

“If I’m not for myself,  
who will be for me? If  
I’m only for myself,  
what am I? And if not  
now, then when?”  
– Pirkei Avot



## Creative Writing Chapbook

Session Three  
2019

*Notes from the Editor*

This summer, 6 Points Creative Arts Academy added a creative writing major comprised of passionate wordsmiths from both Bonim and Olim. These majors constructed narrative works, exploring dialogue, exposition, and scene, before crafting their final pieces all of which centered around the theme of the summer, which comes from Pirkei Avot: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, then when?” In our minor, “Writing the first chapter of your novel” campers explored the elements of book beginnings and crafted opening chapters of larger works. Those chapters are also included in this book.

Creative Writing Arts Mentor: Carly Husick

Instructors:

Allison Woitte

Noy Israeli

Rabbi Leah Berkowitz

Rabbi Elisa Koppel

Artistic Director: David Loewy

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*Camp this year has a theme. It's a Hillel quote, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I'm only for myself, what am I? If not now, when?" My story is about a wizard who wants people to see the world around them, to stop and smell the roses. If you don't appreciate the world now, when will you.*

### **A Spellbound Journal by Jack P. Age: 14**

Dear Journal,

I've never done this kind of thing before. I've never thought of myself as the diary owning kind of person, even if the diary is just some extra pages I bound to my spell book. I only thought of doing this today, but I've been subconsciously thinking of this for a while. People don't realize that the world they live in has magic. They go about their lives thinking that everything is ordinary. Which is a lie, but a very believed one. Even when I stopped a car crash, with an admittedly easy spell that caused one car to go through the other, some person on the street said it was fake. I knew his type though, he was a member of the Order, a secret police of sorts obsessed destroying anything magic as to keep some shred of normality. As the man was shouting something about how the real magic I did was just smoke and mirrors, I felt the massive hands of two people grab my shoulders. They were goons of the Order. They started to pull me backward into the cold dark alley behind me when I muttered a quick levitation spell under my breath, levitating me forty feet in the air and sending those thugs flying to the curb. Then, still in the air, I uttered a quick binding spell that put a muzzle of stone around the mouth of the person who was saying what I did was ordinary. He fell to the ground from the weight of his new accessory, and I could hear the sound of the rock hitting the ground from my admittedly high location. I teleported away after that, and now I'm here, sitting on the top of a skyscraper, writing about magic, what I encounter on a day to day basis. I don't know where I'm going to go from here. I think I want to find a way for people to realize that magic is in their world. To stop and smell the roses.

Until next time,

**B**

Dear Journal,

I figured out what to do. I'm going to travel around the world, to document everything that is different and magical. I think that this will be the healthiest thing for me, because I'm starting to worry. I haven't seen anything else here in the city with magic, probably because cities have the highest concentration of Order members, so what if I'm the last thing left with magic? Every time I use magic, people are always paying more attention to their own minor problems than to the beauty of their world. But, when I have written proof that there are things that possess magic, it will get people to look closer at their world, and will indirectly stop the Order, and a bit of my doubt.

I'm starting my journey tomorrow! I wrote down a couple of new spells just in case of trouble. I know you can't wish me luck, because you aren't alive, but wish me luck!

**B**

Dear Journal,

Traveling isn't as hard as I thought. Once I figured out how to use the wind to put a literal bounce in my step, covering large distances has become easier. Bounding across the city with fifty-foot-high jumps is not only easy, it's pretty enjoyable. The wind was screaming through my ears. My long fiery orange hair was being pushed back so my eyes could see the cityscape sprawling in front of me. The image of a wizard hopping across the city with a spell book as big as a coffee table strapped to their back must have been an odd image to see during midday traffic.

I think I'm going to head to the tropics. I heard that the spirits did something peculiar there. I don't know what that means yet, but I'm excited nonetheless. I'm assuming that it'll take around a week or so to get there.

I'll write in you periodically until then,

**B**

Dear Journal,

I know it's been three weeks since I wrote in you. I've had other things on my mind. I feel drained and paranoid. I haven't found anything yet. No spirits, no creatures, nothing. My movements, have gotten slower since I've gotten to the tropics. My head is held down most of the day, trying to find something, anything that could prove me right. I'm not going to lie, I'm starting to think I may be the only thing left with magic. I know that's wrong, but it's a sneaking suspicion. What if the Order is right? What if what I was doing wasn't magic? I know it has to be wrong. What I'm seeing is what I'm seeing. As I write sitting in the sand, looking up at the almost boring clear blue sky, I wonder if that statement is true.

I'm beginning to have to perform little acts of magic to prove to myself that it's still there. The sparks that I can create in my hand, whose loud snap and bright orange and blue fire would be considered magical even by the most avid deniers, are reassuring me less and less with each passing day. I spend hours upon hours just reading through my spell book, its crisp parchment containing things most people could only dream of, and it isn't doing anything to satiate my concern.

The days are starting to slow and are losing color. I'm going to stop writing in this so I can get back to looking,

**B**

Dear Journal,

This may be my last entry. It's been eight weeks since I got to the tropics, and I'm starting to lose hope. There's nothing here: no creatures, no magic, nothing. I've been looking for so long, and all its been doing is confirming my fears. The Order has taken all other forms of magic out of this world, except me. Also, nothing has changed. The massive palm trees with their grooved brown bark have stayed planted in the ground, just swaying with the breeze. The sea still crashes on the cliffs, and the clouds move mundanely across the bright blue sky. This beautiful place has lost a lot of its beauty and color. Some days I just lay face down in the smooth sand, wondering why am I still here. I'm wondering if I can leave sooner. Every passing day I think to myself why am I looking for something that probably doesn't exist. You may not hear from me for a while.

Goodbye,

**B**

Dear Journal,

I've never been happier than I am right now. I may smudge the ink from how quick I'm trying to write this down. I was right. Magic is still here. I'm not the only one. You may be wondering how I figured this out. It started when I went to the cliffs. I had just stared down to the bottom, where black rocks jutted from the wide teal sea, foam circling the rock spires, like marshmallows in hot coco. Before I could get a good look at the depths, I heard a voice behind me.

Well, it was less of a voice and more of dozens of different whispers collectively harmonizing to say one message, "Don't."

I turned around to see a ball of floating sand, its two eyes like piercings stars in the night sky. It looked like a squid or jellyfish, with six tentacles of sand pooling down from its head. This jellyfish made of sand was just staring at me.

I took a step backward, my foot hit where the grass met the black rock of the cliff, and the creature said again in its chorus of whispers, "Don't, don't become like us."

I asked what it was, and it simply replied that it was wayward souls of people who died unhappy. The creature drew closer to me so that we were about an arm's length apart.

"Get off the ledge," the creature whispered. "Take our hand."

As it said that, it reached out its course tentacle. I looked in its pale blue eyes, took a deep breath, and grabbed onto its limb. When I did that, an almost electric shock went up my arm, it felt like I'd stuck my hand in freezing water. I looked back at the jellyfish, when the entire world went dark, and I fell into unconsciousness.

When I woke up, the sun had moved considerably across the sky. I sat up quickly, worried I was hurt or damaged in some way. My eyes widened as I checked to see if my spell book was on my back, luckily it was, and I heaved a sigh of relief. I looked back at the sand creature and it was still there, having not moved since I passed out.

It looked at me and said in its whispers, "Look at your arm."

I hesitantly looked there, worried that it was cut off. As soon as I saw my arm, I smiled. There was a bracelet made out of sand on my wrist. A bonding bracelet.

"Bonding, huh?" I said, the hint of a smile shown on my face.

"Yes, now we can help you with anything you may need."

As they said that, the sand in its body began to shift, grains turning to skin, growing denser. It's form changing from a squid to a bat, then a bird, then a horse, then back to its original sand squid form. It was

a shape shifter.

“What’s your name?” I asked.

“Things like us are called Gararsh,” the creature replied. “But we, don’t have a name.”

I thought for a second.

“Well Todd...” When I said this, the creature moved a step back, looking none too pleased with their new name.

“We better get going, I’ve been on this island for too long,” As I said that, I felt a slight tingle in my right arm. I looked at the bracelet, and a name started to be written in the sand:

*Todd*

I have always wanted a familiar. Now I have one. I’m writing this before I head to the mountains. I’ll write when I get there.

**B**

*Wha.....What? Whats happening? Am I alive? Oh  
no.....AAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAA! WHY AM I HERE? AM I  
WRITING IN MYSELF OR ARE MY THOUGHTS BEING WRITEN  
FOR ME?! AAAAAAAAAA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA*

Oh, well, who are you?

*It feels weird when you write in me, like getting a tattoo.*

That answered nothing.

*What was the question?*

WHO ARE YOU?

*Woah, no need to use uppercase.*

Answer the question.

*I’m the journal.*

A spirit trapped in the journal?

*No, I’m the journal itself. I think I just came to life.*

How odd.

*Yeah. I can’t see anything, what’s happening now B?*

How do you know my name?

*I can read through myself, dummy.*

Never mind. Me and Todd were running through the forest when I felt a weird sensation, like a bug was tracing a line on my back. I opened it and realized that it was the journal, writing in itself. It’s been a weird day.

