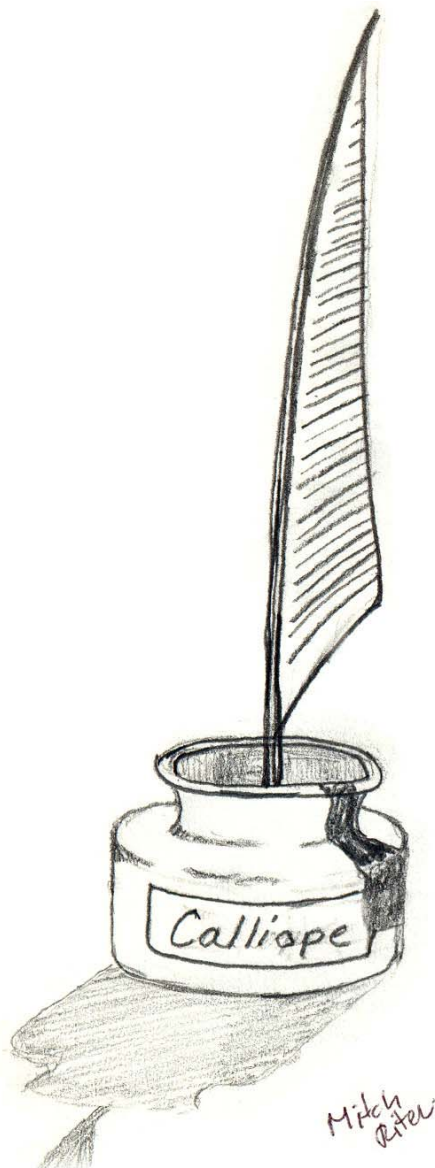


CALLIOPE



NICHOLS MIDDLE SCHOOL
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Edited by Michele Speach and Lisa LaMarca

Mystery poem

I have no voice
But speak for others.
I start careers
And create authors.

Sometimes I can make a sound
That often seems incessant,
But mostly I am silent,
And the room is thus quiescent.

I've been alive
For many a century,
In a manor house,
Or a penitentiary.

I can be
Many sizes, colors, and shapes.
When I am at work,
Not one word escapes.

I've started wars
And often ended them.
And to most of these problems,
I've been the stem.

I'm used daily,
By many a person.
My sweet tone can soothe,
Or sometimes worsen.

So many years I've worked,
They've seemed to all fly by
This last line is the giveaway
Because mightier than the sword am I.

*Alex Regan, Grade 8
Red Jacket Poetry Contest, First Place*

Life

Life is short
Eventful
And sudden
Filled with twists and turns
Until finally after decades you find the end of the maze
But what happens after you die—
Do you start all over again?
Or do you just stand
Waiting for it to keep going or wait until something happens
Life is too short to just be waiting
Take a path you wouldn't take
Even take the long way instead of the short cut
Then when you come to the end again let me know

Matthias Williams, Grade 5

Oysters

Hard on the outside, ugly too
Everyone sees you
Few care to give you a passing glance
Some like you for who you are.
Few know your secret
On the inside you have a pearl
Beautiful and shiny
Makes jewelry so appealing.
People notice the real you
When you open up.
It is hard to open up, I know
You need time or coaxing
To show your true self.
You are always there
Ridiculed by many.
Some, a few people, see you
Know you
Understand you.
Oysters ugly on the outside.
Stunning within.

Matthew Garis, Grade 7

Mouse

I am like a mouse
Scampering quietly
But afraid, always afraid.

I go with the crowd
Wanting to blend in
So no one sees my fear.

I am helpless
Small, out of my control
And afraid, always afraid.

No one understands.
I must pretend I don't care
But I care and am so afraid.

I hide sadness with anger
And fear with jokes
So no one knows the real truth:

That I sighed in the night
And shivered at the thought
That soon things won't be the same.

But like mice I gnawed through it
And now I am here.
But I still have fear
There will always be fear.

*Hayley Weinberg, Grade 7
Red Jacket Poetry Contest, Second Place*

Ponds

People and ponds are a lot alike.
Both can be small
And only concerned with themselves.
Ponds never see what is outside of their banks.
Sometimes people never see what is outside of their group.
Sometimes you can see the bottom of the pond,
And know exactly what is going on.
But sometimes when it rains the bottom gets all muddy,
And you can't see a thing.
People are like that, too.
When something bad happens they don't want to open up,
And you won't know what is going on inside.
If you do something to help clear it up,
They might let you inside so you can help.
But you only have one chance and if you mess it up,
You have lost your chance.
 You will have to wait for the next person to come along and help.
But until then we wait for the next sunny day.
On a sunny day I am reflective.
When a person has a good day,
They might also open up and be reflective of their day.

Erin Gould, Grade 7

Three Special Words

The rain may fall on my window
The wind may whip away
But I am never better
For you are here to stay.

I knew you were a goner
I knew all hope was lost
But our hearts are warm together
Even in winter's frost.

The blooms will soon peek out
The sun will shine and glow
But the most important detail
Is that you realize and know
 I love you and that is all that matters.

Paige Spangenthal, Grade 5

What I Hate

I hate
Mish-mashy potatoes,
Slimy spaghetti,
I hate mushy green peas and beans
Roast beef, turkey, and chicken,
I hate rice, brown or white, neither is nice.

I hate
Practicing my Viola,
It is so noisy,
And annoying.
I hate rosining the bow every time
You have to move the bow back and forth,
It gets so boring.

I hate
My old school
Dirty backpacks and squished lunches sprawled on the floor, like a watchful cat,
Coats and sweaters hanging on the wall, as a spider would,
Homework, and folders, drifting in the air, just like a bird flying,
Everything everywhere.

Samantha Johnson, Grade 6

Erosion

Erosion is a wave of nature
Wind, Water, and Ice shaped the Earth
Smoothed down the rocks
Beaches disappearing, moving, and shifting
River edges collapse.
I'm eroded by many
My mom carved in respect and kindness
My dad hammered in good voice tone
Teachers sculpted my mind with knowledge
Friends smoothed down hockey, sportsmanship, and respect
My brother eroded away hitting and annoyance
Erosion takes place in life and nature.

David Sherris, Grade 7

Hiding in the Lilies

Fairy – *noun*.

A small winged person
in mythology. Not real.

Or so they say.

Hiding in the lilies,
who knows what's there?

Scientists take their clipboards
and say sprites and elves and fairies don't exist
because there's no solid proof.

But what does that say?

We don't have solid proof of happiness
but we know it's there.

They are stalking our footsteps.

Behind that tree.

Under that rock.

in the dew-covered grass.

Hiding in the lilies.

Who knows what's there?

