



KIDSNEWS

Short story competition 2020

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WINNER

The Unexpected Friendship

By Ariana Fais

The leaves crunched as Suzie Snail bit into them.

Suzie heard a rustling behind her, then out crawled Simon Slug.

“Oh, it’s you,” said Suzie.

“Of course, who did you think it was? Oh, let me guess you thought I was a monster, didn’t you?” said Simon meanly.

“No I didn’t,” said Suzie, not sounding very convincing.

“Anyway, I came here to ask if you wanted to race,” said Simon. “We’ll go around the fountain, zigzag through the pointy rocks, go over the pile of dirt, and finish at the vegetable patch,” he explained.

“OK, but why do you want us to race?” Suzie asked.

“To prove slugs are faster than snails,” answered Simon.

“OK, but I’m going to prove you wrong!” said Suzie.

“Well see about that!” he replied.

“Everyone, to your places,” boomed Andrew Ant. “On your marks, get set GO!!”

Both snails and slugs are very slow, but slugs are considered faster because they have no shell.

They crawled away, and as you may have guessed, Suzie soon fell behind, coughing in Simon’s dust. As they circled around the fountain, Suzie did her best to catch up, but just as she was getting close, Simon sped away.

They approached the pointy rocks, and Suzie tried to zigzag through, but kept ramming right into them. She finally cleared the rocks with some new fractures in her shell.

Then she spotted the pile of dirt. At first, it looked small, but the closer she got, the more it towered over her. As she reached its base, she could feel its great shadow looming.

She started the steep climb, but slipped. She caught hold of a root just in time, and watched as a chunk of dirt tumbled down to become a tiny speck at the bottom. Suzie gulped and carried on.

With much effort, she reached the top, but the pebble she was on gave way, and Suzie rolled down the other side. She landed on her back. She flipped herself over and crawled forwards.

Finally, she crossed the two sticks of celery that marked the finish line.

Bugs were cheering, but they weren't cheering for Suzie.

Simon had a smirk on his face.

"Good race," Suzie sighed, shaking Simon's tail. "Maybe I'll get you next time." She sounded more hopeful than she felt.

"In your dreams!" said Simon cruelly, signing an autograph for a beetle.

He set off back to his house. They were neighbours, so Suzie followed. When he saw her, Simon, picked up the pace.

Suzie felt the temperature drop. As she looked up, she saw a huge feathery shadow glide over her. It tucked in its wings and plummeted towards Simon.

"Simon, watch out!" shouted Suzie.

"What's that noise? Oh, it's probably just Suzie complaining about losing!" Simon thought.

"Simon!!!" Suzie said again, but it was no use. She watched in horror as the bird dived.

Fortunately, Simon passed under a leaf, and the bird swerved aside.

Suzie knew she would have to save Simon, but how to get there in time?

Then she had an idea. She got on a leaf, covered it in slime, then grabbed a stick and pushed herself along. In no time, she reached Simon.

"Simon, quick! Get in my shell," said Suzie desperately.

"No way! I'm not getting in there," he sneered.

"A bird is trying to eat you, so unless you want to be bird food, I recommend getting in my shell RIGHT NOW!!!" she screamed.

"Well, why didn't you say so?!?" he replied.

"Just get in," Suzie said irritably.

Simon got in one second before the bird swooped again on the slimy slug. It collided with Suzie's hard shell, which cracked, but held! The bird, sore beaked and squawking angrily, flew off looking for easier prey.

"It's gone!" said Suzie, peaking her head out of her shell.

"Oh ah, good," said Simon. He looked around warily, as if the bird would try to eat him at any moment.

"Suzie, I just wanted to say I'm sorry." Simon said, apologetically. "Slugs may be faster when it comes to racing, but snails' shells are extremely useful," he admitted.

"That's OK, Simon," Suzie said, looking happier.

"Oh, and Suzie, here," Simon said, rubbing some of his slime on Suzie's cracked shell.

"What's that for?" asked Suzie, clearly puzzled.

"Slug slime is very sticky, it'll help mend your shell," Simon explained.

"Thanks Simon," said Suzie.

So the two new friends slid home together, as the sun set behind them.

The Very Naughty Giraffe

By Alyssa Reed

Once upon a time, there was a giraffe called Sparky.

She was the youngest giraffe that lived in the Adelaide Zoo and had three brothers and sisters. Sparky always liked tricking her family by scaring them and playing tricks all the time. She loved when people would visit the zoo and look at her. She was a mischievous giraffe and was always poking her head over the fence.

When the Coronavirus hit Adelaide, there were no visitors visiting the zoo and Sparky was very lonely and bored. When she tried to talk to her other zoo friends, they wouldn't respond.

"Maybe they are bored too!" Sparky thought.

She went to her family and asked them if they wanted to play a game.

"No thanks!" Sparky's family said, boringly.

But Sparky talked back and said: "You always say that, and I'm really lonely!"

Sparky's family didn't like playing The Scaring Game, or Hide and Seek Chasey. They're not boring, don't you think?

When the sun started to set, Sparky rested her head on the fence sadly. She missed all of the visitors that used to come and play.

Over the fence she could see all the bright, flashing lights that made her feel happy and she wondered what they were.

Then, out of nowhere, Sparky had an idea! She could easily step over the fence, with her long legs, so she decided to explore Adelaide city.

Sparky saw a tall building with lots of windows. It had writing on it saying, Children's Hospital. She wanted to go there.

Sparky made sure she looked and listened when she crossed the road.

When Sparky got to the hospital, she peeked through the window. Inside, there was a small room. Inside that room, there was a bed with a small girl in it. Next to the bed, was a table with an iPad, a box of tissues and some drawers.

The girl was sitting in the bed, sulking. She didn't want to eat her carrots.

The girl looked out the window and saw Sparky's head. She was very confused.

"Why is there a giraffe outside my window?" she thought.

The girl ran to open the window. Once she finally got it open, she gently touched Sparky's neck. The girl finally realised Sparky kept on looking at the carrots.

"Do you want them?" the girl asked.

Sparky nodded straight away and licked her lips. Sparky was a bit hungry, so the girl

secretly gave Sparky her carrots.

Once Sparky ate the carrots, the nurse came in. Sparky quickly popped her head down, so she wasn't seen.

"Anna! What are you doing by the window with your bowl?"

Sparky finally knew the girl's name. Anna! What a nice name!

Anna had a think before she replied. "Ummm ... I .. errr.. wanted fresh air while I was eating. Yeah, that's it!"

The nurse was confused. "Ummmm. Ok. Time for some medicine," said the nurse cheerfully. "Noooooooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I hate medicine!!!!!" screamed Anna.

Then, Sparky had an idea. She bent over and picked a bunch of flowers out of the garden.

When Anna swallowed the medicine and the nurse was gone, Anna ran to open the window again.

Right there was Sparky holding the flowers in her mouth.

"Oh, thank you!" said Anna.

Sparky was very proud of herself. She had made a new friend!

Anna yawned. "I think it's time for bed now. Goodnight, giraffe," she said.

Sparky gave her a BIG lick with her giant blue tongue. Anna laughed and got into bed.

"I hope to see you again, giraffe," she said.

Sparky turned around and walked back to the zoo.

Soon she fell fast asleep.

The next morning, Sparky got a BIG surprise. The zoo was finally open!!! She was so happy! And then, something better happened.

A small girl came through the giraffe entrance with her mum. And guess who it was? ANNA!!

"Hi, giraffe!!!" she said. "These are for you!"

Anna handed Sparky a big bunch of flowers. Inside the bunch, was a special surprise.

Guess what it was? A CARROT.

Soon it was time for Anna to go. Sparky was sad.

Anna said: "Don't be sad, giraffe. I will come and visit you again soon. Maybe we can go on an adventure together."

Sparky's eyes sparkled. "I wonder what mischief we can get up to together," thought Sparky.

"He he he," Anna chuckled.

Sparky looked at Anna and gave her a big smile.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

The Deep Tunnels

By Lucas Ruan

We were going on a boring trip to a cave.

I met Bob [my best friend] at the basketball court at 8am. We played a game and I won by two points.

We left at 8.30am and arrived at school in 10 minutes.

Ding! There went the school bell.

Mr Mar asked us if we had everything. Soon we were on the bus. When we were at the cave Mr Mar told us to keep near. But Bob and I went into a different cave. We accidentally slid down a path and nearly fell into lava! I had to pull Bob back up. Bob was super heavy! One minute later Grrrr! Shouted a horrible looking thing. We got really frightened. It was actually a monster! The monster had big purple eyes and a big gooey body.

“Roar!!!!!!” shouted the monster.

“AHHHH!!!!” shouted Bob.

“Bob,” I whispered. “Hand me something.”

Bob gave me a bottle of ketchup.

“Perfect!” I said.

I squeezed 10 blobs of ketchup on the monster.

“Grrrrrr!” shouted the monster.

The monster grabbed me.

I got a piece of cake from my backpack and squashed it on the monster’s face. Then the monster took out a sword made out of noodles and I just ate the sword.

I jumped on to the monster’s back. The monster tried to shake me off but I stayed on.

I shouted to Bob to do something!

Bob just said: “2+2=4.”

“I know that already!” I shouted.

“Ok,” said Bob.

“Now do something,” I shouted.

“Fine,” said Bob.

But Bob just cheered for me.

“Go George,” Bob kept on saying.

“Stop Bob!” I shouted.

“Why?” asked Bob.