*Find anything else?*

I’ll have to write later.

*Wait, where are you going? B? B?!*

Dear Journal,

*Can you maybe not call me that?*

What do you want to be called then?

*Maybe Susan?.....*

Okay.

Dear Susan,

The Order is coming after me. I’m not worried, I’m just stating facts. When they send one, they will send as many as they need to destroy what they want to be gone.

*So, what happened?*

I saw a scout. I was running through the forest, Todd grabbing on to my back in lemur form, when I felt you come to life.

*Sorry.*

Don’t be. I stopped to take a break, sitting down on the dead pine leaves. As Todd turned back into their original form, I heard a gasp a bit away from us. I turned to look up, and I saw a tall, dark haired man looking at me with wide eyes. I immediately closed the book and stood up, but before I could take a step, the man made a closed fist, pulled his hand down and threw something that exploded directly into the air. I knew from its bright green color and loud snap that it was a flare. A flare that the Order uses to find magical things. After the man sent up the signal, he started to run at me, and drew a long-curved knife that looked like it could cut through flesh like butter. Luckily, I had a few tricks up my sleeve. He went to stab me, but I caught the knife between two fingers. I stared the scout directly in the eyes as I moved my hand and broke the weapon’s blade in half. He looked at me in pure fear while I uttered a short phrase that turned both pieces of his knife to dust. I placed my hand on his forehead and quickly uttered a teleportation spell that brought him back to his house, where he appeared to lie face down on his bed. I looked in the sky to see the flare disappearing into the golden sunset. I took a deep breath, knowing what was to come.

*Which was?*

I would need to fight an army.

Dear Susan,

I went through a town.

*Amw, did you finally get some social interaction?*

Stop being lippy. But, yes, I did. After I was through the thick of the forest, I found this little town. It looked almost like one you would see on a postcard. Newly painted white buildings, a taller church with a bell in the center. I turned to Todd, who was a humming bird at the time, and told them to turn back into the sand squid.

“Why?” They asked in their haunting whispery way of speech.

“These people need to see magic,” I said. Also, if the entire Order doesn’t already know I exist, let’s change that.”

I think at first no one noticed a wizard with a massive spell book on their back with a floating sand jellyfish floating behind them. But after a couple double takes and a few quick whispers, Todd and I were being silently eyed by the portion of the town that weren’t neck deep in their own affairs.

*Did you make a giant flaming sword and show those people what magic is?*

No, I did not. I just wanted to pass through and show people something a little odd. Now, can I return to the story?

Fine.

While I was walking through this small town, a little girl came up to me, holding a green balloon.

“Um, excuse me.....what is that thing behind you?” The small child asked, eyes glued to Todd.

“Well, it’s called a Gararsh. Say ‘hi’ Todd.”

I turned and saw the floating ball of sand go up to the child, and bow their head, and say in their unsettling voice, “Hello.”

After they said that, their sand got denser, and little by little they turned white and fluffy. Todd let out a little bark as they finished turning into a tiny Pomeranian. The girl looked at the adorable puppy in front of her, and stared directly at me. Her eyes were wide and her jaw dropped.

“Is, is that magic?” she asked.

I smiled as I told her that it was.

The little girl’s mother, looking as white as a sheet, pulled her daughter away from the tiny dog. As she did that, the girl let go of the balloon, and it began to fly into the cloudy blue sky.

*I hate the mother already.*

So do I.

Anyway, the mother turned her daughter around and told her, “Now honey you know magic isn’t real. Whatever that THING,” the fear

in her eyes turned to anger as she glared at Todd, who scurried back and whimpered. “Did was probably smoke and mirrors, or an illusion of the sun on the pavement. I don’t know. But magic isn’t real.”

“But mom, I saw it. I know its magic!” The little girl said.

*Why didn’t you interject at one point? Are you too socially awkward?*

No, I just don’t like talking that much. Plus, I already knew the mom was angry at me, because after her daughter talked to her, she somehow got even redder in the face and walked up to me.

“Why are you putting thoughts of magic in my daughter’s head?” She asked, poking my chest with her pointer finger to try to emphasize her anger.

“Please don’t touch me,” I said, pushing her hand away.

“Don’t put that nonsense in my daughter’s brain!” The woman said, and as her pitch rose, her voice rushed over me like a crashing wave.

“It’s the truth,” I said, looking straight at her.

She was yelling some nonsense, but I was just zoning out, thoughts moving around like molasses in my brain. I saw her reach back to slap me, and I’d had enough. This woman denied what she saw in front of her, and denied the truth. In front of a child no less. I’ve never been so angry at one person before.

I felt my ears start to radiate heat, and the backs of my eyes began to hurt. When her hand was about to hit my face, I snapped. The sound of my middle finger hitting my palm caused a sonic boom to be sent out of my hand. A wave of wind rushed around me, blowing everyone in the area back around twenty feet.

“TARNA!” I yelled. As I said that, sparks of blue lightning emanated from my body, making me look like a human tesla coil.

“HOW’S THIS FOR MAGIC!” I yelled, my eyes glowing bright white, instead of their normal purple color.

A man then came running up to me. I could tell he was part of the Order. I held my hand out to him, preparing to make a crater where he stood.

“I come in peace!” He yelled, panting and sweating like a sprinkler.

I ended the spell.

“I need to tell you something!” He said as he gasped for air.

“What is it?” I muttered, still cooling down from the stroke of anger that had just went through me. The fury was leaving my body like water out of a leaky faucet. He stood up straight, trying to catch his breath.

“They’re all coming for you,” he said to me. “All of them.”

I turned to Todd, who went from a dog to a massive rhino. I said a quick conjuring spell under my breath, summoning a massive sword, whose blade was as tall as the girl with the green balloon. The blade then proceeded to be lit ablaze, starting from the hilt and progressing to the tip. I could feel the heat on my face.

*I knew you would do that, you liar!*

I looked at the scout and simply said, “Let them come.”

THE END

*My story Blame relates to “If I’m not for myself who will be for me” because Sunny is for Willow when Willow needs his help.*

### **Blame by Yael S. P. Age: 12 years**

Sunny lived next door to probably the coolest person on Earth. Her name was Willow and they had been friends ever since they experimented by rubbing mustard on her cat.

It was a normal Tuesday when Willow knocked on Sunny’s door. Sunny opened it. But to Sunny’s surprise Willow didn’t look good. In fact she looked awful. Her eyes were red like they were stung by jelly fish and her normally pink cheeks were the color of thin plasticky white table cloths.

“What happened to you?” Sunny asked while ushering Willow in. She shrugged off her green backpack and spring sweater. Sunny followed Willow up the stairs to his room. They had been through this routine one hundred thousand times (without the sting-y face). Sunny was confused. He had so many questions like: *why was she crying? What’s going on? Why do you look like you’re about to cry? Do your parents know you’re here? Why are you here?*

They walked into Sunny’s room. The four o’clock sun poured into his room. It smelled like Windex and the awful cardboard colored carpet felt good between his toes.

“Willow,” Sunny said with a gentle and steady voice. “What’s going on.” He knew his word placement had to be careful because in this state she could explode like a volcano at any given moment. Willow plopped down on his royal blue sheets next to a pile of blankets form his unmade bed. Willow sighed really deep like she was trying to blow something away from her face. She clearly didn’t blow that *thing* away because her face looked tense and desperate. Sunny stood awkwardly in the center of his room waiting for Willow to speak.

“I screwed something up.” She fidgeted with her long hair that hovered over her hips. Sunny reached his hand out toward his desk chair and spun it around.

“Sunny?” she said. She sounded like she was crying over his death. Sunny slowly lowered himself on to the chair and scooted toward Willow.

“Yes?” said Sunny with an impatient tone that probably didn’t help at all. Then she broke. A single tear somersaulted down her cheek.

“They were bullying us,” said Willow. Then she paused.



“What did you do?” Sunny scolded. He knew what it meant. *They* were the popular kids and US was Willow and her SECOND best friend, Dellessa. Dellessa was often bullied because she was very short and talked with a high pitched stutter. Dellessa was so lucky to have Willow as a friend. Willow always took Dellessa’s problems into her own hands. Except Willow didn’t quite know the right way to do it. And sometimes she ended up in more trouble than the bullies did. Sunny was especially worried because Willow’s parents were getting very upset about calls home from the principal.

“I wrote on the bathroom mirror,” Willow said like she was in a how-fast-can-you-talk-and-still-be-understood competition. “In the gender neutral on the second floor.”

She breathed. “It says stop the hate and leave us alone.” She looked at Sunny for the first time this whole afternoon. It was a look of waiting for approval, it looked desperate with her eyebrows curved down, but Sunny was not ready to approve of anything she said.

“Dude,” Sunny said. “You could get expelled, what were you thinking? That’s vandalism!” his voice was sharp and stern.

“I know,” Willow said, holding back tears. “What do I do?”

Sunny knew what he needed to do. If Willow took the blame for one more “activism rant” her parents would literally pull her out of the school. Sunny could not let that happen to his best friend. He needed to help her.

“You don’t do anything,” Sunny said with sincerity on his face. His lips were pursed and his head was high.

“W-what?” Willow asked, her voice was like the highest string on a guitar, you could still hear the buzzing in your ears.