Rebecca Regan, Grade 5

Pencils doing their jobs

Do pencils get tired
of walking
Dancing
Up and down the page?
Kurk-snap,
Man that must have hurt
Breaking her tip again.
Are they afraid of
the dark?
Being zipped up
in that prison,
smashing
crashing
into other objects.
Until they have to
Walk and
Dance

Up down page
and the again

Marissa Janiga, Grade 6

Beach

When I am at the beach...
I love the way the hot sand feels on my feet,
When I step into the sand my foot sinks.
The taste of ice cream lingers in my mouth,
The creamy goodness of cookies and cream.
The far away boats are very peaceful,
With their white sails on the beautiful water.
Little kids scream and have fun,
Thump, Splash, Thump!
The hot sun makes me hungry,
All I need is a nice salty pretzel with nacho cheese.
When I get hot I jump right into the cool salty ocean, I take a big gulp of water.
As the cool water trickles down my arms, the salty taste overtakes
The cookies and cream ice cream.
The palm trees around me are high in the sky.
Lots of people surround me,
I feel tight like I can't move.
When I look out all I see are the tops of colorful umbrellas.
When I get up to get a smoothie I step on a crab and it gnaws my toe.
As the sun sets, falling asleep, I hear the waves crash.

Alexa Ayers, Grade 6

The Plant

Fuzzy, broad, green leaves
Spread out, like a canopy in the Rain Forest
Attached, by their stems, to sturdy little trunks,
Lighter in color,
Rising up between the old, fallen leaves,
Now, brown and lifeless
Lying atop the rich, dark soil
That fills the tiny orange clay pot.

Zachary Weinberg, Grade 5

Monday

Today is Monday
Time for things to restart
I am driving to school
Then I see
A hobo
In
The
Trashcan
At
Tim Horton's
But
He Is Wearing
A red jacket
Not a ripped one
But
A Nice jacket
It is velvet and looks soft
But
Then we drive away
And I wonder
How ?

Greg Vanderhorst, Grade 7

My Mom

My mom is smart,
And she also has a big heart,
My mom can fly,
Even one thousand feet in the sky,
My mom is full of beauty,
And she is always on duty,
My mom is stylin',
And I'm not lyin',
My mom has super-speed,
So, quickly she gets us our feed,
My mom understands,
Even though she never stops with the commands,
My mom has more energy than that bunny,
And that is really funny.

John Tomczak, Grade 6

Deadly Silence

Though it doesn't make a sound
It is the loudest voice in the room.
Something is wrong.
The stillness worries me.
There is an uproar of arguments going on
Yet I can hear no sound.
The feeling in the room is tense.
Some won't even look at each other.
Everyone tries to keep their feelings to themselves
But I can see through them all.
With no sound I can still hear the conversation going on.
The yells.
The screams.
The cries.
The arguing.
Until...

Sorry

A small word
Blurted out in a faint whisper
That I have to strain my ears to hear.
And just like that the tenseness of the room lets up.
And the silent conversation is changed completely.
Instead of the yells and screams now all I hear are laughs and giggles.
As the silent conversation disappears
It is replaced with the noisy joyful chatting
Of friends!

Paloma D'Auria, Grade 6

A Kidnapper Named Dance

Like a spirit inside me
Dance took over my body
At such a young age it kidnapped me
And even though it hurt
I loved it

Yes, I had grown to love this kidnapper named Dance
I guess I always knew from the day I was born
If I had to be kidnapped, I would want Dance to do it

The day Dance took me I was only five years old
Dance introduced me to its son Tap
We had a good relationship in the beginning
But by the time I was six
Tap hurt me, he made me cry
He left me with sore arms and worn out legs
Yet I still dealt with Tap because like Dance,
I loved him

Then at age seven Dance introduced me to Ballet
Now unlike the others, Ballet seemed very nice to me
In fact, he became my life
He was such a wonderful person, so beautiful, so powerful
Just looking at him could make me burst into tears
Tears of joy, I loved Ballet
But at age nine I realized Ballet didn't love me

From nine to twelve Ballet and I had our rough patches
A side of me hated him
But the other side was hopelessly devoted to him
A side of me was frustrated with him
But the other side just couldn't possibly let him go

Nor could I live without him

But in the thirteenth year
My mind was made up
I couldn't take Ballet's abuse any longer
I was fed up
So in the summer of '07 I said goodbye to Ballet
And I have come to realize it was one of the worst decisions I've ever made

I can't think, eat, or sleep without Ballet
I miss him and yet there is no way I can go back

Once again looking at Ballet makes me want to burst into tears
But this time, tears have depressing sadness
I never thought I would have to live without Ballet
But it was my decision so I must deal with it
But, oh, what a bad decision it was

Don't worry, Dance the kidnapper and are still friends
He recently introduced me to Jazz and Hip Hop
But that is another poem, another story
And maybe there will be another kidnapper

Nicole Lowe, Grade 8

Island in the Mist

This is the isle where shattered dreams hang blowing on the wind,
Where hopes and fears come drifting past the shores.
This is the place where jagged rocks come jutting from the cliffs
To warn the passersby to come no more.
This is the island where lost souls come searching through the bay
And fate leaves its threads, floating through the air.
And those who drift upon the island, looking for their path,
Will never know just what they're finding there.

This is the isle where life and death are hopelessly entangled,
And those who wander through the snare are caught.
This is the place that's not attached to any mortal thing,
Coated in mist and through the cosmos shot.
This is the island that will keep emotions in its depths,
And the sun never shines behind the clouds.
Perhaps someday the moon will rise into a haunted sky,
Casting away the dark and misty shrouds.

Anna Magavern, Grade 5

Wallpaper

I am like wallpaper that's needed to cover a wall
People look at me and think,
Does it go with the carpet, the pillows, the curtains?
I want to match
Not to stick out of the crowd.

I stay put
I have friends that I want to keep
I am there for them
When they need me, they know where to find me
And they can always remember me.

People know me
They grew up looking at me everyday for years
They picked me out themselves
So they could decorate their rooms
They wanted me.

Wallpaper sits on a wall for a long time
People don't notice it, they just assume
I am "there"
But once it's gone
They notice and all ask about it.

That's me
A piece of wallpaper.

Elizabeth Fitch, Grade 7

My Winter High

I am standing at the top of the hill. I peer down and survey the course I am about to take. The snow sparkles in the sunlight. The steepness invigorates me. My heart races with anticipation, but I sweep any fear aside. This is my hill. SWOOSH! I push forward and the ride begins. I snake down the hill, zipping through the mogul. I leap off the jump with wind blowing in my face. I land and easily glide to the bottom of the hill. Skiing is my sport.

Antonio Roman, Grade 5

Charleston Chew

Surrender to the sweet, succulent, sugary treat.
Rip the wrapper wide open and inhale
Smell the chocolate wafting upwards, oh so sweet.
Shiver with anticipation at the candy that never seems to grow stale.

Closer and closer it comes to your mouth,
You must steel yourself for the first bite.
As soon as your tongue connects, wow!
The wonderful taste gives you new insight.

Crunch, chew, swallow, Crunch, chew, swallow.
Oh no oh no it's already half gone!
I can't believe the length is so low!
Oh well, they never last long.
Well, that one's done,
Let's start another one!