“Because you’re distracting me,” I said.

“Ok,” Bob said.

“OWWWWW!” shouted the monster after I karate kicked it.

“Yeah baby!” shouted Bob.

“Hyaa!” I shouted as I hit the monster’s tummy.

“OWWWWW!” the monster shouted for the second time.

“Yahoo!” said Bob.

“You need to do something,” I shouted to Bob.

Bob finally did something useful; that was shouting “yoo hoo” to try to distract the monster.

Soon the monster started fighting Bob.

“Your turn to fight the monster,” I joked to Bob.

“AHHHHHHH!” Bob screamed as the monster chased Bob in circles without noticing me.

Finally, Bob stopped shouting.

Bob came to me and pushed me into the fight.

“I’ll give you \$10 if you fight for me,” said Bob.

“Fine!” I said. [I mainly wanted the money.] When I was fighting I just sang Senorita and the monster ran away.

“How did you do that?” asked Bob.

“Just hand me the \$10,” I told Bob.

“I actually don’t have any money,” admitted Bob.

“Then can I call you Bobityfrank for the rest of the week?” I suggested.

“Fine,” said Bob.

“Hi Bobityfrank!” I said.

“Let’s just try get and out of here,” said Bobityfrank.

“Ok,” I said.

“Do you know the way out?” asked Bobityfrank.

“No,” I said.

“Let’s try find a way out,” said Bobityfrank.

A short while later: “Aww man, we’re lost!” said Bobityfrank.

“I don’t think we are lost,” I said, pointing to an old map.

“You don’t seriously think this is a map of this cave, do you?” asked Bobityfrank.

"Yes, I do," I said.

"Then let's try to track down where we are," said Bobityfrank.

"I see where we are," I said.

"Now I understand why there was a monster! The map says there is a dangerous monster here," said Bobityfrank.

"We need to keep on going forward, the map shows," I said.

"Forward it is then," said Bobityfrank.

"Ok," I said.

30 minutes later: "I'm hungry," whinged Bobityfrank.

"Fine, I'll give you some lettuce," I said.

"No thanks," said Bobityfrank.

"Let's go then," I said.

"Fine, I'll eat the lettuce," said Bobityfrank.

"Yuck!" said Bobityfrank as he ate the lettuce.

A short while later: "I see sunlight!" shouted Bobityfrank.

"Yay!" I exclaimed.

"Can you piggy back me there?" asked Bobityfrank.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I'm tired," said Bobityfrank.

"Fine," I said. "How much do you weigh?"

"About 40kg," said Bobityfrank.

"That's really heavy for a nine-year-old," I said.

"I know," said Bobityfrank.

"Can't you just walk there?" I asked Bobityfrank.

"Fine," said Bobityfrank. "Only if I can call you Frankitybob for the rest of the week."

"Fine," I said.

A short while later: "You two have detention for the whole week!" shouted Mr Mar.

"Aw, man!" said Bobityfrank and I at the same time.

The Evil Turkey

By Hamish Rendall

Cuddles and Chocolate the chickens were in the backyard.

Mummy has just put them in the lovely dirt scratching place. Someone had left their pencil case in the lovely dirt patch and they were not tasty at all.

Cuddles and Chocolate were confused so they kicked dirt over them.

They had seen 79 worms and just as they pecked one more, they saw some turkey feet with a crocodile tale go past.

Cuddles and Chocolate were interested to see what it was. They started to run to see.

And then .. DUNDUNDUN!!!! They saw an evil looking turkey-crocodile man.

He had a golden mushroom in his hand. He was saying: "Wahaha! Finally, I have the mushroom jewel. Now what should I do with it?"

"Oh that's right, I can make everyone follow me forever. I will be the ruler of everyone!"

"I just need to put it in the Koo-Koo Lyser!"

Cuddles shouted: "What is the Koo-Koo Lyser?"

"Hey, who is that?" the evil turkey man said.

"It's Cuddles and Chocolate, the chickens!" the chickens said.

"Mmmm, I will eat you Chocolate," the turkey man said.

Cuddles said: "She is not made of Chocolate! She is just a chicken that is named Chocolate."

"I don't care! Back to your question – the Koo-Koo Lyser is a fresh banana that I have in my secret lair. I must return to it so I can take over the world!"

So off he ran with Cuddles and Chocolate following him.

Finally they saw his secret lab – well it wasn't really a secret. It was just a normal turkey mound with a hole in the bottom and lots of banana peels hanging around.

But in front of the mound were half cat-half people guards. The cat people guards started to show their claws.

Chocolate and Cuddles showed their sharp claws.

The cat people said: "Meooooow!"

Chocolate and Cuddles turned around and wiggled their bottoms.

The cat people ran away. "Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh."

Cuddles and Chocolate went inside the turkey mound. It was lovely and warm but a little bit scary.

They saw the evil turkey-crocodile man, he was about to put the golden mushroom on the banana Koo-Koo Lyser.

Cuddles and Chocolate had an idea, so they ran back to their lovely dirt patch, got some pencils and ran back to the turkey mound.

They started banging the turkey with coloured pencils. BANGBANG! The lead pencil finally did the trick when they poked the banana with the sharp end.

The evil turkey-crocodile man said: "Nooooooo! I can't take over the world! My banana! You meddling chickens!"

Cuddles and Chocolate felt very happy and the golden mushroom was delicious.

They waited for their super powers to come but all they did was a ginormous burp!

The Mountain of Everlasting Food

By Annabella Clauson

Once a young ant lived in a colony that had one rule: NEVER enter the danger of the great, wide desert!

This rule is because of the legend of THE ABOMINABLE HUMAN, the gigantic monster who walked on two enormous legs instead of six.

Now, this young ant's name is Geoff. Unfortunately for Geoff, he was one of a very small number of ants who were adventurous. This can be very distressing for an ant who lives in tunnels and hunts for food all day without doing anything exciting or adventurous.

Despite this Geoff had many friends: Molly – a bright ant, Ella – an ant of loyalty, Jill – a beautiful ant who followed all rules, Harry – an ant who loved adventures, Bilbo – who was very smart and Flynn – a fast, fearless ant.

Together they were the B.A.Ts (Brave Ant Team).

Geoff was their leader. They all looked to him for advice. Geoff had heard of the ABOMINABLE HUMAN but he didn't believe in them.

One morning Geoff, the B.A.Ts and some older ants went out to collect food for the colony.

While they were marching Geoff was bored and dreaming of adventure. He looked around. In the distance he spied the great desert and a little further on the everlasting mountain of food; a mountain of green filled with food covered with a lid.

Geoff decided to go to the everlasting mountain of food and search for a way in.

While the older ants are looking for food, Geoff tells the B.A.Ts his plan: "Hey team, pretend you didn't see me go."

The B.A.Ts looked confused.

"Wha-," started Molly.

"Sshhh," hissed Geoff as he disappeared.

The older ants turned around and noticed Geoff missing.

"Where is Geoff?" they asked.

"I dunno, didn't see him go," shrugged the B.A.Ts.

While all this was going on Geoff was tramping through the grass jungle. Suddenly he hears a strange noise behind him. He turns around and sees the rest of the B.A.Ts following him (including Jill who usually followed the rules).

"What are you guys doing?" questioned Geoff.

"We couldn't let you go on an adventure without us!" they protested.

Geoff finally gives in and let them come along.

As the morning wore on, the sky became darker. The air became cooler, and large drops of water began falling from above.

When they reach the desert there were streams across it and the sky was black. They didn't know what to do. They scratched their heads.

Then Ella had an idea. "We can use leaves as boats!" she shouted.

So they each found a leaf, dragged it to a stream crossing the desert, and clambered on.

After a few minutes they heard thunder, but it didn't sound like thunder from the sky. Then the ground started to shake. Again they heard the thunder and the ground shook.

They looked around and saw a monster looming above, walking on two legs, not six.

Then someone screamed: "ABOMINABLE HUMAN, PADDLE!"

So they paddled, and paddled but they couldn't escape the tsunami from the ABOMINABLE HUMAN stomping in their stream.

When they woke up, they were at the bottom of the mountain of everlasting food; a mountain of green that stretches high into the sky.

They felt hopeless but when Geoff started to climb the rest of the B.A.Ts followed. After a few minutes their legs started to hurt but they still pushed on. When they reached the top they collapsed in a heap and lay there for a moment, panting.

When they recovered their breath they found a hole, crawled into the mountain of everlasting food and ate their fill.

When they had finished they looked at each other and said cheekily: "Just wait 'til we tell the others!"

WINNER

The Oldest of Heroes

By Emma Savy

It was 1941, during the Second World War.

In the small village of Saint Poliere, France, there lived a little old lady who called herself Granny Margaret.

Granny Margaret lived a quiet life, and that was just how she liked it.

Now, Granny Margaret was the only person who lived in Saint Poliere, as it was deserted. The place had been blown apart by war, and Granny Margaret had survived it all. She had survived the raids, the bombs, the bonfires. She even lived through the Great Battle of Thunderstorm Point!

There were many rumours about how she had done it. That she was a witch, that she was a spy for Hitler, that she was a goddess, a ghost.

These crazy ideas had spread surprisingly quickly, and of course, none of these tales were even remotely true, but the chief of the nearest Nazi base still sent out two of his soldiers to check her and the village out, though they definitely weren't the smartest of the bunch!

