired. But when Laura looked up at the ship *her* tiredness was instantly forgotten, replaced with sheer wonder. The size of the cruise ship was... immense! Gigantic! Enormous! She had never even seen a *building* this large before, let alone a *ship*. She had read that it consisted of 19 decks and had 1200 crew members serving a maximum of 3140 passengers. She had seen many pictures of it, including detailed plans that showed how to find the swimming pool, arcade, cinema, theatre, mini golf course and every other place she wanted to go. But still, seeing the ship in person, the sheer size of it boggled her mind.

They boarded the cruise ship at 11am and left the port at 1pm. Laura's parents, still exhausted from their long journey, opted to stay in their cabin for a few hours to have a nap before doing anything else. But Laura simply could not do the same... and they did not expect her to. This was why they had had her study the deck guide before they'd left home. She would be allowed to go explore the ship on her own, as she knew her cabin number (C301 on deck 10), and was confident she could return to it from anywhere on the ship.

She decided to start from the top and make her way down. There was a large adventure swimming pool on the roof so she took a lift up to it. As she stepped out onto the deck, she instantly noticed a middle-aged man wearing dark sunglasses talking to a crew member. He seemed very upset, as did the boy standing next to him. She had learnt in her girl guides club to always help strangers when she thought she could, so she went over to the boy – who looked to be about her age – and asked him what was wrong. He told her that his father was blind and that his guide dog – a Chihuahua named Hercules (she had to confirm that she heard that correctly, but yes, the guide dog really was a Chihuahua) – had run off, scared by the movement of the ship. Now they couldn't find him anywhere. The crewman they

were speaking to offered to help look, but it was a huge ship and apparently Hercules would not let himself be picked up by anyone he didn't know. The boy (who told Laura his name was Kevin) said that he wanted to go looking for Hercules himself, but was worried about getting lost. So Laura told him (beaming with pride) that *she* knew her way around the ship, as she had been studying the plan of it for *weeks*. That was all Kevin needed to hear. With his father's permission, he left him by the swimming pool whilst he and Laura began their *day long* search for Hercules.

Where will Laura and Kevin begin their search?

Will they ask anyone else to help them, or just search by themselves?

What other interesting people might they meet on this cruise ship whilst searching for Hercules?

The Long Way Home



Josephine was a one hundred and sixty two year old fairy. Quite young, compared to some of the other fairies in her tree village who were three to four hundred years old, and practically a child compared to the village elder, who was well over seven hundred years old. Yet she was the most respected blessing fairy in all the forest.

For those unfamiliar with fairy culture, a blessing fairy is, well, pretty much what it sounds like. Their duty is to fly around their forest, blessing various animals, trees and flowers. Any living being blessed by a fairy will grow stronger, not get ill and have good fortune for some time, but the amount of time depended on what exactly was being blessed, coupled with the skill level of the blessing fairy. Some fairy's blessings lasted for days or even weeks; Josephine's blessings had been known to last for months.

On a Thursday morning like any other, Josephine was giving her blessing to a poorly looking rose bush she had found. This rose bush was growing in the shade of a great oak tree, only getting just enough sunlight to survive. She blessed it, enriching it with a concentrated dose of sunlight. As she was doing this, a fox ran past her. It startled her, causing her to lose her balance (even though she was hovering in the air) and she fell awkwardly on top of the rose bush, one of its thorns tearing a hole in one of her delicate little wings. She cried out in pain, but managed to land on the ground without injuring herself any further.

She looked at her injured wing. On either side of her back she had an inner and outer wing, but it was the right side outer wing that now had a painful hole in it. She tried to fly, but she only got a few feet off the ground before the pain was too much for her and she had to come back down. She knew she had to make it back to her village - their healer could certainly help her - but she wouldn't be flying there. On foot, it might take her until nightfall to get back, but it would not at all be a safe journey. She was only five inches tall and frail, in a forest full of animals - many of whom were dangerous predators who wouldn't think twice about trying to catch her for their dinner - so she would have to be very careful. She began her long hike home.

**What dangers might Josephine encounter on her long walk home?
How will she survive those dangers?**

Will she find any help along the way? She has, after all, been blessing the inhabitants of this forest for many years...

The Nicest Pirate



Joe Benton had been the master cook on board 'Poseidon's Fury' for just over a year. It was a medium sized pirate ship with 35 crew members. Or, at least, it had been. Five weeks ago, Captain Oxford had been killed by a shark whilst off the ship having his morning swim. The quartermaster, being his second in command, took over as captain. But just two weeks later, he had a huge argument with the ship's first mate over an unpaid debt and they ended up shooting each other dead. With a crew this small, there weren't really any other crewmen with important ranks left, but Joe had the word 'master' in his title (which was a little silly, considering he was the *only* cook on board), so the remaining crew had voted that *he* take over as captain. At least until they could find a more qualified replacement for him. But Joe *really* didn't want to be a pirate captain. He had only become their cook because his mother and two teenage sisters were all depending on him to provide for them. And working on a pirate ship simply paid better than any other cooking job he was qualified for. He did rather enjoy being at sea, but he really didn't like how violent the job often was. So much robbing and killing. His mother had raised him to be a good man, too good to take part in all that. Luckily, as the ship's cook, he had always been able to stay on the ship and away from all the fighting. But now the crew had voted for him to be their captain. He had little choice but to accept the title, no matter what it might require him to do.