Zachary Tone, Grade 6

Sorry, No Christmas

This story has been passed down in my family from generation to generation. My grandma told it to me because it is a very special memory for her. The story occurred during December of 1907, just after my great-grandfather's family emigrated from Germany to the USA. The funny thing is that it was exactly 100 years ago when this story happened. At this time, the influenza epidemic was occurring in the USA. Influenza was a sickness that was a very serious cold with a fever and it was a huge factor in all of the people's lives that caught the terrible sickness.

My great-grandfather's family was very poor at the time. Then something life-changing happened to them. My great-grandpa's father caught the flu and battled it for many years, but eventually he died from it. This made the family even poorer. His wife, a widow now, had six children to feed. Christmas was getting very close and the children were getting excited, but since they were so poor, the mother had to tell her children that they were not going to have Christmas the way they usually did. She said that they could not afford all of the things for a regular Christmas. She said that they were not going to have a tree, ornaments, presents, or even the traditional Christmas dinner. The children were very sad that this had to happen.

A next-door neighbor heard about this and he contacted the Salvation Army and explained the situation. The Salvation Army felt pity for the children and the widow so they sent someone to the grocery store to buy a gift certificate so the family could buy the necessary foods for the Christmas dinner. They also bought them a tree, wrapped two presents for each child, and delivered them to

the kids on Christmas morning. Because of this, my grandma has always had a soft spot in her heart for the Salvation Army and has donated a lot of money to them. Sometimes when I see the people collecting money for the Salvation Army I give money too, and I believe it is for a very good cause!

Seth Meyer, Grade 6

Katie

It was six in the morning when my grandmother woke to the sound of her dog Katie barking. Katie was a small, deaf cocker spaniel that most people mistook for a puppy because she was so small. Katie used to be my dog until we moved to our new house. My grandmother was letting Katie out when the phone rang. She went inside and realized she had forgotten to put Katie's collar on. But since Katie hadn't run away since she was a puppy, my grandmother wasn't worried. The phone call was from a rude telemarketer. Grandma walked outside, wondering, "Who calls this early?" When she had gone inside to answer the phone, Katie had been sniffing the lawn. Now when she came back out, Katie was nowhere to be found. My grandma glanced in the back yard, but Katie wasn't there either. She ran back to the front and started to jog down the street. Katie was an old dog, so Grandma didn't think she could have made it very far, but she didn't see her anywhere. Grandma walked back to her house. If Katie really ran away, she'd be back in ten minutes.

Two days later a cop stopped by saying he had seen her missing dog poster and that he picked Katie up the day before; she was 18 blocks away! Katie was an old, lazy dog, so there was no way she could have walked that far. The officer guessed that someone was driving by and saw Katie alone on the lawn. Because she was so small they probably guessed she was a puppy and picked her up. Then they probably saw that her ears were closed and she was indeed old. After they realized their mistake, they dropped her on the street and that's how she got so far from home. After the officer finished explaining his story and explaining that he had left the dog at the S.P.C.A., my grandma rushed to get her. When my grandma arrived at the building there was a row of lost dogs. With three cocker spaniels who all seemed to be about 9 years old. Two of them were a golden brown color and the other was dark brown. My grandma knew right away which dog Katie was; she was the golden brown dog with the big, bushy, brown eyes. As soon as Katie saw her she stood up and started to whine. Katie was so glad to see her.

The next day I was coming home from school and was almost at my stop when I remembered Katie wouldn't be there to meet me when I got off the bus. I felt sad. As the bus pulled up to my house I gathered my stuff and walked off the bus. I was so distracted I didn't look up. My grandma opened the door for me, and Katie ran out and jumped on me. With her tail wagging and tongue hanging out, she was so happy to see me! I hugged her and she licked my face. I was so happy she was home.

Jennifer Sauter, Grade 6

The Kawis' Big Move to Yemen 1979-1980

My Grandma and Grandpa Kawi and my dad, Taryk, moved to North Yemen from America in 1979. They lived in the capital city of North Yemen, called Sanaa. Sanaa is in a very pretty valley with rocky mountains, but the valley is mostly sand.

My grandparents and my dad lived in a stone villa with one floor. Their house had three bedrooms, two bathrooms with indoor plumbing, a kitchen, a living room, and many *scorpions*. They had to check for scorpions everyday before they put their shoes on or before they went to bed. There was a wall outside of their house, and lizards would sunbathe on it and the lizards would do push-ups. My dad's family got their drinking water from a well, and they had to pump the water from the well to a tank on top of their house everyday. They also had to boil all of the water before using it. All of the old houses were cement made from mud and the trim was painted white. My dad said they looked like gingerbread houses!

People would get around by car, bus, taxi, or on foot. Some taxis were actually motorcycles. A person would get on the back without any helmet on and be driven around. The motorcycles were often decorated with beads, feathers, flashing lights and whatever else the driver wanted to put on it.

Two years before my grandparents and my dad moved to North Yemen the government put in dumpsters, but before that people just dumped their garbage in the street. There would be a trench in the middle of main ring road where everyone dumped their garbage. The smell must have been awful.

In Sanaa there is an old wooden wall around the city and many years ago they closed that gate at night, and if you weren't inside—too bad for you. It is also said that the language of Arabic was born in Yemen. Yemen is also the place where algebra was invented and if you go there today, you can still see the mosque where it was invented.

Kaley Kawi, Grade 6

Good Intentions

I wish that I could do more
Than watch them sleep on the street.
Hungry and homeless,
Wishing I could help,
But never trying to.

Hearing about others
Who have done what I haven't.
Who have tried to help, and succeeded.

We have missionaries in Africa and Asia.
UNICEF, Red Cross, and more.
That makes us ask ourselves,
"Why should I help?"
I'll tell you why.
People are starving everywhere.
Hopeful that others will have kind souls
And think of them once in a while.
Am I that person?

I try and think about them
Through my hectic day.
I gaze at the homeless man on the street,
Fork over my loose change,
Hand it to him with a smile
And a wish that his life is changed
By this gift.

Having what others don't,
I consider myself lucky
To have food and shelter.

I watch others donate their old items to charity,
Watch them trying to change lives.
I glimpse true acts of kindness.
Families sending food to the hungry.
Looking at the good that they have done
And the little I have done
I wish I had the courage to do more.

Nayantara Dutta, Grade 8

Safehouse

A hushed breath
From behind a secret door
Waits silently
Wondering

Footfalls
From heavy boots
Approach a bookcase
And an angry eye
Sneers at the bookcase
While a calloused hand
Pushes the books off

The cascade of falling books
Hits the floor
The impact
Causing a wave of distress
To fall on the hushed breath

No sound escapes lips
Frozen in fear
When the footsteps descend
Down

Down

Down

To the ground floor
And the angry eyes glare
At the owner of the house

It is safe when horses' hooves
Pound the earth in the distance
The angry eyes
Might have better luck
Somewhere else

The secret door opens
And the bookcase moves aside
As two pairs of feet
Leave the cabin
Another safe house passed

Lorena Lyon, Grade 6

Mouse

Lifeless, it lies in eternal sleep
Silently,
Feet unmoving,
Eyes blank and staring upward
A dull look at one bright star.