“You’re just going to go to school and do all your normal ol’ stuff,” Sunny answered even more surely than before. He could visualize everything in his head now. All the dots were connected.

“They’re gonna figure out it’s me,” Willow said. Her voice had transitioned from sobs to a what-the-heck-are-you-talking-about voice.

“They won’t, don’t worry,” Sunny said, silently pleading for her to just say yes.

“I love your optimism and all, but that’s not all that reassuring,” Willow said clearly more calm but still prying. Sunny knew that Willow liked plans and lists and everything organized and orderly but he *needed* her just to trust him.

“Just give me a try at my idea, okay?” Sunny begged.

“Okay,” Willow said. It was the most unconvincing “okay” ever but he took it.

Willow got off the bed and left. She just got up and walked to the door in such a soft walk that it almost looked like she was waiting for something to jump out at her.

The next day in school, right after homeroom, Sunny went to the principal’s office. He was so nervous his heart pulsed like a snare drum.

“Ms. Lee?” Sunny said softer than the wind.

“Ah, Sunny, come in,” Ms. Lee said like seeing Sunny was the best part of her day.

“Uh...I need to talk to you,” Sunny said hesitantly.

“Have a seat,” Ms. Lee said.

“Um...” Sunny said. Goose bumps coated his arms.

“I did the graffiti in the bathroom,” Sunny said with a lump in his throat.

“Thanks for admitting to doing that Sunny,” Ms. Lee said. She slowly pulled the glasses off her nose. She was oddly calm with a no-problemo attitude. Sunny wasn’t expecting her to be so chill.

“Um...I’ll go back to class I guess,” Sunny said, slightly more relieved. Sunny reached the door of the small office, painted a faint gray with an orangey wood desk that had papers and pens of all assortments. In the back were off-white file cabinets.

“Sunny?” Ms. Lee said. She hadn’t moved or taken her eyes off Sunny at all.

“It’s very kind of you to take the blame for someone else but it’s important they get the right punishment for their actions.”

Sunny froze. Ms. Lee was on to his plan.

“Sunny are you taking the blame for Willow?” Ms. Lee asked. Her face was tense but also devious like a ha-I’m-on-to-your-plan face.

“No,” Sunny said in a squeak that he didn’t expect.

“I did it. And I know it was wrong and that’s why I’m apologizing,” Sunny said. He was begging for her to say yes because if not he didn’t know what he’d do.

“Okay, Sunny. You go to class now and thanks for your honesty.”

“Um...alright,” Sunny said. He twirled his bag over his shoulder and looked at the door. The knob was brass colored. The door had a small window at the top that had a square pattern on it. Outside of the window were lockers, long and metal with rusty black locks. And then he saw a familiar face. It was Willow’s. *WHAT?* Why was Willow there. She

opened the door and briefly ran into Sunny.

“Stop guys,” Willow said in a panicked and rushed voice. “I did it. I did it! I did the graffiti, not Sunny. He is taking the blame for me so that I don’t get expelled.” Willow was out of breath.

Sunny felt like he had just been hit by a meteor. Willow wasn’t supposed to be there was all his brain could process.

“Have a seat, both of you,” Ms. Lee said very matter-of-factly. “I understand you were trying to protect your friend Sunny, but it’s important for Willow to own up.”

She shifted her attention to Willow. “But I understand that you were being bullied. It doesn’t make what you did right or even okay but I’m not going to suspend you.”

Sunny and Willow’s eyes met in a gaze of relief. Their eyes were wide and their mouths just cracked a smile.

“But neither am I going to let you off easy,” Ms. Lee said like she was a little sad about it. Sunny’s head snapped back to focus.

“Both of you have a lunchtime detention and during that time you need to write an apology note. Okay?”

“Okay,” Sunny and Willow said in unison a little bit mopey.

“You can go to class now,” Ms. Lee said with a smile.

Sunny and Willow looked at each other happily and got out of the velvety green cushioned chairs and went off to class.

The End

*My story, Paper Birds is completely from my imagination. It relates to the theme, because Mi (one of my characters) has to make a decision about saving himself or others and finding a balance in between.*

### **Paper Birds by Alaina C. Age: 11 11/12**

Jillie grabbed some of the origami paper sitting on her desk and began folding it into crisp triangles, sharp squares, and other unique and indescribable shapes. After a few minutes of folding she had created a bird. The origami bird was a tan color, not quite the color of skin “tan” but more of a mix of cookie dough color and a darker skin tone.

Jillie then created a series of six more birds, all unique sizes. She loved her creations and named all of them after the different notes: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, So, La, and Ti. Jillie then gave them all unique personalities and skills. Fa, who was an emerald, sea green, was Jillie’s favorite bird.

The next morning, Jillie took all of the birds off of her ivory windowsill and placed them in her backpack to go to school.

Little did Jillie know, her love for the birds brought them to life.

The way to school was extremely bumpy, especially for the birds.

“Ugh, why do we keep bouncing up and down?” complained Ti.

“You just have to deal with it,” Do said in a hushed tone.

“But I can’t! This backpack is a wreck!” Said So, with shock in her voice, like if she had just been struck with a bolt of lightning

“No one listens to *you* So.” Do glared at her.

“But I don’t care if you don’t listen to me,” So looked off to the side and shook her head in disbelief. “Ugh, I hate this!” she chirped in frustration. The backpack shifted once again.

“If you don’t like what she’s saying, don’t listen to her,” Said La in a calm tone, like she had just walked out of a warm bath.

“Well actually scientific research shows tha-”

“SHUT UP RE!” All the birds yelled at him.

“Sorry,” he said sadly.

“Mmn...” said Fa, in a sarcastic and sassy tone.

Suddenly the bouncing stopped.

“Yay!” Chirped So. She sounded as if she were a kid in a candy store. All the other birds nodded in agreement. The birds then felt a swinging motion. They all fell to the left side of Jillie’s cluttered bag.

“Owwww!” Gaspd So as she hit the bottom of the bag. Her wing was bent and she started crying.

“Are you okay?” asked La.

“She could have just flown, ya know?” said Do, fixing his beak.

“Well, she’s, *ya know*, crying!” La mocked.

“She’s a cry baby then!” Said Do.

“Shut up!” La squealed in an annoyed tone.

“Guys, stop fighting,” sniffled So, her wings getting more wet by the second from her crying. Do quietly glared at her.

“No one asked me if *I* was okay!” said Mi, butting into the conversation.

“Well, one, you never asked So if she was okay, and two, no one besides *me* likes you,” argued La rubbing her tail.

“Stop trying to protect yourself. We all know that you also hate Mi,” Ti told La.

At that moment, Jillie opened her bag, and all of the birds stopped moving.

“This isn’t how I remember leaving you guys,” said Jillie as she looked down into her dark backpack.

A few moments later the birds were taken out of Jillie’s bag and carefully placed on the classroom’s windowsill. On the left and right of them they were surrounded by creepy dolls waving their heads back and forth.

“What are those?” Ti looked at them with confusion in his voice.

“I think...I don’t know. But I saw some in Jillie’s room,” answered So, her voice shaking with some uncertainty.

“They’re bobble heads, duh,” said Mi in a whiney tone.

“Mi, shut up,” said La, in an annoyed voice with tension building. The other birds nodded in agreement.

Pama’s eyes then caught attention of the windowsill, her eyes sparkling with excitement. Pama was an old friend of Jillie’s who also loved origami. Meanwhile, the birds returned to playing dead. Pama then stormed over to the birds, excited to, play, and touch them. She was quivering with excitement.

“Oh my goodness! Who made these?” Pama asked excitedly. She then checked her surroundings to make sure no one was watching, and took Re, Fa, and Ti. The other birds watched as if they were on the edge of their seats.

“Oh, no!” cried La after Pama had walked away. “We have to save them!” She started frantically looking around for a way to get to them.

“No we don’t,” answered Mi.

“Yeah we do,” Said So, agreeing with La.

“Do, what do you think?” asked Mi.

“Uh, I agree with So and La,” answered Do in a chill voice.

“Well I say we don’t save them,” said Mi with a stubborn tone in his words.

“Mi – if you are only for yourself, who are you?” said La in a hurt tone.

“And, if you are only for yourself, who will be for *you*?” answered Mi in a taunting voice.

“I have a balance, Mi. I am taking care of myself and saving Re, Fa, and Ti!” La said tapping her wing against the cold windowsill.

“Well how about we come up with a plan,” So said. All of a sudden the birds heard a loud ringing sound and the shuffling of feet against a dirty tiled floor. Jillie came over.

“What happened to Re, Fa, and Ti?” she asked getting more worried with every word. Jillie then grabbed La, So, Mi, and Do and put them in her black soft fleece jacket to take outside to recess.

A few minutes later the four remaining birds were outside on the blacktop. There were kids running and screaming around everywhere.

“Alright guys, I have a plan,” whispered So, excitement present in her voice. She sounded as if she were on the edge of her seat.

“What is it?” asked La.

“Let me explain,” said Mi. “We don’t save them.”

“But we have to!” cried So, flapping her wings in annoyance.

“Fine. Let’s hear it,” Do added.