Joe chose to continue with the mission the two previous captains had begun: a treasure hunt. Using the map Captain Oxford had purchased (at great personal expense), they eventually found the island on which a famous pirate had apparently buried a vast treasure trove. Obtained through a lifetime spent pillaging, he had stolen more gold and gemstones than he could ever spend, so he had left it for another ambitious pirate crew to find one day. It was the pirate way.

"Land ho!" shouted Joe's helmsman.

"Well shiver me timbers, thar she blows!" Joe was referring to the island, though 'thar she blows' should actually be shouted when spotting a whale. But... Joe really wasn't very good at pirate slang. Too much of his time on the ship had been spent working on his own, away from the rest of the crew.

"Please find somewhere for us to dock the ship." This caused the helmsman to raise an eyebrow. "Erm, I mean, dock us now, you son of a biscuit eater!"

The helmsman smiled back at Joe. "Aye aye, Captain!"

Soon they docked and the whole crew disembarked. Continuing to follow

the treasure map, it took less than an hour to find the spot where the treasure was apparently buried. But, to Joe's dismay, he discovered that they were not the first ones there – another pirate crew had already begun digging! The other crew looked to have about half as many men as Joe had with him, but upon spotting each other *everyone* (except Joe) drew their guns and swords.

“Wait, wait!” Joe shouted to both crews. “This is not necessary! No-one needs to die here, I'm sure we can all share the treasure!”

“Share?!” Joe's whole crew shouted in unison.

“Yes, I say share! Erm, you scurvy dogs!”

His crew was not happy about this proposal. One member, who went by the name of Squid, walked over to him and whispered in his ear, “Captain, that's *not* going to happen. We've all worked too long and hard to get here. Either you get us *all* that treasure, or we'll find someone else to be our captain.”

What will Joe do?

Can the situation be resolved peacefully, or must there be a fight?

What will Joe do with his share of the treasure if he obtains it?

The Pendant Heist



Sophie didn't like school very much. She had her own personal bully (or at least it felt that way to her): Dirk Chambers. He was relentless. Every day he would find some way to upset her. Maybe he would steal crisps from her lunch box, maybe he'd grab homework she was about to hand in and tear it up, or maybe he'd push her into a wall as he walked past her laughing. The worst part of it was that the teachers all knew what an awful boy he was, but let him get away with anything because he was the best football player in the school and his team had won the last county championship. Every time a teacher tried to give him detention, his parents refused to pick him up late because it was inconvenient for them. They were always saying that they could easily transfer him to another school that would treat him with more respect. Sophie knew what that meant - Dirk parent's thought that rules shouldn't apply to him.

One Friday afternoon, Dirk finally pushed Sophie too far. He was walking ahead of her down a hallway when he tripped over a bag that had been left on the floor. He fell face first to the floor, and before she could stop herself, Sophie let out a short laugh. Dirk heard her. He picked himself up, turned and grabbed her roughly by her arm.

"No-one laughs at me! Anyone who does pays the price!" he growled at her. At the same moment, he noticed that she was wearing a gold necklace with a small jade pendant at the end of it. "That'll do." he sneered, grabbing the pendant and yanking on it, breaking the chain it was hanging from.

"No! Give that back! My grandmother gave me that!" she cried.

"Yeah, well now she's given it to *me*." he informed her as he walked away. A few other children who had stopped to watch this mugging immediately continued on their way in silence. Sophie felt like crying: her grandmother really *had* given her that necklace, it was the last birthday present Sophie had received from her before she had passed away about six months ago. Sophie had worn it every day since in memory of her. So Sophie *really* felt like crying... but she didn't. She clenched her teeth and balled her hands into fists. No, she decided in that moment. No, this would not stand. Dirty Dangerous Disgusting Dirk had taken a lot from her, but he couldn't have Grandma's pendant. She was going to get it back. She had no idea how, but it was going to happen.

She knew she had no chance of getting it from him directly. She was a Year 5 girl, he was a Year 6 boy who was an athlete and about a head taller than her. She was mad, but not mad enough to try to fight him alone. There was little chance either that he would simply leave her pendant lying around somewhere. Once Dirk got himself a trophy, he always took it home with

him. Which only left Sophie with one (crazy!) option: she was going to have to go get it back from his house.