Lifeful, it links itself to the world,
Intelligently,
Buttons clicking,
Wire protruding through its mouth,
The world unfolds beneath its feet.

Jessica Zhou, Grade 5

When I Shoot a Foul Shot

When I shoot a foul shot, I am an engine
All parts working together
to reach a common goal.
If the gears aren't in line
or the belt is off,
the engine won't start.
If the oil isn't added
the engine won't run smoothly.
When I shoot a foul shot
my left foot is a little ahead of my right;
my right foot is in line with the rim.
I tuck in my elbows
Dribble three times
Flick the ball
Shoot
And follow through.

Sam Sendziak, Grade 7

The Writer's-Block Blues

When I lost my worldly-views
I saw I had the writer's-block blues.
Could not write, type, or tell a story.
Short or long, they gave me no glory.
Stuck without a single thought
No more story no more plot
Stopped at the middle of sentences
I keep throwing papers on the floor
Just can't do it,
No more breakthroughs.
That's why I've got
The writer's-block blues.

Leah Finkelstein, Grade 6

Spring

Spring is the time of year
When the animals come out,
And you can have bonfires anytime you want.

Spring is the time of year
When you can ride your bike,
Or play with your friends.

Spring is the time of year
When you're trying to grow green grass,
And clean up around your house.

Spring is the time of year
When you can do whatever you want!

Jean Beecher, Grade 5

Ripley's

Over Easter break, my family took a trip to Williamsburg, Virginia. Across from our hotel stood a Ripley's Believe It or Not! Museum. On the last day there, we decided to go inside, and we had the time of our lives!

When we entered, we saw a water faucet seemingly floating in mid air! I was amazed by this, but that was nothing compared to the odd and freaky exhibits I was about to see. We first went to the 4-D Ripley theatre next door. There, we saw a movie about log rides and monster trucks. The effects popped out at me, but the best part was the wind blowing me in the face and the water being sprayed on my lap; it was really a wild experience! After that, we entered the real museum. The first thing that caught my eye was a life-size model of the tallest man that ever lived. He was over nine feet tall but sadly, he died at age 23. I also saw a life-size gorilla made entirely out of black nails. A few rooms after that, I saw a real shrunken head, a life-size model of the fattest person ever, and another model of a two-headed bird, the world's smallest book, and the world's smallest carving, which was on a toothpick. One exhibit I was really grossed out by was the two-headed cat. It looked very much like a living cat, but I knew it was only a model. Or was it? Anyway, I had a fun time and hope to go to the Ripley's museum in Ontario soon!

John Hager, Grade 6

The Awesome Dinner Party

On the night of Thursday, November 15, 2007, I hosted a Mexican dinner fiesta at my house. The people who were there were my family, my cousins, my aunts and uncles, and my grandmas and grandpas. The awesome night started with an extremely intense game of bingo that went right down to the wire, but eventually Grandma Meyer came out on top. After the game, she was quoted as saying, "I have never been in such an exciting game of bingo in my life. All of the opposing players were very competitive. I think I played very well and I'm glad I kept an outstanding amount of focus. I think next time Aunt Joelle should focus more like me." This is what Aunt Joelle had to say to that: "She thinks that she can just trash talk like that! Telling me what to do, that is unbelievable. Just you wait Mom, next year I'm going to come out on top." A little emotional aren't you Aunt Joelle? It's just bingo. During dinner, they didn't say anything to each other.

I served three courses all together. The first course consisted of a choice of either a crunchy taco salad or a very colorful relish tray. The taco salad was made with scrumptious ground beef, shredded mild cheddar cheese, delicious iceberg lettuce and many more things with a different array of smells. The relish tray smelled of sour from the pickles and sharp from the olives. The second course consisted of very creamy butter on Pandemuerto (which is a Mexican bread that they eat on the day of the dead), delicious Spanish rice, soft Yuca

(vegetable like a potato), and silky Sopa de Fideo (Mexican pasta). The third course consisted of a juicy steak quesadilla, spicy chicken fajitas, savory taquitos, and appetizing burritos. After dinner, I took a poll on what was the favorite course. The guests said that they liked the second course the most. To finish off the fiesta we hit the piñata until all the candy was beaten out. The part of the party that the guests seemed to like the most was the bingo. If you're thinking of have a fiesta, go ahead because I had a blast doing it.

Seth Meyer, Grade 6

My First Time Skiing

"Ahhhhh!" I screamed as I skied down the hill. It was four years ago on a white snowy day when I was at Holiday Valley. My family was all together and having a great time, except for me. I didn't really like skiing that much. Truthfully, I don't really like sports if I'm not good at them. I'd rather be inside drinking hot cocoa and listening to some good music. So far all I had done was take some lessons and they were ok. I learned how to stop and get up. Before I knew it I was able to ski. I was no professional, but I could at least do it by myself.

It was a little bit after lunch and my family had gone back onto the cold snow. My sister and my friend Mary really wanted me to try the Bunny Hill. I was thinking, "Are you crazy?? I just started and now you want me to go on a hill?" I protested, "No way!" They kept nagging until I finally gave in. There was a huge line to get on the hill, so we waited about 30 minutes. As I was going up the lift I was scared for my life. I thought I would crash into a tree and die a dramatic death. I started skiing down the hill and I was twisting and doing well. I actually thought I would make it down alive. Then I lost control and went down completely, heading straight for the line. A variety of thoughts went through my head such as: "Oh my God. I am going to die on the hill!" or "Hopefully, I'll make it out of here just with a broken bone or two." Then I thought, "Hey, this is kind of fun!" I skied through the line and landed on my back. It hurt a lot but I was fine. I was furious with my sister and I didn't talk to her for the rest of the day. It was truly a learning experience: I learned not go down a hill when I'm not ready.

Aarti Chandan, Grade 6

Indigo Is

Indigo is
waves crashing the shore
and swallowing up
oysters and pearls,
old crab shells and jellyfish jelly,
fascinating pebbles
dragging them into the darkness.
The crescent moon of midnight
glows over
the swirling, foaming waters.

A wolf running through the woods.
An owl hooting above.
The sadness, loneliness,
all shown in the midst of forest cries.

A glass of fresh grape juice
and concord grapes
on a windy day.
A sad story
read in the winter.
And while the still, silent,
snowy world sleeps,
a morning glory pops up
and wakes the earth.

Rebecca Regan, Grade 5

Sila

Here's to the middle school queen
Who presents the scent of royalty.
Surrounded by her loyal fans
Still as a tree in the wind she stands.

Her afrotastic muffin top
Fluffs and puffs as by she bounds.
Gracefully galloping down the hall
The fifth grade mascot loved by all.

