

No one would have believed that it was possible. Back then, nobody believed in magic. So it came as a complete surprise to all of us when, one rainy night in June, an outbreak of magic spread across our city.

Read ten tales of magic and mystery, created by young local writers between the ages of 12 to 16 in a free program guided by the charity Story Studio staff and visiting authors from across British Columbia. Participants worked virtually over the course of a summer to collaboratively design a world for their stories to inhabit, with award-winning illustrator Gareth Gaudin bringing their words to life.

Pockets of magic now lay hidden around our city, little reservoirs of wonder now merged with our own. We believed in magic again. We had no choice.

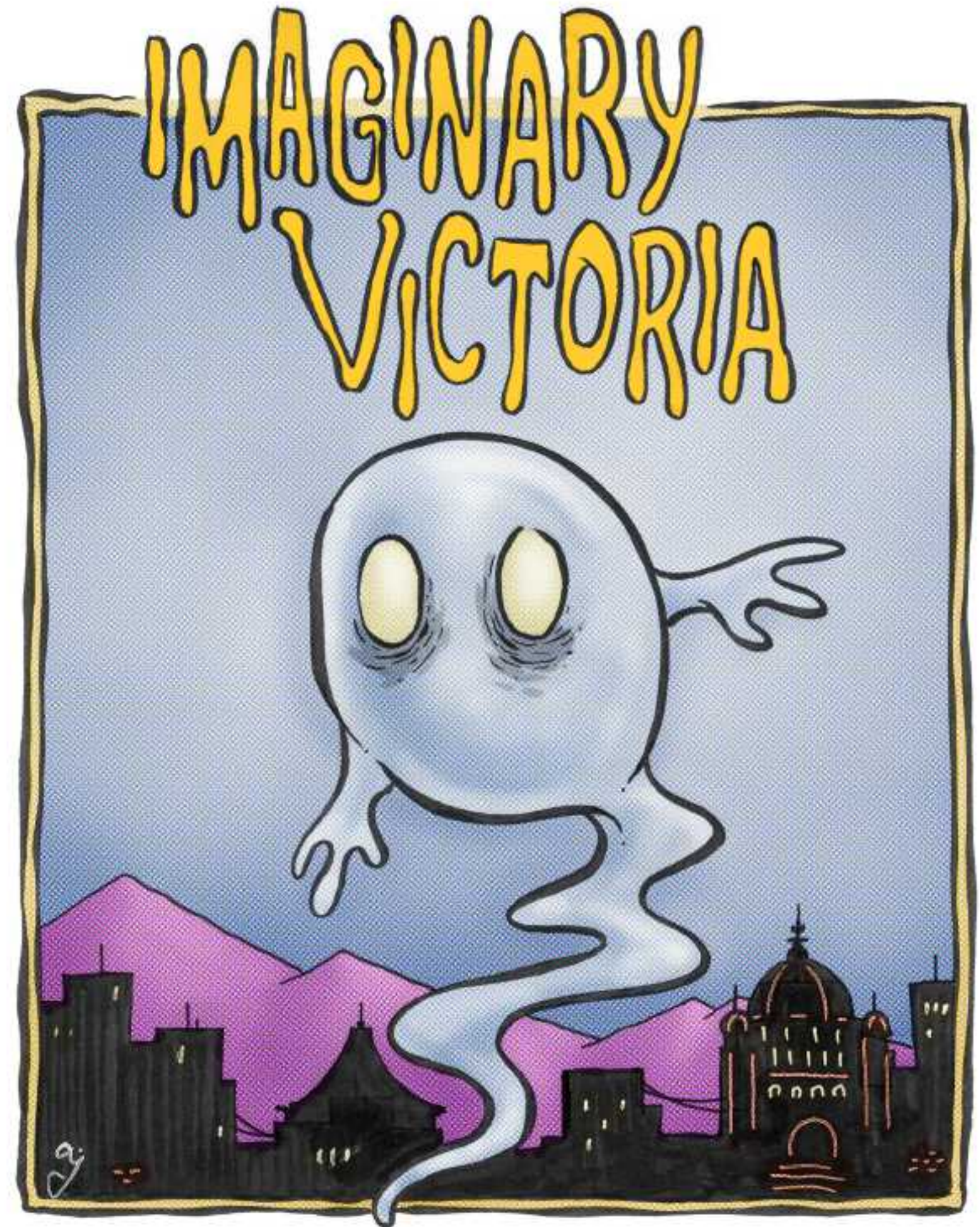
Now, it was our job to write the stories of these new places, and tell the tales of Imaginary Victoria.

This program was made possible by the City of Victoria.



Imaginary Victoria

Story Studio



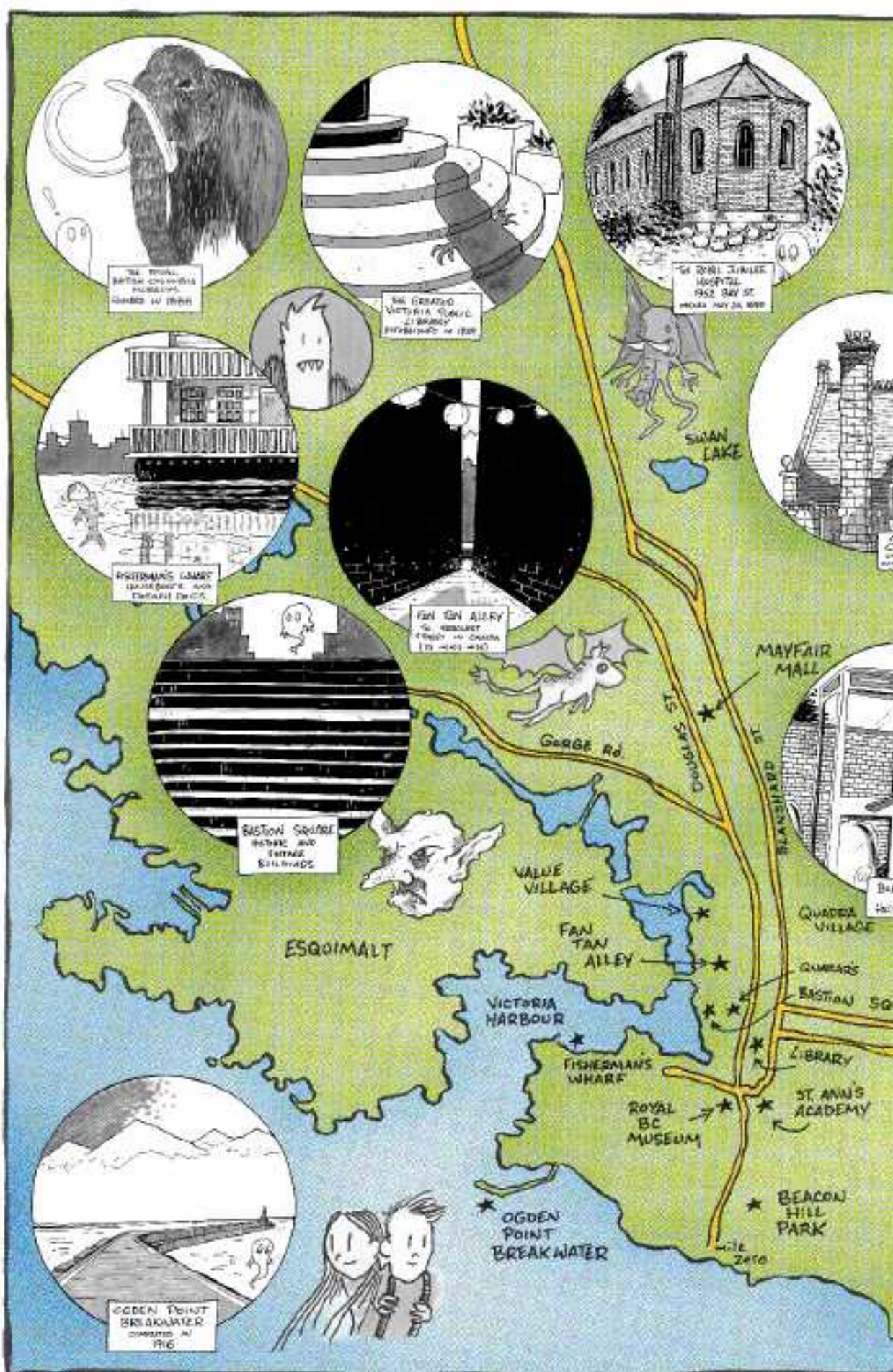
Story Studio is a charity that inspires, educates and empowers youth to be great storytellers, transforming lives and strengthening communities. We create innovative, 'fun-first' workshops that develop narrative capacity in youth, and celebrate young writers by crafting beautiful publications from their words.

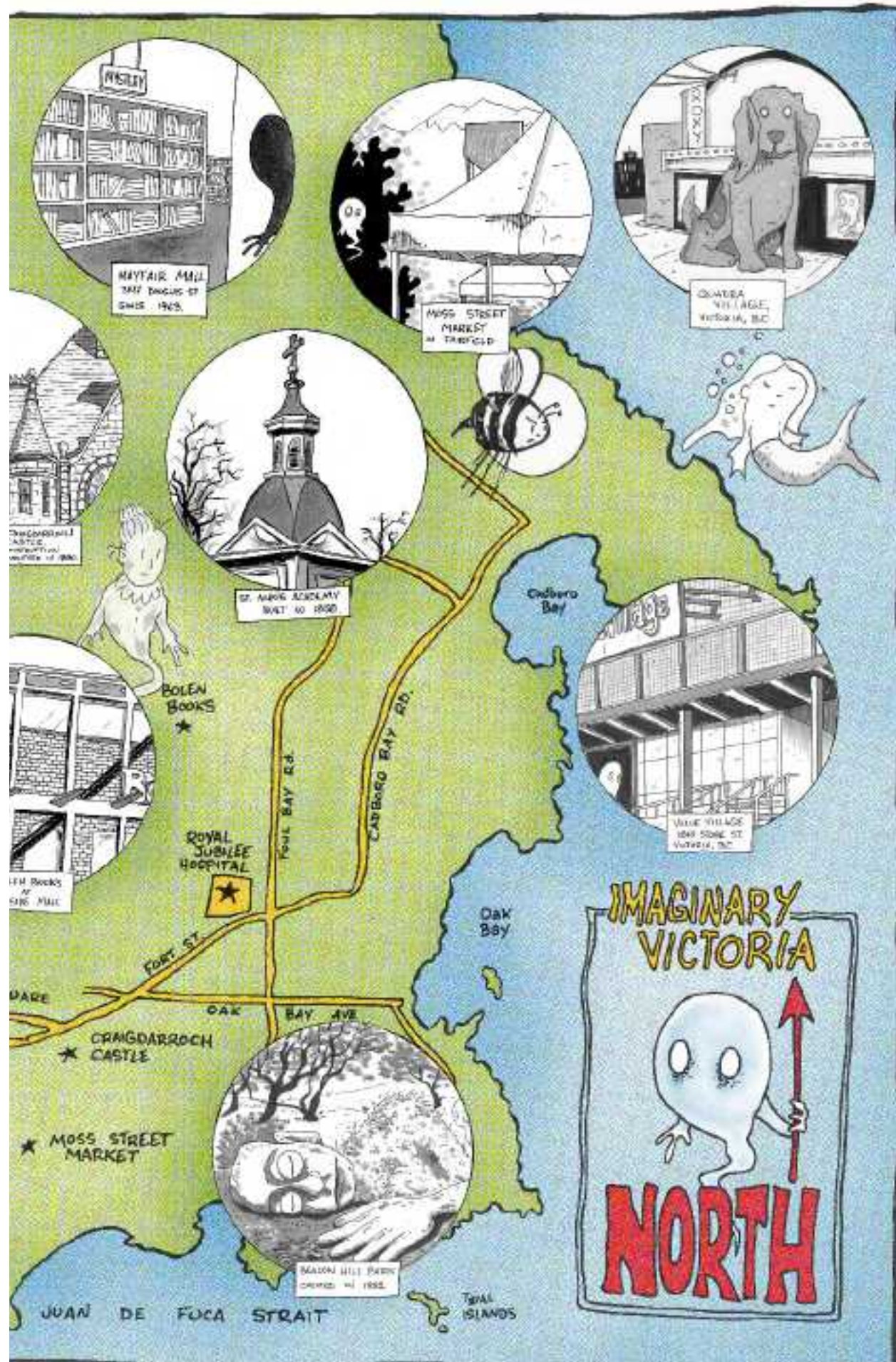
This anthology is composed of selections of stories written by dedicated writers between the ages of 12 and 16 as a result of our eight week 'Imaginary Victoria' program in connection with the City of Victoria. Participants worked virtually over the course of the summer to complete an independent writing project within a collaboratively designed magical world of Victoria with the help of illustrator Gareth Gaudin and support of other visiting local authors.

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NO ONE BELIEVED THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE.

Back then, nobody believed in magic. So it came as a complete surprise to all of us when, one rainy night in June, an outbreak of magic spread across our city.

Some witnessed a storm that wrapped itself around the office towers downtown, howling like a creature enraged. Others saw an iridescent volcano erupting from under Pandora Street. Many ran from a fog that moved like an animal on the hunt, as if carefully following a scent through the homes of James Bay.

No matter what we saw that night, it was clear that our world had been punctured by somewhere else, another reality colliding with us like an iceberg tearing through the hull of a ship, letting strangeness flood in. It was as beautiful as it was terrifying.

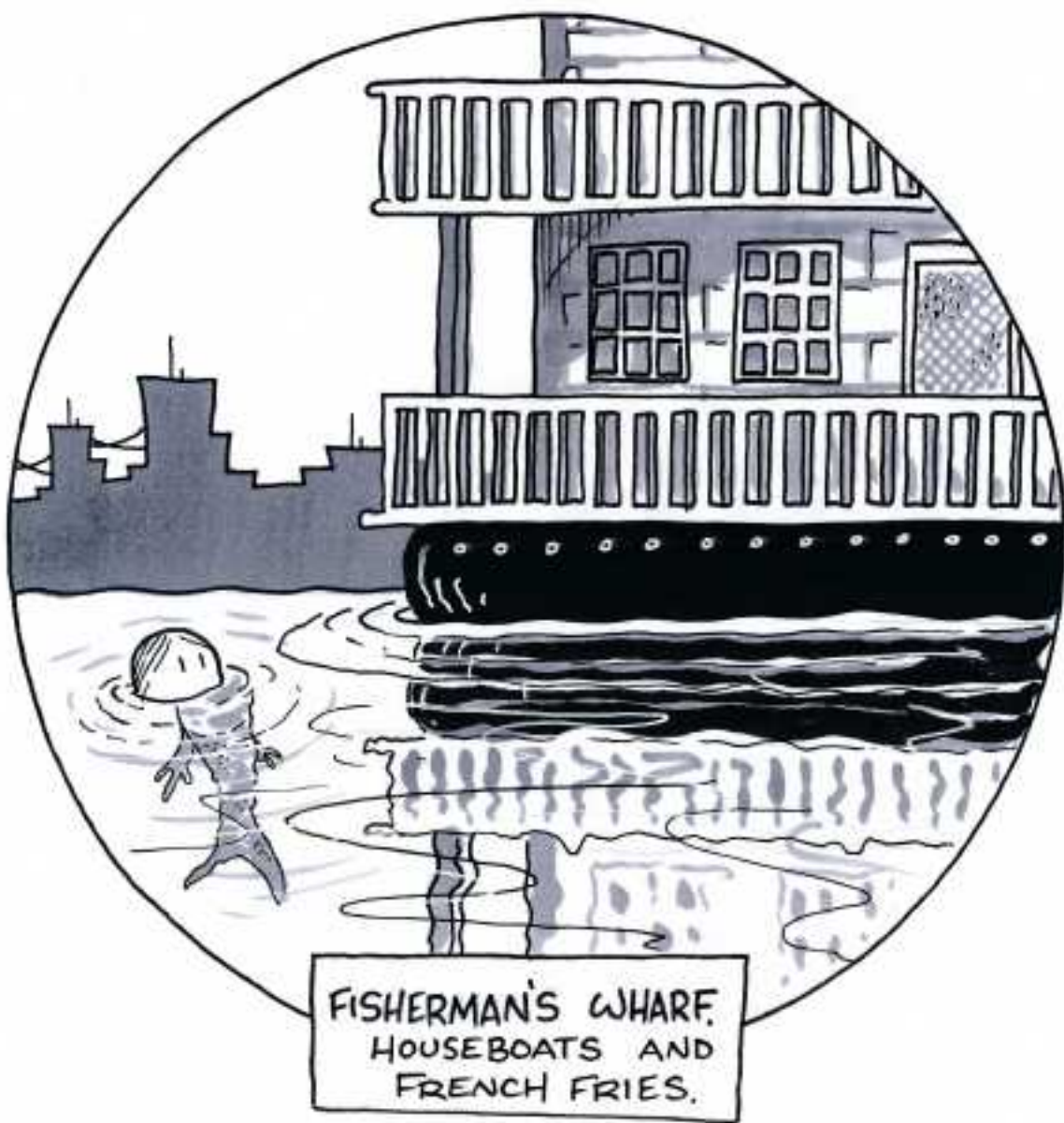
But it didn't last. When the sun rose the next morning, the magic seemed to fade away with the light. Everything seemed normal again, real and solid and mundane.