That very day, Granny Margaret was sitting at her dining table filing a report. You see, Granny Margaret was actually a top secret spy working for the Resistance, a group of people intent on taking Nazi Germany and Hitler down.

Her real name was Carmena Road, but we shall continue calling her Granny Margaret. She had been through one too many battles, but she served loyal to her country, and is a figure who represents kindness and courage.

So, Granny Margaret was doing just that when she heard a loud rat-a-tat-tat at her door.

Anyone in Granny Margaret's position would have panicked, but Granny Margaret stayed calm. She nimbly slipped the letter into a hidden compartment in a secret box under a concealed floorboard, and tiptoed into the next room and straightened her old grey wig.

"Open the door or we're coming in!" she heard one of the Nazis yell.

There was a deafening CRASH as the door was ripped off its hinges.

Granny Margaret put on her best granny voice and called: "No need to make a fuss, there's hot tea and cakes for everyone!"

As Granny Margaret's voice echoed through the worn old house, the soldiers frowned, confused. They slowly glanced in the first room then progressed to the next room where Granny Margaret was sitting.

She was up in a flash. As soon as they entered the room, she lunged for them, a

length of rope in one hand.

One of the soldiers took a wild swipe at her with his fist, and in doing so, he knocked off her wig and mask. As their opponent's cascading blonde hair and all-seeing green eyes were revealed, the Nazis were stunned for a second, and that was all the time she needed.

There was a sickening thump as the soldiers hit the hard wooden floor as Granny Margaret swiftly pinned them to the ground, while using her rope to tie their wrists together.

"Now tell me all I need to know," she said in her low, clear, not at all granny-like voice. "Or there will be consequences."

And as these soldiers were not very bright, they told her all she needed to know, and more. They told her plans, dates, times and MUCH more.

Even though Granny Margaret knew Nazis did NOT deserve to live, she had a gentle heart. Plus, she knew that these two soldiers did not have the guts to go back to their chief and tell him the bad news, and even if they did, she would be LONG gone.

So, just before she untied their binds, she scratched a message onto each of the Nazis' chests.

"Long live the Resistance", it said.

And that is the end of this tale.

The Dunny Man

By Luke Lovell

“Grandpa, Grandpa, tell me a story about your childhood.”

I was visiting my grandparents, and Grandpa always told the best stories.

“Here’s a story that will make you laugh. It’s about the Dunny Man!” said Grandpa excitedly.

“Dunny Man? What is a dunny?” I ask inquisitively.

“Well, a dunny is what a toilet was called in the 1950s. Because we lived in the country, we had a small bucket that you do your business in. A Dunny Man is someone who would collect a bucket, that we called the dunny can, and throw the poo into the back of his truck,” answered Grandpa.

Then Grandpa started his unbelievable story of a Christmas when he was nine.

He started the story with his mum saying, “What’s that dreadful smell?!”

“It’s the dunny, mum, it needs emptying,” he answered.

“Then put it out the front, Brian!”

“But it’s Hilton’s turn!”

“No it’s not!” Hilton interrupted, as older brothers think they know best.

“Then whose turn is it?” I bellowed.

“YOURS!” Mum and Hilton shouted together.

Groan. I mumbled under my breath, “Do I have too?”

“YES!!!!” they screamed.

“But it’s Christmas.”

“You still have to do it, Brian,” Mum said.

“Okaaaay,” I muffled.

“You better hurry up. The Dunny Man will come any minute.”

I ran as fast as my short legs could take me.

As I ran I wondered to myself, does the dunny man choose his job, because there is no way I would want to be the person who picks up poo?

“Mum!” I yelled.

“Yes Brian.”

“Have you got a Christmas present for the Dunny Man?”

“Not yet. Rhonda, can you get the Schlitz please?” Mum asked my sister.

“Mum, what’s a Schlitz?” Rhonda asked.

“It’s a beer, Rhonda. Now can you get the beer from the Monitor-Top?”

“Monitor-Top! Why can’t you say fridge like everyone else?”

“Because I want to say Monitor-Top, that’s what it is.”

“Ok, Mum,” Rhonda replied.

I grabbed the beer from Rhonda; with the stinky full dunny can in my other hand and carefully went to put them out the front.

“Mum! I put the dunny can and the beer out the front!” I yelled out.

“Well you’re on time, because the Dunny Man is coming down the street now,” Mum replied.

“Does anyone want to watch the Dunny Man today?” Hilton said.

“Okay,” I answered.

Living in the country with no TV made looking at the Dunny Man entertaining.

“Yes!” all my other four siblings yelled. The Dunny Man arrived. He had ruffled hair, a slick moustache and had a cigar hanging out the side of his mouth (remember, it was the 1950s when this happened and they didn’t know cigars were bad for you).

He looked pretty wobbly. I think he drank too many Christmas beer presents already. He saw our gift and sat down and drank the beer. He then finished the bottle and reached to get the dunny can.

He got up, grabbing the dunny can and started to walk to his truck. As he wobbled up our tricky garden path, he slipped! What happened next made it the funniest Christmas ever!

Because he was carrying the dunny can on his shoulder, slipping over would be the worst thing to happen to you ever.

But it didn’t happen to me, it happened to the Dunny Man so it was hilarious to see that brown sludge ooze all over the poor man. The poor Dunny Man! It was sad for him but terrific to see! He then had to pick up the droppings from the ground, scooping it with his left arm back into the bucket as best he could.

Mum came out of the house and walked over to the Dunny Man and said, “What are you doing?!”

And he replied, “Picking up the poo. I think I had too many beers.”

My siblings and I couldn’t stop laughing at what we just saw.

“That is the best Christmas memory I have! And that’s the story of the Dunny Man!” Grandpa said.

“Thanks Grandpa! That was a great story, a story that I can smell!”

Now whenever I sit on the toilet, I am thankful that we have a flush button.

COVID Cooking

By Olivia Green

Dad came home with sore red eyes, he looked like he had been crying.

We sat down and he told me about losing his job.

I felt sad for him. I wondered what I could do to cheer him up. My tummy gurgled. FOOD! Then, I had an idea. I could bake some cakes, pies or slices and sell them to help out our family.

Mum told me I was entrepreneurial! What a big word. It means something about coming up with cool business ideas.

Mum said I could if I asked the neighbours, so I found a pen and paper and set off to get orders.

With my order book, I went across the road and knocked on Dot's door. Dot is 70 and likes to dress up and drink coffee with her friends.

"Oh, goody gumdrops, let me get my wallet," she said and ordered a mud cake.

Next door Sally and Sue, a fun couple, ordered a shepherd's pie.

Simon has just become a Grandpa, his daughter has a tiny new baby and they ordered some Anzac biscuits to have with cups of tea. The baby started screaming, I think he wants to eat biscuits already.

Lastly an order for a hummingbird cake, from the house with two dogs and a family of four requested a hedgehog slice.

I got my FULL order book and ran back home to get my apron on. I opened the pantry and got out LOTS of ingredients. I could tell that these holidays I was going to be busy as a bee.

On Monday I made mud cake. I delivered it to Dot.

"Marvellous," she said. "I can munch this with my mates."

When Dot cut the cake, mud splattered out onto her table and all over her friend's Gucci shoes. They laughed and laughed and had the best fun they had in years.

Tuesday, I created a tasty shepherd's pie. "Super, this looks scrumptious," said Sally.

When Sally started serving it two shepherds stepped out and started looking for sheep under her table.

"What's going on?" said Sue.

Sally stood there with her mouth open. "This pie is astonishing," she said.

The shepherds decided to stay to dinner.

On Wednesday I baked Anzac biscuits and when Simon crunched into his first one

soldiers appeared and started saluting him.

“Oh, hello,” said Simon. “Is that a real rifle?”

On Thursday it was time to mix the hedgehog slice. It looked amazing, all chocolatey and chewy. This looks delicious and ... when I looked again maybe a little bitspiky?

When delivered, the slices turned into hedgehogs and ran around on the kitchen floor. The kids leaped up on the kitchen bench and jumped up and down super excited.

Then my last baking day on Friday, I made a scrumptious hummingbird cake. It looked heavenly. I was a little worried about what might happen and sure enough as soon as the cake was cut, two bright blue hummingbirds flew out of it. They flew into the air then landed on the heads of the two dogs and started humming a duet. Then they rapped a song. It was such a groovy tune, even the dogs danced.

I left before the end of the rap as I wanted to get home and give my Dad the money I had made this week from baking.

He smiled at me with a smile that reached his ears and brightened his eyes.

My heart grew.

The Mystery at Blackwood Manor

By Caroline Senkbeil

One Saturday evening, sitting by the fire in a cosy armchair, world-famous detective Cordelia May, pondered over the happenings in the Daily News, reading in the front headlines that a famous painting had been stolen at Blackwood Manor: "Breaking news: Famous Painting Stolen, large reward offered for information. Stolen Friday night, 3rd May 2020 at Blackwood Manor. Owned by Sarah and Felix Bridgewater."

"Strange," thought Cordelia, "Blackwood Manor is not far from my house. I'll call on Sarah and Felix in the morning to see if I can be of any assistance in this case."

Feeling sleepy, Cordelia heard the clock in the hall chime 10, so she put down her paper and went to bed.

Next morning, she got up early and drove to Blackwood Manor. At the front door, Felix let her in.

Cordelia asked to see the room where the painting had last been. She took out her magnifying glass and looked closely at the floor, hoping for a footprint in the dust. There was one, with an oddly-shaped imprint on its sole. It was a pattern she recognised, as she owned a similar pair herself. Taking great care, she traced a copy of the footprint.