5th Grade Owl Group

Sleepover Bash

“Yumm!” I said when I felt the cold ice cream hit my tongue. Amy, Aarti, Mary, Amy’s family, and I were all at Cold Stone eating our ice cream. Everyone got very strange flavors, which Cold Stone is known for. That’s when I first saw Mary’s funny face. Mary had her tongue almost out of her mouth and her mouth was in the form of a circle. We were almost on the ground laughing. After disturbing most of the Cold Stone workers and customers, we decided to leave.

It was a short ride back to Amy’s house, but I could tell Mrs. Powell was already regretting that she had us sleepover. When we got to Amy’s, we ran inside and went right upstairs to Amy’s room. Amy’s mom said, “There’s a surprise down here for you girls.” We rushed down the stairs to find four plain black bags. Amy’s mom explained what we were doing: “You girls are making your own sleepover bags.” We walked over to the bags and saw the paint and glitter; it was time to decorate. After five minutes had gone by, Amy stepped away from the table and my jaw dropped. Amy had a big glob of paint on her pants. Since Amy had paint on her, we all checked ourselves and I was the next victim. I had paint on my brand new shirt. Mrs. Powell came to the rescue and took our clothing and washed it. Thank God because if I went home with paint on my shirt I know my mom would kill me.

Once we were finished making our bags, it was around 8:30. We decided to start watching the movies and we picked *Vacancy*. The beginning of the movie was not scary; it was just a normal movie until they got to this motel called Vacancy, and then we were squirming in our seats. Mary and I had the candy tray in our hands and when this man in a mask appeared in the window the tray went flying. Sour patches, Gummy Bears and Twizzlers were everywhere, but we were all kind of glad that happened because we needed a break from the suspense. For the rest of the movie, Aarti was really the only one watching because Amy, Mary, and I hid under the covers most of the time. When even Aarti got scared we had Mary do her funny face again to make us laugh.

The movie finally ended and we decided to watch a funny movie called *Miss Congeniality 2*. Aarti and Amy were the first to fall asleep half way through the movie, but Mary and I watched the rest of it, which was very funny. I thought since I watched a funny movie I would be able to fall asleep, but I was still shaky from *Vacancy*. No matter how many times I tell myself movies aren’t real it never seems to help me fall asleep. When I woke up at 2:30 I got very scared because no one was up, but then Mary asked me if I was awake and I was so glad. I begged Mary to turn on the T.V. because I was too scared, so she did. We watched *Full House* and sometime during that I feel asleep.

Morning finally came and we had the most delicious French toast in bed. It was already 11:00 and our parents had started to arrive. My mom came last. She asked if we were ready for school to start, but we had completely forgotten about school!

Ellen Plunkett, Grade 6

An excerpt from...

Grandma's Story

Her father led Grandma down a few streets to the beach that was close to their motel. When Joanne saw the beach her breath caught in her throat; it was so beautiful, the vast, unending ocean with thousands upon thousands of stars reflecting on its surface. Grandma was still in awe fifteen minutes later when her father met with the captain of the ship that would soon take them out into the ocean. The boat was 112 feet long and 26 feet wide and could comfortably seat fifteen men. On this trip, however, only seven people were going: Grandma, her father, the captain, his first mate, and three other guys who were fishing. After the exchanging of greetings and money, the boat headed for deep, deep water in search of big, big fish. After about fifteen minutes of the steady rumbling motor, Joanne started to get drowsy and kept nodding off, so her father leaned over and said, "It's alright to go to sleep, you know."

When Grandma awoke, she was dazzled by sunlight. Her leg was cramped from the position she was sleeping in. She got up to go look over the side of the rail. Her dad was talking to the captain about how deep the water was and the type of bait they were going to use. He called her over and asked, "How was your little two hour nap?" Grandma thought he was teasing her so she said, "Fine!" He wasn't teasing-she really had slept for two hours. Grandma asked how they would be fishing. Grandpa explained they would be trolling with sardines as bait. "You put the rods in the holders on the roof of the boat. You let a lot of line out with the hook and sardine on the end. The hook and line trail behind the boat. If something bites, you see the rod go up and down. We have four rods in the holders already, one for each of us."

Her father explained that the rods were thick so, in case a large fish was caught, it wouldn't break the pole. Just then, one of the rods began to bob up and down. Great-grandpa nearly jumped two feet because that was his rod. He raced over to it and started to reel it in. It only took him 15 minutes to reel in the small striped bass. Great-grandpa sank down into a chair because he was hoping for something much bigger. He reset the line with a new sardine and let it out even farther this time. It took almost an hour before he got another bite. This time the rod bent down much farther than it had the last time. Eugene didn't jump as high this time, but he came pretty close. He ran over to his rod, lifted it and tried to reel the fish in. When he gave the rod a yank, the fish on the other end nearly pulled him to the edge of the boat. The captain shouted, "He's got a big one on! Strap him in!" When deep sea fishing, if you have a big fish on the line, they strap you down in a chair so that the fish won't pull you over the side of the boat. After the first mate strapped Great-grandpa in, he started the fight.

The line that was let out was about 750 feet long and the line left on the reel was about 250 feet. Every time Eugene would get the fish close to the boat it would make a run away from them. Finally, he got it close enough that Joanne could see it and she could tell that it was huge. The fin on its back was so big it

looked like a sail, and she didn't know then, but the fish was called a sailfish for that reason. Then it surged out so fast that she thought the line would start on fire. That performance was repeated at least seven more times, and by then Eugene had been asked over and over if he needed somebody to take over, but stubbornly he kept saying, "No!" Finally he got the fish close enough that the first mate could gaff the monster, and then Great-grandpa knew he had caught the biggest fish of his life. When the fish was hauled up onto the deck, all anyone could say was "WOW!" Later, after everyone at the dock finished congratulating him, an old timer came up and said, "I think that's the biggest fish caught today," and ambled away. Eugene decided to have it mounted so he took the fish to a taxidermist. For the remainder of Grandma's vacation, they hung out at the beach and looked for shells. Nine months later a box as big as a car arrived in Grandma's driveway, and when her family opened it the huge sailfish had a new home on the wall of the den right by Grandma's room.

That sailfish is now living in my closet until it can be restored and hung on my wall. I dream of one day catching something bigger than that so my story can also be told for generations to come.

Zachary Tone, Grade 6

The Pig-Run

It was a cold beautiful fall morning and reddish-yellow leaves were scattered about. I noticed my dog was looking bored. Her big brown eyes looked up at me, the yellow hair on her back was standing on end, and her paws were shaking. I thought, "Ella is such an athletic, energetic dog; doesn't she ever need a rest?" Then I thought, "Maybe I should just go out and play with her."

I went upstairs to put on a long sleeved shirt and a scarf. Then Ella and I went out into the brisk morning air. I could tell she was very glad to get out and run around. After a couple of rounds of fetch with the deflated soccer ball, she lost interest and trotted away. I thought since she was at the other side of the yard, I would kick the ball and see if she came running. "Ella," I called. She saw the ball go flying and charged at me like a torpedo. Ears down, hair on end, and tail tucked between her legs, the "pig-run" began. With one leg up from kicking the ball, I was depending on my other leg to hold me up. Too late! Ella hit the leg I still had planted on the ground and I fell straight backwards and landed hard on my back. My neck hurt.