Until we found that our reality no longer played by quite the same rules as before. Where a bookstore had once stood on Fort Street, there was now a shop selling only cauldrons and curses. Shadows flickered across an otherwise empty Bastion Square at high noon, causing the ravens to squawk uncomfortably at the invisible creatures soaring unseen around them.

Unearthly neon flowers now grew in Beacon Hill Park, glowing softly in the evening twilight amid flickering fireflies.

Our 'normal' lives continued, but not as before. Pockets of magic now lay hidden around our city, little reservoirs of wonder now merged with our own. We believed in magic again. We had no choice.

Now it was our job to write the stories of these new places, and tell the tales of Imaginary Victoria.



REVOLUTION STARTS WITH AN ICE CREAM STORE

by
Kat Gillese

Michelle Barcina awoke early, as she normally did and felt refreshed and cheerful. She looked around her room from her red soccer jersey to the potted plants on her windowsill. ‘*Shoot!*’ she thought, ‘*I forgot to water them yesterday...*’

She pulled on some shorts and a plain orange t-shirt, and took her cup to the bathroom to fill it with water. She came back whistling softly and poured some water into her first plant. She jumped back in surprise, splashing water on herself and the floor as one of her plants attempted to take a bite of her. She stared at it and for the first time realized that her usual tropical plants that inhabited the plant boxes had been replaced with turquoise coloured plants that looked somewhat like venus flytraps.

“Petit Gervais?” she asked tentatively. The first plant snapped back at her.

“Arnold? Janey? Mr. Pepperface?” The plants all snapped back, as if responding to the names that had previously belonged to the tropical plants. She surveyed them carefully, then came to the most plausible conclusion.

“CAAAALUUUUUM!” she yelled.

“What’s up, Mishi?” He appeared at the door looking tired.

“Did YOU do this to my plants?” She gestured to the snapping plants beside her.

He rubbed his eyes sleepily, then screamed. Michelle didn’t think that the plants were really that scary, but realized suddenly that he was pointing to her head.

“YOUR EARS!” he screamed.

“What’s wrong with my ears?” she said irritably. She had always been a bit sensitive about them ever since Parker C. had called her ‘Dumbo’ in grade one. Since Calum certainly wasn’t going to answer her, she went into the bathroom to see for herself. It was when she screamed as well that her parents decided to see what was going on.

“Calum, Mishi, what’s wrong?” her mother said exasperatedly. Her mouth formed an ‘o’ shape once she saw Michelle, and her father yelled as well. Michelle stared at her reflection. In the mirror, she could see her usual eyes, nose, mouth, hair – along with a pair of elf ears that definitely were not cosplay.

Once they had all calmed down, they found out what was happening. They worked their way down their apartment building before they found the entirety of the truth. Three of the neighbours' plants had also become carnivorous and poor Mrs. Adachi had been on her porch during the storm last night and her toenails had grown into sharp black claws. Most of the cars that were on the street in front of their apartment building had been totalled, the cause of which was unknown.

When they had reached the ground floor, Mr. Ayala called out to them, screeching slightly at the sight of Michelle’s ears but regained himself and said, “I suppose you have heard the news by now, or at least seen it,” he smiled sympathetically at Michelle.

Michelle tugged on her ear, self-consciously. “The whole city is infested with magic!”

Her parents cried out in alarm, having been convinced that they were still sleeping, but finally accepting that this was no dream. This was very much real.

Calum pulled her aside. “How did that happen to your ears?” Her little brother asked worriedly.

“I-I don’t know. I was out last night, and it had started to rain, so I was heading back home and--” she stopped. Mrs. Adachi had been out in the storm and had grown claws. *She* had been out in the storm and had sprouted elf ears. Calum and Michelle looked at each other with dawning understanding.

“The storm!” Calum exclaimed.

“Of course it was the storm!” Michelle said, pretending that she had guessed that before so she sounded like her usual bossy self. She liked being an annoying older sister to Calum, though she could not quite say that Calum felt the same.

She stepped outside, leaving her parents to talk with Mr. Ayala and Calum clung onto her arm. She looked down at him.

“I’m going down to Fisherman's Wharf. Wanna come with me?”

He nodded.

The walk down to the Wharf was not quite as normal as usual. Michelle and Calum saw a number of unidentifiable creatures soaring overhead as they walked and as they passed the park outside of the Wharf, a walrus in a very damp suit and a green fedora mumbled something at them that they couldn't quite make out.

"Pardon?" Michelle asked as they neared him but he only snorted in response.

They arrived at the Wharf, a bit shaken from the displays of magic seen previously, but to their surprise they could find nothing wrong with the Wharf. "Huh," Calum remarked as they came down onto the docks. "Where's all the magic?"

Michelle shrugged and offered to buy Calum some ice cream, seeing as the shop was open. If they had not been so dazzled by all the magic they had seen that morning, they might have wondered why it was open so early, when it usually opened near noon. But since they had been dazzled, they simply proceeded to wander toward the line that consisted of one person, who was about to step up to purchase some ice cream. Before they reached the counter, however, the person behind the till made a gesture and a hand sprung up from the water, grasping the poor soul by their ankle and pulling them under.

Michelle and Calum gasped. They looked from the unperturbed clerk to the shape of something swimming behind the residential areas of the Wharf, towing the unconscious passerby. The person at the till glanced up, and grinned wickedly.

“Care for a cone?” she asked.

“Um, no thank you!” Michelle said, putting an arm protectively around Calum and staying far from the edges of the dock. “You just let that person drown!”

The clerk scoffed. “Oh, pish posh. They didn’t *drown*, they’re just unconscious.”

Michelle told Calum to stay right there and walked over to the clerk, making sure not to go through the side facing the water.

“Look, I don’t know who you think you are, but in this town, kidnapping is illegal. And it’s just rude in general!”

The clerk narrowed her eyes and smirked. “You mean you listen to those ridiculous laws?”

Michelle thought of her ears and realized that the person at the till must have thought that she wasn’t human. “Well,” she said, playing along, “They are a tad condescending, but even humans should be allowed to roam freely without having to worry about being knocked out and taken off like that.”

The person surveyed her carefully, then nodded. “Maybe you’re right, but they should have thought about that before *they* started it.”

“Who?” Michelle asked.

“Those fisher dudes, the ones with the big nets. They stole Catrina!” She almost shouted the last part, clearly unhappy about it.

Michelle found herself intrigued and motioned for her brother to come over.

“Yuck! A human! What’s he doing with you?”

“This is my brother, Calum. I’m part-human.”

The person seemed a bit shocked to hear this at first, but then nodded and said, “Okay...I wouldn’t have guessed, to be honest. You do ‘magical being’ very well,” she said.

Michelle smiled and flushed a little. “Well, I guess you’re still partially one of us...” she trailed off, as if she didn’t know what she should do in this situation.

“I’m sorry for thinking you were gross,” she said finally, turning sheepishly towards Calum.

Calum crossed his arms at first and pouted grumpily, but then uncrossed them and said, “I’ll forgive you, if you give me an ice cream cone.”

The person did, giving him a raspberry cheesecake cone (which happened to be Michelle and Calum’s favourite flavour) and Calum decided that she wasn’t all that bad. The person offered one to Michelle and she took it gratefully. “My name is Kane Hellwreck of The Lost Tide clan. You can just call me Kane, though,” she said with a goofy smile.

“My name is Michelle Josefina Barcina, but you can call me Michelle,” Michelle responded with a similar grin.

“Or Mishi!” Calum added brightly.

Michelle’s cheeks turned red. “It’s just a nickname my family calls me.”

“Mishi it is, then!” said Kane, grinning mischievously.

Kane came out of the shop and Michelle got a better look at her. She had a blue baseball cap twisted backwards on her head, and long, coppery hair tied back into a ponytail. She was wearing a baggy soccer shirt and a pair of bright yellow carpenter pants that were rolled up at the cuffs. Her sneakers were green and scuffed. Michelle wanted to say something, but she couldn’t find the words. Most of the female students at her school wore clothing that came straight from the girl’s section of any clothing store, and Michelle had always felt out of place. While she identified as a girl, she felt more comfortable in the loose-fitting clothing often found in the boys section, and Kane seemed to match her style. Still being only twelve, wearing clothing from either section fit fine, and she wished that clothing stores would just have a kids section instead of gendering everything. Calum didn’t care either way. He wore Michelle’s hand me downs.

“Do you want to meet everyone else?” Kane asked.

Calum and Michelle exchanged curious glances and nodded. Kane took them into the residential area of the Wharf.

“Hey! We can’t go back here! It’s residents only!”

“We’re the residents now,” Kane said shrugging, “We’ve kidnapped the ones over here--” she gestured with her hand towards the residential area they were entering, “--and we’ve left the other docks as they are. For now.”

Michelle and Calum didn’t like the sound of that. Opening the door to the last house on the dock, Michelle and Calum could see about five captured civilians.

“Kane, this is--!” Michelle was interrupted by Kane.

“Cruel? I know.” She was quiet for a while.

“Why do you do it then?” Calum asked.

“The leader of our clan, she wants to take control of the city,” Michelle and Calum gasped. “But I just want Catrina back.” Kane looked sad, and Michelle put a hand on her arm. She felt an odd sensation, similar to when her class had gone to see salmon at Goldstream Park and had gotten to touch one.

“Kane, what magical creature did you say you were?”

Kane looked up, surprise on her face, and smiled. “I didn’t say. I’m a mermaid.”

It was at that moment that a large fish-like creature popped out of the water and jumped onto the dock. Michelle realized then that it wasn't a fish but a mermaid.

She flopped about on her belly until she finally transformed in a spray of water into a human.

“Kane! Kane!”

“What is it, Kelby?” Kane asked, smiling playfully.

“Mama says that it’s your turn to watch the humans.”

“What? But I just came back from the counter!”

“Mom said so, not me.” They bickered on, for several moments. Then Kelby seemed to notice Michelle and Calum. She ducked behind Kane’s legs and peered at them shyly.

“Kelby, it’s alright. They aren’t sharks, y’know,” Kane said smiling down at her.

Michelle and Calum waved. “Hi there!” Michelle said kindly.

The little mergirl waved back.

“Mishi, Calum, this is my little sister, Kelby.”

Kelby was a bit nervous to talk to them at first, but soon enough she was showing Calum her attack seal and they were getting along fine.

“So, can I meet your family now?” Michelle asked as Calum and Kelby fed Kelby’s attack seal.

“Oh yeah, sure. I can only take one of you though...”

Michelle looked at Calum playing happily. “Could you ask that person who dragged away that civilian to watch Calum while we’re gone?”

Kane nodded, and barked loudly. There was some barking in response, and another merperson popped out of the water. This one was much taller than Kane and had purple hair and slightly darker skin than her.

“This is Abalone, my older sister! Abalone, this is Michelle.”

Abalone smiled and Michelle smiled back. Unlike Kane, she was wearing clothing that Michelle had seen in storefronts downtown, all of which were considerably expensive. Kane noticed her eyeing Abalone’s clothes.

“We raided the fallen stores for clothes. I went to the Sally Ann, in case you couldn’t tell,” Kane did a small twirl to show off her thrift store clothes.

“And I, being the more fashionable one,” Kane glowered at her, “I actually got clothes from the *trendy* stores.”

Kane scoffed. “I didn’t call you here to talk about clothing. Would you mind watching Kelby and Calum for me? I just wanna show Mishi something.”

Abalone seemed to ponder this. “Well... I dunno, sis. I’m pretty busy...”

Kane huffed and said, “Look, if you do this, I’ll give you my cherry star I’ve been saving.”

Abalone tried to cover up her interest. “Alright, I’ll do it. But be quick, okay?”

Kane nodded and took Michelle’s hand, pulling her towards the water.

“Uh, hello? Have you forgotten that I’m not a merperson or...?”

Kane shook her head and said, “That doesn’t matter. Here,” She made an ‘o’ shape with her cupped hands and blew. Seemingly out of nowhere, a bubble emerged, and fit itself around Michelle’s head. “There!” Kane said proudly. “You should be fine now.”

Michelle didn’t want to think about the ‘should’ in that sentence. Kane held her hand and counted down from three. “Three... Two... One, go!”

They jumped and Michelle screeched. “IT’S SO COLD!” she cried.

Kane made an ‘oops’ face and pulled her along. “You’ll get used to it. It’s warmer down here.” Her tail was yellow with patches of orange, and her clothes; apart from her shirt, had disappeared.

After several minutes of swimming, they reached a mass of rocks, kelp and eelgrass. They could see dozens of small creatures living amongst the rocks,

some the kind you might expect, and others not so much. After passing a pink, glowing jellyfish, Michelle said, “I’m pretty sure those jellyfish aren’t native here...”

“Well yeah, but are *merpeople* native here?” Kane said.

“I guess not. Where do you come from then?”

Kane shrugged. “We were from here originally, long, long ago. For a while, we lived in Hawaii. Also Zimbabwe, the Kei Islands in Japan and some other places but we didn’t go on land much. But somehow, we wound up here again and these jellies came too.”

Michelle said nothing, but admired her surroundings. As they got closer, she realized that the rocks had light coming from in between them.

“Voila! My home,” Kane said, turning so Michelle could see.

The village was lit brightly by the jellyfish she had seen moments before, and the rock had been put together roughly to form little caverns in which she could see more merpeople. Kane brought Michelle over to a cave that was slightly bigger than the rest and decorated with seashells.

“Mom! Dad! I have someone I’d like you to meet!” Kane shouted and two figures emerged from the cave. One was tall and had long dark hair with a seashell crown and the other a good deal shorter, with lighter, copper locks that looked more like Kane’s.

They both had yellowy tails, like Kane, although neither were very orange.

“Hello there, little elf person. Who might you be?” the shorter one said.

“Daaaad! This is my friend, Michelle. Mishi, this is my mom and my dad.”

“Hi!” Michelle said smiling.

Kane’s mother bowed to Michelle and said, “Nice to meet you, Michelle.”

Michelle tried not to gawk. *‘She actually bowed to me! Do people still do that?’*
Michelle thought as she awkwardly bowed back.

Kane’s father chuckled and without bowing said, “Feel free to stop by anytime. A friend of Kay kay’s is a friend of ours!”

Kane screeched, “DAD! Don’t call me that in front of my friend!”

Her father chuckled, “Sorry Kane.”

Michelle elbowed Kane and gave her a look that said, *That’s what you get for calling me Mishi!*

Kane grinned back without even a hint of sheepishness. “Anyway,” she interjected, “I’m going to show Mishi around some more, so we better jet. See you later!”

Kane tugged Michelle out the door and Michelle called out, “It was nice meeting you, bye!”

Kane’s parents waved and started to say something that sounded like, “Kane! Who’s watching the humans--” But Kane didn’t seem to hear.

“Your parents seem nice,” Michelle said looking around. Kane smiled and pointed out different houses and waved to merpeople who either waved or bowed back. Michelle was starting to wonder if maybe bowing was a merperson custom.

“What was the seashells on your mom’s head for though? Decoration?”

Kane squirmed uncomfortably. “Kind of. The seashell’s are mostly symbolic, but they do give her some magic.”

“How come nobody else has them?” Michelle wondered.

Kane muttered something Michelle couldn’t hear. “What was that?”

“My mom’s the leader. Of our clan. A sort of queen, if you will.”

Michelle’s eyes widened. “So that’s why your house is fancier than the others. But that makes you--”

“A princess. Yup,” Kane interrupted dismally.

‘That’s probably why everyone was bowing to her...’ Michelle thought.

Kane sighed heavily and turned to Michelle. “I suppose you don’t want to be friends with me now that you know who I am.”

Michelle gave her a puzzled look. “Why would that matter to me?”

Kane looked taken aback, “Everyone else I’ve tried to be friends with told me that it’s too much to live up to, being the friend of royalty. They thought they had to be rich or fancy to be my friend, so they didn’t try. I don’t want friends like that anyway! I want friends like you.”

Michelle blushed and smiled. “Well, I *do* want to be your friend. And I’m not fancy at all, don’t worry about that.”

Kane beamed and hugged Michelle. Michelle hugged her back until suddenly her eyes lit up. “Kane! You haven’t shown me *that* yet!”