“Here’s what I suggest,” continued So. “We head to the side of the school and then try to take off. I saw Pama on the monkey bars so if we can fly, we grab Re, then he grabs Fa, then she grabs Ti.” So beamed with excitement. She was very proud of herself.

“Okay...” said Do with a voice that sounded like a rubber ball bouncing. “Let’s go,” he continued.

The birds hobbled over to the side of the building. They stopped when they had eyes on Pama and the rest of the birds.

“Okay everyone, try to take off on three,” So explained to everyone. “One, two, th-”

“*Wait!*” Do yelled. “I can’t do this. We can’t fly. We’re, well, *paper!*” Do backed off and sat down. So looked at him, her face had “hurt” written all over and her face was steaming red as if she were about to cry.

“Let’s try again.” So took a deep breath. “One...two...three!” So tried to take off but then stumbled to the ground, with a bent wing and she was coughing. La took flight for a few seconds then dropped down unhurt. But Mi had taken off. In the air, he was doing somersaults, trying to learn to control himself. After a few seconds he eventually got it. Mi was quickly approaching the monkey bars.

“You got this!” So’s voice was like dropping milk into warm honey.

“If you are only for yourself, who are you?” La added, slightly smiling.

Meanwhile, in the air, Mi was debating whether or not to save the other birds. “I *can* do this,” he told himself, his voice kind of sounding like sandpaper. Mi then swooped down and grabbed Re. Fa and Ti saw this and gripped on to each other.

“Re, I’m gonna swoop back in and I need you to grab Fa, she is holding on to Ti,” Mi directed Re.

“Okay,” Re started, but by that time he had grabbed Fa and Ti and had already started heading towards the other birds who were cheering their heads off.

When the birds were all reunited, they had a gigantic group hug.

“Ugh, I missed you all so much,” Fa said with excitement in her voice, it sounded like if you were to melt an ice cube with an open flame.

“Well according to my math, recess is going to end soon,” Said Re, very matter-of-factly.

“Finally, something useful from you!” laughed So. “Let’s go back to the blacktop,” she continued.

The birds then hopped back over to Jillie’s jacket, which had been sitting on the steaming hot blacktop.

“Well, that was an adventure,” said Fa chuckling but exhausted. The other birds nodded in agreement.

*\*Briiiiiinnnnnggggg\** – the bell rang.

The birds returned to playing dead.

*The Pond connects to the part of the theme “If I am only for myself, what am I?” It relates to the theme because Chealsy was only thinking about herself by throwing the rocks but not by realizing there were consequences. This is how my story connects to the theme. I hope you enjoy.*

### **The Pond by Jessie W. Age: 12**

In the little town of Mountainville lived a girl named Chealsy. She was eight years old and lived with her dad. The town was always quiet, not a peep was ever made. The town was like an exotic jungle with trees you have probably never seen before. Every blade of grass was perfect and looked untouched just like a freshly sharpened knife.

The town revolved around a big pond. The citizens of Mountainville swam, drank, and ate the fish in the pond. If the pond was not there life would have been much less enjoyable for all of the citizens especially Chealsy.

Every morning, bright and early, just when the sun was rising and it looked like a gradient of pink, purple, and orange being painted on canvas, she went right into the pond. She looked at her reflection in the pond and wondered why it looked the way it did. Then she sat down and looked at all the rocks around her. There were little pebbles around the whole pond.

“Why are there rocks all around me instead of grass?” she asked herself while moving around so she could sit comfortably. Once she found the right spot it was as if she was sitting on a pillow.

As you can tell, Chealsy was a very curious little girl and had many questions. She sat with her feet in the pond, the fish swam around her feet. They nibbled on her feet and it tickled, it was a light tickle as if someone was giving her the chills on her feet. The fish brought back old memories and a rush of warmth through her entire body.

Soon after she remembered when she was six and she and her dad used to go fishing every afternoon at four o’clock on the dot. That was when all the fish were hungry. They would keep the bigger fish and let the small fish free. Now Chealsy’s dad goes fishing on his own because Chealsy swims then and does not prefer to catch fish anymore, although she does miss those moments, but time must go on.

Chealsy’s life was pretty simple. That’s the way she liked it. So there was often time for thinking. For most people life was like a rollercoaster. There were many bumps along the way and challenges you had to overcome. However, for Chealsy, it was like being in a car going

over bumps, little momentary problems but nothing major.

As Chealsy was sitting at the pond fiddling with the rocks she decided to start tossing them into the pond. One by one they made a subtle splash. Then one by one the fish slowly swam away, leaving Chealsy's feet.

Chealsy was often confused why the fish always swam away. Every day she threw the rocks the same way with the same rhythm. And every day the fish swam away one by one. The first day there were seven fish, the second day there were six fish, and the third day five fish, until the seventh day came and there was only one fish left.

That day was a special day. Right then she decided to go swimming in the pond. She went to search for the fish. Thirty minutes later no fish were found.

There was something telling her that before she got out of the pond she should go to the far corner of the pond she had never been to before, for Chealsy this was like going to a whole new place. So she did just that. The birds stopped chirping and the air became tense.

It was like Mountainville had paused for a moment of silence.

There not one, not two, but SIX fish lay dead in the newly discovered corner of the pond. Chealsy was so distraught with her actions that her face started burning as it felt like fire and unexpectedly she burst out screaming. She ran as fast as she could out of the pond. She sat at the side of the pond like she always did.

It was right then that Chealsy realized it was her fault. She had hurt the fish by throwing the rocks into the pond.

The one fish left seemed lonely to her and she felt it was up to her to find the fish some more friends. She ran like the wind to find her dad. She explained what had happened. With some compromise she and her dad went to the store and got five more fish so there will be six fish in total.

They got back and immediately placed the fish in the pond. Chealsy sat at the pond like she always did and thought about her actions. She made herself feel better by knowing she did all she could to make the problem better.

*My book, Secrecy, relates to the theme because one of the theme connections is about having balance between selfcare and care for others, and Emma is very good at handling school, home, herself, and her mother.*

## Secrecy by Elizabeth M. Age: 12

### Chapter One

As I lay there in my bed, restless, my mind drifted off to a memory of when I was a small child, as it often did. When your mother sends you to your room at four o'clock PM because you came home from school 10 minutes late, there's definitely a lot of time to think about everything.

"I just want what is best for Emma," I remember my father saying to mother. "She isn't going to be happy growing up in this environment!"

"Don't tell me what's best for MY daughter!" Mother had screamed at him. "We need to reprimand her! We need to teach her right and wrong. Don't you want her to *listen* to us!"

"We can do those things without being overly strict!" he had sort of screamed at her, but his voice was soft, like a gentle breeze.

"My parents ignored me and didn't do *anything* to help me," Mother growled. "I think that if we teach her PROPERLY we can find better results."

"I *think* you're wrong," Father had said calmly, but I could tell he wanted to shout." My parents were loving and kind and they CARED!"

Mother took a step towards him and released her hand, as if about to hit him. "You know what?"

"Don't you DARE take a step closer," his voice was so threatening I got scared.

"You know what, then?"

"What?"

"LEAVE!"

"Fine." Father left the living room. He left behind that old green couch that I still hate. He went upstairs, packed his bags, and left. Mother looked over into the kitchen and saw me standing there. Her glare was piercing and little four year old me was scared out of my mind. I couldn't believe what I had just witnessed. I don't know if anyone else can feel what I felt. My heart sank, like it was an anchor thrown over the ship.

"Emma, go to your room and go to bed," she sounded threatening.

“Yes, Mommy,” I replied, and was about to go up when –

“Excuse me?” she turned back around to look at me.

“Yes, Mother,” I was frightened. I hurried up the stairs and into my room. I found a note on my bed from Father. It said:

*To my dearest Emma,*

*I am extremely sorry that I left you with your mother. I was planning on taking you with me but your mother kicked me out before I could tell you about my plan. I hope that there is a day where I can come back and collect you; to bring you to my magnificent home. I will see you soon, my love.*

*With the most exceptional regards,*

*DAD*

He would always sign his cards like that: DAD. I kept the few that I got from birthdays, Chanukah, and Valentine’s Day. Mother hates it.

“The proper way to address your parent is by calling them ‘Mother’ or ‘Father,’” she would tell me during my lessons. “Any other name is lazy and strange. Now, my dear Emma, how would you address me?”

“By using ‘Mother,’ Mother,” I would respond.

“Very good.”

But my father still hasn’t come back for me. It’s been ten years and he’s still gone. Mother has raised me well. Strict, I know, and somewhat abusive, for she would hit me whenever she got frustrated with me, but nonetheless she was *there for me*. She taught me how to take care of myself...and her.

I would wake up at five o’clock every day and clean the house from top to bottom. I would then make us breakfast and pack my backpack for school.

“Goodbye, Mother,” I would say to her as I was about to leave.

“I love you, Emma,” she would say from the kitchen. “And be home by 3:30.”

\* \* \*

I never understood why my parents talked like they were from the 1800s. My mother always said it was “proper”, but that sounds like it’s from the 1800s, too.

“Emma!” Mother said, her voice holding back anger, as if she were a volcano about to erupt, with the slightest hint of sarcasm.

“Someone’s at the door for you!”