With the wind knocked out of me, I lay on the damp, hard ground for several minutes. Ella looked very puzzled and stood there looking ashamed. Her head was down and she softly whimpered. My mom noticed me through the window sprawled out on a pile of leaves and came to help. She brought me inside and whipped up some hot chocolate. Boy, do I love playing with my dog!

Mary Carney, Grade 6

Letter to a character in *Sign of Qin*

Dear Monkey,

I've noticed that you've been extremely naughty in the book. You are so heartless that you seem to be able to give up anything for immortality. You must resist the pull, my friend. Otherwise you will always be known for how you betrayed your "friends." Try to stay with the young Starlord and protect him. Your guidance and experience will help you. It is not time for immortality yet, sir, but you should work for it. By this I mean that you should protect the Starlord and *earn* eternal life. If you work hard enough, then Master Hand might give you immortality, i.e. when Master Hand decides to let you out from Five Elements Mountain. You were given a chance to redeem your sins. When you redeem, it isn't wise to commit another sin, especially one that is as big as stealing the peaches of immortality. Next time, don't give up the chance for redemption. It was a good idea, though, to save Dragon Rain and the wishing rod from the hands of the bandits. Pay attention to General Calabash too, for he holds much wisdom in his body, as well as grief. You **MUST** protect the Starlord from danger (if he needs it) and help him in his quest to find the Twelve Scrolls. Use your time under the mountain wisely. Become wiser than you are now, for you know the consequences of betraying heaven. I am devastated that you have nothing to do and are forced to remain in that mountain. I understand your grief, for I have had timeouts before. Still, I know that those timeouts cannot compare with what you're facing. I hope that you heed my advice, for you are my favorite character. Good Luck!

Jason Zhou, Grade 6

Sad Song

I am stuck in a box
Nobody can see or hear me
I am so sad
I just wonder if people are
Searching for me?
I am only a mime of age three
I have one getaway and that's
To play my sorrows away on my violin until the end of the day
But, there is no point of that
So, I will just lie in my box
And wait for another day

Tyler Trammell, Grade 5

How $1 + 0 = 2$

A thunderous applause filled the auditorium as the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* ended. The audience especially praised Juliet. I was so proud. I thought of how I came to this moment.

I always knew I would be number one. After all, I was a fabulous actress. I'm pretty, popular and have been the lead in every production since coming to this school.

I remember how it all began. It was September 13. I was walking down the hall and saw that the sign-up sheet for the school play was there. I ran up to the sheet to find that there was only one more space left. I quickly grabbed the pen and scribbled my name down. I looked at the rest of the names and knew I'd have no trouble with the audition for this play. In fact, the name right above mine was Maggie Hamilton. I knew that Maggie was a grade-grubbing, no talent geek: a real zero personality.

"Well," I chuckled, "at least I know I'll get the lead."

Maggie and I were never friends. We were forced to work together only because of Mr. Fillburg, our evil math teacher. Well, I thought he was evil because I was failing math. This is what happened. I was leaving math class when Mr. Fillburg pulled me aside.

"Emma, I saw your name on play sign-up sheet. You know that the school does not allow extra curricular activities if you're failing a subject, don't you? And you ARE failing math."

I had felt like my heart skipped a beat.

"Wa-wa what? I know I'm not doing too well, but failing?!" Mr. Fillburg gave me the same look my Dad gave me when he saw my math grade on the report card. You know: the eyes-over-the-glasses stare and the disappointed sigh.

"Mr. Fillburg, what can I do?"

"Well..." Mr. Fillburg said as he looked around. He spied Maggie, who was still packing up her things. He called to her. "Maggie, come here for a second." Maggie walked over and looked up. Mr. Fillburg said, "Maggie, I would like you to tutor Emma."

"What?" I gasped. If I was number one, Maggie was less than zero. Mr. Fillburg told us that we could use his room on Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:00. He explained that his room was free at that time so it would be perfect. All that I could think of was that spending time with Maggie could never be perfect. To be

honest, Maggie didn't look too happy about it either. She mumbled something like, "I guess I have no choice."

We walked out into the hall together. I knew I had to say something but Maggie beat me to it. She shrugged and muttered, "See you."

Ding!!! The school bell rang and I walked to my first class, geography. I couldn't stand geography, but not as much math. All day I couldn't stop thinking of what would happen at 3:30. All through geography I stared at Maggie to see what she did to be so smart. What I saw was: 1. She always has her head down. 2. She never talks. 3. She never looks anywhere but the board and her paper.

The day flew by. Before I knew it, the end of the day bell rang. Time to be tutored, or should I say, time to be tortured. I walked right into Mr. Fillburg's room with my math books to find that Maggie was already there studying. I dropped my books right next to her and moaned, "OK, so how do I do this silly problem?"

For the first time ever I heard Maggie speak with confidence. "OK, first you have to figure out what 12% of 120 is."

I nodded. We kept going on and on until 4:00. A small group of girls walked in the classroom to pick up math books that they had left behind. As soon as they entered, Maggie's head sank and her voice got very soft again.

After they left, giggling, I had to ask Maggie, "Why did you do that?"

"Do what?" Maggie responded, her voice perking up.

"You know, your head fell and you got all shy again. If you want to be popular, you can't put your head in the sand like some ostrich. You need to show your beautiful colors like a peacock," I lectured.

Maggie got a little indignant and said with a smirk, "Well, if I have to start strutting like a peacock to make you happy, then shouldn't I at least finish teaching you how to multiply?" After that we both laughed. It was the first time I had ever seen Maggie laugh.

We kept working. When we got to the 5th problem, Maggie said, "Why don't you do this one on your own, Emma?"

I gulped. "Oh, okay. I'll try." I was really starting to click with this whole math thing. But I still was a bit nervous to do one by myself. "Done!" I hollered.

"Let me see that," Maggie responded. "Yep, you're right, great job!"

"I think I'm starting to get this math," I exclaimed.

“Well, doesn’t it feel so much better when you get the answer right?” Maggie questioned.

“Yep, and if I get all the answers right I can be the lead this year’s play!” I explained. “My dad will be so glad!”

“You’re going to go out for the play?” Maggie asked.

“Yep, and now that I will pass math, thanks to your help, I can still be in it!”

A worried look came over Maggie’s face. She lowered her head. I was confused. Just moments ago, we were laughing and now, Maggie was acting like she had no colors again. “What’s wrong, Maggie?” I asked.

Maggie sighed, “I don’t know why I signed up for this audition. My mom forced me into it. She thinks if I get a part, then I’ll be less shy.”

I thought about it. “You know, your mom is probably right. Tell you what. I can tutor you in acting!”

Maggie laughed and said, “Me? Get tutored in something? That’s a first.”

I stood up and put out my hand. Maggie smiled. She stood up, too. We shook hands and said, “Let’s do it!”