Next, Cordelia looked around the room for more evidence. She saw a strand of brightly coloured orange hair. She picked it up and placed it in a little box.

She scanned around the room once more, finding a piece of cloth stuck to the picture hook protruding from the wall. Picking up the piece of cloth, Cordelia noticed that it was a pale shade of blue.

Cordelia thanked Felix for letting her have access to the room, and said that she would try her very best to solve this case.

She took the clues home to consider them. Firstly, there was the footprint to tackle. She took out the sketch that she had drawn. Looking at the shoes in her own cupboard, she found a pair with the same patterned sole.

The next thing to examine was the strand of hair. Taking the piece of hair out of the box, Cordelia noticed that her own hair was the same colour and thickness.

Then excitedly, she looked at one of her jumpers and saw that it was made from the same pale blue cloth.

After these exciting discoveries, Cordelia hurried back to Blackwood Manor.

When she arrived with her strange but exciting news, Cordelia confessed to Sarah and Felix that the evidence led her to believe that she was guilty of the crime. She did not know how or why she did it.

Felix suggested that she might have been sleepwalking, which would explain why she remembered nothing of it.

In order to try and locate the painting, they decided to retrace her steps to see if she had accidentally dropped it on the way back to her house.

Felix, Sarah and Cordelia walked out of Blackwood Manor's big wooden front door, going along the gravel drive until they came to the rose garden by the front gate.

There, poking out from amongst a beautiful yellow rosebush, was the precious painting!

Thankfully it was undamaged. They retrieved the painting from the bush and brushed off some fallen petals. The painting was hung back in its place in the Manor.

Very kindly, Felix and Sarah offered Cordelia the reward that had been advertised in the Daily News.

Team Awesome

By **Rafaella Chait**

It was a pleasant Monday morning in Middleton. People were hustling busily along the pathways and cars were driving freely through the streets.

I was walking down an especially quiet alleyway. Then a woman walked past me. This woman was very unusual though. She was dressed in black business clothes with a waterfall of dark red hair flowing down her back. She carried a brown leather wallet and on her shoulder sat a small monkey with silky orange fur.

I stared at the monkey in surprise. It stared back at me and then stuck its little pink tongue out. I stuck my tongue out back. It jumped down from the woman's shoulder and stood in front of me angrily.

The lady turned around and picked up the monkey. "I'm so sorry little girl," she said, stroking the monkey's fur, "little Nell is not usually like this. She's a tamarin, tamarins are meant to be calm, wistful creatures."

She turned around and continued walking, the tamarin glared at me and indignantly threw the lady's wallet down in frustration.

"Excuse me, miss!" I yelled, "You dropped your wallet!"

But it was no use. She had already disappeared into the black end of the alleyway. I was going to run after her until I opened her wallet up to a strange picture.

"Spies Incorporated" it said on the image.

"Spies Incorporated?" I said. "SPIES INCORPORATED!" I yelled.

Spies Incorporated was the number 1 spying agency in all of the world. They had only the most elite spies on their squad.

In a pocket next to the picture was a small gadget that looked like a brooch. I pinned it on my shirt and almost instantly I was wearing a spy uniform.

"Clara Tippet" it said on my nametag.

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "It even knows my name!"

"Clothing enhancement complete," I heard a robot voice say.

I was so excited to try all the other gadgets when I remembered that this wallet didn't belong to me. I had to give it back. I searched every pocket to try and find a clue of who this woman was when a piece of folded white paper fell out on to the ground.

"Jenny Webb" it said. It said nothing about where she lived or where to find her. "Oh, Jenny Webb, where are you?" I said gazing longingly up into the fluffy clouds.

"At 801 Casberry Towers, West Bermuda," my spy watch said.

"West Bermuda?" I replied. "How did she get there so quickly?"

“By a supersonic jet,” my watch remarked.

“Then on a supersonic jet we go!” I shouted proudly.

Suddenly I heard a loud buzzing noise and from the dark end of the alleyway emerged ... “Nothing?” I exclaimed.

I walked up to the darkness when I bumped into something. Then out of nowhere appeared a jet. I was too confused for words so I just proceeded to get inside and sit down.

When I finally found my voice the plane took off.

“WHO’S FLYING THIS THING?” I shrieked.

Then I found a remote on the floor in front of me. “No wonder we are going so fast, the plane is set to hyper speed,” I said chuckling.

I turned it down to sonic speed but before I could take another breath I was at 801 Casberry Towers.

I got out of the jet and stepped inside. I got into the elevator but instead of numbers there were names to resemble the floors. Darcy Pike, Michael Sniper, Jemima Blackhead, Gary Von Toppelpants, Jenny Webb. I clicked the button and up I went.

Then two bodyguards stopped me.

“Business only girly!” the male one said.

“Leave the poor child alone Gerald!” said the female one. “What do you need, sweetie?” said the lady.

“I need to speak to Miss Webb,” I asked politely.

They showed me through a lovely little hallway with gold plaques and marble columns into a nice office.

“Someone’s here to see you, Agent Webb,” the man announced.

“Bring them here,” Jenny replied slowly.

I explained what had happened and after four hours of dramatic speed talking the most amazing thing happened.

“I see,” she said. “Clara,” she whispered. “You came all the way here to helpme?”

“Yes,” I replied grinning.

“How would you like to be my sidekick?” she asked.

“Are you kidding?” I said sarcastically. “YES!”

From then on, Jenny and I have defeated countless villains, peaked through many windows and saved thousands of lives. We are TEAM AWESOME!!!

WINNER

Quake

By Samantha Straw

It's sweltering hot today and my clothes stick to my body. Even our overpriced and heavily advertised cooler can't cut through the heat.

Mum and Dad left the house for an important meeting, so it's just Ellie, myself, the horses and Ratchet our dog.

I haven't seen Ratchet since this morning when he went in search of a cool place and water to paddle in.

I haven't even seen Ellie since she disappeared into the kitchen to watch whatever girl swatch. Probably something boring.

I'm struggling to relax, pulling my hot clothes away from my skin as I continue to read the comic, fighting off the endless barrage of mosquitos. I am swatting off a fly above my head when the ground begins to shake. I massage my temples wondering if the heat has got to me until I hear Ellie shout.

Books begin falling towards the ground. A glass topples off the table smashing. The front door, already ajar, is thrust open as wind tunnels through into the room. Outside I glimpse the horses galloping away.

Ellie races into the room staring at me, her eyes open wide in horror as the ground around us trembles. The already peeling plaster flakes away from the walls in plumes of dust. I stand, my hand holding the couch for support as we stare at each other. The room begins to dim as smoke fills the house and I stumble as the tremors increase.

I hear a crash from the kitchen and smashing glass. Something inside me snaps.

"Get under the table!" I shout, grabbing Ellie and forcing her under.

As I crawl next to her my hand connects with the smashed glass and I wince, pulling it out. Blood skates through the creases across my skin.

The room shakes more and more vigorously and my ears pop as if I'm being smashed by a wave, turned and thrown over and over. Dirt and grit cling to me and I feel Ellie's body rising and falling squished against mine. Around me, a sea of dust flows through the air. The world seems to slow down.

Thoughts come slowly, sluggishly. They come rolling into my brain, lapping at my thoughts, slapping at my terror.

I feel the slow pulse of Ellie's hand in mine, every few seconds she methodically squeezes my fingers. Her head is pressed against the floor, one hand holding mine, the other over her head. My ears ring, and I realize she's been screaming and crying. I squeeze her hand even tighter. It seems like the thing a big brother would do.

As quickly as it began the tremors cease. We stay put listening to the creaking

sagging roof. With one final horrible bone-crunching snap concrete and cement rains down upon the table as if dark furious bombs have fallen on to us.

Ellie whimpers, her eyes shut tight and I tilt my head to see the table sagging under the weight of our roof. I gulp, hoping it will hold, wondering what will happen if it won't, scenarios playing through my mind. The table creaks and Ellie squeezes my hand tighter as the shaking rocks us.

I release Ellie's hand suddenly realizing how tight I'd been gripping it and lower my arm from above my head. I can't hear the wind. I feel as if I've been smashed in the head and thrown underwater. Every sound around us feels silent and diluted. Dust settles, covering us in a tacky layer of plaster and grit.

I look to my side to see cement blocking us on every angle. Grooves and bumps cover the fallen roof where the plaster has peeled away revealing a labyrinth of cobwebs and grit. The table covering us creaks and stretches under the weight of it.

Ellie and I lock eyes and I try to crack a small smile to reassure her. I try not to blink, scared that the slightest movement or weight will bring the delicate pile crashing down upon us. We sit still, I clench my eyes shut and we wait.

That's when I hear voices. Diluted by the ringing in my ears but definitely there, coming towards us, shouting out.

Ellie looks up as we hear their feet clomping over the rubble. We shout and scream and suddenly footsteps are running towards us and we hear grunts as the concrete is pulled away revealing three men.

We crawl out in a daze, the men guiding us through our childhood home, now in ruins. A gaping hole occupies the middle of the roof. Dust plummets down from it. In the kitchen, the TV lays on the ground, wires poking every which way, sending up sparks. Outside the paddocks' fences lay broken on their sides and the house crumbles, sending up small dust clouds.

The men lead us away. We are safe. We are saved.