I rushed out of my room and ran down the stairs. I turned the

corner into the living room and saw who was standing there.

“Hi, Emma,” he was out of breath from running. “I just want to say that-”

“Get out,” I growled at him.

“But Emma-”

“I said get out!” my voice climbed as I took a step towards him. “You have *ruined* my life.”

“I just want to talk,” he started back out of the door. “I made a mistake and-”

“OUT!” I slammed the door closed, locked it, and ran back up to my room. I flopped down on my bed, my sobs and screams muffled by my soft, striped pillow.

## Chapter Two

My door opened and Mother came into the room. I looked up from my tear soaked pillow into her eyes and saw one of the most sympathetic looks on her face that I had ever seen. Her face was all soft like I could tell her almost anything. Her eyes shone like the stars as if she were about to cry. It was a look I had never even seen before.

“You know he’s not going to leave, Emma,” Mother said matter-of-factly. “Not until he gets to talk to you.”

“He said he would come back *soon!*” I sobbed. “10 years isn’t soon!”

Mother looked at me strangely. “What do you mean, ‘he said he would come back soon?’”

Uh oh...

“Well...Father left me a note when he left...” I said, nervous as to what Mother would think of this.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” her tone became suddenly angry. “Do you not trust me?”

“Mother,” I said, as if pleading with her. “It’s not that, it’s just that-”

“Bring me the note.”

So I went up into my room and went into my sock drawer, where I’d put a box that I kept all of Father’s notes in. I opened the one in the golden envelope and read it one last time. I then went downstairs and gave it to Mother. She read it.

“That dirty little-” I didn’t hear the rest of it, but I knew she was muttering some curse words under her breath.

“I’ll go start making dinner,” I stood up from the couch to go over into the kitchen.

“Wait,” Mother said, her tone suddenly calm again.

“Yes, Mother?” I turned back around to respond.

“Well...” she had a sly smile on her face. “Why don’t we go out to eat?”

I was in shock. There were so many restaurants that my friends at school had told me about but I had never actually been to one. I could just taste the crispy egg rolls, the juicy burgers, and the sugary, glazed donuts. Mother had always said that it was way too expensive, but now she was actually taking me to one! I felt a rush of excitement, like the first time that you go on a roller coaster. There were so many options!

“McDonalds, Burger King, Chipotle, Mandarin Express...”

“What are you doing?” Mother looked at me all confused.

“Huh?” I awoke out of my delicious daze. “I’m just thinking...”

“About where you want to go eat?” she gave me one of “those looks”.

“There are just too many options!”

“We could always have a girl’s night out,” she offered. “It is, after all, a Friday.”

So we had a girl’s night out. We went to a bunch of different restaurants, trying a little bit of every food at each restaurant. The ooey gooey apple pie tasted like the fresh, crisp, fall air. The pizza was so cheesy and stringy, I almost choked because it was too good and hard to get down.

“Slow down,” Mother said, her laughter like a song. I hadn’t heard her laugh like that in a long time, except in a faded memory from when I was two or three.

We were in a big, grassy field, under a lone tree, the only tree for a couple of miles around. We were on a big, red and white checkered picnic blanket. Mother was throwing me up into the air then catching me again and I felt like I was flying. We were laughing and Father was there too. I used to like this memory, because Father was in it, but now I noticed something different....

Father wasn’t really looking at me.

He was looking more off into space...like he was thinking about something.

That was pretty much all I had remembered of it. It made me think about why Father had left in the first place and why he wanted me to come with him...

“Emma?” Mother said, reaching across the table to touch my hand. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine,” I responded, feeling a little lightheaded. “Just tired.”

“Let’s go home then,” she helped me get up out of my seat. “We can do this another time.”

I had actually had a lot of fun. Tonight I had spent more quality time with Mother than I had, probably ever. I just couldn’t get the mystery of my father out of my head. My father was a strange man. I could stay up for hours, just listening to him tinker in his workshop. At one point, he quite literally made me a friend. It was “3” years old, just like I was, but what was strange was this: he said the doll had a “real, human heart.” I didn’t believe him until, a few years after he left I went

down into his workshop and opened up the doll's chest. There, inside, just like he had said, was a real, human heart. I screamed so loud Mother came downstairs into his workshop and slapped me for being too nosy. She then discarded the doll, all of Father's hard work, for nothing.

I slept on the drive home. Since Mother and I live in a mostly rural area, it takes a few hours to get to the nearest mall, which is why it was such a treat. By the time we got home, I was well enough to walk up to the house on my own. When we got there, the front door was open

"Hello?" I asked, nervous as to what was in there.

"Hello, my daughter," the lights turned on and Father was sitting on the couch. "How are you? Please, sit."

*Emma finds out many secrets about her father's past and decides to go to his mansion to try and see what he's up to. He might not be as good as he seems...*

*My story Finding the Truth relates to this summer's theme because the main character does things right in the moment because "If not now, then when?" It also relates to "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" because she will stand up for herself against anyone who tries to go against her.*

## **Finding the Truth by Abigail Z. Age: 12 ½**

### **one**

I walked through the silent halls of my middle school. I could feel a gentle January crisp in the air. I had been going to this school for the past four days, no more than that. It was boring. I knew everything we were being taught and the TOEs, short for Town Official Educators, knew that. They had asked to meet me this morning. That was the main reason I was walking through the dark and deserted hallways of my school on a Saturday morning.

The other, less important, reason was I was supposed to meet up with my...friend, I would call him a friend, to give him some cookies. It was a peace offering and a bit of a bribe. I just needed to make sure all the information he knew about me was safe.. He knew too much and that could be quite dangerous if used incorrectly.

I sighed once I got to the classroom, number 158. It was a science room with a big poster about volcanos hanging on the door. I studied the poster for a moment and without bothering to knock, opened the door. It startled my friend, Chase, who brushed a hand through his sunset orange hair and muttered angrily as he pretended to know of my presence long before I opened the door.

I set the plastic box of chocolate cookies down on the desk in front of him and whispered, "Do you promise you will not tell anyone about this or me, no matter what? From here on out I and any information about me is just a memory. I am just that nobody who never even made the picture. The side character with no lines who barely made it into one clip of a movie. The pers-"

"I get it!" Chase said with enough force to start an earthquake.

"No matter what?" I was demanding him to promise, not asking. I stopped him as he started poking the cookies toward himself.

Chase looked me in the eyes, his expression cold as the snow and ice outside. "No matter what."

That was all I needed. I stood up and walked out of the room without closing the door.



Now, I must tend to my other business. The TOEs told me to meet them in room 127 at 5:39 AM. I had never questioned the odd timing, assuming it was for safety and security. I had seven minutes to spare.

The classroom was only two hallways away so I got there with some extra time. It was a sixth grade English classroom whose teacher was very strict. Some younger students explained being put into her class like a death sentence. That is unless you love writing seven paragraph essays twice a week.

I walked inside the already open door and found no one. I checked the time and room number before sitting down on a desk. There were still two more minutes until the meeting.

*You're late*, I thought as a tall man in a blue suit walked in eighteen seconds after 5:39.

Two other men followed. The first one was a short, large man with a bush of brown hair and glasses that slipped down his nose. The other was growing bald and had a long beard.

I suddenly felt less confident. I did not look very presentable in my jeans and t-shirt. My light brown hair was not brushed, but I refused to let any of my uneasy feelings show.

I hopped off the desk and walked up to the first man. We shook hands and he introduced himself as Carl Miloxe, chief TOE in the department of Advanced Education. The other two were named Nicholas Ram and Michael Stals, both of whom worked under Miloxe. They apologized about the last member of the meeting being late. She arrived three minutes later.

It was the TOE that stopped me from going to math yesterday. Not that I was complaining. I hate my math class. She came up to me just as I was leaving my locker. A small nervous and suspicious feeling started to grow in my stomach as she asked to speak to me. I quietly told her she could. I examined her, trying to read past her kind expression. She took me to a private room and told me she was a TOE. She said that she as well as some other would like to meet me here this morning to talk about some important topics. Using my instincts I tried to give myself an advantage. While she was talking I tried to shift us around so I was closer to the door. She saw what I was doing and did not follow along. I was trapped like a bird in a cage. I felt uncomfortable knowing she was superior over me. I studied my surroundings already coming up with a plan for escape. Just in case...

The TOE stepped into my line of sight and cleared her throat. She

said in a teacherly manner, "We *do* know about your past and you should be grateful that you are being given this opportunity because of it. You should know that if we suspect even one little thing, charges will be taken against you."

My legs tensed up, preparing to run. I tilted my head to the right, stretching the side of my neck. This TOE was not making a good first impression on me.

Still, I said softly, "Okay, where and what time?"

"I need your full attention," she could tell I was distracted. I focused on a dot on the wall trying to get the noises out of my head. My breathing became heavier and the woman noticed my reaction to her comments as much as I tried to hide it.

"I am gr-"

"I asked you a question," I cut her off before she could apologize about anything. I could see that she did not like my response.

She failed to hide the annoyance in her voice as she said, "No one can know about this. Not one single person. Tomorrow morning in room 127, 5:39 AM. Do not be late."

I nodded and tried to walk out of the room. She stopped me by touching my arm. I stopped and looked back up to her. I stared right below her left eye. She looked back at me for a moment then let me go. I waited another second before quietly slipping away.