Michelle was introduced to the twenty-six ‘attack’ seals that the merpeople had trained to ambush people who came close enough to the water. They were kept in a gigantic area that had been bordered by massive rocks.

“Okay. Are you ready?”

Michelle nodded and Kane took a deep breath.

“Here’s Sheila and Maku and Leo and Hunter and Sully and Linus and Scrappy,” Kane took another breath, “Oscar, Flopsie, Zach, Teiko, Nancy, Luseal, Bianca, Pailey, Sunshine, Billow, Flynn, Monk, Keith, Earl, Gerald, Stefano, Skaeg and Wolfgang.”

Michelle stared at Kane in awe and then looked at the seals who were staring back at her playfully.

“Oh yeah, and my attack seal, Hedwyn!” Kane picked up one of the seals and held it out to Michelle. Michelle was unsure whether to pet it or let it sniff her, but it instead looked like it wanted food.

“I don’t have any fish for you. I’m sorry,” Michelle said to the seal. Kane rummaged in her mass of hair and produced a small sardine from within. Kane grinned proudly, and Michelle took the sardine with a look of alarm on her face. She sauced the fish to the seal who ate it happily, and continued to look at Kane in dismay.

“What?” Kane asked.

“Nothing!” Michelle decided not to say anything about Kane’s hair, seeing as she was the one with twenty six attack seals at her disposal and not her.

“Come on, we should be heading back now.” Kane started to swim back the way they came from, and Michelle followed. They reached the surface and Michelle hoisted herself up onto the dock.

Her bubble broke when she had fully resurfaced and she noticed that Kane seemed to struggle to get out slightly. Michelle guessed because she was much shorter, and she helped her up.

“Thanks,” Kane said smiling.

“It’s about time!” Abalone said, ruffling Kane’s hair.

“Come on, Calum. We should be getting back to mom and dad.”

“But Mishiiii! I don’t wanna go!”

“But you have to. You can come see Kelby soon, okay?”

“Promise?” Calum looked at Michelle uncertainly.

“Promise.”

Calum waved goodbye to Kelby and Kane took Michelle by the hand. “Here. If you ever want to come see me, just do this,” holding onto Michelle’s hands, she replicated the movements she had done earlier and created a bubble. Michelle copied her and Kelby popped Kane’s bubble, and Calum popped the other. They both giggled.

“We’ll be back,” said Michelle waving to them. Kane and Kelby waved back, and Abalone gave a small smile.

“Calum! Mishi! You should have told us you were going out! We were worried.” Michelle’s mother kissed both of their cheeks and then frowned again at Michelle’s ears.

“I don’t think they’re temporary,” Her father sighed.

“I think I’m starting to like them,” Michelle said in defence as her parents exchanged a look.

“Xuxu, they are a part of you now. If you like them, then we will have to learn to like them too,” Her mother said, smiling at her.

“That mermaid thought she was an elf!” Calum mused.

“Mermaid?” her father asked.

“Yeah! There’s a bunch of them down by Fisherman’s Wharf.”

“Are you sure you should be associating with these creatures Mishi?”

“Mom! They’re not *creatures*, they’re nice!” ‘*Well – for the most part.*’ Michelle thought about Abalone pulling the unsuspecting person into the water. “And anyway, weren’t you just saying that we should be more accepting?”

“That’s different. You are our daughter. We don’t know those fish people.”

“Well I do! And they’re called mermaids, not fish people!” Michelle yelled.

“Okay, okay, calm down. No need to get all upset.” her father said soothingly.

“I’m sorry, everyone. I just don’t like how you talk about them like they’re objects or animals. They’re people too, mamá.”

~ ~ ~

“Oh! You’re back!” Kane exclaimed at the sight of Michelle the next day.

“Yup!” Michelle's smile suddenly faltered. “What are you doing?”

Kane’s cheeks reddened in shame. “I-I tried talking to mom about kidnapping folks, but she wouldn’t listen! I’m not allowed to disobey her...” her shoulders slumped as Abalone took down another passerby. “I even try to call to people to come through the other way, out of Abalone’s reach, but most of them hear after it’s already too late.”

Michelle walked over to the counter and looked at Kane. “Come on. Let’s get out of here.”

“But--” Kane sputtered.

“No buts. Abalone! You can get someone else to stand at the counter,” Michelle called out.

Abalone huffed and muttered, “Little sisters,” shaking her head.

“That was awesome!” Kane grinned at Michelle as the two of them walked along the docks towards the boats. “No one’s ever stood up to my sister like that before! Except Catrina I guess...” she trailed off, looking lost.

“Isn’t Catrina the person you mentioned the fisher peeps kidnapped?”

“Yeah, that’s what started this whole thing. Catrina was the merperson who was always helping everyone out, always the brightest face in the clan. When the fisher dudes took her, everyone was upset. She was everyone’s friend, even mine,” Kane smiled nostalgically.

“They haven’t given her back?”

“No, they haven’t,” Kane looked angry, as she kicked a stray pop can, before then picking it up and placing it venomously into a recycling bin.

“Do you think--” Michelle thought for a moment. “Do you think that your parents might not try to take over the city if we got Catrina back?”

Kane thought about it. “Maybe. It’s worth a try! But we don’t know where she’s being kept. And the fisher folk always have someone stationed to look after the boats.” She nodded towards a figure down one of the docks that was standing with a fishing rod menacingly.

“Well...maybe we can’t get in on our own. Do you know anyone that could help?”

Kane’s eyes lit up. “I know exactly who will help.”

Michelle stood at the end of the residential dock as Kane emerged from a house holding a small pink walkie talkie. “Earlier the other day, we caught a green little dude who was moping about. We tied him up with the rest of ‘em, but I convinced Abalone and my parents that he was one of us magic folk and they let him go. I got him a map of the city so he could find his way back to where his friends were and he gave me this thing and told me he owed me, and if I ever needed a favour to call him.”

“It looks kind of cheap,” Michelle said, inspecting the batteries on the back. “I’m not sure if it will work.”

“Well, we best give it a try,” Kane said and pressed a button, inclining her head.

“Hello? Anybody there?” There was a pause, and Kane tapped the walkie talkie suspiciously.

After a moment a voice replied. “Yup. Geordi here. What’s up?”

“It’s Kane! You said you owed me, right?”

Another pause. “That’s right, I did.”

“Well, I could use that favour right now. How quickly can you get here?”

“As quick as my hilariously small legs will take me. So basically-- around twenty three minutes for the average human, and like thirty-five minutes for me.”

“Great. Could you bring some kind of gadget that will help us find a lost person?”

“I’ll see what I can find. See you soon!”

Kane tucked the walkie talkie in her pocket. “Please remind me that it’s there or it will most likely die a watery death.”

Michelle giggled, “Okay, I’ll try. Hey, Kane, I heard that there’s been a sort of fight going on between some merfolk and some trolls. Do you know anything about it?”

Kane grimaced and growled, “Yeah, I know about it. That’s *not* our clan. Those merpeople are from The Blue Mangrove clan. Most of them have stayed on land long enough that they’ve become humans. Permanently. They want to take over too, but their means of doing so are a lot bloodier than ours. At least we don’t harm the people we kidnap.”

“That’s rough...” Michelle put her arm around Kane’s shoulders. Kane gave her a small smile.

After a while, Michelle could see a small figure dressed in a short sleeved button up shirt and shorts sprinting toward them. When he emerged from the shade of the trees, Michelle could see his neon green stark against his surroundings. “Uh, Kane?” Kane turned to face Michelle. “I think your friend is here...”

“Geordi! Hey!” Kane waved wildly as the short green person came into view.

He looked like a cliché alien from some cartoon show, minus the oversized glasses and outfit. He grinned widely, showing braces.

“Hi! I brought some stuff.” Noticing Michelle, he waved and said, “Oh, hi! I’m Geordi!”

“I’m Michelle!” Michelle was surprised by his large grin and smiled back.

“I’m from the arcade. Quazar’s, you know it?”

“Oh yeah! I love that place.”

Geordi smiled. “So, I took these along. They might be handy?” In his hands were a pair of aviator goggles. One of the lenses was cracked, and the glass had a pink tint to it.

“What are they?” Kane asked.

“Well, originally just goggles, but I’ve tinkered with them so they can detect living organisms. Here, try it on.”

He handed the goggles to Kane who put them on and then took them off right away. “Too bright, you try them, Michelle.”

“Okay,” Michelle took them and put them on.

Kane was right, everything was much brighter and looking at Kane and Geordi, she could see their outlines in bright pink. Michelle took them off, as they started to hurt her eyes. “Wow! Now we can see inside the boats without going in them.”

Kane hugged Geordi, then Michelle and said, “Alright, now listen up. I’ve got a plan.”

It was dark when Michelle met Geordi and Kane at the docks. Michelle had the goggles, though she wasn’t wearing them yet. Crouching behind a table from one of the restaurants, Michelle put on the goggles and peered at the boats. She could see a few people inside some boats, and one posted near the entrance to the docks. She scanned the area again, until her eyes rested on a fish-like shape.

“Found her. She’s in that boat, the small one three down from the end,” she motioned with her hand to Kane.

Kane nodded, and jumped into the water. Her walkie talkie had been put safely away minutes before. Michelle and Geordi went over to the person that was standing guard.

“Excuse me?” Geordi asked, his green-ness invisible in the darkness of the night.

“Hmm? What are you doing out this late, little boy?”

He opened the door and came out onto the dock. Michelle carefully squeezed past him, and krept across the docks.

Kane had gone into the boat that Catrina was being kept in and was pulling her out. She was walking with Kane wobbling, and Michelle joined them, preparing a bubble for herself.

“I would have thought they would put more protection on her,” Kane whispered with a puzzled look on her face. It was at that moment that the person posted to guard the dock turned around and yelled, “Hey! What do you kids think you’re doing?” He ran toward them and other people came up from the boats around them.

Michelle gasped. She had seen them, of course but she had not thought that they were awake or prepared for their rescue. Catrina, Michelle and Kane were held firmly by the people with no visible way of escape.

Kane seemed to think of something though, because she barked as loudly as she could. The captives cringed, but held on tight.

“So much for that idea,” Michelle said gloomily.

“My idea wasn’t to hurt their ears,” Kane said looking at her. She grinned her wicked smile she had grinned the first time they had met. With a deafening crash, a number of figures appeared at the end of the dock. The one in front of them all was Kane’s mother.

~ ~ ~

Michelle walked over to Kane with Calum in tow. “Two Raspberry Cheesecake cones, please.”

“Coming right up! Catrina, can you hand me the scooper?”

It had been about a week since They had rescued Catrina from the fisherfolk and a week since The Lost Tide Clan had declared a truce with the fisherpeople and renounced their plan to take over the city (with the compliance to co-rule Fisherman’s Wharf). They had found out that the kidnapping of Catrina had been an accident, that she had become trapped in one of the nets and they were originally going to release her anyway, if it hadn’t been for their kidnapping people as well.

Life had gone back to normal, or as normal as a newly magical city could be, and Catrina was safe in her home.

“Hello?” came a voice from Kane’s back pocket.

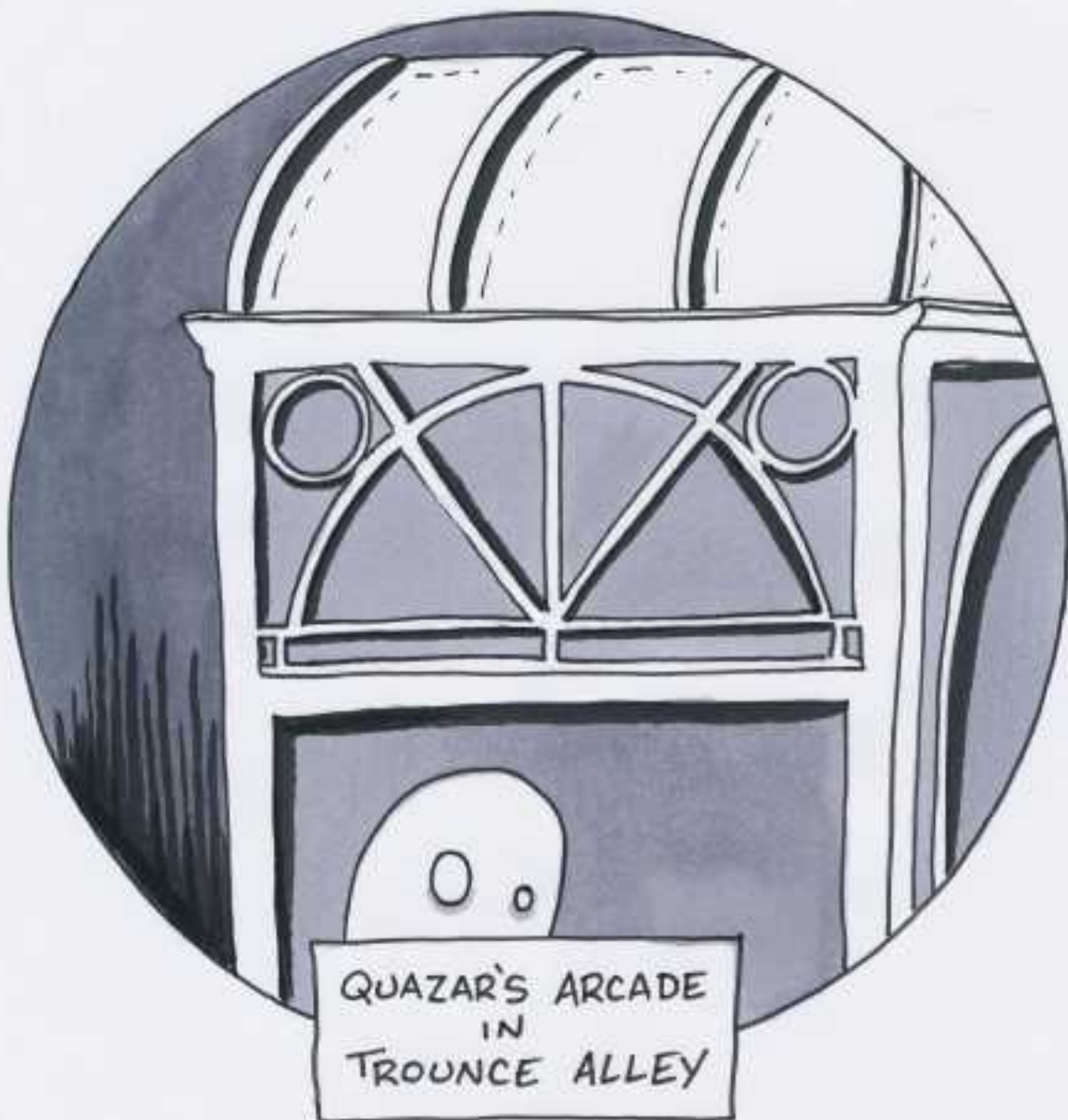
Kane pressed down the button and replied, “Hey Geordi, how’s it going?”

“Okay. We’re still trying to fix these arcade machines. They don’t seem to like being run by magic,” In the background Kane and Michelle could hear screaming.

“Do you need our help?”

“Yes, if that’s alright.”

“Okay,” said Kane grinning at Michelle, “But, you’re gonna owe me!”





THE MUSEUM

by
Jakob Wiebe

Alan Arnold had been eating a grilled cheese while he walked around the museum. He was a night guard there, and liked to explore frequently. He loved watching *The Night at the Museum* movies, and he supposed that was why he became a night guard in the first place.

Alan Arnold had always felt like he wanted to live in some fantastical world. It made up for his life, which had been normal in every sense of the world. Lately, he had been hearing about strange things happening by Fisherman's Wharf. Something involving merpeople. But, he didn't believe any of it. He wanted to believe, but Victoria was just another coastal city, and- **CRASH!**

'*What was that?*' Alan ran over to where he heard the noise, and peeking into the orca exhibit, he couldn't believe what he saw. A group of trolls were smashing the glass with giant clubs.

"Smash! Crash! Bash!" They shouted, "We will steal the treasure!"

Alan breathed. This wasn't happening. This couldn't be happening. Trolls weren't real. Trolls weren't- Suddenly, he heard a larger crashing noise. And, looking behind him, he leapt out of the way as a mammoth crashed through to the orca exhibit. Bellowing, it used its massive tusks to hit the trolls.

"OH CRUD!!!!" one of the smaller trolls shouted, "Stupid BEAST OF BURDEN!"

"Yech, yech," a large troll shouted, "Yech, yech, yech! Stupid, stupid, stupid beast!"

The mammoth stomped that troll straight into the ground.

“Retreat!” a muscular, bearded troll shouted, “RETREAT, DAMN IT! RETREAT!”