Up in Flames

By Zoe Karas

I tossed and turned, shoving my doona off my bed. My house seemed to be getting hotter with every minute I stayed awake. Why I had kept reading secretly after lights out, I didn't know, but my insomnia had taken over. I screamed into my pillow, drenched in a pool of sweat. Why was it so hot!

Just as I had almost reached the point to burst into tears, I heard a crackling noise. I may as well just check what it is, I thought, seeing as I was not going to sleep any time soon.

I slipped out of bed, and softly padded down the hallway in my UGG boots. I wandered into the living room, let my eyes adjust to the glare of the TV. Dad was lying limp on the leather couch, with a sheepskin blanket thrown over him. He must of fallen asleep watching the news.

Then, my thoughts turned to the noise, and what was on TV. The news presenter, on a 24 hour special, was speaking in a fast, frantic tone. I saw neon yellow warnings flash up on the screen. My eyes were lethargic, but then they focused.

Middleton, evacuate now. The bushfires were here. The whole of last week had been spent preparing our Middleton property for the raging Australian bushfires. Dad had cut down some of the old gumtrees surrounding the house, so the fires could not spread as easily. And Mum, Eloise and I (Amara) carried bucket loads of water to the house, just in case we got desperate. We did everything we could to protect our vineyards from any danger.

Each night we sat in front of the TV, with baby Ranie, watching praying not to see the words I had just seen, hoping to be safe.

But now, the traumatic fires, that destroyed everything in their path, were here. I stood frozen for a second, brain stopped and muscles stiff. Then I broke into action. I had to save my family.

I ran into the bedrooms, shaking mum awake from her slumber, and telling her the news. She scooped up baby Ranie after she too was woken, and ran out into the kitchen.

Then I woke my younger sister, Eloise.

"ELLY!" I screamed, and forgot about Ranie. Ranie burst into tears, and Mum almost did the same.

"Elly isn't here!" I told Mum. "She must be sleepwalking again!"

My little sister, Eloise, has a habit of sleepwalking, a very bad one. So in the morning, she may be way out in the back shed, or round the front of the house before we found her.

Then I realised her situation. Elly might be outside. Outside, where the fires are.

I ran down the hallway again, the wooden floorboards creaking under my weight. I slid open the glass door, and sprinted in to our colossal backyard. She wasn't there.

So I went further, closer to the scarlet and amber blaze that was inching closer, and closer to the property. I could hear Mum and Dad yelling for me to come back, but I couldn't. The life of my little sister was in my hands, and I had to find her. I just had to.

Now I was in the vineyards, my favourite place in the whole property, and north of the house. Elly had never come this far before. Maybe she was in the ground garden? But I was here now. I had to keep going.

Just then, at that moment when I thought I was going to give up, I found something. A scrap of soft pink cotton. The same shade as Elly's pyjamas.

She must be here! I sped up, and ran, and ran, and ran, thankful for all of those cross country lessons at school. Then I did it. I found her.

"ELLY!" I screamed again, except this time for the better. "Oh Elly!"

She turned to face me, as she had just woken up.

"What's happening Amara?"

I tried to find a quick way to explain it.

"And where are Mummy and Daddy?"

"The bushfires are here Ells. Mum and Dad are back at the house with Ranie. We need to hurry!"

And we really did. I was heating up as the fires came closer and closer to our land. They had probably already burnt the back paddock, which was not that far away from the house.

I could feel more sweat trickle down my back as Elly and I sprinted back to the homestead. Luckily we didn't have to go very far. Once we got to the fence of our large back garden, I saw our shiny new Honda.

Dad shouted from the open car window: "Get in!"

I jumped the fence, and flung open the door to the car. Elly ducked under the wooden posts, and threw herself in. I flung myself past a surprisingly calm Ranie, and Dad revved up the engine.

I looked over at Mum in the passenger seat. Her face was sodden with tears, and when she saw me staring, she said: "You and Elly almost got killed. I almost lost ..." She couldn't continue.

Just as I thought we were on the freeway, I saw a burning tree up ahead, blocking our path. Dad muttered a string of swear words, but then noticed a gap. The fire made it look like we were stuck, but really, there was a small, small space. So Dad went for it.

We squeezed through the tiny gap, the Honda only just getting through. We did it. We were safe. I twisted around in my seat, craning my neck to look out of the window. Then, I heard a pop. Then, louder crackling. The tree had just fallen to the ground. My eyes gazed over our burning house, chimney shaking and slowly crumbling.

At least I had what mattered. My family.

A Book and Its Pages

By Callan Peterson

Dr Edward Bartley stared down at the vial of clear fluid in his hand. He had never heard of something so bizarre in his life.

It looked innocent enough, just a clear glass tube of slightly opaque liquid. It didn't bubble, didn't froth and didn't even give the slightest impression of being anything other than slightly thickened water.

Carefully, a little sullenly, he gave the vial an experimental shake. Nothing happened.

Putting it down for the moment onto a small wooden bench, Dr Bartley heaved himself from his chair and looked at his assistant. He waved his hand irritably in the general direction of the nondescript glass cylinder.

"Well? What else does it do?"

The other man, Alistair, shrugged amiably, engrossed in his work at the other end of the room.

Bookcases lined the walls, novels and textbooks shoved haphazardly against one another, and the thin man continued his herculean efforts to cram another encyclopaedia between "The Big Book of Bioluminescence" and "Extensive Essays on Early Artistry", both true to their names in size.

Straightening, he turned to face Bartley, sweat dripping in a persistent stream off his nose.

"I've told you Ed, that little ointment you have there can let you travel into pictures. I can't put it more simply than that; that's all it does."

Alistair sighed, slumping down into the armchair that was adrift between stacks of cabinets, filing drawers and loose papers like a ship adrift at sea.

"If you continue shaking it like that the best thing that can happen is the glass will break. Vials like that one cost an awful lot, you know, and that one little bit of ointment has cost us dearly in time and money."

Alistair sipped experimentally at a congealing mug of coffee on the table, sneezed, and closed his eyes, possibly deep in thought.

Dr Bartley had to admit it was true. Ever since they had hit upon the concept of inter-image travel, their every waking hour had been fixated upon the next problem, the next step to overcome in their quest for fame and not quite so many mortgages on the house they lived in.

Alistair and Dr Bartley combined had long ago run short of the fingers necessary to tally the number of faults, leaks, and cracks in their residence.

Alistair, by way of contribution, insisted the sagging of the ceiling would never have started if Dr Bartley ever did any exercise.

“This house is only built for two,” he would repeat, glancing meaningfully at the overstretched buttons on Bartley’s shirt.

The whole project often seemed insane, even to Bartley himself. He picked up the vial again, staring hard into its depths as though hoping it would shoot sparks or display a message, but nothing was forthcoming. If only he had some way of knowing whether it really worked or not.

Bartley stroked his beard in concentration, then after a few seconds of observing the empty space in front of him, jerked up straight in his chair, yanking out a generous proportion official hair in the process. Of course! Kneading his watering eyes and dropping the extracted hair into the overflowing bin next to his own armchair, Bartley began to think hard.

Alistair was snoring on the lounge at the other end of the room – he had been asleep for some minutes now, no doubt about that.

He just hadn’t been thinking in the right way. It didn’t have to be the Mona Lisa he used the ointment upon, any image would do. A picture from a computer, an illustration, a book ...

Getting up quietly from his chair, Dr Bartley moved with a stealth not many would have thought possible with his prodigious bulk. He crept across the carpeted floor with the vial clenched tightly in his hand. Across the floor, past a cabinet; all went well until the carpet.

His foot slipped on one of the many loose floorboards, and he fell, eyes wide, mouth closed to not make a single squeak. The vial rolled underneath the table, and so did Bartley, arm reaching for the glass as it stopped just within reach.

Returning to his feet, he turned once more towards his goal; the towering bookshelf. He seized a book randomly from one shelf, flicked it open without so much as glancing at the page and tapped out a drop of the fluid onto the image there.

Nothing happened for a moment. Then, Dr Bartley found himself standing on a staircase, holding the vial and the book. He glanced at the paper again on impulse, and saw the stacks of cabinets, computers and shelves that was his study. And there, frozen in time was Alistair, mouth open in a snore.

Bartley turned, and, for the first time looked at his surroundings. The same spiral staircase curved around, and somehow connected round the rear, like some sort of optical illusion.

Interested, he looked back at the book he held and turned to the next image in the text. An elephant with disconnected legs ... a bridge that corkscrewed into infinity ... finally, he looked at the cover: “Escher’s Extremely Ingenious Engineering”. Now he had context, the dimension he stood in made sense.

He only noticed the vial slip from his fingers when it hit the platform; a soft thud, and it began to roll, bouncing merrily away downwards. He stared, uncomprehending, at it until realisation finally dawned – his only way out of this place was now getting further and further away from him.

He dropped the book, tried to move down after it, but slipped, and Bartley and vial alike went bouncing down the never-ending staircase, all the time getting further and further away from the last image of the world they had left behind, in the book that was still lying on the stairs.

The Singing Bridge

By Francesca Goulding

"I've only heard the bridge sing once," Charles said with a glimmer of excitement, every word rolling off his tongue.

The bridge was old, its green paint flaking and the sticky sea water coating the grey metal. Everyone in the old town took pride in the bridge, as though it united the people as one.

"The sound was so light and delicate, that I could hardly hear it. But it was there," he continued.