I was brought back to reality by the woman apologizing. I had to remind myself not to glare.

Stals started by asking me if I minded him recording our conversation. He set up a small recording device on the table we had sat down at after I told him I was fine with it.

Then I was asked if anyone else knew about this meeting. I was told not to tell anyone and I did not. Chase technically knew enough to assume I was having a meeting, but I had nothing to worry about with him. My parents and younger sister would all still be sleeping by the time I snuck back into my house. If someone did go into my room looking for me, a note was laying on my bed, saying I went out on a walk and would be back soon. My parents would not worry and my sister would not care unless I was hurt.

They asked me a few more questions like that for security then explained the real reason I was here.

"We have noticed that you seem to need a bigger challenge than what the current school system has been offering you," Miloxe started. I nodded, paying close attention to his word choice. "We have thought you

may like joining the School of Accelerated Teaching. It would require you to transfer schools again, but it is not far from your house. There is much after school commitment to the program. You will be pushed beyond your limits, and you will be expected to excel. It would help us greatly. You will be given more details if you agree but let it be known that your added presence would settle some conflicts. No one will be allowed to know of this. Not even your parents.” The TOES glances pierced me like lasers.

In my mind this already sounded suspicious. My heart rate quickened, but I did not know why I was suddenly afraid of this man.

“Anything else to it?” I asked, trying to keep the low distrust out of my voice.

Ram checked his watch and told me I had thirteen minutes to decide. I looked at each of them, an all familiar look of deep planning present on my face.

“And what if I say no?”

With a blank expression Miloxe told me, “Because of the information you already know, you will have to be properly taken care of.”

“We are doing this as a favor,” Stals said. He was tapping his foot on the ground in a strange pattern that sounded like the water leaking off of our old house’s roof at the end of a big rainstorm.

If I did not want to find out what properly taken care of meant then I had my answer. I tilted my head to the right to stretch my neck. I felt a rock in my throat as I swallowed.

Seeing my small hesitation Ram said, “We *do* know about your past.”

Keeping this a secret would not be hard. I almost never told anyone anything. I still had a feeling that something else was wrong here. If I was not allowed to tell anybody anything and they were threatening me with information about my past, there was something more to it.

“I’ll do it.” *Not for you or even for me, but to find out what that “something” is.*

two

The TOEs dismissed me after making me sign a paper. I did not say anything as I tried to take as much time as I could to leave the room. Stals did not stop the recording and did not look as though he was planning to until I left. They all watched me as I awkwardly left. After I walked far enough away to convince the TOEs I left I crept back quiet as a mouse and slid into a neighboring classroom just as the TOEs were coming out of the one we had been in. They walked the other direction and turned a corner.

After a minute I could hear a faint voice talking. I slid out of the classroom and closer to the TOEs. Someone coughed many times.

“How much did you need to tell her?” He coughed again. It was not anyone who I knew.

“Almost nothing,” Miloxe sounded almost surprised as he spoke those words.

The unknown man spoke again, “She had no questions? No suspicions about your lies?”

“Oh, she had questions and she was very suspicious. She just did not want us to know. But I am almost positive she bought what we were saying.”

My face transformed, as they spoke, from annoyance to confusion back to my normal plain expression. They had lied to me. How could I not tell?

A terrifying image from my past flashed into my mind. *Not this again.* I retreated into a classroom. I could have just agreed to be killed. They walked past the room I was hiding in. I came out behind them, trying to get the most out of the their conversation.

“She is only doing it because of the threats. She wants to know why we need her. She is dangerous. Do not get tricked by her attitude,” Miloxe had said that. The man next to him coughed again. The others followed behind. If anyone of them were to turn around I would be spotted. Still I wanted to hear what they had to say. I needed to know what was going on.

I held my breath as I moved closer. I made no noise. They kept talking. I knew it was about me. They said things that only could apply to me.

They had almost reached the doors when the female TOE said, “Check and see if she went home.”

That sentence gave me chills. My heart beat faster and I started

feeling sick. The man I still did not know pulled computer out of a bag he had slung across his chest. I took a step backwards as he did and tripped over my feet.

*This is my end, I thought. Once the TOEs find out I was spyi-*

My thoughts ended abruptly as someone stopped my fall. They pulled me into a classroom and hurried me out of one of the open windows.

It was Chase. He put a finger to his lips and pushed me forward. I was angry at him, but grateful for his help. I followed his directions. He steered me into the woods that lay behind the school. It was the complete opposite way of my house. He was watching something on his phone, but would not let me see what it was. He made me walk back and forth from two trees that were seven meters apart. I glared at him the whole time.

“Finally,” he said. “You can stop now. Follow me.”

“No!” I said. “There was no point in you making me do that. I only did it because you half saved me.” I started to stomp away.

Chase shrugged and watched me go. When I was almost out of sight he raised his voice and said, “I guess you don’t care that the TOEs put a bugging device on you. They can hear everything you say. See everything you do.” He listed off many horrific things I had done when I thought no one would see. They ranged from simple things like picking my nose to some stuff much, much worse. He paused, “They think you’re a psychopath.”

That stopped me. I was standing over Chase in less than a second. His muscles tensed. I knew he thought I was going to hit him. I only tilted my head to the right and asked with a cold glare, “How do you know that?”

He looked me in the eyes, opened his mouth to answer then bolted. I raced after him. He staggered to the left in an odd pattern. He thought he was fast, but not fast enough. I caught up and pushed him to the ground.

I kept him on the ground as he caught his breath. Once his breathing steadied he told me, “I bugged them too.”

I stopped him from sitting up with my foot. “Proof.”

“Come with me,” he begged.

After a moment I helped him up. I noticed him keeping some distance from me. He kept saying a word or two to make conversation but would stop abruptly whenever I looked over to him.

“I am not a psychopath,” I told him, holding my hands out. My voice was quiet and a bit horse.

Chase swallowed and started talking really slowly as if I would go crazy from what he said. “You *do* look really angry. All the time. It can be kind of scary sometimes. What you call your normal expression is a look of pure hatred. It’s like you despise everything that crosses you.”

I did not flip out at his comment. I just asked, “How do I get this “bug” off me?”

He took me to a tree with a small wooden shack up in its branches. We climbed up into it. Inside, every single wall was lined with computer screens. There was one desk in the middle with a real computer and the box of cookies I had given him. Two of them were missing. Many of the screens were lit up with videos of many different TOEs going on with their days. Some others showed location on a map. Only a few were dark. One of them, off to the side, seemed to show itself going on to infinity. It was looking through my eyes. That was the bug he was talking about.

“Proof,” Chase said.

I examined the room in awe. How was this possible?

“Even now,” he pointed out. “You look disgusted. Like you want to destroy something.”

I ignored him, then made a gagging sound like I had just eaten a barf flavored jelly bean.

He looked at me, confused.

I explained, “You have a camera through my eyes! You can watch me shower. The Toes can watch me shower!” I paused then asked, “How does it work? How can I get it out?”

First Chase told me that I would usually shower between 6 or 6:30 in the morning. He said he never would watch my camera when I was taking one.

I sighed, not believing him.

“And,” he continued. “The TOEs have been studying you for a lot longer than you think. Many, many years actually. Not just the week you have been here. Can you do something for me?”

I looked at him suspiciously and he took a step back.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“Can you...uh...”

“What?”

“I need you to lift up the back of your shirt,” he said it so fast it took me a second to comprehend.

“What? I don’t even know what to think of you anymore!” It

came out more like a growl than it was supposed to.

"It's not like that! I was going to show you where the listening device was put." His face reddened as he made his excuse. He took another step back.

I glared at him as I pulled the back of my shirt up.

Chase walked behind me and touched the scar stretching right behind my left shoulder.

I shrugged his hand off of me saying, "Hey! How I got that is none of your business."

"The bug is there," he said matter-of-factly.

"No, it's not," I covered it up with my hand.

"You may not believe me, but it is true." He shrugged. He must be wrong. I vividly remembered getting that scar. I pulled my shirt back on.

After a moment Chase said, "I won't be able to take it out or disable it because the TOEs will know that something is going on. But, I can reprogram it so it shows something you would be doing. But it will be completely fake, don't worry."

Even though I did not think the bug was where Chase said it was, I knew it existed. I let him program it. It did not take him long. I watched as the image from my prospective on the screen changed to an image of me in my bed at home.

After he finished I asked him a question that was on my mind from the beginning of this talk.

"What if the TOEs were listening to our conversation?"

Chase smiled. "They weren't," he answered.

"How do you know?"

"I was working on the program on my phone while you were eavesdropping on the TOEs. If I was not there, you would have been caught. I was finishing it as you were pacing between some trees."

I thought that through before pointing to my screen. "How was that screen still showing me in here?"

"I waited to update mine until I saw your reaction to it," he smiled.

I glared at him. "That's not funny." I paused. "Are you sure the TOEs cannot change the program back?"

"If they do I'll know about it. Then I'll change it again. Trust me, I've got your back." Chase said.

I smiled at that.

"Can you do just one more thing for me?" He asked.

"As long as it does not require me to do anything inappropriate," I said.