The trolls ran towards Alan, who ran out of view of the trolls. They ran straight past him, clearly fleeing from the mammoth. And then... They vanished. They seemed to just... Not exist anymore. Vanished completely from view. And as he walked closer to the area, he could see why.

Or rather, he felt why. He walked on an oddly shaped square of floorboard and fell right through it. Or, should we say, phased right through it. The floorboard remained intact. It appeared there was some magic in the floorboards.

Alan hit the ground fast and hard, and he heard the clamouring of many other trolls. As he ran through what appeared to be a bizarre underground tunnel, he saw what seemed to be another massive floorboard above a section of dirt. He had never seen floorboards like this before, so he felt it was very likely that the trolls had specifically installed these in the quest of being freely able to steal artifacts from the museum. Climbing up onto a rickety, makeshift, ladder, he phased through the floorboard and examined his surroundings. It appeared to be the permanent gold rush exhibit. A horse galloped into view and seemed to motion for Alan to get on, and hearing crashing beneath the floor from the running trolls, he did.

It was almost surreal as Alan rode the horse through the undersea exhibit, which had birds flying from the fake pond and an octopus swimming in what was supposed to be a fake water tank.

The horse galloped further and further through the museum, when Alan suddenly heard a voice. It was Garnet and Jessica, the fellow night guards who monitored the security cameras. The horse screeched to a stop, as Garnet and Jessica, their minds blown, began to talk with Alan.

“Alan,” Jessica began, “What the hell is happening? On the monitor I saw trolls stealing artifacts, and a mammoth and horse coming to li-” Birds from the pond exhibit flew overhead and everyone marvelled at their beauty for a moment.

Alan wiped a tear from his eye. “It’s such a beautiful thing, isn’t it?” he said simply and happily.

“Yea, it truly is,” Jessica responded, stroking her ginger hair.

“Guys, guys, guys!” Garnet shouted, prepared to tell the others what was on their mind, “I think this might be connected to the merpeople at Fisherman’s Wharf! All sorts of magic must be happening! We have a Victoria of imaginary proportions!”

“You really believe that?” Jessica asked sarcastically.

“I mean, it’s no stranger than everything else we’ve seen,” Alan responded, shrugging.

Garnet and Jessica were about to respond when water suddenly flooded the room, and the four of them were washed away, carried by the tides as orcas, likely from the orca exhibit, swam through the water, and the mammoth rushed through as well.

Jessica grabbed hold of the wall, avoiding the water.

“Incredible!” Alan finished for her, as an orca swam next to him. “I-I’ve never felt so alive.” The orca nuzzled up next to him, and cooed softly. Tears were brought to Alan’s eyes... “Ben Stiller got nothin’ on me!” he shouted, but then clasped a hand on his mouth. He should have been quiet. Now he could attract trolls.

There was loud splashing as Trolls swam into the room. One had a giant war-horn and bellowed it. Others grabbed hunting clubs, spears or other weapons. “ORCA MEAT!” A bulky, black-haired troll shouted.

Tossing spears at the orcas and clubbing them, a fight began. The orcas chomped with their sharp teeth at the trolls, which began clubbing them. “No! Stop!” Garnet shouted, as they were trying to swim to help the orcas, but the tidal waves from the fight were far too strong.

Jessica was hit by a massive wave and pushed underwater. When Alan dived under he couldn’t believe what he saw. Jessica’s skin was blue, and had grown a long fishtail. Jessica was a mermaid.

Now it all made sense! Jessica had only arrived a few days prior, and as such was a bit of a newbie to the night guard business. No wonder she avoided the water! After all the havoc the merpeople had been causing, she wouldn't want to be identified with them. At all.

As both Jessica and Alan pulled themselves to the surface, there was no time for explanation. They had to save the orcas. It was a feast for the trolls, who numbered around 50 in total. There were orcas all around, fighting back in a losing battle. There was a giant mammoth that was pure meat, and in the water, quite slow. And the horse had already fallen. Killed by a well placed spear followed by several trolls viciously digging in. "It's a good thing the magic that brought us here brought these creatures to life," a female troll stated before chowing down.

"NO!" Alan shouted. "NO, NO, NO! GO AWAY, YOU DAMN-"

Suddenly, the museum collapsed. The water, combined with the tunnels, combined with all the battling, had decimated the museum into a lake with trolls and sea creatures battling. Onlookers stared as they saw the collapse of the museum that they cherished so much. Garnet swam out of the de-facto lake and shouted, "Help them! Help them! They're going to die!"

But the citizens of Victoria just fled. Garnet buried their face in the ground, feeling defeated, before picking up a stick and entering the fray.

They were dying. The orcas were dying, killed by these trolls. And even the Mammoth was falling down.

There was no hope... and all Alan felt was a sense of vengeance. As trolls gathered artifacts from the ruins to serve their own purposes, he rushed straight into the water, roaring with the need for justice. His shouts distracted Garnet, who was clobbered by a troll club, his green (dyed) hair touched with sparkles of blood.

“Garnet!” Alan and Jessica shouted.

“You trolls will PAY for this!” Alan shouted.

The trolls laughed. “Oh, la de da!” they shouted, “You can’t beat us; we’ve already won!”

Suddenly, a noise was heard over the hills.

“Die, foul trolls!” A voice shouted, and hundreds of armour-clad, sword-in hand warriors, rushed to the lake.

“Other Merpeople...” Jessica breathed.

It was a massacre. The trolls had no chance. And Garnet was able to swim out of the lake, and watched as troll blood soaked the water.

“Our people will avenge us...” A bearded troll said before being decapitated by a merperson.

Alan wasn't sure what to feel. The animals were avenged, and yet all the trolls had died. And, judging by the unease on Jessica's face, there was a possibility he had unleashed something far worse. Garnet got up, stroked the blood from their brow, and straightened their glasses.

A few merpeople walked out of the water. "We saw the museum collapse, and we knew we had to help- Jessica?" a crowned mermaid said, presumably the queen of the merpeople.

"Yes, it is me. The one you kicked out- for being too peaceful!" Jessica shouted.

"That's hardly appropriate, given we've just saved you from the trolls," the queen scoffed, "Hopefully now they've learned their place."

"I think you just started a war," Jessica said, looking at the wet, sad, ruins of the formerly Royal BC Museum.

"They had to be stopped," the queen stated.

"I know, but, did you have to be so fierce?"

"I-"

"How come you were here?" Garnet interrupted, "Aren't you merpeople by Fisherman's Wharf? Or did you run out of people to terrorize there?"

"Garnet, what do you mean?" Alan asked.

“Didn’t you read the article? They’ve been taking people hostage over by fisherman’s-”

A dart hit Garnet straight in the head. “OUGH!!” He shouted, falling over, unconscious.

“Get out of here, now,” the queen stated, harsh, and Alan and Jessica, carrying Garnet, obeyed.

They arrived in a secluded park. “So,” Alan said, “You’re a mermaid?”

“I suppose I am,” she said simply. “There isn’t really another word for it. I was kicked out after I protested invading the surface world. And now poor Garnet is infected with the kelp poison.”

“Will it kill him?” Alan asked, his eyebrows frowning this way and that like a buzzing bee.

“I don’t know, but I believe so judging by how weak he is. Yet the poison hasn’t made an imprint on his features yet, one week’s time. Strange normally it would happen right away,” Jessica said. “However, I believe there is a cure.”

“What’s the cure?”

“Rainbow kelp, I think.”

“Well, how do we find it?”

“Well, nobody really knows. Except... My great-uncle.”

The trolls were clamouring for a fight. “They’ve killed fifty of our brothers! We did nothing to them... besides destroying a museum!” a blonde-bearded, studly-muscled, troll shouted.

A big, bulky, eye-patched, golden-toothed, golden-armoured troll came forward. “My brothers, sisters, and non-binary others... If we destroy these foul merpeople, we will be free to pillage the city as we wish!”

A loud chorus came and thousands of trolls followed their leader to battle.

~ ~ ~

Alan and Jessica were by the pier. “Are you sure there isn’t anything I can do to help?” Alan asked.

“You already are helping, silly,” Jessica responded. “My great-uncle is as old as the sea-floor, and he might need your help to find surface ingredients.

“Is there some plant that lets me breathe underwater or-?”

“Alan, don’t be ridiculous. This isn’t some fantasy story. Everything will be fine.”

“But... Jessica, I’m worried. You’re heading straight into the fire without any-”

This was interrupted by Jessica, who promptly kissed him. “Alan, it’s sweet of you to be worried, but I can do this myself.”

“Goodbye, Jess,” Alan responded, his voice filled with worry.

“Bye, Alan,” Jessica spoke sweetly.

And Jessica dived in the water, as Alan walked away from the pier, thinking, *‘Did that really happen?’*

Three days past before Jessica returned. And a lot happened IN those three days, both on the surface and below it.

On the first day, Alan was busy taking care of Garnet in his apartment when he heard a loud crashing noise outside. Running outside, he saw what could only be described as total chaos. Thousands of merpeople vs thousands of trolls. All armoured. Wrecking downtown Victoria. Legends’ Comics & Books was getting a lot of new business from some Marvel-fan merpeople though. Clubs against swords, spears against tridents, spirit against spirit, a war had begun. And the fighting continued. And continued. A merman threw an explosive at a rotund troll. A mermaid was tossed into a brick wall by a massive troll woman.

This wasn’t good. Even if Garnet was saved, the trolls and the merpeople would still fight. Soon, his apartment would be destroyed, and Garnet would die. So, Alan rushed up the stairs as trolls and mermaids inched ever closer to destroying his apartment. His home. And as he picked up Garnet, the windows shattered. A dart hit the ground. The same type that had poisoned Garnet.

Alan felt a rage build up inside of him and as he ran down the stairs, the building collapsed. But he and Garnet made it out in time. They rushed far, far away, out of downtown.

~ ~ ~

Jessica had been swimming for a long, long, time. She had to avoid a merpeople military base, for if they found her, then... she would die. Die a gruesome, horrid, death. Now she was finally reaching the area where her great-uncle was, as the second day dawned.

The hovel was small, and wrecked by wars between the merpeople in the past. It was mostly a cave with few accessories. It seems Jessica's great-uncle didn't spend much time on design.

Jessica swam inside, and saw her Great-Uncle, lying asleep on the ocean floor. "Great-Uncle!" she shouted, and he awoke with a start.

He had been asleep for so long barnacles were beginning to grow on his beard. He looked wrecked. "Why the octopus didja wake me?" he shouted. "One of my friends, Garnet, was hit by a poison dart arrow, and now they're going to die within a week! I need to find Rainbow Kelp."

"Die within a week? Normally if it was actual poison, it would kill someone instantly... unless they were quite big, of course. I think something else must be going on here," Jessica's Great-Uncle began, "Wait! Does this friend of yours- Garnet- have any preexisting medical conditions?"

“He has had cancer.”

“Oho, cancer! Now that’s interesting. Normally afterwards they develop an immunity to our poison... and rainbow kelp as well. There’s only one thing that could change that.”

“What is it?”

“The use of bleach to dye hair.”

“Um, yes, he has dyed hair. Okay, so it’s hopeless, then?”

“I didn’t say that. There is one final option, although it is risky. I could use my magic to teleport you and someone else of your choosing to two of the dark dimensions to pick up crystals to use as magical essence. There may be some risk-”

“Why can’t I just go to both of them?”

“Because you can only pick up one crystal. If you pick up more, you’ll die. So- who do you choose?”

~ ~ ~

Alan and Garnet had slept in Beacon Hill Park. Alan had tried to force some water down Garnet’s throat, but barely any went in. Garnet was looking worse by the hour, and Alan needed to stay alert.

The merperson-troll war was mostly confined to the edges of town currently, but Alan didn't know that and was still high on guard.

Alan saw a peculiarly shaped piece of ground, that looked like plastic. Stepping on it, he found himself whisked far, far, away, to a strange place. A place with a purple sky, and darkness all around. There were rocks floating in mid air to stand on, and what appeared to be an obstacle course, or something similar. It was all very vague and weird. Then, a disembodied head popped into the sky. It was Jessica.

“Jess!” Alan shouted, “Did you find your Great-Uncle?”

“Yes!” Jessica shouted. “Alan, listen very closely, you have to get to that crystal. And you have to pick it up. It's the only way to save Garnet!” the head vanished.

Alan turned around and saw a massive purple crystal on top of a stone walkway that seemed to begin right after the rock obstacle course finished. And so Alan jumped from rock to rock. And although the gravity was lighter than usual, he still managed to find his footing.

~ ~ ~

Jessica appeared in an underwater area, filled with small caves and sharp rocks. She could see a crystal in the distance; and she swam toward it, avoiding the sharp rocks. She was scared because of how small the cave was, but she knew she had to do this. For Garnet. And so she continued on.

~ ~ ~

Alan had reached the end of the rock obstacle course. Now came the easy part. As he walked through the stone walkway, however, he felt a sharp pain in his mind. All his regrets, all his guilt, coming back to haunt him. Every nightmare, every bad memory, everything. He felt like he was going to die as he collapsed and convulsed on the stone walkway floor.

He didn't know this, but Jessica was having the same experience as she entered a wide, clear, room, and she too could barely move. Weakly, both of them had to convince themselves that it didn't matter if they lived or died, they had to do this for Garnet.

Garnet. Everything was about them. Everything.

At the same time, both Alan and Jessica touched the crystal, and both felt themselves teleported back to where they were beforehand.

Jessica reappeared in the underwater cave. Her great-uncle was already working his magic, levitating the two crystals, transforming them into magical essence. Sending most of them off, he said, "It is done."

"Thank you, great uncle!" Jessica shouted, and she hugged him.

"My pleasure," he replied.

Jessica, noticing there was a bit of essence left, asked him a question, “Um, there was a museum that got destroyed. I notice there’s a bit of essence left and-”

“Say no more, child, I can fix it.” He heaved up his hands and with that, the Royal BC Museum, living animals with it, was restored. The merpeople were teleported away. And Jessica smiled, a tear running down her cheek.

~ ~ ~

“I can’t believe that really happened,” Garnet exclaimed excitedly, as they ate a scoop of pistachio ice cream.

Alan and Jessica, each with lime ice cream, smiled. “It all seems unreal,” Alan responded. “I still can’t believe that-what?” he asked, looking at Garnet’s face.

Garnet winked at him. “So, you two are a... Thing?”

Alan and Jessica blushed. “Well, uh,” Alan started, but was interrupted by Alan.

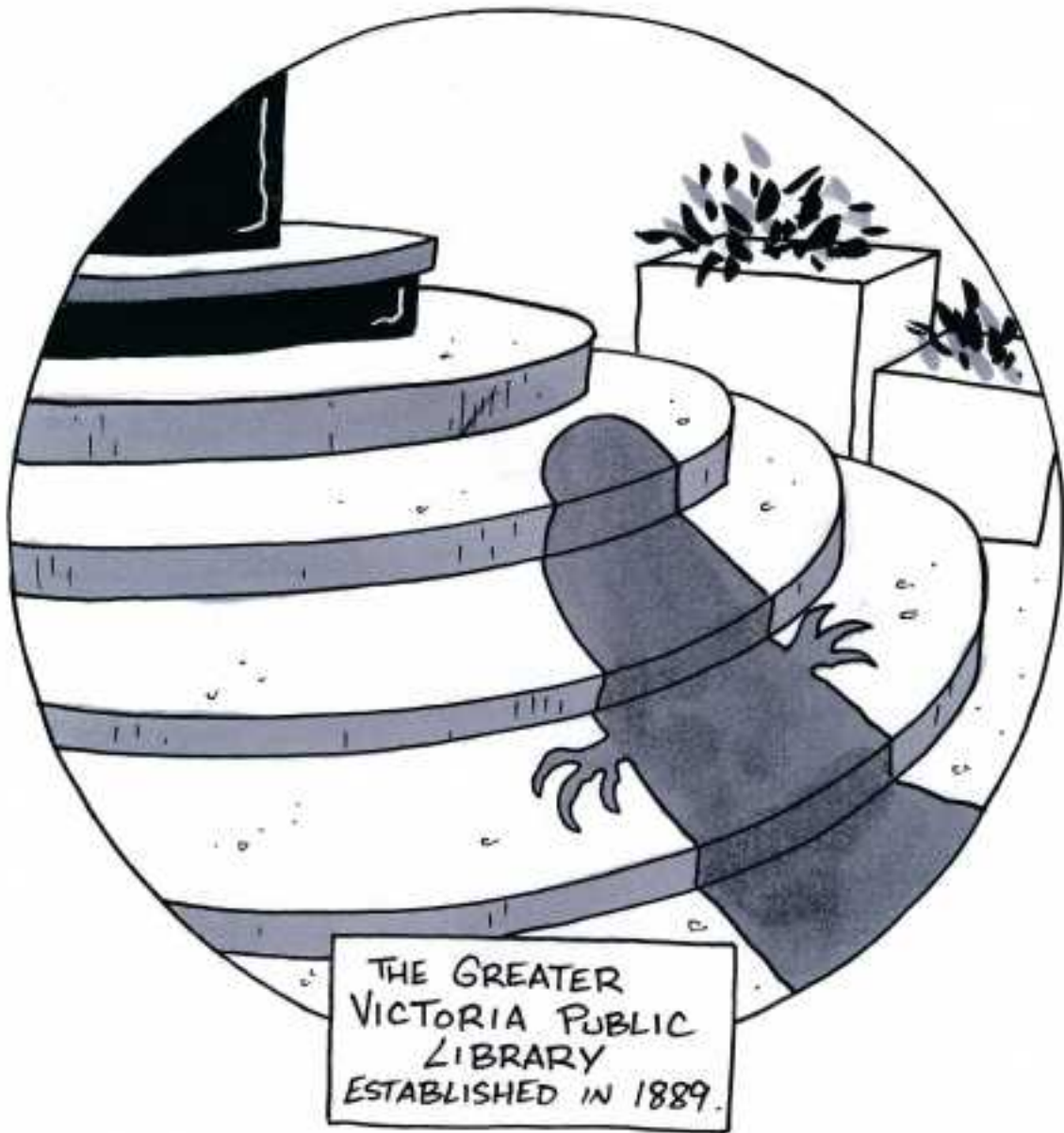
“Hey, now that the Museum’s there again, we should look after it. You know, make sure nobody comes again,” Jessica replied.