**When Sophie goes to Dirk's house, will she just ring the doorbell?
Or will she try to sneak into the house somehow?**

If she sneaks in, will she be discovered?

Either way, what will Dirk do once he realises he doesn't have possession of her necklace anymore?

The Photo



It was Drew's 9th birthday and he had just received the greatest present a kid could ever receive. Some would say it was just a bike, but to Drew it was much more than *just* a bike. This bike was freedom. It was exhilaration. It was street cred. It was a black and white Carrera Vengeance Junior Mountain Bike. Made from sleek, lightweight aluminium, it had 21 gears, powerful disc breaks for superior braking and 24 inch lightweight alloy wheels with Vee Crown Gem tyres. It was quite simply the coolest bike any boy his age could possibly ask for. And it was all his.

Luckily for Drew, his birthday fell on a Saturday this year, so he didn't have to wait to take his bike for a spin. His parents wanted to go to a nearby park with him, but that wasn't what he had in mind at all. No, he wanted to go for a ride around the block *on his own*. His parents were a bit sceptical, but in the end decided to let him do it. He could ride to the bottom of their road, turn right four times and end up back home in five minutes. His mum lent him her mobile phone, just in case he did somehow have an accident and needed their help.

So his parents waved to him from the gate of their front garden, then went back inside their house to wait for him. Drew set off on his Carrera Vengeance, feeling like the king of the roads (though technically he was cycling on the pavement). At the bottom of his road, he turned right. At the end of that short road, he was just about to turn right again when he saw his friend Michael entering a newsagent on the other side of the road. He knew he should continue on his lap around the block, his parents were literally waiting for him... but he *had* to go show his new bike to his friend, right? He had to. So he crossed the main road (carefully) and pedalled over to the shop.

When he got to the shop door, he suddenly realised he had no bike lock with which to secure his bike outside. Okay, so he'd just wait outside for a minute until Michael came out. Maybe he'd tell his parents he went around the block twice? But as he was waiting outside the shop, he suddenly heard the sound of a few men shouting inside. He looked through the shop window and was shocked to see two men wearing ski masks shouting at the man behind the till. One of the men had a knife, the other a baseball bat. The shop was getting robbed!

Drew jumped away from the window, not wanting to be seen. What should he do? What *could* he do? Mum had given him her phone, so he knew he could call the police. But no way they'd arrive fast enough to stop the robbery. And his friend was still in there. What if Drew didn't do anything and the men hurt Michael for some reason? Just then, in a flash of inspiration, he had an idea. Before he could give it another thought, he entered the shop.

Everyone turned to look at him. He quickly held up his mum's phone and took a picture of the two robbers.

"Hey, I got your picture, dumbos! I'm going to the police with it!" he shouted at them, then ran out the door and jumped on his bike.

"What the... get him!" one of the robbers shouted.

Drew began to pedal away like his life depended on it. It might. One of the robbers ran after him on foot, the other jumped in a car. Drew had never been so scared in his whole life, but he *believed* in his Carrera Vengeance. Nothing could catch him as long as he was riding this bad boy.

How will he outrun the robbers?

Where can he head to that they'll have trouble following him?

Do the robbers somehow get arrested in the end? Or is it enough that he lured them away from his friend?

The Right Thing To Do



“We have to put him down, we have no choice!” This is what Erik, Magnus and Lucy heard the man say to the woman. They were on a school trip to Adelaide Zoo and had left their group to go to the restrooms. Normally 11 and 12 year olds at a zoo would need an adult to go with them, but Erik and Magnus were exceptionally responsible twin brothers, so their teacher let them go on their own. Their classmate Lucy had asked to go at the same time though, so the boys took responsibility for her.

As they left the restrooms, they all stopped as they heard two adults arguing behind the lady’s restroom. “We *can’t* put him down, that’s totally unfair! He didn’t bite me on purpose, he was just trying to grab a fish out of my hand and missed, that’s all!”

“And you nearly lost your arm!” the man exclaimed.

“Pff, hardly. Look, I’m not saying the bite didn’t hurt, but it’s just a couple of cuts, he didn’t *break* anything. If I wear a long sleeve shirt for a few weeks no-one will even know!”

“Oh, you want to keep this quiet? He attacked you! Next time it could be one of our customers. No, we have to follow protocol on this. And protocol says that if *any* animal attacks *any* human, it *must* be destroyed. I don’t make the rules, but as a manager it is my job to enforce them.”

“But... but... he’s just a little sea lion. I’ve been treating him for nearly 10 years and we’ve always gotten on great. Tasko has *never* tried to harm me before, not once!”

“Yeah, well, today was a bad day for him them. You say it was an accident, but when he bit your arm he didn’t let go straight away. He held on. He chewed on it. And having done it once, he could do it again. No, he has to be put down. He is your responsibility, I’ll give you until the end of the day to take care of it.”