"It doesn't. I know about you and SAT. While you are there I need you to get me some information. Here, I have a list." He gave me a piece of paper with many different categories on it.

"I will try." Some of them seemed impossible and others looked to be really simple. I had no idea what a few of them were asking, though.

"Thanks a lot." Chase smiled.

I smiled back. "No, thank you," I said before taking one of his cookies and climbing out of the treehouse before he could stop me.

Chase only rolled his eyes as I started home.

*When I continue this story I will have the main character go to the SAT and also work as a spy for Chase. The whole time the TOEs will be suspecting her. They will be trying to find evidence against her while she will be doing the same with them. They will be trying to uncover each other's secrets.*

## Henry & The Tree of Money by Calista W. Age: 9

### CHAPTER ONE

One day a bear ate a penny. Then he pooped it out in a field in the middle of the woods. Then over time a sprout grew with leaves that were actually pennies. As the years passed the plant turned into an oak/money tree. The leaves were dollars and the acorns were pennies. And then the tree had immortality.

Suddenly a boy comes running and crying. He is running away from home. And his name is Henry. He sees the tree. He looks at the tree and observes it. Henry pokes the tree and pulls some leaves and acorns off. Henry realizes that it grows right back. He is very happy.

Then he secretly runs back home, takes his mother's Little Red Riding Hood costume's basket, and brings it to the tree. He collects as much money as he can. Henry runs all the way to the bank. He puts the money in the bank and repeats until the sun goes down.

Then he takes a little more money and goes to a restaurant. He eats the food there and once it is time to pay the waitress asks, "how old are you?"

Henry responds, "eight."

Then the waitress drops her jaw and Henry skips out of the restaurant.

Then he picks the money for the rest of the week and puts it in the bank.

Then he finds out that he can build a tree house in the tree of money. So he runs to the store to get his tools like a screwdriver, hammer, nails, and wood. He goes back to the tree and builds a tree house.

But he doesn't know how to so he tries to wing it. And it doesn't turn out so great. So he tries again and it still doesn't work. So he runs into town and asks a man to help him. So the man helps Henry build the tree house.

Once the tree house is built the man asks for fifty dollars. Instead Henry gives the man five hundred dollars. Then the man is like, "hmmmmmmmm." The man asks Henry if he wants to be his son.

Henry says, "sure!"

Then the man brings Henry to his new house and then the man says, "Could you work with me...heehheehheeh!"

*What happens next? Henry asks what is his new dad's name. He replies, "Joseph."*

*Henry asks, "Also do I have a mom?" Then Joseph thinks he can use Henry for his money. At nighttime when Henry is in bed Joseph sneaks out and takes all the money from the tree and cuts down the tree!*

**Chapter One – Jennifer**

One night when I was about five I was outside in my backyard with my BNFF (which stands for Best Neighbor Friend Forever) playing, running, and laughing. But I was very distracted by noises that sounded a little like coughing so instead of playing I ran off to go see what was going on. I ran up the hill all the way to Kate's house and there on the deck of house 703 was Kate's mom.

She didn't talk to me when I was there. Actually I don't think she even saw me. She had her eyes closed as if she was sleeping, but I didn't think she was sleeping because it didn't really look like she was breathing.

I ran down the hill past Kate and ran into my house. I ran straight to my mom.

"Mommy," I said panting. "Mommy you have to come." I directed her out the door.

"Jennifer, what's wrong, where are we going?" she said as I pulled her toward the door.

"Miss Sawfer is on the front porch dead!"

My mom didn't say anything until we got to the top of the hill to see Kate. She had found out about all the commotion. She was crying.

My mom tried to comfort her saying things like, "It's okay," and "everything is going to be fine," but I knew in my mind those things weren't true.

My mom called 911 and they took Miss Sawfer to the hospital after three hours of being at the hospital that night. In the end we found out Miss Sawfer had passed.

Kate's mom had adopted her so she had no dad.

Kate stayed with us and for a week every day we went to her house to pick up some stuff from her house.

Kate and I were left at home with my dad one weekend and my mom had left the house. Kate and I weren't told why she left but frankly that week Kate and I only had each other. We were never talked to by Mom and Dad. My guess was because they were too busy yelling at each other. They yelled each night but I didn't know what about.

At that point I was only five but very smart at the time. I was very concerned about everything that had been happening but frankly Kate was not, which surprised me because this was her Mom's death and probably her new family.

Every night I would spy on Mom and Dad but every night it also became harder and harder to do it. The sound of my two parents, the people who raised me, were fighting and yelling at each other. At one point I stopped because it became too emotional for me. So instead of spying I talked to Kate all night. Usually I talked and talked and at one point she just fell asleep.

One morning I woke up and then woke up and then woke up Kate. We were downstairs and saw my mom making breakfast and my dad setting the table. Seeing my mom and dad not fighting and getting along made me happy. After my dad finished setting the table he told us to sit down and directed us to the table. We sat down and looked at all the good food on the table. We started serving ourselves.

I couldn't help but realize my parents had left the room. It made me very confused because it seemed like they were getting ready to tell us something big, so I told Kate that I had to go to the bathroom and left the room as well. I followed the sound of talking all the way up the stairs to my parents' room. My mom and dad were discussing something but I wasn't quite sure what, since after all I came in the middle of the conversation. But doing this reminded me of when my parents used to fight at night and when I used to spy on them so I ran back downstairs to continue eating.

My parents came down into the kitchen with bright eyes and big smiles. They were also standing quite close to each other unlike they used to when they fought.

"Okay girls, you know that Kate has had to stay here for some time for reasons, but," she stopped and my mom and dad grinned. "Jennifer," she said with a questioning smile. "You are going to have," she stopped and looked at my dad. "A sister!" they said in unison. At first I had a big smile then a confused face and then a mad face.

I got up from my chair and slammed it against the table like a loud burst of thunder. I stormed off to my room and slammed my door. My thoughts were all jumbled and I didn't know how to even express myself so instead of being mad I cried instead.

My mom and dad came to my room and knocked on the door. I wasn't able to even say, "come in," because I was sobbing so much but they must have heard the quiet sounds of my sobbing because they decided to come in anyway. They sat next to me in confusion.

There was a quite long bit of silence, until, "Mommy, I don't want a sister!" I yelled and cried and quite frankly screamed a bit.

“Oh honey,” Mom said. “You’re not getting a baby sister,” she said.

I stopped crying for a bit. “I’m not?” I said as I wiped my tears away.

“No honey, you’re getting a sister your age. A sister who already loves you,” she said. “And maybe, just maybe, her name might be,” she stopped. “Kate,” she said.

I was confused but I was also really happy if what she said was true.

I uncurled myself from a ball and hugged my mom and dad and said thank you and then I was about to leave the room when a thought stopped me – actually many thoughts but one had overpowered the rest.

“Mommy,” I said. She looked up at me. “Mommy why did you and Daddy used to fight and yell at each other?” I asked.

My two parents looked at each other and I could see them blushing.

“Well honey,” my mom said. “See, these are things we’ll tell you about when you’re older,” she said.

I nodded, left my other thoughts behind, and left the room. I could hear my parents talking and they were definitely confused about my way of exiting but I heard them walking behind me down the stairs.

I sat down at the table and my mom and dad and me told Kate everything. Then we continued to eat and talk. This was my new life. My new family.

*If I were to keep writing I would write not a flashback but a normal day for Jennifer and Kate. Like them going to school and coming home and talking to their mom and dad and then them meeting the evil ghosts and then being captured by the evil ghosts and then defeating the evil ghosts.*

## More Than a Little Change by Gwynnie N. Age: 12

### 1 Fire

Today was like all other days, that meaning another failed history sheet. No matter how hard I try to study I can only just blankly stare at the ink filled pages. But one book I can read is *To The Passed Past*. It is a book about a boy who gets time traveled to the 1970s. That book is interesting but not the history book. I am bad at history but I’m really good at inventing.

I’m almost done with my new invention. With every piece I build, new ideas spark in my head. But, in your head you might be wondering where I get my materials. In my town there is a lab where they sell all kinds of materials. They can only sell the dangerous materials to people twenty-five or older with a science degree. My dad is a surgeon so we make a lot of money, but my mom is a scientist.

I build all my things in the basement and it’s practically my lab. Sometimes I sit down there and read. As I was doing that my mom knocked on the basement door.

“Ria, I have something!”

I ran up the stairs to her and opened the door. She handed me a box that contained a high tech switch for my invention. In excitement I shoved the book that I had placed on my chair and set down the box. I carefully placed the switch in the right place and walked over to my table where I was building the final piece.

It’s about time to tell you that my invention is a time machine. I thought that maybe if I actually lived history, I would understand it more. This final piece isn’t like other final pieces. It makes the time machine a time machine. The rest of the things just tell what year and where and things like that.

As I was tightening the last few screws I thought to myself what if I can’t come back or what if the machine malfunctions? I looked up from what I was doing and took some deep breaths. My mom always tells me to take deep breaths when I am stressed or scared. It always helps.

“In two three four, out two three four,” she always softly speaks that pattern when I am having difficult times. After I took some time to breathe I thought to myself, I need to do a test run. I twisted the green colored screwdriver one last time and finally I was done with the final piece.