“How are we going to do th-” Alan and Garnet responded, and then gasped.

Behind Jessica, there was someone who looked like a wizard. Her great-uncle. He chuckled. “The surface world is nice. Gimme some of that ice cream before we set up camp... And protect the museum!” he shouted.

Everyone smiled. The story had ended happily ever after.

Except... well, not quite. The merpeople and the trolls were still fighting, and, by touching the crystals, Alan and Jessica might have just given an ancient trapped evil the ability to call out... And decimate everything.



THINGS HAVE CHANGED

by
Cathy Y.

It was a regular day for Indigo, or so they thought.

The sun was shining on this lovely June day, and the birds were chirping, flying around the block. In a high rise condo in the central area of Downtown, Indigo had just risen from their slumber and was ready for a nice relaxing day at the public library near their home.

At least, that was what they planned to do.

Leaping out of bed, Indigo looked at the purple clock on their bedside table. *10:34 am*. They had slept in. However, it was the perfect time to go to the library. By then, the facility would have just opened, and they were ready to walk. Their parents were already at work by now, from 9-5.

Going to the library was not much of an excitement for Indigo. Well, at least it wasn't boring, but they had been to the library many times, if not every day. Their family lived in a small condo apartment, only a block away. The walk was uneventful, but it was relaxing every time. Indigo walked on the nicely paved streets through downtown, looking around at the stunning architecture and scenery. They passed many tall buildings, like the Bay Center, before arriving at the street of Broughton, where the library building stood. Somehow, every time they'd notice something different. Like the other day, they saw that the glass dome on the top of the entrance to the library looked like a greenhouse with the plants all around. Today was no different.

Indigo entered the building in a mannerly fashion, making sure to wipe their shoes before entering even though there wasn't mud on the ground.

But construction was everywhere, and dust-filled carpets at the front wouldn't be such a sight to see. Indigo always wanted everything to be spotless, and they stuck to their word. The apartment was always tidy, except when friends were occasionally over. The floor was almost always spotless, and most days, Indigo would spend their days cleaning around the apartment, especially the kitchen, where it was dirtiest at times. Once, Indigo and their friends were trying to make cake, only to spill all the flour all over the floor. To add, the cake batter ended up everywhere, and parents were not happy when they came back.

However, today, everything seemed different from the moment they stepped into the library. The aura around it changed, and Indigo could feel a shift in time. They looked around, only to find dwarfs swiftly running around the library. They carried books on their small paws and their arms extended to reach the higher shelves. These dwarfs were like ant-sized dwarfs. They were small, like tiny small, and they were green with such random attire. They smiled brightly, and for a second, Indigo thought that it would blind them with such a large smile.

'Wait,' Indigo slowly realized. *"The library is run by these creatures that look like... dwarfs?"* They pinched themselves, trying to wake themselves from this nightmare, only to find that they were already awake. Extremely awake. All plans of a quiet reading session at the library were quickly discarded.

"This is real?" they thought aloud.

"Why would it not be real?" one of the dwarfs stopped and asked. It wore a bright pink suit, and had a blue headband around its head.

Indigo screeched. "It talks!" they bellowed, pointing furiously at the poor dwarf, who was confused as ever.

Other dwarfs gathered around to see what was going on. Indigo felt a sense of panic as the dwarfs neared them and started running around, waving their arms crazily. "There are more of them," they screamed.

"Excuse me," a voice asked. "Please calm down; this is a library."

Indigo turned around, horrified, only to see a unicorn scanning books with their magical horn into the library system. The unicorn was slightly pink and looked at the dwarfs in fear. Indigo shrieked again. "Magical talking unicorns!" they yelled louder. "Help!"

Realization struck them, and a thought processed through Indigo's head. *'If the people running the library had changed, did the books change as well?'*

Indigo screamed as soon as they realized the logic in their thoughts. They rushed to get the nearest books they could get their hands on. It was a book about First Nations, and it seemed interesting, but there was no time to read that. They opened the book, only to find green snakes spiralling out of the book, hissing furiously. They circled around Indigo, and spit their ink all over them. The ink dissolved into a portal, which folded around Indigo, leaving them in confusion. And the snakes? Well, let's say they were more than pleased to see Indigo go.

~ ~ ~

The world around Indigo had dissolved, and suddenly it felt like they were on the fastest sky train that had ever existed. The wind spiralled around in such immense speeds, and Indigo could feel themselves feeling a bit uneasy. Oh! How their stomach churned. Nevertheless, they tried to understand what was going on. *‘Was that the Empress hotel?’* Indigo thought as they passed a giant building that looked extremely royal. It had gardens to the side and there was a glass dome sticking to the side of it. Then the wind came to a halt. Indigo looked around, only to find they were falling out of the sky.

Down they went, tumbling down from the sky. Indigo fell on their feet with a quiet thud. Somehow, even falling from such crazy heights, they were able to land safely. *‘How did I land so softly?’* Indigo looked around at the site they had landed. They immediately recognized it as it was to the side of the Royal BC Museum. Indigo had been to the museum a few times, and every visit was informative and exciting. But where they landed was where Indigo had never really looked at or spent much attention. Parents would always be rushing her to get back home for dinner.

The totem pole stretched high as it contrasted with the background. The house, the Mungo Martin House, or the Wawadit’la, which Indigo remembered from their readings from school. Indigo started to admire the crest before a sound shook them out of their focus.

Bang!

Indigo turned around, only to find no one around. *‘What was that?’*

Bang!

Indigo tried to use their senses to the best of their ability and to try and figure out where that sound was coming from, but with no avail.

Bang!

Suddenly, their head swivelled around and looked at the totem pole. The sound was coming from it, they thought. But before they knew it, they heard voices. Then more and more voices. *‘It sounded spiritual... Like a drum circle. No, wait – it was a drum circle.’*

The totem was singing and drumming, enjoying the beat. Indigo lit up. They had never been in a drum circle before, and it felt so incredible to be part of.

Alas, the song was over, and Indigo was standing there, alone, in the middle of Thunderbird Park. *‘Should I take a walk now? After all, it’s quite a good day today.’*

Now, Indigo was fully aware that their parents wouldn’t be super pleased when they found out that they were wandering around downtown, especially alone and without permission. But Indigo felt like they had to explore more. They were curious and wanted to see how much more of the town had changed. If the totem pole now was in a drum circle, and the library was overrun by dwarfs, snakes, and a unicorn, what about the rest of the town? Was the whole town different now? Was the entire island now magical? Was the whole country this way?

Indigo walked down Douglas Street, passing Helm's Inn and the row of new-looking modern apartments on the other side of the street. It was a quiet walk, and barely anyone was out. A few cars passed, but that was all. '*Weird*,' Indigo thought. Usually, there would be more traffic than that. They kept a close eye around, examining every detail of the scene in front of them as if magic or other bizarre things would pop up and make their appearance.

They soon passed the intersection and bordered Beacon Hill park as they walked. Indigo saw no one in the courtyards of South Park Family School. '*How did I forget*,' they said to themselves. '*It's the weekend*.' Alas, they reached a crossing and promptly crossed the street.

They walked through the park, keeping a wary eye for anything out of the ordinary. The trees were full-grown, and the grass was as green as jade. They passed by a lake; so beautiful it was like you were in an anime fairytale. Numerous lily pads spread across, and the branches of the trees hung low, caressing the water. The scenery around them reflected upon the water. Oh, was it a sight to see. But as they progressed through the trail, they felt a sense of false security. Indigo started to crave ice cream, as their life depended on it. However, they were never the ones to love ice cream. It had always been something they hated actually. But how intoxicating the taste of ice cream seemed in the moment, and Indigo wanted to taste it and feel it dissolve into their mouth.

'But Ice Cream,' they thought. *'I need Ice cream. Now.'*

Their eyes widened as they realized something was greatly wrong, and tore themselves away from the urge and started running.

After a while of running, the yearning for ice cream disappeared. Indigo walked through more forests of trees and walkways. They passed numerous parking lots that were usually full of cars, but instead were empty. *‘How strange.’*

They passed the playground. Oh, what an enjoyable playground it was. Indigo had spent their early childhood days playing in the water park, swinging on the swings and climbing and running around on the playground. Those memories were the best. Sadly, now, they never really had those memories anymore.

They started walking along a path that bordered the flower garden. Indigo had decided to walk with the flowers in case they were magical. But nothing had changed about the flowers, all colours and sorts. Some were purple, while some were just bushes, but they were sure fun to look at. They passed the duck pond, and the ducks started flying around. That was a sight to see. How funny it was, indeed.

However, Indigo felt a craving to go to the Rose Garden. The Garden had always been one of their favourite places to go whenever they visited Beacon Hill Park, and they thought that this was the same feeling. But little did they know it was something else.

They opened the heavy, sleek metal gates and walked in. In the middle of the Rose garden was a sight that shocked Indigo. There was a weird aura around the frame of the middle area. The Rose Garden looked normal though; many roses of different colours spread themselves along the beds of soil. But the aura... It looked like a simple Minecraft portal, but it was the colour of a bloody red rose.

Roses circled around the portal, and Indigo wondered, *'If I went through the portal, would it teleport me to the Nether or another Rose Garden?'* Their mind frantically told them not to go through the portal, but curiosity took over Indigo.

They stepped through the portal.

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Indigo looked around, in the place they ended up in. Looking around, they felt a sense of familiarity and recognized where they were. They were in Quadra Village; the home they lived in for the first seven years of their life, until they moved downtown.

They spotted the large 'Fairway Market' sign across the street, the drug mart a few glances to the left. Circle K, the convenience store that used to be called Mac's. Across the street in the left corner (or not so corner), was the Roxy Theatre. Indigo turned around to find themselves in front of Young's Restaurant, one of their favourite places to get Chinese Food when their family lived in this neighbourhood. It would be once a week, and Indigo would happily feast on chow mein. *"Huh,"* Indigo thought. *"Things have changed."*

Things have changed indeed. The Party Crashers that used to be on the left of the restaurant, was replaced with a thrift shop. The thrift shop that used to be on the left-hand side was replaced by a new sushi place that Indigo had never been to. *"Chiba Sushi,"* they read aloud. Maybe they would go there sometime.

But little did Indigo know, they'd never live to be able to go there.

Suddenly, Indigo spotted something unusual, or mysterious. They saw one of their neighbours, Joe, who was walking their dog. But that wasn't what was confusing, no. Joe and their dog were stone. They were both frozen and grey as if they were carved out of stone.

"No!" Indigo screamed, running toward them. They shook Joe frantically, but nothing happened. It was stone and they couldn't move it at all. Indigo looked around carefully, and suddenly people started appearing out of nowhere, but in stone. That one person was shopping from Fairway, who was crossing the road. Groups of people who were leaving the Roxy Theatre from a late night performance. A person, who was sitting on the side of the sidewalk, holding a sign that said, 'Hungry, anything helps.' Someone who was happily dining in the windows of Young's Restaurant. People in their cars, yet none of the cars moved. Indigo wondered if anyone could even see the traffic.

And maybe, no one else could.

Indigo heard a stomp. They were large footsteps, noisier than the neighbours upstairs in their current apartment. And their neighbours were sure to be noisy, but this stomp rumbled the ground beneath them.

A large stone head made itself visible from behind the market. Indigo shivered. Was that the thing that made all these people and things, animals, turn into stone? Was that going to turn... them into stone?

Indigo started to run in one direction but didn't know what to do. They looked around frantically, to see if anyone was still in their human form, and not stone.

The giant dog who stretched up to full height was now storming its way to Indigo. Its beady eyes held no emotion as it stared directly into Indigo's eyes. They froze. The dog froze and fell, partially paralyzed. Its eyes looked at Indigo for a moment, and for a second, Indigo thought that it might dissolve into a puddle and release everyone from their stone form, but it didn't.

'But wait, why isn't the dog freezing me into stone?' they wondered.

Then, Indigo realized that there was something different about them. *'Maybe, they weren't who they thought they were.'*





MAYFAIR MALL MYSTERY

by

Isabella Piombini

*I'd like to dedicate this story to Dr. Bonnie Henry
and all the health care workers who are trying
to keep us all safe and healthy.*

Thank you!

It was an extremely busy Friday at Mayfair Mall in Victoria, BC. The hustle and bustle of shoppers was rather surprising given that the COVID-19 pandemic had not yet subsided. The sounds of people talking and eating with the soft music in the background made it seem that, at least at the mall on this day, things were somewhat back to 'normal'.

Down at the end of the long corridor inside the mall, Chapters bookstore had been having a gigantic sale, which had drawn a lot of attention. People were walking out of the bookstore with multiple bags of purchases. The most popular areas of the bookstore were the Do-It-Yourself and Self-Help sections. Bookstore clerks had noticed quite a spike of interest in these types of books during the pandemic.

One section that wasn't getting much attention lately was the aisle with the mystery novels on display. Once their best-sellers, now almost a forgotten area. But it wasn't because the pandemic had changed book lovers' interest in these books. Rather, it was because a rumour had gone around that customers who had gone down this aisle had actually disappeared and were reported missing by their families and the Victoria Police Department. Some adults and teens – gone, completely vanished. No one could figure out how or why they went missing. So the bookstore closed for a number of days as the police investigated the case of the missing people. But the police found nothing. Yet cars had been left in the parking lots, teens never returned home and reports had been filed. All of the thirteen people reported missing had been inside the bookstore at Mayfair Mall when they mysteriously disappeared.

Erica and her twin brother Justin, a couple of curious young teens and mystery buffs, decided that they would venture into the bookstore, against their parents wishes, to see if they could solve this real life mystery unfolding before very eyes. They had each consumed many hours pouring through mystery books in their short lifetimes and had watched many mysteries on television and at the cinemas. They had talked a lot about the Chapters bookstore missing persons case, made detailed notes from newspaper clippings and TV News channels, and had even designed a floor-plan of the bookstore itself from memory based on their frequent visits.

On this day, they told their parents that they would be visiting their friends at the park as they had not been able to see them in quite some time over the past eighteen months. They left the house together, each with a backpack containing some snacks, flashlights, their detailed notes, a copy of the floor-plan, and their cell phones.

They had taken the Number 32 bus to get to Mayfair Mall. They brought a few dollars with them and enjoyed a drink at the food court as they surveyed the shoppers and people enjoying their meals. Then, a few minutes before the 6PM closing, Erica and Justin went into the bookstore. They knew there was a chance that one of the workers would turn them away, but they had a plan to hide under one of the display tables until everyone in the bookstore had vacated it.

Their plan worked. At 6:15PM, all of the patrons and staff had left. The alarm had been set, but they knew from their research that the alarm could only be triggered if one of the entry doors were opened.

Erica and Justin know that they would now be stuck in the bookstore until at least the start of business on Saturday morning. They had to also call their parents at some point to let them know they would be staying overnight at their friends house. They decided to take care of these details early on as they sat on the floor in the middle of the bookstore, eating their snacks they had packed and further reviewing and hatching out the next steps of their plan.

“Let me take another look at that floor-plan, sis. Now that we’re here, I think we made a mistake. I don’t recall that armchair being there,” he pointed to the shelf just in front of the Mystery section.