“Me? I couldn’t! I can’t!”

“Yes you can. Every zoo vet knows that one day it might come to this. If you don’t like it, you can find another job. But if you want to keep this one, you’ll get this done. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to figure out how best to break this news to the public.”

With that, the man strode away. The woman stayed though. It sounded to the children like she was crying.

“Did you hear that?” Lucy asked the twins. “They’re gonna kill Tasko! We can’t let them do this!”

“We? What can we do about it?” Erik asked her.

“Yeah, exactly. What could we do? Break him out? Release him into the wild? That’s impossible!” Magnus chimed in.

“Why? Why is that impossible?” Lucy shot back at him defiantly.

“Erm, because we’re kids? We’re in the middle of a school trip. Someone will notice if we suddenly disappear to go break out a sea lion. Can you even imagine how much trouble we’d be in?” Magnus reasoned.

“And anyway, we know nothing about this place. We don’t know where the sea lions are kept, we don’t know how to access that area even if we did, and we have zero idea of how we could get a sea lion out of the zoo unseen.” Erik further posited.

“I do.” They all heard a voice say. They turned around to see a woman approaching them from behind the restroom. “I know how I could get him out. Until I heard you talking I never would have thought of doing something like this, but... it *is* the right thing to do, isn’t it? Even if it’s a really bad thing to do. But... I can’t do this alone.”

What is the vet’s plan for freeing Tasko?

What part will the three children play in her plan?

Even if they all get Tasko out of the zoo, what will they do with him?

The Sanctity of Life



I was raised to believe in the sanctity of life. That every living thing deserves to live, so I should never choose to take another life. This does not just mean I am vegetarian or vegan, it means I never consciously kill a fly, spider, or any other small creature that others might consider pests. It is a simple code to live by, but some of the boys in my school don't appreciate it one bit. They constantly try to get me to break my code, even if it means me breaking it unknowingly. Why? I don't really know. Maybe they are bored, maybe they are mean, maybe they are jealous I have a strong belief and they don't? Or maybe my killing nothing makes them feel a *little* guilty about not being so careful themselves? I could ask them, but I doubt they would give me a truthful answer.

Every day at school it is something with them. The three main boys that mess with me are Derrick, Charlie and Michael. On Monday I was sitting at a lunch table, about to eat a tomato and cucumber sandwich. Michael and Charlie, who were sitting behind me, got my attention by pretending to swat a fly. When I turned back round I saw Derrick walking away from my table, and I noticed that my sandwich was not *exactly* where I left it. Highly suspicious, I opened the sandwich and was not at all surprised to find a small strip of bacon in it. I took it out and put it to one side, then enjoyed my sandwich. Or at least tried to look like I was enjoying it to the annoyed looking boys sitting behind me.

On Tuesday I was in my class, learning about bees and pollination when I felt something tickling the back of my neck. I moved my hand to scratch it but just before I touched it I realised what the tickling was: one of the boys had put a small spider on my neck. Now I may believe in the sanctity of life, but I did not relish the feeling of a spider crawling on my skin any more than you would. Still, I managed to restrain myself, and put my hand on my neck *next to* where the spider was. When it crawled onto my hand, I placed my hand on my desk and let it go on its way.

Wednesday was a bad day. They got me. I was walking out of the hallway door that led to the playground, when I felt a little crunch underneath my foot. I froze and looked down. It was a snail. I saw Derrick and Charlie laughing at me before they ran away. They must have placed the snail there. It was dead, I could not help it, so I did the only thing I could think to do.

At the far end of the playground was a tall tree. About two thirds of the way up that tree was a bird's nest. I put the snail's crushed body inside a tissue in my pocket and climbed the tree (which was completely against school policy and I would get in no small amount of trouble later). When I got to the nest, I gave the snail's remains to the hungry chicks, who gobbled it up like it was the finest cuisine. I told myself that their mother might have

found this snail for them anyway, but still, the boys *had* succeeded in making me break my code. But it just made me *more* determined to be more careful in future.

Will the boys continue to torment the writer on Thursday and Friday?

How will the writer avoid breaking their code again?

Will the three boys get in any kind of trouble for their actions?

The Silent Mine



This is a story of courage and determination. But it begins with a little history. In the Forest of Dean, in the county of Gloucestershire, lies Deanwell Mine. Opened in the mid-19th century and closed in 1957, it was re-opened as a tourist attraction in 1972. The mine was constructed inside a series of naturally forming caves and tunnels, where strong winds moved around the tunnels in a way that produced some eerie sounds, almost sounding like human wails and howls. Many miners over the years had believed the mines to be haunted, and were only willing to work in them during the day and in groups of four or more. In the 1920s, the Hatfield Mining Company created a competition to find brave men to work in their mine. It was simple: any man who could sleep from sunset to sunrise in the deepest section of the mine, alone and without light, would receive a significant cash prize. Many men attempted to win that prize, but *all* left the caves before sunrise, seemingly unable to conquer their fears.