The other children around him looked at him in complete awe. All kids in the local area formed a club where they would meet once a week. It was called The Young People. Their club space was limited to Charles' parents' shed. It was turning brown with rust, but it supported them well enough, so it would have to do.

How does this have to do with the story? Well, read on and see.

It was a Thursday afternoon, the air was balmy and the club were meeting for an annual meeting. The kids were waiting around, watching kookaburras flying into the distance.

"Attention!" Charles called.

The children turned around and saw Charles staring at them.

"What are we going to discuss today?" Alice asked.

Alice was the mayor's daughter and always looked bored.

"The bridge," he said slowly.

Everyone looked eagerly towards Charles. They knew that the bridge was peculiar, strange. It had been where the mayor's wife was murdered. It had been where Tom, their headmaster, had started acting shifty and strange. Rumour had it that the bridge held some kind of curse, that if you had heard it sing, you were doomed. You didn't know when it would hit you. You didn't know why. But if you were one of the people that had heard it use its voice, then it had chosen you.

The adults didn't believe in what they had nicknamed silly nonsense but The Young People knew that this curse was real. They avoided walking on the bridge, even though they would have to take the long way round to school.

"We're going to find what this magic curse is on the bridge. Does it have a secret? We will never know if we don't try," Charles stumbled.

Alice had a look of worry on her face. Henry gasped in shock. But they all knew that they had to try. They agreed to start tomorrow.

With worry, they walked in the direction of the bridge. They arrived shortly after and quickly realised, what were they going to investigate? There was nothing interesting

to look at. Only the crashing waves and the trees reaching up to the sky.

Charles turned behind himself, only to see a little boy, the tiniest in their group. They had never noticed him before, and Charles didn't think much of it. People join their club all the time, maybe he had slipped in when nobody was watching.

"Okay, um, everyone split into groups. Why not groups of three?" Charles said, trying to start up their investigation.

Alice, while muttering under her breath and counting on her fingers said, "No, that wouldn't be even. There are eight people here. Two groups of four."

Charles rolled his eyes. This was so typical of Alice. He ignored her and got back to searching for any signs.

Meanwhile, the little boy behind Charles tapped him on the shoulder.

"I think I've found something," he said.

Charles turned around and saw the little boy holding a dark green button, which had been camouflaging in the bush. Charles examined it quickly.

"Maybe it does something," he murmured.

WHOOSH! The area had changed. The scenery was the same, but Charles had felt the change. The air seemed more fresh, and the sky more blue. The sea was cleaner, and sea life was bouncing around in the ocean playfully.

Everyone had vanished, all except the little boy, who was still standing behind Charles. He looked excited, as if he'd returned home after a long trip.

There was an old newspaper flapping about in the wind. Charles caught it and read the date carefully, making sure that he wasn't dreaming. "18th February 1907", the newspaper read.

He turned the page, curious if there was more.

Written in clear letters, the writing read "Move!"

"Huh?" Charles mumbled, looking all around.

A man and a woman crept onto the bridge. Charles and the boy ran behind a bush, listening intently.

"Chuck it!" the man said, ushering the woman forcefully.

"No! I can't! It's our son!" she said desperately.

"That monster is not our son! He is an angry spirit who is a danger to our town! We need to get rid of him!"

Charles looked at what the woman was holding. A black vase, quickly painted with the word William.

The woman looked reluctant, but the man looked shaken with fear. She took one final look at the vase she was holding and threw it to the water. The vase crashed and sank to the bottom of the ocean.

WHOOSH! Charles had returned, as if no one noticed he was ever gone, but the boy was no longer there. Charles didn't think much of it, but he knew that the boy had to go.

“Okay, we can finish up for the day! Everyone lets go. You guys can start, I’ll be there in a second,” he called out.

Everybody began to march back to the clubhouse, proud of their courage.

He crept up to the bridge slowly and said, “Bye William, I know your secret.”

He looked down into the waves. Usually crashing, they had stopped. The bridge seemed almost calm, unlike the restless place that it had always been.

He caught up with the rest of his club. When he had arrived home, his mum came up to him.

“Where have you been, Charles, we’ve been looking for you,” his mother said sternly.

“Nowhere,” he said softly, remembering the painted vase and the little boy. “Just out.”

And he smiled.

Copycat

By Zaphiya Irvine-Wieland

The poster flapped in the wind, its surface tainted yellow and its edges ragged and torn. I watched as it tore away from the pin and flew away into the gusty day.

I looked around, then looked back at my phone. Phones had evolved since the old days. Now they were holograms that popped out of the phone.

I scrolled through, looking at pictures of my vacation to New York. It was a wonderful place, giant billboards, a zoo, and robot animals.

Maybe robot animals weren't the best thing, I thought as I scrolled through to the almost seamless picture of me with a robot giraffe. It was painted perfectly, with behaviour that had no jolting movements, and if I could compare the two, I would struggle to recognise which was real. I was looking happy, a cheesy grin spread across my face. The robot giraffe had bent its head over the fence and was halfway through licking me. I remember the feeling – it felt warm and slimy, like a real one.

I shivered; what about that robot rhino? I mean, rhinos were extinct, but what if they let them out in the wild?

I shook the thought away, getting up from the bench. I started down the street and saw something I probably shouldn't have. I froze, looking the figure up and down. It was dark and shadowy, a blank expression on its face. I grimaced as I saw its curling, twisting teeth, and took a step back. It took a step forward as I stepped back.

My foot slipped on a rock, and I fell. Sharp pain stabbed my back, and I winced. The shadowy figure knelt. A strange whispery hiss seemed to echo around it. I scrambled to my feet as I fast as I could.

The pain still throbbed in my back. Taking another step back, the shadowy figure took two. I opened my mouth, hands shaking. I tried to look brave.

“W-who are you?” I asked it, trying to keep my tone strong, but it obviously sensed my fear.

The whispery hisses were replaced by a high-pitched voice.

“W-who are you?” it retorted.

“I am ...” my voice trailed away.

“I am,” it hissed.

Copycat, I thought. There had been reports of these strange creatures that apparently were harmless. I didn't trust the news reporters. What if it attacked me? My mind raced. A memory of the wanted poster came back to me before it had vanished.

I had taken in its details: it was old, ragged and had a reward. The figure on the poster had holes in it, but I remembered that the face fitted the one staring at me now.

I glanced around to see a place where I could run. I was on a sidewalk, and cars –

unlike the ones in the old days, they had rockets that replaced the wheels – were parked on random spots of the speedway. (Well, roads were what we used to call them, but now they are neon speedways).

There was a park across the road, a dusty path leading up past the oaks and maples before vanishing behind a layer of grass where the park was.

Ahead of me was a store that was closed, and past that I could not see, for the shadowy figure stared at me.

I dared myself to take my eyes off the figure for a moment and looked back. I saw the bench and the wide alleyway behind it, the electricity pylon with the pin on it where the poster used to be.

I made up my mind and ran in between two cars, darting over the bridge on the speedway and heard whispers growing louder and louder behind me. I ran into the park, starting to pant. I heard panting behind me, too, but knew it was copying me.

“Go away!” I shouted angrily to the figure. I stopped and stared at it as it slowed.

“Go away!” it screeched.

“I am human,” I growled, remembering that the copycats from the news report only told the truth, so you could trick them, and they would disperse into tiny pieces. The creature seemed to know my tricks, however.

“I am copycat,” it screeched.

“You did not copy me then.”

“You-you did not copy me then.”

“You stuttered,” I told it, grinning.

“You stuttered,” it said, then froze, realising its mistake, and it dispersed into dozens of shadowy sprites that fled the park and spiralled upwards. I followed their gaze but couldn’t look any longer as the sun’s penetrating glare hit my eyes.

Letting out a sigh of relief, I soon realised I would miss the train if I dawdled any longer. Walking back across the path and to the old bench, I followed the path up past the shops and houses.

I wondered what it would be like once I got to the city. It would probably be brighter and louder, I told myself, jolting down the stairs to the train station. I saw the plasma train and the robotic voice: “Please make your way to the train,” it repeated.

I trotted over to the plasma train and it felt like the Tardis as I entered. It was a large room with soft, red lounge chairs and large 3D TVs. Selecting a seat and putting on my seatbelt, I leaned back, hearing the engine whir louder and louder. Then there was an ear-splitting bang, and although I felt nothing, looking outside I saw everything blurred and fly past.

Smiling, I knew I was on my way to the city. Away from the copycats, and away from the small town.

WINNER

My Aleksy

By Amaeh Reed

The soft snow settled upon the wooden window pane. The day was grey, bleak, the winter wind sweeping through the white elm trees that lay just beyond the ghetto walls. The winter stalked us like wolves, hunting their prey. There was no escape.

My mind wandered back to my beautiful town of Zelazowa Wola, to happier times. There during the long, warm summers, we would play on the banks of the Utrata River, under the shady willows, swimming and laughing. On other days, we would follow the winding streams, through grassy meadows blooming with buttercups and orchards laden with golden pears.

Each Passover mother would prepare charoset with apples, walnuts and spices. The charoset represented the mortar used for brickmaking when we were slaves in Egypt. Now, we were slaves again.

My reverie was shattered by a pounding at the door. My heart sank to my stomach – the sour taste of fear arose in the back of my throat. A sense of foreboding crashed around me like thundering waves, drowning me in a sea of despair. One hour past curfew – it could only be Nazi soldiers. Finally, they had come for me.

The pounding came again, louder, more ferocious. I shuffled to the door and heaved it open. And there he stood. Aleksy.