They both got up from the floor and went over to take another look at the armchair. It looked strange, really strange. However, they didn’t know why so they continued on to the Mystery section. Justin stopped as he noticed a book title he had never heard of. He took it off the bookshelf.

Erica whispered, “Now’s not a good time to catch up on your reading, bro. Come on, we have a mystery to solve here.”

He reluctantly put the book back on the shelf. Just as Justin was about to move forward toward his sister, who was headed further down the book aisle, he heard a noise behind him and instantly froze. He kept listening intently, but heard nothing else. “Did you hear that?” he asked Erica.

“Yes,” she whispered back. She too stood still, and without looking back at her brother she asked, “What was that?”

“I don’t know,” Justin responded all too quickly.

“Do you think there’s somebody still in here?” Erica asked.

Justin paused, then answered, “I’m not sure. It might not be anything.” He tried to convince both himself and his twin that they were going to be alright.

Erica was confused. “But if we both heard it, then it must be something,” she insisted. There was no response from her brother this time. So she turned back to look at him, but he was not there. All of a sudden, a panicked look came across her face and she managed to get the words out without screaming.

“Justin? Justin? Where are you? Where did you go?” she repeated her efforts.

“This is not funny. Where are you?”

Still no response. She started making her way quickly back towards where she and her twin had been, looking both ways and back again as she walked.

“Justin? Justin?”

Erica got back to the end of the aisle and instantly noticed the armchair was not there anymore. It was gone. She could still see the four marks on the carpet left behind by the feet of the armchair, further proof that it had been there previously.

Panicking, she quickly scanned down each aisle, wondering if her brother had gone down another book aisle. She reached the end of the store with no sight of him. She turned and ran back quickly. She looked under the table where she and her brother had first hidden to avoid the store staff. Not there.

Convinced there was nobody else in the bookstore, Erica raised her voice but just loud enough as she did not want to alert mall security. “Justin. Justin. Where are you?” Almost in tears now, she fell to the floor crying out, “Justin? Justin?” She couldn’t bear the thought of her twin having gone missing. How would she be able to explain this to their parents? Who would have taken him? How would anyone ever believe her? She slowly fell to the floor, helpless.

As her panicked pleas turned to outright fear amidst her flowing tears, her cellphone rang. She quickly rose to dig for it from her backpack. **RING. RING. RING.** She finally located it and looked at the call display. It read, ‘*Incoming.*’ No name or telephone number was associated with the caller. She hesitated to answer it, wondering who it might be. Then she pressed the ANSWER button.

“Hello?” her voice was still choking back tears.

The voice on the other end of the phone was very faint. It appeared to be the voice of a woman, but unknown. All Erica could make out from the voice on the phone did not make sense to her, but she listened intently just the same. “Look for the armchair,” the voice said in a whispered tone. “The armchair, go look for the armchair.”

Erica was startled. Who did this voice belong to? Who knew that she was in the bookstore in the first place? But most important of all, where was her brother? All these thoughts raced around in Erica’s mind as her breathing managed to intensify. “Who are you? What do you want from me?” Erica’s words seemed to rush out of her mouth. She paused for a moment. “Justin, is this you? Are you playing some kind of trick on me?”

She paused again, then, “Okay, you win. Now you can come out. Come on, let’s just get out of here. Now! You’re creeping me out, Justin. You’re really creeping me out.”

The woman’s voice on the other end of the phone began to whisper again. “Your brother is fine. You don’t have to worry. He’s not in any danger. I promise.”

Erica began again, “Look, who are you? What do you want? What have you done with my brother?”

Again, no response on the other end. Erica looked at her phone to see if the caller was still on the line. Then she spoke again into the phone, hysterically but clearly, “Who are you and where is Justin?”

Still no response. Erica cried uncontrollably. She had never faced this much trouble in all her life. This was a defining moment for her and, quite possibly, the fate of her brother, and she knew it. Her crying continued but when it subsided, the voice on the other end whispered again. “Go to the armchair, Erica. Go to the armchair, sweet child. All will be revealed, but I need you to do something for me first.”

Erica was now totally freaked out. How did the caller know her name? Her mind was spinning out of control, but she felt she had to do whatever the caller asked. “What armchair? It’s not there anymore,” she shot back. There was no response.

Erica got up from the floor, with her phone in her hand and she slowly made her way to where the armchair had been earlier, while her eyes desperately searched around her. She was so scared. As she approached the Mystery section, she stopped, noticing that the armchair was now back in its place. This time though, it was different. There was a book placed upside down on the seat.

The voice on the phone asked Erica to pick up the book. At first Erica was reluctant. “Go on,” the voice continued. “Pick it up and open it to page forty-eight.”

Erica picked up the book and looked at the title: *Soap and Water and Common Sense*. A puzzled look crossed her face. She opened the book and turned to page forty-eight just as she had been instructed. About half-way down the page, in bold letters, appeared the words, ‘*Worldwide Immunization.*’ She quickly read about how vaccines and clean water systems are widely regarded as the two best tools for protecting public health. All of this did not make any sense to Erica. What did all this have to do with the disappearance of her brother and the other people? What or who was on the other end of the phone? “Okay, so what?” Erica shouted. “What does any of this have to do with me? What have you done with my brother?”

The voice spoke again, “Your brother will be fine. Like the others who have faced the same fate, I’ve detained him for now. They will all be back in their homes in your life and other people's lives soon. They won’t remember anything about their experience, but you will. You will remember everything, so I need you to do something for me.”

Erica, still unsure about everything, shot back quickly, “What do you want from me?”

“I need you to carry forward a message to the world. A very important message. Something that is badly needed right now.”

Erica stayed quiet as the voice continued.

“You see. I died in this pandemic. You’re not actually talking to a person. You’re talking to a spirit. My spirit. Like you, I didn’t listen very well and didn’t bother following all the Public Health Orders. I never bothered with soap and water to keep the coronavirus disease away. I didn’t wear a mask all the time. I never got vaccinated. I used to hide away in this bookstore even when I got very sick. I died sitting on this very armchair. This is where they found me, slouched over, reading a good Mystery novel.”

Erica, in a state of disbelief, couldn’t put down the phone, even though her arm and hand trembled. “What about my brother?” Erica pleaded. “How do I get him back? Why did you take him? Why?”

“Your brother, like all of the other people he’s with right now, needed a bit more convincing to get vaccinated. He was a non-believer, like me, so I took him and the others so they wouldn’t end up like me,” said the voice. “They will all be here, in this bookstore, tomorrow morning when the place opens. They won’t remember anything about what’s happened to them. All I’ve done is worked on their psyche a bit and they’re all good as new. They will all be taking the pandemic more seriously now and will get fully vaccinated.

You are already fully vaccinated, my dear. You are the best person to carry the message forward tomorrow and for the rest of your life.”

Erica was now a bit more trusting of the voice on the other end of the phone. She still couldn't believe, though, that she was talking to a spirit. “What's the message you want me to carry forward?” she asked.

“This is what I want you to do,” continued the voice with more of a sense of confidence now realizing that Erica seemed to be willing to accommodate the situation.

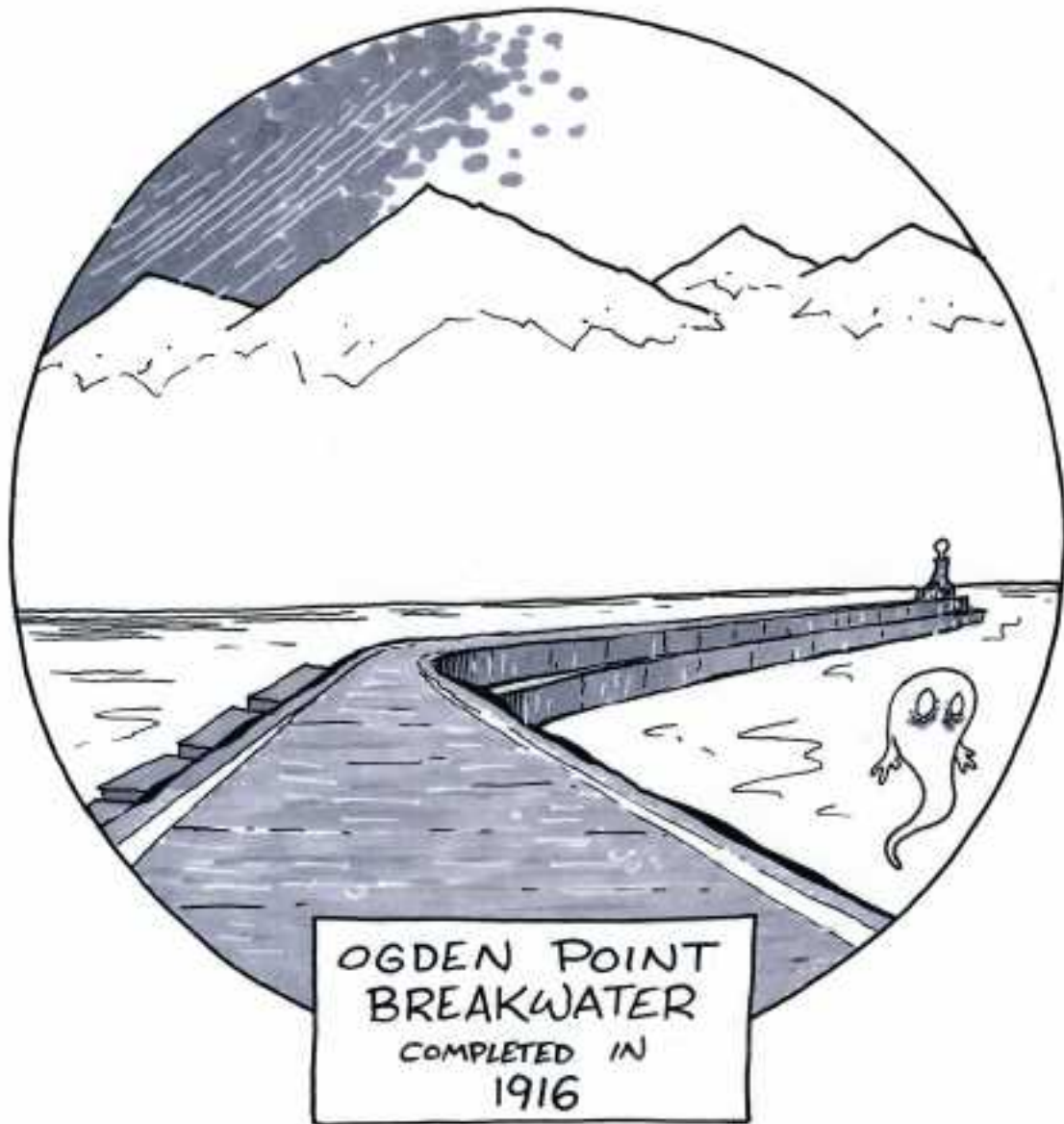
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The next morning, several police cars, other emergency vehicles and local TV news crews were on the scene upon hearing that a teen girl had phoned 9-1-1 from the Chapters bookstore before it opened to let the dispatcher know that all fourteen people had reappeared in the middle of the night. All were okay, including Justin, but no one had any recollection of what had happened.

Erica was being interviewed and appearing in front of several video-cameras in the full presence of her parents, who had arrived on the scene after she had called them to explain what had happened. The bookstore staff did confirm with the police officers that an elderly woman had died in the armchair a few weeks earlier, but no one knew her name.

“The message, Erica, what was the message that you received from the Spirit Woman that talked to you?” asked a Channel 6 reporter, interviewing Erica.

“Simple,” answered Erica. “The message is very simple, but it will help save many lives. The message is, ‘Be Kind, Be Calm, and Be Safe’.”



OGDEN POINT

by
Astrid Kim

“Good morning, dad, father.” I say to the picture beside my bed, their faces becoming more visible as I rub the sleep from my tired eyes. I stand and walk towards my dresser, dressed in a light green shirt, sturdy pants and a family coat. I look in the mirror and brush my hair a bit. I stare into my own green eyes. My parents both had green eyes.

I walk down to the foyer and see ten or so people, creatures and strange beings eating breakfast already. I mostly recognize them but faces are always blurring together. I’ve met so many people in my lifetime. It’s not that I’m that old, just that visitors never last more than a week. People come and go. They stay for a while but always leave to go back to their timelines.

My family left me here to take care of the time travel lighthouse so it wouldn’t fall into the wrong hands. But it means that I can never have a true friend because they always have to leave me. I walk outside to the mailbox and pick up the news. I start reading it while I continue walking.

‘Breaking news!’ the headline says. ‘A wave of magic has hit Victoria. Stay indoors until specialists can figure out what it is and how to undo it!’

Strange. My parents told me about this happening to them. It doesn't affect me or the lighthouse’s time travelling abilities. It happens every so often. I walk to the path that leads to the lighthouse for my morning rounds. It’s cool by the seaside - that's why I wear the old coat wherever I go. The paintings on the walls of the walkway were painted a long time ago, and are faded with time. They were there when my grandparents and their grandparents ran this place.

As I reach the lighthouse itself, I look over the railings for a second. The sea is peaceful, like always. I must have not heard the lighthouse door open, but a voice says,

“Hello there.” I turn. Dark hair and purple eyes. *Human*.

“Nice to meet you. Welcome to Ogden Point, Time Travel Hub and timeline #73. I am Silver Page, owner,” I say. Having said this phrase many times, it’s a habit.

He reaches out a gloved hand, which I shake firmly.

“Loren Vi, timeline #26,698, pleasure.” We start to walk back to the inn. “This is one of the nicer Hubs I’ve been to. You definitely keep things well,” he adds.

“Thank you, I always try my hardest. So, why are you stopping here?”

“I’m looking for something to win the war in my timeline. I was sent to this timeline to find it. Our armies are on the brink of victory but we need that last push to finish it forever.”

What? A war timeline is common but usually it’s the rebellion who... never mind, it’s none of my business. Never get involved in other timelines unless necessary.

“Interesting, what are you looking for?”

“Magic, a type of magic that we can use to send them far away without killing them and, in return for sparing their lives, they will join us, changed.”

We reach the inn and walk into the warm room of the inn. After I lead him up the stairs to his room, he bows.

“Thank you for your kindness.” I smile and shut the door. Odd one.

“Father! Dad!” I say running towards them. Running across the beach I fall into their arms but instead I fall onto the sand. It starts falling away into a void. A hand with black cloth grabs me and pulls me into darkness. I hit the ground so hard I *wake up*.

I open my eyes, the blurriness of my dream fading into reality. It's always a dream. It's still dark out, but I'm not tired anymore. I get up and get dressed, go outside and lock eyes with a pair of purple ones.

“Loren? Why are you awake?” I say. To be honest, I'm happy to see him.

“I could ask you the same thing, darling.”

I can't have people running around in the middle of the night. “Listen, you're here to rest, this is a hub, you should sleep!” I say, knowing the response that's coming.

“You listen,” he says and steps closer to me, “I'm not tired and I know you're not either.”

“Fine,” I say, “Want tea or something?” I’ll just make sure he doesn’t do anything.

“Sure,” he says, smiling. All I need to figure out is who's behind that smile.

A night like any other, but I’m happy this time as I know I’m not alone anymore. It’s been weeks since that first night but I still carry around that small light that was dimmed after my parents. Now it is brighter than ever.

Doing my rounds like any night, I walk up the concrete path towards the lighthouse. The night is warm for a fall evening, the moon looms over me, guiding my way so that I didn’t need the lantern. Everyone was already asleep. My footsteps are too far away to wake them. I reach the lighthouse and sit on the bench, a beautiful night, like any other. The metal plate on the back of the bench. *‘In memory of Xander and Pluto Page.’*

I miss them a lot. But that wound has already healed, and I don’t want to open it again at such a happy time. I hope it lasts but I know it won’t. I know that Loren has to leave eventually but selfishly I want him to stay.

I hear the door of the lighthouse open. Who would arrive this late?

I turn around to see my own face staring back at me. Except she’s different, her face scratched and large scars on her hand and chin. Her clothes are tattered and she’s holding a knife.

I draw my gun from a pocket in my coat. “Who are you, shapeshifter? Show your true form!”

“I’m truly you,” she says, holding up her wrist. “I don’t have the mark of a shapeshifter.”

What? The mark of the shapeshifter is one I’m all too familiar with and I suspected she would have it. But that must mean that I actually travelled back...

“I don’t have much time,” she says, interrupting my thoughts. “You can’t trust Loren, you have to end his life now or the future will be...” She starts to glitch out of reality, disappearing into the air. Leaving me stranded now in the present that will soon become the past. I scream my own name into the rushing ocean around me, but all I hear is the waves. She’s gone and I know who caused it.

I walk back to my room, numb. Why? I can’t – I can’t kill Loren. I pick up the gun from my pocket. My father taught me to use it when I was young. “Only use it on people who deserve it,” he said.