Every five years since the mine re-opened as a tourist attraction, the owners of the Deanwell Mine Museum had organised their own version of that competition. In the month of September, any adult could apply for a one night stay - alone - inside the mine. Anyone who managed to stay there until the morning won £250. Out of the 300+ people to attempt the challenge, only 12 had succeeded. Now, in 2022, on the 50th anniversary of the mine's reopening, the museum owners had decided to make one key change to the entry criteria: this year children (from 12 years old and upwards) would be allowed to apply. The prize had also been increased to £500. Lilly Velasquez (who turned 12 in August), knew she could win this competition.

Lilly lived in Gloucester, about a half hour drive away from the mine. She had visited it the previous year for a school trip and liked it a lot, so still checked in on its website from time to time. For the last eight years she had been living in an apartment with just her mother, who needed to do two jobs (full-time café barista, part-time Spanish / English translator) to support them both. Her mother had never failed to pay their rent on time... but sometimes it had been close. An extra £500 would really help her - maybe Lilly's mum could even take a few days off work to have a little holiday with her? That would be a first.

Whilst on her school trip, many of her classmates had been creeped out by the sounds in the mines. Two boys and one girl had even started crying and needed to be escorted out. But Lilly hadn't been bothered in the slightest. You see, Lilly had been deaf since she was three years old. To her, the mine was just a beautiful and mysterious place.

It was not easy to convince her mother to let her enter the competition, but

she did. It was not easy to get through the competition's selection process, but she did. And so it was that at 7pm, on Saturday the 24th of September, Lilly was guided into the depths of the mines by a nice lady named Sue. They got to an area about the size of Lilly's living room, where a sleeping bag and torch had been laid out for her. She was also provided with a walkie talkie, in case she wanted to leave early. Lilly... had not actually mentioned in her application that she was deaf, as it would most likely have prevented her from being chosen. Lilly had learned to speak clearly and could lip-read extremely well, so it wasn't too hard for her to hide her advantage.

Once Sue left her, Lilly got as comfy as she could inside the sleeping bag, then began to read a new book she had brought with her. It was a *little* creepy being all alone like this of course, but Lilly just kept reminding herself that there was nothing to fear but fear itself. She would soon find out how wrong she was.

Who or what does Lilly encounter in the mine?

Are they friendly or bad?

Will being deaf be more of an advantage or disadvantage to Lilly in this story? Or will it make little to no difference?

The Slide



Darby Brown had been missing for the past three weeks. Some said that he had run away from home. Some said that he had been kidnapped. Some even said that he had been murdered. But Joyce and Ellen knew the truth. The slide had got him.

Their town's swimming pool was one of the largest in the country. It had giant slides, a wave machine, tire floats on rapids, the works. Many of the slides had been replaced or improved over the years, but one slide – The Drop of Despair – had been there since the day the swimming pool first opened in 1986. It was the OG of slides. Nothing fancy, just an almost straight 40 foot drop (at seventy degrees, to be exact) with just a slight curve at the bottom to stop you hitting the water too hard. It was the only slide that most young children were too scared to go on. So much so that over the years stories had developed about it. Some said that when you go down this slide, you lose a little piece of your soul. Some said that your hair could turn white from fright before you hit the water at the bottom. Some said that if you were to use this slide unsupervised, it would transport you to a deserted island. That one, Joyce and Ellen thought, was probably just made up by the owners of the swimming pool as a way of discouraging kids from trying to sneak in after closing time. But Joyce's younger brother, Darby, *had* believed this particular story. He had been obsessed with it, in fact, researching online about fourteen kids that had gone missing within the past three decades. There were plenty of missing adults reported too, but Darby figured that any or all of them could have gone missing for standard adult reasons. But he was convinced that all (or at least some) of those fourteen kids had been transported away by the slide. And he would prove it. He would find a way to get into the swimming pool at night and go down the slide. One week after he told Joyce that, he went missing. His parents had put him to bed at night, the next morning he was gone.

At first the girls thought Darby must be playing an elaborate prank on everyone. But as days turned into weeks and he did not come home, they started to think that maybe he was right. A magical child stealing slide was a wild idea to believe in, but how else could his absence be explained? Joyce was Darby's big sister and she was supposed to look out for him, always. So she knew what she had to do. She had to go down the slide at night. Ellen, her best friend, was not about to let her do this alone.

Ellen's older sister worked at the swimming pool as a lifeguard, so stealing the swimming pool keys from her room was easy. That night, Ellen and Joyce entered the swimming pool. With most of the lights off it was actually a pretty creepy place. But the girls put on their swimsuits and climbed the stairs up to the top of The Drop of Despair. They held hands and entered the slide together – it was just wide enough for two, though they were normally

never allowed to go down that way. They counted to three, then went.