I had known Aleksy my whole life. He was in my year at school – a promising pianist, which was fitting, as Zelazowa was the birthplace of Frederic Chopin. My friends and I would lay on the soft grass, under twinkling stars, and be transported by the beauty, the musical majesty, of Aleksy performing beautiful etudes. But I had not seen Aleksy since Zelazowa was liquidated. So, what was he doing here, at my door?

I hauled him inside, horrified.

“What are you doing?” I whispered.

Aleksy looked at me with his deep blue eyes – eyes like pools of mystical water. He was shivering from the wild winds, wearing a weak woollen shirt, his trousers a hundred times patched.

“I wanted to give you these,” he breathed.

He pulled three shrivelled apples from his pocket. I looked in disbelief.

“They’ll kill you if they find out,” I whispered.

He smiled a shy smile, “Nie przeszkadza,” he said, “Never you mind,” as he slipped out the door and into the gathering night.

Each day I was locked in a battle of survival in the Hell that was the Lodz ghetto. Starvation stalked every man, woman and child. The Nazis cut off the water, sewerage

and electricity. Every day thousands of people died around me – those I knew, and those I did not. And now the freezing Polish Winter was coming, dragging his icy tendrils across the bitter landscape. Arm in arm with his brother of a thousand sorrows, Death.

Moonbeams flooded through the window, snowflakes drifted from the dark heavens, delicate as breath. The ghetto wall loomed above me, monstrous, ghastly, sinister in the darkness. Then I saw it – the slightest movement. I looked closer. Were my eyes deceiving me? There on his knees, digging through the freezing snow, was Aleksy.

Quietly, so quietly, quieter than summer blossoms drifting to the soft earth, Aleksy meticulously removed a bulky brick from the ghetto wall. I could feel my heart hammering in my chest, a bead of cold sweat trickled from my brow as Aleksy silently crawled through the crevice, pulling the bricks carefully into place behind him. Was Aleksy running away? Were there people on the outside who would help him, smuggle him into the forests, far away from this place? I didn't know why I cared so much. But I did.

Slowly days turned to months, and each night I stood as the silent witness to Aleksy's escape and re-entry into the bitter ghetto. His eyes would twinkle when he slipped me the food that kept me alive, a few small onions, a portion of stale bread, a handful of barley.

"Be careful," I would whisper.

"Nie martw si o mnie," he would reply. "Dont worry about me."

One morning, from my lonely place at the window, I looked from the distant tossing trees, down into the street. There were few people about, some begging, others huddled around braziers of small wood fires. And then I saw them – four NAZI guards with Sturmgewehr 45s slung over their shoulders, between them dragging a struggling boy.

I staggered outside. The freezing snow stabbed at my body. Numb with fear, I stared at Aleksy, standing against the grey wall. He looked at the ground – shivering, fresh bruises on his face. A mere boy.

I held my breath. I wanted to scream. To shout. To pause time, to rescue him. I wanted to tell him that he was good and brave and strong and that I loved him. The icy wind blew, as Death passed by, filling all time and space with grief and loss and indescribable pain. People turned away, bent their heads, went on with their business. I closed my eyes and wished that they would shoot me too.

All this was a long time ago, I remember. But still today, as I watch my grandchildren play in the park, squealing and shrieking with joy as they romp through piles of autumn leaves, the sun sinking in the orange sky, the ghosts of the Lodz ghetto walk with me still.

And my mind wanders back through time and space and dreams, to cloudless days and meadows of buttercups, to charoet and Chopin. Back to the Lodz ghetto, where Aleksy, the blue-eyed boy, the pianist with his shy smile, the boy I loved, calls to me still, "Nie martw si o mnie. Dont worry about me."

Our Backyard

By Hajar Hussaini

In our house in Australia we have a small backyard. About two months ago, there was concrete under my feet and a pear tree, but we removed them and put down some fake grass. Around the yard there is a little area where my mum planted vegetables like celery, leek, turnip and parsnip. The vegetables looked like my childhood garden in my country.

One day when I was eating an apple, I saw an apple seed that had sprouted. I planted the seed beside the vegetables in our new garden.

Sometimes my brothers and I play volleyball in the backyard. We made a volleyball net with a long rope and tied that between fences. Of course, often our ball goes into our neighbour's yard or the other side of our house. Our neighbours are good people, they throw our ball back so that we can continue our games. I think they are not new to Australia, they have been here for a long time. One of our neighbours has little children and the other has a dog.

On the other side of our house is a busy street. Our ball doesn't go into the street because between our yard and the street there are a lot of trees and branches. When our ball goes there, it usually gets stuck on some branches. We go out of the yard and there is a fence that has broken, so we can go from there to take our ball. The broken fence makes our way closer to the big street.

We have a small garden here, but in my childhood, in a small village in Afghanistan named Shamqully, my family and I had a large garden. In our garden we had about 40 fruit trees: apple, berry, apricot trees, peach trees. We also had some fruitless trees. Under my feet was always real grass and often yellow flowers grew up.

Beside the garden was a little river, which my grandfather used to irrigate the grass and the trees. Sometimes I went in it and wet my feet.

In our garden in Shamqully, everyone from my home chose a special tree. I chose an apple tree because it was easy to climb and had big apples, I always climbed on the trees and tried to go up, and then shook the branches to release the apples.

My grandfather made a swing between the trees for my friends and I. We always played there and if some trees were hard to climb, we put stones under our feet and climbed anyway.

At any time our garden looked beautiful and had fresh air.

In the autumn all the leaves changed from green to yellow, after a few weeks the leaves fell down and we collected them.

In the winter in our village there was a lot of snow. Snow covered all the ground and the branches, everywhere looked white, even the trees.

In the spring there was even more beauty, in every branch was flowers. Every kind of fruit tree had different flowers with different colours, and after a few weeks the flowers changed to fruits.

In summer, everywhere was green and the fruits became bigger. When I looked at the sky from our garden it looked beautiful, it looked as if the sky was in the middle of the trees.

I like to have a garden in Australia too, even though the grass is not real. I'm happy to plant an apple seed here. After a few years, it will be a big apple tree. I hope I will be able to climb it.

Thursday

By Edana Harvey

Until she saw the thing in the mirror, Mrs Simmons was having a perfectly normal Thursday.

It had started, as Thursdays usually do, with an ache in her joints and a stuffy nose. She'd risen from her nice warm bed, braved the chilly bite of a winter morning in Brisbane (though her cousins in Sydney would say it was practically summer), and done her stretches.

After that, Mrs Simmons had dug out her slightly stale muesli and sat down at her dining room table just as the golden caress of the sun hit her seat. If Robert was here, he'd have told her to get some new muesli, but he wasn't, and Mrs Simmons preferred it stale anyway.

Shortly after the final raisins had been chewed with great care, the newspaper had been dropped at her door and she read the day's articles. As usual, it was a lot of gossip mixed in with the minor achievements of some silly little student, sports, and some political mumbo jumbo. Nothing interesting, as was to be expected.

Then Martha From Next Door (Mrs Simmons had never bothered to learn her last name) had called around for a cup of tea. Later, she found out that Martha had taken the sugar with her. To get it back, Mrs Simmons had to threaten to tell Patrick O'Boyle, who lived across the road, that it was Martha who'd taken his dead wife's hat.

The rest of the day had passed in much the same fashion. Crossword until lunch, which was leftover soup from last Saturday, then a travel into town for her weekly Elderly Citizens meeting (during which she fell asleep and was embarrassingly called out on it), another cup of tea, this time with the lovely young Jenny Parks from the other next door, and finally dinner.

All in all, Mrs Simmons thought, the day had been alright, for a Thursday.

She got up the stairs, pausing halfway up and regretting buying her great-grandson a miniature motorcycle and her great-granddaughter a very large dollhouse instead of a stair-lift, and read the latest thriller novel her daughter-in-law had thrust at her.

At about 8 o'clock she tired of the author's bad writing and had a bath. The water was warm, and she felt sleepy just lying there, but decided that her nap at the Elderly Citizens meeting had been quite enough sleeping for the day.

Eventually, Mrs Simmons got out, changed into her brand new, bright purple flannelette pyjamas with the words Owl right! plastered all over it (yet another gift from her daughter-in-law), and went to brush her teeth.

This was about the time when she saw the thing in the mirror. It wasn't human, that much was very clear. It was black all over and carried a nasty-looking sword straight out of those pirate cartoons her great-grandson with the motorcycle was so fond of. It stood somewhere outside the door, though Mrs Simmons, feeling very much like the paranoid people in the thriller novels given to her by her daughter-in-law, couldn't see

anything, even when she craned her head around the corner. It was, of course, she told herself, just a shadow. Just her mind playing tricks on her.

But when she looked back at the mirror, it was still there.

By this point, Mrs Simmons was beginning to get annoyed. As you can probably tell, she was not the type of person to get particularly frightened of anything. Except perhaps butterflies. But that was a perfectly reasonable fear, what with their horrific flapping wings and the terrifying eye patterns you could see when they spread their aforementioned wings out (Robert had always said that those were moths, but there wasn't really any difference anyway).

But this mirror-thing, which was certainly not just a shadow, because Mrs Simmons had checked and there were no shadows near where it stood in the mirror, was downright aggravating. Some people might have shuddered to think of it watching them in the bath, but Mrs Simmons wasn't a huge believer in privacy, having grown up with four brothers.