Does Loren deserve this?

“Family comes first!” Pluto has always said. My dads had been kind, up until...

You can’t kill your only friend!

I look in the mirror. Family comes first. Why does it always come to this?! I can never have anything for myself! I just want this one thing!

“You can’t trust Loren, you can’t trust Loren, family comes first,” I repeat over and over, waiting for something to change.

It happens to me, I’m told to do things, I have to comply. My heart refuses but my mind knows that I have to do it. I look at the mirror again.

“No!” I punch the glass, shattering it into bits, my fist bloody. “Why does family always come first?!” But Loren will have to leave anyway. I just wanted more time to spend with him. Just a few more days!

Family comes first.

I storm to the bathroom and bandage my fist. Regret hitting me like a train, my only mirror. I go back to my room and grab the shotgun, the one I never wanted to use. I know where Loren is and now I have to stop him for doing whatever he does in the future. I don’t want to but I must. This is the one thing my fathers’ left me with. Even though my hands are trembling.

“Why are you doing this? What do you even want?” I yell across the walkway to the person I thought was a friend. Loren whips around, his hair streaming around him like a wild animal, his face matching. But he seems more surprised than angry.

“How did you find out?”

I stare him down, not saying a word until he answers my question.

He sighs then gives me a look of confidence. “I always needed the lighthouse. Getting close to you was just a stepping stone. I’m sorry, I really did enjoy spending time with you. But this is just more important.”

I knew that already.

“You only needed the magic. You were planning this, this was the thing you needed to win the war. You’re a traitor!” I shout, trying to be heard through the wind. My words unbottling my fear and anger. How did I not see this coming? On the first day I should have known that he was the villain – the dream, everything!

“Of course! I need it to be powerful enough to win in my own timeline. This is the only way. I visited so many timelines to find one the one Hub that would have a weak enough owner for me to take down.” He takes a step towards the lighthouse. “I’m sorry, Silver, but it ends now.”

“Not this time!” I load the gun and point it to his head.

Darkness, then two huge purple eyes in the pitch black, illuminating it.

“You thought you could kill me?! Who do you think that dream was from? Me! Why do you think I was so nice to you?” His voice rings in my ears.

“I trusted you!” I scream. I fall through a trapdoor onto a mirror, shattering it. The pieces falling everywhere.

“That was your first mistake! Now you will be just like me!”

I close my eyes. He’s from a magic timeline. An illusionist. I breathe once. His words are drowned out. But I feel a purple flash past my eyes. I feel for my eyelids and feel a liquid draining out of it. I’m still inside his little game. I have to get out of here.

I feel around for the gun, touch metal, and hold it up. Two shots.

I open my eyes. A body lies on the lighthouse path, lifeless eyes staring back at me. I look at the gun, and in the shiny reflection I see the same eyes on my own face.



THE SPIRITED SOFTTAILS OF VALUE VILLAGE



by
Abby Hawthorne

It is quarter to six on a cold day in January and magic is just about to occur.

The workers at Value Village on Wharf Street are closing up the store. “Five minutes to closing,” comes over the loudspeaker. People start rushing to buy their items before the store closes, hurrying to pay.

Suddenly, as quick as a flash of lightning, a group of Swedish Softtails appear above the people's heads, gliding silently. The customers, oblivious to the tiny blue dragons fluttering over them, hurry to the cashiers and line up to pay.

A shrill cry – **Reahk!** - escapes from one of the smaller dragons when it accidentally flies straight into a signpost. It drops down into a fuzzy blue sweater which has fallen on the floor, landing unnoticed with a soft **whump**. Luckily, a nearby child doesn't notice the creature cowering under a fold of the sweater, thanks to the Softtails' ability to camouflage whenever they feel threatened. Soon, without any more mishaps, the store starts to close. The customers trickle out of the exit, leaving the small dragons alone with the staff.

Soon after the shoppers leave, the staff start checking that all the racks are tidy and scan the store to see that all the shoppers have left. It seems like there aren't any problems until one staff member, Maggie, goes over to inspect the change rooms. As she pulls the door open and peers inside, she lets out a breathless gasp and stumbles back, utterly shocked. **CRASH!** Falling into a bookshelf, darkness fills her vision as she slumps to the floor.

“Maggie!” Luke calls out from across the store. “Is everything alright?”

Hearing no reply, he and his coworker Kit walk through the racks, navigating around the boxes on the ground. When they reach Maggie, they find her lying on the floor, unmoving. They look around to see what could have startled Maggie.

Sitting on the edge of the stall bench and flying around the top of the change room are tiny little beasts with butter yellow light dancing off of their deep blue scales which glisten like the ocean.

“A-are those d-dragons?” Kit says in disbelief. Luke is preoccupied with Maggie, and scarcely notices the dragons flitting above his head.

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Earlier, in Sweden, scientists working for the Swedish military at the University of Borås had created little blue dragons called Swedish Softtails in an experiment. Their purpose: creatures that could destroy and harm cities and people. In a lab accident, the genes evolved and altered them to be empathetic creatures, (though still mischievous.)

The Softtails flew around their cylindrical, glass cage, feeling trapped, confused and wanting to escape. A few minutes before their feeding time, they hatched a plan and decided to camouflage themselves with the metal bottom of their cage. A worker opened the door to feed them, wondering where they all went. Surprised, he left it open and ran down the hall to let his boss know the Softtails had disappeared.

The Softtails slipped out of their enclosure, flying wildly around the basement. They explored down the hall and found an unoccupied lab, where some other scientists had been working on a portal to transport troops and other war supplies. The portal wasn't quite functioning properly, so when they decided to fly into its rippling, shiny surface, it spat them out randomly in Value Village, Victoria.

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"Luke..." Kit says warily.

Finally, Luke looks up from holding Maggie and sees the dragons watching him. His brows move together like inchworms. He opens his mouth about to say something then closes it. He takes a minute before he can get his words together.

"Kit, I think those are dragons." Despite the situation which they're in, Kit rolls her eyes – he literally repeated what she had just said.

Just nodding, Kit sits down, mesmerized by the aqua-blue creatures looking at them. Slowly, one courageous Softtail hops off the bench and cautiously starts walking closer towards the two Value Village employees. Kit, as always, decides to be the brave one.

"I'm going to try and stroke it," she says calmly, as if she pets dragons all the time.

"Are you absolutely crazy!?" Luke says.

“Nope.” And that’s all Kit says before she reaches out her hand.

~ ~ ~

Meanwhile, in Boras, Lukas Willin, a commander of the Swedish military force, begins the search for the elusive Swedish Softtails. He shouts at the worker who accidentally let them out.

“You dunce! You’re going to burn for this!”

Practically shaking, the employee gives a small nod, but stands his ground. In a quiet tone he whispers, “Yes sir.”

“Now get back to work you... You...” Before he gets to finish his thought, a scientist interrupts to tell him that a small miracle has occurred. The technicians had inserted tracking chips into a small portion of the group of dragons. After a bit of frantic discussion, the commander announces to the group that they are able to locate the Swedish Softtails’ whereabouts.

When they get a lock on the Swedish Softtails’ location, Commander Willin gets an idea. He shouts to no one in particular, “Put out a news report for the dragons! Make it sound urgent but try not to cause panic.” Swedish workers and volunteers, like mice, scurry as fast as they can to get the commander’s order completed.

~ ~ ~

Kit's hand comes closer and closer to touching the cat-sized dragon. Suddenly, as if it hadn't been there in the first place, the creature disappears. She gasps.

"Where'd it go?" Kit asks Luke who had also witnessed what seemed like a magician's act. Luke, eyes wide, just shrugs. The coworkers sit in silence for a bit, trying to figure out where it went. All the while, the rest of the blue dragons watch them from their spots in and above the change room. With no more surprises occurring for the moment, Luke lets his eyes drift back to the unconscious Maggie.

"Is she alright?" Kit says, remembering that their friend is there on Luke's lap, unmoving.

Fa-thud, thud, thud. The sound is coming from their left, and draws their attention away from Maggie. A pile of cardboard boxes which holds clothes and shoes comes tumbling down. The garments spill onto the floor, but there's one thing which differs from all the other times boxes of clothes have been accidentally knocked over. Unusual shapes are being pressed into the fabric. And there's no apparent source. Turning at another sudden noise, the friends look over.

"Kit, look at that," Luke says pointing to small paw print denting a crumpled shirt. "I think we found our vanished dragon."

~ ~ ~

Later that night, when the report for the missing dragon is about to air, Commander Willin gathers his scientists and volunteers to watch on the television with him. In a commanding voice he says, "Hurry, hurry. Come quickly, it's about to come on!"

A woman, well-dressed with a white shirt, charcoal coloured blazer and tie appears on the television. "For the news today we have some very interesting news to start us off." Everyone in the lab is enraptured by the reporter on the big screen as she continues speaking.

"An anonymous source has come to us with an important piece of information. In Victoria, a small city in British Columbia, the citizens need to be on the lookout for - and you're not going to believe it - dragons." A gasp can be heard in the background of the broadcast though the newswoman seems unfazed.

"Now, you shouldn't panic. These creatures are harmless though they *do* need to be brought back to their owners. So, if you happen to see one of them please contact the authorities immediately." Beside her, a picture of a Swedish Softtail is being displayed, showing it flying around in a large cylindrical container looking frantic. "Again, report any sightings and remind yourself: the government is telling citizens not to overreact." Commander Willin nods, seeming satisfied with the broadcast. He reaches for the remote and clicks it off.

"Alright everyone, any thoughts?" he asks his team, not really expecting a response. Everyone there is scared of him for one reason or another, usually because he's the Commander. A couple shake their heads in a 'no', others just stand still, not really giving an answer. "Good," he says.

~ ~ ~

As the Swedish military and scientists were watching the news report about the Swedish Softtails, the two Value Village employees were doing the same. Except now they were hatching a plan.

“You know, Luke, if you think about it, we are three teenagers, one is unconscious, and we are harbouring a family of wanted dragons here. This sounds just about perfect for a book. Don’t you think?”

“Well, sure. That and going to jail,” he replies. The unfortunate thing was that he was probably right. Unless they put a plan into action.

They were going to save the dragons.



THE CASTLE

by
Jakob Wiebe

Benjamin slung his backpack over his shoulder as he walked out the door. It was his usual neighbourhood walk down Rockland and around Craigdarroch Castle. However, this time was different. Benjamin had to get out of town. Victoria was turning into a hellscape of magic, with the merpeople and trolls warring against each other for god knows what, and with other magical creatures strewn about. He wasn't even sure who had the advantage in the merpeople-troll war, or who'd taken over what anymore. All he knew was that merpeople were blocking passage onto the island and trolls controlled quite a bit of the land.

As he hit the castle, he heard screams in the distance. Fire. Death. A battle was happening. He heard the sound of troll clubs hitting the swords of merpeople who were in their land form, busy fighting over the city. Rushing without a plan, Benjamin suddenly found himself falling.

Falling in an unfamiliar place. There were sparks in the sky. And Benjamin remembered everything as his life flashed before him. Everything was shown. The skinned knee. The first time he rode a bike. The time he ate ice cream for the first time. His mom had died when he was only three years old. His dad had left shortly after. Then, Benjamin's brother took care of him. And then-

Suddenly, Benjamin felt himself twisting, whirling, through space and the cosmos, through all of time. It was scary, but glorious. Benjamin felt strange... like something was clawing at him, something very scary. But then... he felt at peace. He heard a roar, but a peaceful one.

And Benjamin fell. Benjamin fell on top of the back of a red dragon with scales like a fiery inferno. The beast roared happily and dived through the clouds. “D-dragon?” Benjamin shouted.

“Nice t’meet you, m’friend,” The dragon began, “M’name’s Infernorawx.”

“Infernorawx?” Benjamin had never heard a name as complex yet simplistic in nature as the name Infernorawx. It sounded good for a draconic beast.

“Ah’m here t’take yew to the crystal.” Infernorawx roared as pheonixes flew in the distance, gloriously bright and shining beautiful like the sun.

Benjamin gripped Infernorawx tightly. He had never felt anything like this before. His life had been nothing but a wave of repeated sadness, death, and despair. He had no relatives. When he turned eighteen, his brother died in a car crash and he was forced to look after the house himself. Benjamin still woke up everyday expecting to see his brother watching Netflix with his morning hashbrowns and eggs, preparing to work at Bolen Books.

Benjamin found himself feeling the full beauty of this world, filled with leaves as green as thousands of pistachio ice cream cones, and his mind was like a circus, the neuron clowns riding unicycles. And the dragon swooped down, landing. Landing on a platform with a beautiful glowing pink crystal.

Suddenly, something felt off. Benjamin’s vision blurred.

“Touch it...” Infernorawx spoke, “It is your destiny...”

“Uh...” Benjamin began, “I don’t know if I sh-”

Infernorawx’s tail smacked into him, knocking Benjamin into the crystal. Benjamin’s hand grazed the crystal and then it burst. He watched as the sky grew red. Infernorawx aged, turning into a rotting corpse, a skeleton, and finally, dust.

Shadows grew in the sky, and a voice shouted out, “You... freed... me!” The voice was gravelly, deep, and scratchy. It gave off an air of ancient, ancient, evil. And then a shadowy figure with red eyes appeared out of nowhere. “And now I have access to your world, Benjamin.”

And the creature vanished, leaving Benjamin shocked as he watched this world crumble and give way to its true self. Somehow, this creature had needed Benjamin to free them, and had created illusions in this reality to show it as more than a desert wasteland.

Benjamin sat for a few minutes, crying. What he done?

He did this until he heard a voice. “Git up, laddie.”

And he saw a group of elves standing before him. One big one had square shoulders and long, braided, blonde, hair. “Yah accidentally released it unto this world, young laddie.”

“Released what?” Benjamin was confused, and his messy hair seemed to stand up on end because of that.

“The Behemoth!” the elf shouted out, and Benjamin felt his heart beat faster.

“No- no! I can’t do anything right!” Benjamin screamed, crying and beating his hands upon the wooden ground on the platform. “Every damn day of my life, I try so hard, but I never get a break! I never-”

“Shut up, laddie,” The elf said, grabbing a canister of beer from his pocket, and guzzling it. “‘Tis not the time to cry, ‘tis the time to get drunk and fight evil!”

“The behemoth,” a female elf began, “Is an evil being that was created in a dwarven experiment. Destroying the dwarves, this being latched onto another dimension and opened up magical windows- portals and sections- unto that world. We managed to trap it in a crystal before it could get there, but were unable to destroy it. It called out, because of events that increased the darkness of the universe after two mystical objects were found and was able to catch an unsuspecting human, we assume. You. And animating the dead corpse of Infernorawx, the last dragon, it forced you to touch the crystal and set it free.”

Benjamin felt blood pumping in the palms of his hands. Blisters on his feet swelled. Benjamin felt sweat fall down his back. To him the world felt like how a fly might perceive it, seeing and feeling everything in slow motion. “But- but- how do we destroy it?”

The elves laughed, and the drunken elf spoke. “Thish guy, I love thish guy! We cahn’t, laddie, it’s that simple!” he guzzled another canister of booze. “The Behemoth destroyed all the beings who were made of troll hair, and tha’s the only thang tha’ could-”

“Troll hair?” Benjamin knew instinctively what he needed to do.

~ ~ ~

Skyler had seen it happen. A boy was strolling along next to the castle, and then he vanished without a trace. She instantly dialed 911, although she wasn’t even sure if it was still going on. Small, cat-sized dragons dubbed “Swedish Softtails” ran through the neighbourhood, likely escaping another skirmish between trolls and mermaids.

Skyler had grown up in Esquimalt but had been forced to leave when a pack of trolls destroyed her home, and merpeople, after taking out those trolls, destroyed her house. Skyler didn’t know what to do, so she ran. Like she ran from everything, she supposed.

In the distance, she heard the faint clattering of clubs and swords. She heard screams that sounded far too human to be magical creatures. And she was reminded of the screams she heard when HE hit the ground dead. When her- Suddenly, she saw what the Swedish Softtails were really running from. Shadowy figures with long claws and bright red fangs, with a slender figure. They wailed out in a terrible way and it shook Skyler to her core.

One of them grabbed hold of a Swedish Softtail and it began to morph into something unrecognizable. Something... Exactly like the slender figures.

~ ~ ~

A hotbed for trolls could be another way of describing Craigdarroch Castle. There were many that had taken residence there, as this was a primary fortress against the merpeople, and although this clan of trolls were nocturnal, they could be awoken easily. Travelling through an elven portal, the elves, led by Benjamin, teleported inside Craigdarroch Castle. And Benjamin was determined to get the troll hair and tie it to an arrow, which would destroy the great behemoth.