It felt like they were falling through forever darkness, but they could feel that they were still inside the slide. Until, with no warning, they suddenly weren't. Now they were falling through nothing but air! A second later, they both splashed down into cold, cold water.

Where are Ellen and Joyce transported to?

What dangers might they face in this place?

Do they manage to find Darby and get home?

The Turtle



The Jones family had been in Bora Bora for two days. It was, to say the least, amazing. They were staying in a bungalow at the end of a pier. On either side of their hut was fresh, cool, clean sea water that perfectly reflected the all day blue sky above them, and they had two canoes for exploring their beautiful surroundings. It was the closest thing to paradise Mr and Mrs Jones had ever seen, or even dreamt of seeing. To their eight year old daughter, Rachael, it was just another cool holiday. Her one year old brother, Derek... didn't have much of an opinion on it.

At around 5 o'clock that day, Rachael was out in a canoe with her father when a dark shape appeared in the water below them. For a moment Rachael (who saw it first) was frightened, but she soon saw that it was a green sea turtle and her fear instantly turning to delight. It looked huge to Rachael, being at least a metre long. It wasn't moving fast though so she asked her father if they could follow it for a while. He liked the idea so they did.

The turtle was apparently friendly - it was fast enough that it easily could have swum away from them, but instead it stayed close to them whilst moving in one direction for about half a mile. As they got near to an island with two small mountains on them - probably hills, technically, but they looked as rocky as mountains - the turtle dove down deeper into the water... and disappeared. Where had it gone? They were close to the island shore now, so how deep could the water be? But the turtle did not reappear. Rachael was disappointed but glad she had got to watch the beautiful turtle for as long as she had. They returned to their bungalow.

The next day Rachael and her father were out in the canoe again, but were exploring a different area than they had the previous day. But again, at around 5 o'clock they saw a green sea turtle passing below them. Again, they decided to follow it. Again, it led them close to the island with the mountain hill, then dove down and disappeared. This time though Rachael felt more frustrated than grateful - why was the turtle leading them here, only to disappear? Did it mean for them to follow it? How could they? Well, Rachael's father had an idea about that...

The next day Rachael and her father went back out in their canoe - but this time they took some rented out diving equipment with them. They had both learned how to scuba dive on their previous holiday, so Mr Jones felt confident they could use this gear together safely.

Again, at around 5pm the turtle found them. Again it led them to the same place. But this time when it dove down, Rachael and her father dove down with it. Near the sea floor the turtle approached the base of the mountain hill - then disappeared inside it. For a moment Rachael was confused, but

her father noticed that the turtle had entered a small underwater cave. Luckily the entrance was just wide enough for them to follow. They swam along a long tunnel that angled upwards, then emerged into a large cavern that was above sea level. What they immediately saw in that cavern that would change their lives... forever.

What do they see?

How does what they see change the course of their lives?

Was there something special about the turtle that led them to the cavern?

The World Class Athlete



Alexander the Really Great, as his trainer called him, was a world class athlete. Or at least that was how he thought of himself. So far he had only competed on a county level, but soon Rebecca and he would be going to their first national competition. He had every intention of winning it. Sure, technically it was only a junior competition, as his trainer was only twelve years old (in human years), but Alexander the Really Great knew that this was where the real prestige could be gained. Children training their pet squirrels to run through obstacle courses was sweet and adorable. Adults doing it was just, well, kinda sad.

Rebecca had been training Alexander the Really Great for about four years now. She had started by putting out nuts or other treats for him in trees, on a swing, a seesaw or her garden climbing frame, to name just a few places. Wherever she put his food, he would get it. There was seemingly no mountain too high, no valley too low; there was nowhere he could not reach if he put his mind to it.

After a while Rebecca's father started to build obstacles for Alexander the Really Great to traverse. Alexander the Really Great found them really easy to beat. But to the humans' credit, they kept making the route to his food longer and longer, then eventually they even added a speed element. They would place his treat at the end of the course, but if he took too long to get to it they would take it away, then lead him back to the start to try again. Alexander the Really Great should have found this annoyingly unfair, but he actually enjoyed the challenge. When the humans were sleeping some of his friends would come by to try the course. Only two could complete it, but neither one of them could do it as fast, as smoothly, or with as much confidence as he could. Alexander the Really Great just knew he had an extraordinary talent for this.

The big box with the spinning legs took him and Rebecca to where the national competition was being held. He did not like being inside the big box at all, it felt... wrong, somehow. There were a lot of other squirrels at the competition - a few red, but most grey like himself - more than he had ever seen in one place. He really wished he had time to play with them, yet understood that he could not see them that way. They were his enemies this day, he must outperform them all!