I looked at my invention and smiled. I walked over to the time machine with excitement, ready to do a test run. Unfortunately that pesky switch box didn't agree with my plan. I tripped over the box and dropped and broke the final piece. I was ready to scream but before I could, something else happened.

I felt a dizzy shake and woke up on wet dewy grass. But it wasn't a familiar grass. It was a strange but soft grass. I looked around me and became confused. People were dressed like it was the 1800s. The 1800s is the only thing I'm good at in history. I love the fashion and the houses. All the lace and delicate material. The trim on the houses and the soft dull colors, it just makes me happy. Even though I loved what I saw around me, my eyes started to tear up. I tried to remember my mom's pattern – in two three four, out two three four but I couldn't. I just started crying. I was surprised when no one passing me asked if I was okay.

I eventually gathered myself up and breathed. I stood up and tried to take a step forward without crying again.

I tried to find a place to go inside. All I saw was Edward's Barber Shop and Violet's Shoe Repair. One place I did see that caught my eye was Peggy's Hat Shop. I went in and looked around and I almost felt at home. I asked the woman at the counter if I could try some on but she didn't respond. In fact, no one I talked to responded. I then again started crying.

Once I was calm again I started to get hungry. I saw a place called Dough's Bakery and it sounded familiar so I went in. Since no one could see me I just grabbed some bread, sat down, and enjoyed the freshly warm bread. As I was eating I started to hear a commotion.

Eventually someone yelled, "fire!"

People rushed out. I walked out and sat while watching the building be engulfed in flames. Many people started crying and watching every red hot flame grow. People started pumping water into steel buckets and throwing it at the building. I was starting to feel overwhelmed so I went back to where I first woke up.

I laid on the still moist grass and tried to look at the clouds and come up with things they looked like. It was one of my favorite things to do. Looking at the clouds became more difficult as the sky filled with smoke. When would the fire stop? When would I get home?

"Little girl," a bold voice said as a man looked directly at me. Could someone finally see me?

*Ria gets time traveled back to the 1800s. No one can hear or see her and she has to figure out how to get home. What year is she in? If not now, when? When will things be normal again? Will she have to build a whole new time machine?*



## The Doomed Duet by Lili A. Age: 12

### 1

Trumpet players are devil's spawn. Deep down they're all the same: cocky, obnoxious, loudmouthed jerks. Therefore anyone who associates with them is awful too because who in their right mind would be with them willingly (except for me of course, but I don't really have a choice). This means all band members are awful. This isn't even a personal opinion. Everyone in orchestra hates the band because of the fact their songs are too annoying and too loud. The band even hates the orchestra, though they're probably just jealous that we can breathe. Our respective ensemble directors however, do not share the same sentiment.

"They can't possibly be serious," I mutter to my fellow cellist, Raina, beside me. "They do realize I will actually fight any of these band jerks."

"Bea, chill," she whispers back. "You're making this too big a deal."

"Too big a deal? These people shouldn't even be able to call themselves musicians," she rolls her eyes and I'm yelling now. "They're not even good!"

All eyes are on me, including Mrs. Brock's glare and all of a sudden I have nothing to say, which is certainly a first.

"As I was saying," Mrs. Brock breaks the silence. "This activity is to encourage unity. Your pairs will be assigned."

Mr. Harton then follows with, "If you fail to do well on this assignment you will not be able to participate in any musical activities." This is clearly supposed to be a threat, but Mr. Harton is a small portly man with the least threatening face, probably ever.

"You are dismissed," Mrs. Brock finishes.

Raina and I sling our bags over our shoulders and begin our trek home.

"This is the actual worst. I legitimately cannot think of anything more horrible," I say as soon as I feel the fall chill hit my face as we leave the building.

"Oh, so you'd be fine never playing in the orchestra again?" Raina says matter-of-factly.

I roll my eyes. "You know what I mean."

"Well, you have to do it because you're my stand partner and you wouldn't dare leave me would you?" She pouts but I can see the smile in

her eyes.

"Well if you're that helpless I guess I must." At this we both crack, ending up in a fit of giggles and snickers.

"A flautist wouldn't be so bad I guess," I begin to say, but I'm cut off by Raina's dark look.

"Nothing against flute players, but flutes are awful instruments. They're just airy tubes. Plus they wouldn't even make a sound compared to a cello."

"That's true. Also trombones and tubas would be hard 'cause like who gets the melody? I certainly don't know."

"Clarinets and saxophones would be fine, I guess," she says. "But oooh, a percussionist would be great 'cause they don't do much."

I contemplate this for a moment. "No, but that's the problem. I mean how much melody can they actually carry before it becomes a cello solo with a beat."

"Ugh," she groans. "Now that we're talking about this it's seeming more and more annoying."

"At least we're not doing this with choir, they're almost as annoying and obnoxious as trumpet players."

"Yeah, yeah," she mutters waving a dismissive hand. The conversation then cuts off when we arrive at my house.

"My friend," I gasp. "I must bid you farewell." I bow.

"I shall see you in the morn," she says, playing along. She waves goodbye running across the street to her house.

I enter the front door of my house with a shout.

"I'm home!"

There's no reply.

The thing is, there are two cars in the driveway and my sister's bag is by the door. Everyone is home.

I walk more towards the kitchen and get an explanation. You see, the stairs leading up to where my sister's bedroom is, are on the way from the front door to the kitchen. I can hear the faint honks of a trumpet and clapping floating down the stairs. My teeth clench and my nails press into my palms. I'd do anything to escape the sound.

My sister is practicing and my parents are listening so they obviously won't give a hoot about me. I could probably set myself on fire, heck I could probably set the house on fire and they'd be too enraptured by Melissa's "beautiful playing" to even notice or care. Getting their attention when they're with Melissa is legitimately impossible, for me at

least, so I've stopped trying.

I grab some grapes and my homework and retreat to the basement trying to be as far as possible from the sounds upstairs.

"Girls! Dinner!" My dad shouts. I remove the earbuds from my ears and head upstairs. I smell the fish before I see it. I want to gag but refrain. There's no use in it.

Melissa loves seafood. I, however, very much do not. I can't complain, though, because Mom will go into her whole, "I slaved over this for you," spiel even though we all know it was frozen. I guess it's just salad and pasta for dinner, again.

As I sit down at the table, holding my breath so as to block the smell, I'm reminded of all the times my parents would instigate breath holding contests between Melissa and I. This causes me to stop, the smell is better than those memories.

"How was your day?" My dad asks both of us, but both him and Mom are facing Melissa and obviously only half care about my answer.

"Fine," Melissa mutters, as ungrateful for the attention as usual.

"The orchestra got an assignment today," I begin to say, but Mom just hums, already bored. "We're assigned a partner from the band that we have to do a duet with."

At this Mom perks up. "Oh, maybe you'll get to play with a real musician."

My head thumps to the table.

"Mom," I groan. "The cello is a perfectly fine instrument."

"But is it a trumpet?" My dad asks.

This is why I don't talk at dinner.

Sometimes I feel like the universe hates me. Actually, no. There are what, seven, eight billion people on Earth? Why would I specifically attract the hatred of whoever runs this place? No, I just have some really bad luck. I'm looking at the piece of music in front of me, the score if you will, and I might actually riot.

My eyes are drawn to the top of the paper below the title. I don't even look at the composer, his name is probably Johann anyways. Right next to the words Arranged and For are the words Cello and Trumpet.

Apparently said trumpet player in question is *Quinn Hogan*. I vaguely remember who he is and oh God I'm dead! Of course first chair trumpet goes with first chair cello. If there's any way to make a trumpet player worse it's to put him in first chair. (At least Mom and Dad will be

happy).

Quinn never takes anyone seriously. He probably thinks he's better than them or something. He struts around the hallway with just the stupid little mouthpiece of his trumpet, blowing into it, sounding like a strangled duck.

"Alright!" Mrs. Brock barks. "Find your partners everyone!"

I stand and watch as Raina joins a little flute player, at least I'm not the only one suffering.

I weave through the chairs and spot him. I hate him already. He has one of those silvery trumpets that whenever someone asks why his trumpet is silver, he'll say something stupid like, "it's a different thing." Like, no. I mean how are they *even* different? It's really just the color.

I stick my chin up and extend my hand.

"Bea," I say with a scowl.

He quirks his eyebrow and it makes me furious. What else is he going to do to show off, a backbend?

"Quinn," he says, actions mirroring mine but in a mocking way.

It takes everything in me not to punch him right now. I take a deep breath and try a smile.

"Look," I begin. "I don't think either of us like this arrangement, however I think we can manage to be civil people and manage to play a piece of music. How hard can it actually be?"

"Have you even looked at the music?" He talks to me like I'm a child. The nerve! Still, I glance at the page and for a minute I can't even comprehend it. There's just a sea of eighth notes, quarter notes, even sixteenth notes. Then I look at the 120 tempo and actually die a little inside.

We're screwed.

*Bea Marx has, in her opinion, a very reasonable hatred of trumpet players and band members in general. School is her escape from them, usually. Enter: Quinn Hogan. When forced by the band and orchestra directors to put together an extremely difficult duet they must put aside their differences if they want to be able to play with the school ever again.*