Over the next week, we spent all our free time tutoring each other. I began to actually like math. It was weird. I was becoming one of the star pupils in Mr. Fillburg’s class. Maggie was trying very hard to show off her colors. She was a great student actress. I was really enjoying tutoring her in acting. We were becoming real friends.

Audition day was finally here. I had to get to school early to audition for *Romeo and Juliet*. Another student was already on stage giving her audition when I walked into the auditorium. Everyone in the audience was totally quiet, leaning forward in their seats, paying close attention to every move she made. I stopped dead in my tracks. It was Maggie! She was standing on stage, with her legs solid like pillars, real confidence in her voice. Maggie was the best actress I’d ever seen! She was the young girl Shakespeare had in mind.

Before I knew it they called my name. I stepped on stage and said to the drama teacher, “O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?” I felt my audition went well. But I had to be honest with myself; Maggie had done a great job, too. I worried that it was maybe *too* great. I felt like that day would never end. I was so anxious. All I wanted was to see who got the role of Juliet.

The next morning, I ran straight to the bulletin board when I got to school. The cast list sheet was up. There was a group of boys standing in front of the list, laughing.

I went up to them and asked, "What's so funny?"

One of the boys kept on laughing as he replied, "Did you see the cast list yet?" I shoved him out of the way.

My eyes almost popped out of my head as I read, "Juliet...Maggie Hamilton. Juliet's understudy...Emma Matthews (me)."

I felt dizzy and queasy. This couldn't be! I've always gotten the lead. Suddenly, a tap on my shoulder startled me. I turned around. There was Maggie. Her eyes were shimmering through her glasses. Her smile was the biggest smile I have ever seen!

She opened her arms and exclaimed, "Oh Emma, I got it! I got it! Without you, I wouldn't have even auditioned!" Next thing I knew, Maggie hugged me.

Then the oddest thing happened. I hugged her back! I smiled an honest, big, happy smile at my friend. I guess I realized that we were truly friends. When you're true friends, you're happy for each other, even if you are disappointed at the same time.

Rehearsals lasted a couple of months. Maggie and I worked really hard on the part of Juliet. We made a great team of star and understudy. Maggie was a brilliant Juliet. I was pretty good, too.

*Leah Finkelstein, Grade 6
Purdy Short Story Winner,
First Place*

Darkness Overhead

Marrok watched intently as Triole, his master, raised his paw toward the night sky. "That constellation is called the Great Bear."

The young bear gazed in awe, and then frowned. "It is so dim; it is as if a cloud is passing over it."

Triole stared at Marrok intently. "That is enough for tonight," Triole rumbled in the deep tones of an old and wise bear. "Go and sleep; it is obvious that you are tired."

Seven bears sat in a circle around a large, dark stone. It crackled with energy and power, as if it were alive. These were the Elders, the greatest and wisest Guardians. Triole growled, "Marrok is a Seer. He saw a darkness over the Great Bear."

Murmurs arose from the other seven bears. Selene, the clan leader, raised her voice above the others. "He cannot be! We haven't had one in the clan since..."

"We will protect him. He will not be like...the Evil One. He dreams not of power and glory, but of being a good warrior for us."

Triole growled in assent, "He holds great power in his hands. When he discovers it, the choice he makes is out of our control."

"Who knows," said Selene. "Perhaps he will be the one to remove the shadow... or perhaps he will be the next to join it. Perhaps he will be like us... or perhaps he will be another... like Nyroc." A chill ran down the spines of the Elders at the name.

Nyroc smiled, and his smile was that of one who is merciless and cruel. *Soon I will have everything I need to take over those foolish Guardians and the sky that they protect. All I need now is the Young One who can see the veil I have placed over the stars that they worship so... With them, he could put a stop to my plans. But with me...he could assist in many ways. I will bide my time. I can afford to wait.*

Marrok arose from his den earlier than the others the next morning, and went outside so as not to awaken them. The day was bright, and dew was fresh on the leaves. The young bear sighed. *Why is there still a large dark patch in the sky? It is as if no one else can see it. When I pointed it out last night, Triole just said I was tired. But I still see it, and I'm not tired at all...*

He was interrupted from his thoughts by the movement of a snake through the wet grass. The snake hissed. *Marrok... Come with me...*

I must be seeing strange things again. Perhaps I should talk to the Healer. I would swear on the Great Stone that the snake just talked...

The snake hissed again. *Power... Isss it power you want, Marrok?*

Marrok decided to talk to the creature. "I don't want power. I just want to know why I am seeing these strange things."

Oh, I know why... and many other thingsss besssidesss...

“Why?”

If you come with me, you will learn...and you ssshall have great power assss well...

Marrok stared at the snake. Its coils rippled and its eyes were a myriad design of shining jewels. Its eyes were so pretty...

Come with me.

Without a word, Marrok followed.

Triole rose from his den later than usual. He wondered why, and then it struck him – Marrok had not come to wake him as he had every morning before. The strong warrior walked silently outside with claws outstretched. *Perhaps he is sleeping late. He did seem tired last night. And perhaps... something else was here.*

Triole stole around the main path through the bear camp. Then he saw what he was looking for – small bear tracks. And next to them, the rippling S-shape of a snake.

Without another look, the bear ran toward Selene’s den.

Selene growled. “He has left?”

Triole nodded. “With a snake.”

The leader of the bears shook her head. “This confirms our fears. Nyroc has long had the ability to change his appearance.”

“We should send out a search.”

“Nyroc will soon leave us behind. We will never catch him. We couldn’t even if he didn’t have a head start.”

“The stars...” Triole’s voice broke off.

“What have they told you?” asked Selene, her voice gentle.

Allegiances will shift, and paths will turn. The sky will darken. So spoke Triole in a voice that was his but not his.

“It has been a long time since the stars have given you a prophecy, Triole.”

One will stay, six will go. Six will return, but one will stay.

Triole shook his head. “Selene, you must stay with the rest. Weron, Uchar, Sior, Evely, Jiod, and I will go at once.”

Nyroc smiled inside his snake skin. Everything was going according to plan. *The foolish young bear follows me, thinking he will soon understand the secrets of his power. He will know them, of course. Nyroc always keeps his word. But he will be forced to use them for my purposes and obey me...*

Marrok’s thoughts wandered as he followed the snake. Straying from the camp with an unknown and slightly sinister creature seemed so foolish. But it had promised that he would know the secrets of his power. Yet how did he know it would keep its promise? For all he knew, it would slither away, leaving him lost,

helpless and betrayed. He would only follow it for a little more... then he would return.

The six bears tread lightly and quickly throughout the forest.

“Why did he leave?” asked Uchar, with an angry undertone in his deep voice. “He should have known that the Evil One would have many ways to attempt to win his service! He should have known not to trust a snake that SPEAKS, for the Great Stone’s sake!”

Evely frowned. “We never warned him. He could not know. He could not know that Nyroc would try many things to lead him out of the protective circle.”