Rebecca's name was called. Alexander the Really Great now stood before the biggest obstacle course he had ever seen in his life. A lesser squirrel would be daunted, but he could not wait to begin.

**Can you describe the course he is about to attempt?
Will it all go smoothly, or will he struggle at any point?
After the competition, what is next for Alexander the Really
Great?**

The Trouble With Truth



On a planet many, many light years from Earth, there lived an alien race called Lyers. They had (what would seem to us at least) a strange way of communicating. Every statement they made to one another was a lie, but it was considered to be incredibly rude to *suggest* that someone was lying, so everyone acted as if everything they heard was truthful. For instance, Inget might ask Zsar, "who is the best dancer in the world?" and Zsar might reply "I am, of course" and Inget would say back, "wow, that's so amazing, you're so cool!" Then Inget would continue on his way, still wondering who the best dancer in the world *really* was.

One day, a young but fairly famous artist was holding an exhibition for her latest work. The artist's name was Troof Nofeer. All the art she had created in the past year was on display in a caplark (which was sort of like a circus tent, but made of a far more solid, yet entirely see through material) in which people could walk around and look at them.

Troof approached one elderly man, who was looking at one of her statues. "What do you think?" she asked him.

"Oh, it's wonderful. I love it and wish to buy it. Oh, but I can't afford it until the end of the month."

"Oh, that's a shame. But I'm sure no-one else will buy it today. I hope to see you again soon."

A short while later, a middle-aged couple were viewing the same statue. "What do you think?" she asked them.

"Terrible," replied the one closest to Troof, "it's utterly worthless. I definitely have no interest in displaying it in our home."

Troof smiled. "That's a pity. But even if you were interested in it I would probably only sell it to you at a high price."

"Well I would not buy this at *any* price. I certainly will not be reserving this piece for purchase at the end of the day. I hope you find someone else to take this junk off your hands."

"Thank you," Troof replied, "I'm sure I will."

In addition to selling that statue to the couple, Troof managed to sell nine more pieces of art that day. Which was a great relief to her. You see, Troof had just learned a dark secret about herself and would need all the money she could get her hands on if she was going to save herself.

What is Troof's dark secret?

Why is Troof in danger?

How will money help Troof save herself?

Understanding

la Côte
d'Azur est l'un des
endroits les plus
visités



Jenny was out walking her dog, Badger, in her local park. It was a cloudy and windy afternoon, so there weren't many other people around. Badger had just finished his business so they were turning back for home. As they walked, Jenny happened to glance up at the sky and saw a small ball of light emerging from behind a cloud. She had no idea what it could be so she kept looking. The light sped closer and closer to her, but by the time Jenny realised it was headed straight for her, it was too late to move or even turn away. The ball of light enveloped her completely, so now all she could see around her was pure white light - which made her feel like she was inside the world's brightest (and scariest) stand up sunbed. Except there was no heat at all. Jenny really tried to look through the light, but it stung her eyes. So she shut them tightly and prayed that whatever this was would stop soon.

A moment later she opened her eyes again and found that the light was gone but now she was lying on her back, on the grassy ground. Badger was licking her face. "Ruff! Ruff!" Badger barked, which Jenny knew meant "Are you okay? I am concerned for you." Jenny sat up. "Ruff! Ruff!" barked Badger, which meant "oh, you're up. Is this a game?" But wait, Jenny suddenly thought, how did she know that? Sure, most people think that they know what their dogs are saying when they bark, but this didn't feel like a guess. She *knew* what his barks meant, exactly. But how?

She got to her feet and picked up Badger's leash. Not really knowing what to think - or do - she decided to just head home. Badger continued to woof at her from time to time, complaining about being thirsty or telling her when he wanted to stop to sniff something. He didn't seem to notice that she could understand him better than usual. Jenny was feeling quite frazzled, but also a little excited. Could she really understand dog language now? Could she understand any dog, or just hers? And why, because some strange light had touched her?

She walked in her front door and let Badger off his leash. Her mother was in the kitchen, watching a movie on her laptop while she cooked. "Your eyes are more enchanting than all the stars in the night sky", she heard a man in the movie say. Except, he'd said it in French - her mum was watching a *French* movie. But Jenny had understood him perfectly.

"Oh, hi honey," her mum said as she noticed her, "did you... oh, what's wrong dear? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Jenny didn't even take a second to respond. Her mind racing, she ran into the living room and grabbed a Korean movie off the DVD shelf. She put it in the DVD player. Her mum was trying to talk to her, but Jenny ignored her.

The movie started. Jenny understood every word of the first conversation two characters had with one another. There was no doubt about it now. Whatever that light had been, it hadn't just given her the ability to understand *dog* language; it had given her the ability to understand *all* languages.