Others still might have wondered if they were going mad, but Mrs Simmons was perfectly aware that she was quite sane unless, of course, believing that you were sane was a part of being mad, in which case there was no way to tell, really.

But Mrs Simmons liked to know why, and she wasn't getting any answers. So, behaving like a madwoman, she spoke to the mirror-thing.

"What are you?" she demanded.

It didn't answer.

Mrs Simmons felt like someone in a movie, because they always did stupid things like this and never got scared of things that should have been scary. So, trying to ignore the fact that this too was a movie-star thing, she asked again.

The mirror-thing blurred and just like that it was face-to-face with her, taking up the whole mirror and obscuring her own reflection.

As she watched, it transformed, black shadowy form twisting and stretching, into a face. Her face. But not as she knew it. It was young, and beautiful, and healthy, and didn't look like it had ever felt the pain of sore knees. It was the face Robert had fallen in love with, 74 years ago, when the soldiers had come home from the war, beaten-up but alive.

Her vision blurred, and she could taste salt. Mrs Simmons couldn't remember the last time she'd cried. She reached out a hand, a gnarled, trembling hand, and touched it.

The world sharpened and she could still see her face, but she felt alive and healthy, staring back at a wrinkled, tearstained face, eyes full of wisdom and heartbreak and the knowledge that comes with being 97.

Then all that knowledge and heartbreak and wisdom stilled and toppled back onto the floor, fading away with the breaths of Mrs Simmons, the oldest person at the Elderly Citizens meetings and the woman who gave her great-grandchildren the most wonderful of toys instead of buying a stair-lift.

Robbery Gone Wrong

By Cormac Trousdale

When Bill had agreed to rob a train with Barnabas Bronson and his gang, he had imagined a glamorous image of him and the other cowboys charging towards a railway station on black stallions, then storming aboard the carriage with the sole intention of robbing it. He had imagined riding off into the sunset, his riches strapped to his horse, belt, and boots. It had been a glorious and almost beautiful vision.

What Bill hadn't expected was to be waiting by the railway track for hours with 16 other men, waiting for a train to rob, shivering in the freezing downpour. He hadn't expected the intense boredom of standing in the same spot, as droplets of icy water sliced into his coat. He hadn't expected to be wishing that he brought about three extra layers. And he certainly hadn't expected any of the other chaotic events that would take place that night.

Just next to Bill, Mr Barnabas unloaded his rifle for the sixteenth time that hour. Bill figured that he was doing it to keep himself busy, which was understandable. He himself had found himself fidgeting with his buttons three or four times.

"Goddamn rain," muttered Mr Barnabas. "Doesn't rain when our crops are drying up, but on the night we decide to rob a train it pours down, as if God's spitting on us."

"Maybe he is," replied Bill. "What we're doing isn't exactly the work of Saint Peter, sir."

"Shut your trap. If God didn't want us to go to lengths such as these, he would have placed this downpour a little earlier in the year."

"So why's he drenching us now, sir?"

"Again, shut your trap."

Bill looked down the track. He still couldn't see the light of the train, but he could see that the other gang members were getting impatient. Two were sitting down, and the other fourteen were kicking stones about the track and pacing. But Bill couldn't blame them. He had considered simply going home on numerous occasions in the past few hours, as the rain seemed to only be getting more violent, and time only going slower.

Someone shouted for Mr Barnabas, and he sharply turned his head. He first looked for who had shouted his name, but stopped caring once he realised why it had been shouted. In the distant mist, the light of a train was starting to emerge from the dense fog.

The gang grinned and pulled their hoods over their heads. All the torture of waiting in the vicious rain, being water-boarded by the horrendous downpour, the boredom of staring down the endless railway track, it was about to pay off.

Bill imagined the enormous mansion he would buy after they had robbed this train, the massive farm down south, the crops so high that God would have to look up to see them.

Meanwhile, outside of Bill's majestic fantasy, the men drew their rifles and revolvers and waited for the train.

Bill shivered in the damp cold of the cave, glaring across at Barnabas, who was lying in the corner clutching his bandaged left hip. Barnabas groaned in pain as he applied pressure to his wound, using his hood as a makeshift bandage.

The robbery had gone horribly wrong. They had charged onto the train in a terrifying and chaotic rage as planned, but that really was the only thing that had gone well.

They had smelt awful due to their damp coats, not to mention their nervous sweating. People, including some gang members, had been throwing up from the putrid smell, which only made it worse.

But that was far from the worst part. After they had cleared the first carriage of jewelry, they straggled onto the next, expecting just as many diamonds and coins. They expected it to be easier, considering the swiftness they had robbed the first carriage with.

What they hadn't expected, however, was to hear the crack of a gunshot and to see Toothless Tim collapse in the doorway of the carriage. They had stood there in shock for a few moments, staring goggle eyed at poor Tim, before seventeen lawmen had charged out, slashing with their sabres and shooting with their guns.

Bill and Barnabas had leaped from the carriage with three others. Bill didn't know what had happened to the others, but from the vicious amount of gunfire he had heard, it couldn't have ended well.

And then Barnabas had been shot. Bill didn't know how they had aimed so well through the howling wind and the fog that was thick as a wall, but they had hit him right in the lower back. A little higher and there wouldn't have even been any point in Bill dragging him through the muddy forest. But he had. It had been 30 minutes of Barnabas cursing and shouting at nobody in particular. Bill had been forced to knock him out in order to shut him up. And now they were hiding in a damp, miserable cave, the only light being that of a weak fire that Bill had crafted for warmth.

This hadn't been the glamorous Jesse James style robbery Bill had imagined. But something had stuck with Bill. Something one of the Rangers had shouted at Barnabas as they had straggled through the long, wet grass.

"You can't go anywhere, Barny! There's over \$800 on your ugly head!"

Bill had been thinking hard about this. It was pretty clear that they weren't getting out of the forest without being caught, there was little to no chance.

As for Barnabas there wasn't even much chance of him living through the night! If Bill handed in the body of Barnabas, he could take a lot of years of his sentence maybe even get the reward. And for Barnabas, he'd want a quick death, wouldn't he? He wouldn't want to be lying on the ground for hours on end? Surely it would be the right thing to do?

The Last Photo

By Mia Hynes

Robert was sitting on his porch, alone. In isolation, no one had come to see him, and he had not gone outside at all. He had received a few phone calls here and there, but everyone knew that phone calls were not the same as being able to see your family in person.

After almost three months of isolation, Robert had been very down hearted and lonely. The whole house was gloomy, like a prison to poor Robert. For 93 years Robert had always been an extrovert, he loved all his family and friends, but this was a very different feeling to those 93 years. He had always been out to see friends and family, but now he couldn't go out at all.

In just two months his home had gone from being a cosy place, to being a jail, that Robert was feeling trapped in.

Robert went up to the attic and retrieved his beloved photo book. It had 93 years of photos, all so important to him. He struggled out of his chair and up the stairs. He sighed as he heaved himself out of the backyard seat. Everything was getting harder for him.

As he came back out to the garden and sat down on his comfy seat he smiled to himself as he saw a rainbow over his house. The sun was shining down. He opened the book, to him it was a world of laughter, happiness, sadness and he loved all of it.

The first page was his very first few photos, they were in black and white and hard to see, but that made no difference to him. There was one of him, smiling and laughing as a baby. He had heard his parents tell him so many stories about when he was young.

A few pages after, were photos of him standing outside the huge school that he had once attended as a young boy. Robert had a huge smile on his face and was always so eager to get into class and the playground. Robert remembered how much he loved school! There were photos of him dressed up and with his friends. Photos of Robert with his results over the years which he worked so hard for and was truly proud of.

After all his school photos, was a photo of Robert's first day at his job. He was a doctor. He had saved so many people's lives, every day he made a real difference. Like school, Robert was always excited to get to work. He felt proud to have saved those people's lives.

His next page of photos was full of his wedding day photos. It was the most special day of his life. He loved his wife, Rose. He looked through all the beautiful photos of his wedding, loving seeing Rose smiling and so full of life.

A tear slowly ran down his left cheek. His heart beating harder and harder as each photo took him back to a time he now craved.

The next photos were all of his children. He had three children, he loved them so much, now they had grown up, but that didn't change the amount of love he had for

them. There were photos of when Robert took them all to the playground, went out for lunch, showed affection and simply just loved life.

Robert wanted for the isolation to end so he could visit them once again. They had always spent every second together.

Robert continued to turn the pages. The next photos were certainly ones Robert was so proud of. There were more of his children, but this time with other people. They were his children's partners. And after were photos of the children that Robert could call his grandchildren. Robert loved his grandchildren, just as much as his own children, because they all reminded him of his young children. Robert was so excited to see them all again and give them a huge hug. He hoped to himself he would one day see them all again. Just one last time!

The next photos, Robert always found hard to look at. They were photos of his beloved wife Rose, some of her last photos. She had fallen very ill and died from cancer. Robert loved her more than anything, anyone. She was always the one who made him feel alive! His rock in any hard times! Rose always brought the sunshine to his every day! Without her next to him there was always something missing. He still did love her more than anything, even though he couldn't talk to her. He missed her with all his heart.

Then, the last photo of his photo book. He slid the photo out of the book and held it in his hands. It was a family photo, with his wife, children and partners and his grandchildren. It might have been his favourite photo, everyone together. They all looked so happy, and they were Robert's family, the people Robert cared about most. He looked at this photo for a very long time until eventually, the photo slowly fell to the ground.