Weron growled loudly, “It does not matter why he has gone! It matters that we find him! And if you weren’t so busy wondering about Marrok’s motives and thoughts, you may have noticed that right as we speak we are treading on the tracks of a young bear and a snake!”

The Guardians fell silent. “We are on the trail,” said Triole. “We must keep going very carefully, for they may be close ahead.”

“And,” asked Jiod in a hoarse whisper, “what will we do when we find them?”

Triole smiled a thin, grim smile. “We will fight for all we stand for, and for our and Marrok’s lives.”

Nyroc was pleased. *Everything is as planned. Soon we will reach my citadel. And then the Seer will be trapped and forced to obey my will. The veil will become stronger, and the sky will be mine.*

Marrok grimaced. He hadn’t noticed how tired his paws were, and he had stepped on a thorn. “Where are we going?” he suddenly wondered aloud. The snake did not reply. The thought then struck him as mist cleared from his eyes. He was following a snake, and he didn’t know his way back. Thoughts coursed through his now-awakened brain. *I will pretend it still has me under control. Then, when we get to... wherever we are going... I will force it to tell me how to go home.*

Marrok looked up towards the sky. The black patch seemed nearer and larger, and it almost throbbed with fury. *It is evil. And powerful. The simple realization struck him strongly. And so is the snake.*

So Marrok made up his mind not to do what it told him, while a Guardian’s blood still flowed through his veins.

Triole stopped abruptly, and the others behind him soon stopped as well. “Footprints,” he whispered to the others. “Fresh, only a few minutes by the look of them.”

Weron padded softly towards Triole. “Brother. This may be the end, of us and of our world. Nyroc has the Seer. The sky will soon be tainted with darkness forever.”

Triole was silent for a moment. Then he spoke: “We must make a plan. We cannot defeat Nyroc by force alone.”

The snake slithered forward at a pace that tired Marrok's paws.
I wonder where we are going, thought Marrok. It has been so long. The snake must be evil if he lives this far from the bear camp.

He rubbed his eyes, and suddenly noticed a black shape rising over the horizon line. *Perhaps that is where we are going.*

The citadel! Nyroc began to slither forward faster and faster, making sure that Marrok was still close behind him. *Soon I will have him trapped inside to do my bidding and darken the sky.*

Sior squinted. A large black spire was faintly visible on the horizon. "Nyroc's citadel," he whispered quietly.

The six bears stopped and looked. "If he is in there," breathed Uchar, "we will never get him out with our lives."

It was an awe-inspiring sight, a dark needle rising over the pale blue sky. But it cried out in evil and pain. It struck fear and sorrow into the hearts of any that viewed it.

It was the perfect place for Nyroc.

Marrok stopped short. They were approaching the door of the citadel. *The snake is evil. If I enter his home, will I ever leave it?*

Come, young bear, young guardian... The snake's hiss woke him from his thoughts.

Come.

Marrok knew that if he went in, there was no telling what would happen to him, but he knew that if he tried to run, the snake would never allow him to escape with his life.

Marrok entered the home of the snake.

Triole watched helplessly as the young bear he had taught all he knew entered Nyroc's citadel. "He is gone from us. There is no pulling him back now."

Weron raised his head and looked towards the horizon. "Brother. We must try all we can. We must go to Nyroc, and fight to keep the sky safe. If we leave, we are letting not only Marrok die, but the life we have known as well."

Marrok watched as the obsidian door slammed shut behind him. The room smelled metallic and was filled with strange devices and bottles. The snake turned towards him. *Marrok... you have made the right choice by coming to me. The otherssssss will never have asssss much power and knowledge asssss I do. And if you would like...I will tell you the sssecretsssss of the thingsssss that you have sssseen... And I will ssshow you my true form...*

Marrok was curious in spite of himself. "You are not always a snake?"

Oh, no... hissed the snake. *I am sssometimessss a ssssnake... and sssometimessss I am many other thingsssss...sssuch will be your power if you join me. I am Nyroc, sssometimessss a ssssnake... and sssometimessss a bear.*

As he was saying this, a large cloud of smoke erupted around Nyroc's body. Paws began to push out of his snakeskin. His head grew, and his snout elongated. Black fur grew all over his body.

Marrok stared in awe. *He is a bear now, bigger and stronger than I. There is no way for me to escape or defeat him. It is hopeless.*

"Now, young Marrok," spoke Nyroc in deep bear's tones. "Are you wondering, perhaps, why you have seen what others have not? Why you alone have been able to see the veils that have been placed over the stars?"

As the six bears sat in a circle near the home of Nyroc, Triole thought back to the prophecy he had made before they set out. *Allegiances will shift, and paths will turn. The sky will darken. That has happened. The sky is dark with Nyroc's curse.* The great bear then thought of the second half, the part he had not considered since they set out. *One will stay, six will go. Six will return, but one will stay.* Realization dawned in Triole's eyes. *One will die, or stay with Nyroc. The fates are equally bad. The stars have placed us all in great danger. Perhaps it will be me. Perhaps it will be Weron, or Uchar, or Sior, or Jiod, or Evely... Perhaps it will be Marrok.*

Nyroc smiled. The bear was his. His to use in any way that was necessary.

"Marrok. You have come to me."

Marrok was trembling inside, but knew not to show weakness. "I have come."

"I have promised that you will discover the secrets of your power, but first there is a small task I would like you to do for me.

Marrok dared not refuse. "What is it?"

"I want you to tell me the secret star pattern that keeps the Guardians safe."

The young bear's thoughts raced through his head. Telling the star pattern would mean his entire clan would die. Not telling would likely mean that he would.

The six bears padded softly up to the citadel. Inside, they heard snatches of conversation: *I have promised that you will discover the secrets of your power... secret star pattern...*

Triole turned towards the other five bears. "We need to get in. Now."

Nyroc was growing impatient. The bear seemed unwilling to tell him the star pattern that would give him utter control over the Guardians, even with the bribe of his power's secrets. "Bear. speak, or your death will be long."

Marrok turned to Nyroc. "I will not tell you. I will fight you to the death."

"Fool. Who can hope to match my power?"

At that instant, six voices rang out from the threshold. "We can!"

The shapeshifter's power was great, but so was the power of seven bears trained for battle. Swirls of dark energy surrounded the brave Guardians, and all that was visible through the cloud was a paw, or a snatch of fur. Blood spilled on the floor of Nyroc's citadel. Nyroc himself was not able to change forms in the confusion.

At long last, Weron placed a paw over Nyroc's black heart. "Evil must never again remain where there are Guardians."

Nyroc smiled, almost insanely. He opened his mouth, breathing heavily in pain. "I have one last thing to do before I depart."

Black tendrils shot around the two bears, spiraling higher and higher. Then, with a twisted wreath of smoke surrounding them, both bears were dead.

Triole walked slowly towards Weron's body. "Brother. You died to save our clan. You died in battle, like the noble warrior you were. May you find peace among the stars."

Marrok looked outside to the heavens. The shadow was gone.

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