**What will Jenny do next? Will she tell her mum what she can do?
What language will Jenny be most interested in understanding?
What is the best way in which Jenny could use her new ability?**

Would You



Time travel had just become commercially available, but only extremely wealthy people could afford it. For thirty four million pounds, you could now go back to any point in your own life and redo it from that point onwards, with your past body containing your present day memories. Most rich people simply used this technology to make themselves even richer - perhaps a fifty year old businessman might go back twenty years and buy shares in all the companies that he knew would do well in the future. Maybe he would bet a lot of money on sporting events he knew the outcome of. But... he was not allowed to steal someone else's idea outright. He could not, for instance, create Facebook before Mark Zuckerberg did. To do so would change the world too much, and change could have dangerous consequences.

To ensure that no-one altered history too much, every time traveller had to wear a special watch called a Watcher. Essentially, it was a watch with a camera hidden inside it, through which every time traveller was monitored by someone in the future. If the time traveller tried in any significant way to change the course of human history, they would instantly be transported back to the present and never be allowed to use the technology again. This technology was *only* available for a person wanting to improve their own life or the lives of those closest to them.

Trent had no interest in human history. He had made his fortune with a simple invention that had become a wildly popular home product in over forty different countries. But despite his wealth, he had rarely been happy. He wasn't married, he had no children and most of his friends were his business associates.

Trent's plan was simple: he would go back to when he was nine years old, at the start of Year 5 of his primary school. He would correct every social mistake he'd made that year. He would stand up to the class bully, smacking him right in the mouth the first time he bothered him. He would ask the girl he'd always liked to be his girlfriend, utilising the confidence he had found later in his life, but never had at this age. He would of course be the smartest kid in the whole school, instead of constantly struggling to keep up in class, as he had back then. He would also be the *coolest* kid in school, knowing songs no-one else had ever heard (and already being an accomplished guitar player) and knowing all the best movies and TV shows to recommend before they even came out. Yes, life for Trent would be so much easier for him the second time around, he was sure of it. In fact, he had no intention of ever returning to his present. Everything he'd miss from that time, he was sure he could wait a few decades to see again.

What happens between himself and the school bully?
What happens with the girl he always liked?
Will his plan work? Will he be the coolest kid in the school? Or is his plan too simple?

Yellowstone



When I was 12 years old, my father took me on a fishing trip. My mother and two sisters stayed home - this new adventure would be for just us men. Twenty years later, I still think of this as being the *best* week of my life. But it was almost the *last* week of my life.

Back then my family was living in America, in a city called Buffalo. Yeah, I know, I always thought that was a funny name for a city too. Had the names Horse, Dog and Cat already been taken?

Anyway, my father and I had a four hour drive to get to Yellowstone National Park, then had to hike for another four hours to reach his favourite fishing spot. It was his favourite for one simple reason - it was where *his* father had taken him when he was a boy. My father had been waiting a long time to share this rite of passage (as he called it) with me. We'd followed a path that took us through a dense forest, but the moment we emerged from it we were there: on the shore of a lake so large it looked like an ocean. I was eager to begin fishing straight away, but by that point we only had a few hours of daylight left and my father insisted we set up our camp first. So together we pitched our tent then made a campfire.

A few hours later, it was fully dark and my father and I were sat around the fire, speaking in great depth about our favourite wrestlers. But then I saw something: a white figure moving towards us. I alerted my father and a moment later we both saw what it was: a white wolf! It came within about five metres of us then stopped, then started to growl at its potential dinner. My father stood up and ordered me to get behind him. I was gripped with terror so overwhelming I felt like I couldn't even breathe, but somehow I managed to do as I was told. He told me that as long as we stood with the fire between us and the wolf, it wouldn't dare attack. That was when we both heard it: a growl from our left side. It was another white wolf! How it had snuck up on us, I'll never know, but it was on our side of the campfire. It started to edge towards us, whilst the other wolf moved to flank us from the other side. My father grabbed a small flaming log from the campfire and started waving it in front of us. "Chidi," he said to me, "whatever happens, *don't* run. You'd be turning your back to death. Our only advantage is here."

Well, it sure didn't feel like we had an advantage. But just then, something jumped on the back of the wolf on our left - it was another wolf! But this one was black, and noticeably larger than the white ones. The two wolves rolled around on the floor in a frenzy of teeth and claws, until the black one sunk its fangs deep into the white one's neck and its whole body went limp. The other white wolf barked at the victor, but when the black wolf pounced at it, it thought better of challenging the larger beast alone and ran away. The black wolf chased it for a moment but then stopped. I couldn't believe

my eyes. A wild wolf had just come to our rescue! It was a miracle! Except, it wasn't. The black wolf turned back towards us and began to growl as it approached us with bared teeth and mad hunger in its eyes.

How will Chidi and his father defend themselves from the black wolf?

How persistent will the wolf be? Will it give up after a few minutes or continue to stalk them until their fire goes out?

How much wood do they have to burn? How long can they keep their fire going?

Finish
Story

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