The Earth around them was rumbling. Outside they heard screams.

“Laddie,” one of the elves said, “It appears the Behemoth has arrived.”

Benjamin balled his hand into a fist. “We need to find a troll.”

“Well, tha’ shant be hard,” another elf with a blonde beard grinned, “Thar’s one right thar.”

A big, lumbering troll growled forward, attacking them. An elf, who went by the name of Jartin, grabbed a golden sword and matched the club of the troll. The female elf grabbed a knife and leapt onto the troll. However, the troll had armour on, meaning it was going to be difficult to cut the hair off said troll.

Benjamin was whacked in the face by another troll, and crashed through the castle window, bleeding. His life flashed before his eyes. And he remembered. His brother. His brother wouldn’t want him to give up. And when Benjamin pulled himself off the cold, hard, battle-worn ground, he saw shadowy monsters that wailed so horribly. Dead bodies were all around.

“No!” Benjamin shouted, and he ran at one of them, unsure what to do. And then he felt it. Deep within his bones. The truth... and although he didn’t fully understand it yet, it seemed to shatter his mind. The Behemoth... was telling him the truth.

~ ~ ~

Skyler saw it. A blackened storm in the sky. And she felt her knees ache. The darkness was coming. And she breathed. Hard. She felt herself climbing up that mountain, that snowy, cold mountain, where the terrible thing happened so long ago. It was Mount Douglas. It had suffered from a terrible storm recently, and as such was hard to climb. Her brother Andrew was with her. He slipped. Hit his head. Died. There was blood.

And that... that was only half as scary as what was coming. Skyler saw a figure grow from the sky as screams converged. The Swedish Softtails yelped and the mermaids fled to the sea.

It messaged everyone in the area. It told them it was the great behemoth- and it was darkness personified. It was darkness, but not cool darkness... it was death. It was pain. It was starvation. It was something that twisted your soul, that chomped down with blood red fangs. Something that you couldn’t escape, couldn’t stop. Something that would hunt you down and feast upon your lifeless corpse. A corpse that rotted from thousands of years of running, unable to die until it caught you. And it went slow. It loved the screams. It loved them.

Skyler ran, but she realized the cruel truth. She could not escape. There was an invisible enclosure around the castle. The great evil was going to take over the world, one small area at a time.

~ ~ ~

Benjamin denied the truth and told himself the Behemoth was lying, and he needed to focus.

“Get your bow, Aarmund!” The female elf told the bearded elf, “We’ve got the troll hair!”

“We’ve got a bit of a problem here, Klara,” Aarmund responded. “The troll’s angry.”

“This feels like my dungeons and dragons campaign,” Benjamin muttered, as he climbed back through the window, Jartin pulling him up.

“I never took ye for an adventurer, lad,” Klara responded, “What a pleasant surprise.”

“No, it’s- never mind,” Benjamin replied as the troll slashed at Klara.

“Oi!” Aarmund shouted, “It’s hard t’ tie a bow on these arrows, wot.”

“Make two pretzels,” Benjamin told him as Klara slashed her sword at the troll’s club.

“What the hell is a pretzel?” Aarmund shouted.

“Just hand them to me,” Benjamin sighed as he rolled his eyes.

“No! I can’t risk anyone harming Betsy!” Aarmund replied loudly, defensive.

“What the hell, you twat,” Klara shouted while using her sword to slash the troll’s club. “For millenniums our ancestors have been trying to destroy the great behemoth, and now we finally can, but you won’t let-.”

Klara was interrupted by the roof of the castle totally collapsing, sending everyone flying. Jartin was grabbed by a massive black tentacle and morphed into a wailer. The noise of the wailers was so great Benjamin fell to the ground and screamed. A pure, terrified, scream. The truth. The truth... THE TRUTH.

Skyler saw all of this happen. And she noticed a Swedish Softtail rushing away from a group of slender figures, which she, since they wailed with horribly, called wailers. The dragon leapt onto her shoulder and whimpered. Skyler balled her hands into a fist, unsure of what she was going to do, and breathed. She was going to die. Everything was going to die. But she was going to go down fighting. Then she, out of the corner of her eye, saw a bow. And a barely tied arrow with troll hair. She didn’t know what to do but she ran over and picked it up.

“Shoot it!” Klara shouted as the drunken elf, laughing, was turned into a wailer, and Aarmund, tears stroking his beard, succumbed to the wailers. “Shoot the great Behemoth!”

“What?” Skyler shouted, but Klara was turned into a wailer before she could answer, along with the other elves. Skyler ran away with the bow and arrow, trying to figure out what needed to be done. She saw Benjamin lying on the ground, unconscious. Maybe he could tell her. She tried to wake him, but nothing worked.

Then the wailers surrounded them. And big black tentacles from the great Behemoth surrounded the sky, zooming down toward them. When Benjamin awoke, he would know what to do. Skyler grabbed various arrows and shot them at the behemoth, but nothing did anything. The Swedish Softtail whimpered.

The trolls began to attack the behemoth, and Skyler let out a battle cry. However, they were turned to wailers, and Skyler felt nothing would help. But Benjamin was stirring. It was her last hope that Benjamin would know what to do. Crying, Skyler succumbed to the beast, and was turned into a wailer. The bow fell onto the ground and cracked into several pieces but the Swedish Softtail grabbed the arrow and ran away.

“Get that Swedish Softtail,” the Behemoth roared, and launched black tentacles down toward the little dragon, who dodged them all.

Benjamin pulled himself up off the ground but felt a sharp pain in his back, and fell down again, closing his eyes.

“Come on, you coward, get up.” A voice told him, and when he looked it was his brother.

“T-Toby?”

“It ain’t over yet, so get up. Get up and grab that arrow and stab the Behemoth.”

“But... The truth...”

“Kiddo... The truth didn’t prevent you from climbing back in that window and helping your teammates face the trolls, did it?”

“No...”

“So why aren’t you getting up?”

“Because it was so much to ponder... So much to think about.”

“Really? The simple truth that the elves lied?”

“That isn’t true!!!”

“So that’s why you got back in the castle. That’s why you climbed back in.”

“No, that’s not why.”

“Why?”

“Because they didn’t lie. They just didn’t tell me the full truth.”

“And what, pray tell, is that?”

“The elves forced the dwarves to create the great behemoth so they could destroy their enemies. Boom.”

“Makes you hate the elves, doesn’t it?”

“No, it doesn’t! Because these elves weren’t the ones who created the behemoth! These elves rebelled! And I don’t know why they couldn’t tell me, but... I’m gonna trust them, damn it!”

“Good on you. Glad to hear that.”

“Toby...”

“Yes?”

“You’re not real.”

“No. But you are.”

“You’re dead.”

“And you’re alive.”

Benjamin, blood on his hands, teeth falling out, his ankle twisted, his eye black and his knees skinned, got up.

The wailers were ignoring him in favour of the Softtail. Determined, he ran to the Softtail, who eagerly jumped into his arms. A tentacle crashed into the ground next to him, and Benjamin leapt onto it.

“Die, you bastard!” He shouted at the great behemoth, who tried to hit him with another tentacle, but only succeed in making Benjamin fall down toward the ground.

Grabbing the arrow he stabbed it straight into the tentacle, and as the Behemoth screamed, Benjamin shouted, “Go to hell, you damn monster!”

And the Behemoth died, Benjamin hitting the ground fast and hard. The wailers were no longer wailers. And the barrier was no longer there.

The elves walked towards the bloodied body of Benjamin, who was smiling, even in death. “Rest easy, friend,” Klara said and, everyone, even the Swedish Softtails, put one knee on the ground, closed their eyes, and thanked Benjamin, in their own way.

The trolls welcomed the merpeople, who had fled to the sea by Dallas road, and both seemed to reach a sort of peace. The elves left for their world, to rebuild and welcome those who had been wailers in their world. And Skyler now had a Swedish Softtail for a pet.

In time there were statues and holidays. But through it all, nobody forgot Benjamin. And with their magical town, now connected to a magical world, Victoria citizens did their best to make everyone and everything welcome.

Where there once were seagulls, now phoenixes too flew the skies. Where wild cats once walked alone, now joined by Swedish Softtails. And even the land, at times, seemed to smile.

Epilogue

“So...” Klara asked Jartin, “Did you know?”

“No,” Jartin said, “I was with you, out on the front lines, fighting a damn useless war. I suspect when the big revelation came, I was still out there.”

“The warlord lied.”

“I know.”

“They told us the dwarves did it on their own.”

“I know.”

“Thank god we found out, ‘else we might have let him rule again. I suspect the reason as to why the Behemoth weren’t bad in the first place was he didn’t want to be used for war.”

“That tells you something, doesn’t it? We elves have a perfectionist mindset, don’t we, eh? We think we’re perfect, when in reality...”

“We’re to blame.”

“Maybe it’s time that we just admitted that we’re a flawed civilization... and try to do better.”

“For Benjamin.”

“Aye. Now let’s go make sure Aarmund’s not giving the drunken elf any more dew-vodka.”

“What is his name?”

“Oh, it’s-”

Never the end.



THE BUTTON PEOPLE

by

Sophia Herrington

Fan Tan Alley: to some it is the perfect place for photographs, to others a shortcut between streets, and to a few of us, it is a place cloaked in mystery, a place we just can't stay away from.

But if I were you, I'd leave the alley be. It may seem quiet, empty, peaceful...

It is not. So if you must venture down into the alley, keep your collar up and your steps quick. Because Fan Tan alley is occupied, and its tenant would like to be left alone.

Part One

Far away from everywhere, there lies a row of thirteen silent mountains. On the outside, they are each dreadfully ordinary; dark and unrelenting stone, stoic, snow-capped peaks. But on the inside of each mountain is a living, breathing kingdom. They look nothing like any other kingdom, or city, or town; they are all stone, all darkness, slit here and there by lantern-light. The people in the mountains live in levels, from staircase to staircase, from one tiny pocket of light to the next. None of them mind it. They don't know any other way. The children of each kingdom grow up hearing tales of the mysterious light outside their mountain, light that will singe their skin and turn them blind should they step out into its rays. For centuries the outside was forbidden, until one day, Marigold Mudd found a way out.

The danger began before Marigold was ever born. Her father was a man named Rufous Mudd, the architect behind the seventh mountain's greatest weapon; an army of mechanical soldiers. Mindless, heartless, but impossible opponents made to silence the enemies pounding at the seventh mountain's doorstep.

Her mother was called Sylvia Soul. Sylvia was in charge of the morgue, or rather, for the bodies flowing in and out of it. She conducted her work at the very bottom of the seventh mountain, as far down as one could go and then just a little further. It was the perfect place for secrets.

They met there, far below the rest of their stone kingdom. Rufous was there for research purposes. He wanted to see whether he could find a way to capture the very essence of death and bring it back with him to his lab, where he would instill in his soldiers the ability to sense when their enemies were truly dead. Sylvia was more than happy to help. She had heard of his work, and it fascinated her. She was so enthralled with him, with this man who could bring pipes and wires to life, that she unearthed her secret and laid it flat into his hands.

Drawing a tiny brass key from the folds of her skirt, she beckoned him to a darkened doorway, sliding the key into the lock and twisting the latch.

Once inside, Sylvia shut the door tightly behind herself and Rufous. She lit a single lantern and held it out before them, revealing a small, cramped room lined wall to wall with metal crates of varying sizes. He looked down at her, curiosity glazing his dazzling eyes. She smiled up at him in the light of the lantern, then stepped forward and withdrew two metal crates from the top of a stack.

She set them side by side on a narrow wooden desk in the center of the room and gestured for Rufous to come closer. As he did, he could feel an icy breeze wafting up from the metal.

Sylvia lifted the lids. The cold sharpened.

Rufous leaned forward. When he laid eyes upon the contents of the crates, he was not repulsed in the slightest. In fact, he stood there for ages, gazing on inquisitively while Sylvia watched him.

In one box was a human heart. In the other, a human brain. The rest of the boxes were the same, hearts and brains all the way around. Sylvia explained that she had been storing them there for years, stealing them away and locking them up in hiding. She told Rufous how she couldn't bear to waste them, to let them turn to dust when they were still so full of life. The bodies were useless. Those she let burn. But the hearts, the minds, those she rescued so that they might live on.

That night Rufous Mudd and Sylvia Soul spent hours sending their voices back and forth to one another across that tiny, cold tomb. Telling stories. Confessing. Making plans.

He had bodies but no souls, and she had just the opposite. With their minds in one place, Rufous and Sylvia were responsible for the creation of an entirely new race. They watched the first soldier come alive on the very same night that Sylvia discovered that she was pregnant. Already fizzling with the news, they locked themselves away in Rufous' lab and set about laying the final touches in place.

Adjusting steel bones, locking joints into place, tugging on teeth made of razors and veins made of wire. Sylvia stepped forward, her hands shaking, and lifted a carefully chosen heart into its dark little cage. She settled the brain into the soldier's cold silver skull, and then backed away to let Rufous latch it all shut. His hand was still resting against the soldier's chest when a frigid, mechanical hand sprung up and grabbed his wrist.

Rufous and Sylvia sobbed with joy, and the being before them sat up all on its own and watched them, silently.

"It hasn't got any eyes," Sylvia remarked. And so Rufous plucked a button from the front of his shirt, and then another from Sylvia's. He fastened the buttons to their creation in place of eyes. He did the same for the second soldier, too, and the third, and the fourth. They were christened the Button People, and would soon be the undoing of their makers.

Scientists. Inventors. Pushing nature to its limits. They were dizzy with the power of what they had done, and yet they both agreed that they should keep it all a secret for the time being. But this proved difficult when the Button People began to get hungry.

At first it was little things; a creaking hand grabbing at the hem of Sylvia's skirt, a set of shimmering teeth snapping at Rufous' wrist. They hadn't anticipated any of it, which meant that it was a mistake. So they turned a blind eye and hoped that it would fade away, until one day their very first soldier took a swing at Sylvia's swollen belly.

Rufous had just finished fastening blades in place of fingers to some of the older models, the very first one included, which resulted in a fine slice along Sylvia's stomach.

Sylvia watched as her blood melted away into the soldier's blade. And once the blood had vanished, Sylvia knew. She knew that her creatures would never stop grabbing, swinging, gnashing their teeth, slicing at herself and Rufous with their newly minted blades. They had been bred for battle. They wanted victims, not thoughts or feelings. The violence would only grow. The Button People would have to be destroyed.

Her mind on fire, Sylvia fled to fetch Rufous. But before she could reach him, the child tucked safely in her belly decided that they should get to be a part of the excitement as well. Sylvia collapsed, her body wailing as her baby fought to be let free.

Rufous found her that way, and rushed his true love to the medicine wing. It wasn't until an entire day had passed, and they held a darling little girl in their arms, that they remembered they had forgotten to lock the door to the lab.

The Button People had escaped. They had chewed the arm off of a cook, pulled an irretrievable chunk of hair out of an innocent maid's skull, and killed a mailman who had travelled all the way from the thirteenth mountain to deliver a letter that was now soaked through with blood.

Their secret was out. It was an unnatural thing that they had created, not to mention a dangerous one, and, as King Tashava of the eleventh mountain had decided, it was a crime punishable by death.

Rufous and Sylvia had just enough time to name their daughter Marigold before they were stripped away from her forever, and hung by their necks in the throne room of the eleventh mountain.

The Button People were destroyed. Ground down to dust and gone within an hour. All that was left of Rufous and Sylvia (that is, all that was left to anyone's knowledge) was a box full of tools sitting in the center of an empty lab, and a golden-haired, green-eyed orphan who would never know her parents.

There was however, one little thing that was missed when Rufous Mudd and Sylvia Soul were scraped from existence; the first soldier, who had crammed himself into an old, damaged and neglected pipe amongst all the chaos. Badly damaged, but still bearing his button eyes and the blood of his maker.

Part Two

Marigold Mudd didn't miss her mother and father. She didn't know how to miss them, as she had only known them for a few moments, and she had no reason to miss them, or even to want them. She had a wonderful life.

After Marigold's parents had been executed, the king and queen of the eleventh mountain had made hushing it all up their top priority. They'd drugged up those who had been injured in the day's events, and disposed of the mailman long before anyone began to search for him. He was never found, of course, but some say his son is still searching.

Within a week, hardly anyone remembered Rufous or Sylvia, and those who did were prohibited from ever speaking of them. As a finishing touch, the king and queen took Marigold in and let her grow up in the royal wing of their mountain, under the care of their staff.

When she was six years old, Marigold began to be trained as a ladies maid to the eldest princess, who was a month older. From day one, Renoya was never interested in a servant. She only wished for a friend, and that is exactly what she got.

They never left each other's side. What was Ren's was Mari's, and anyone who tried to break that rule was met with tears from a princess and a scowl from her maid.

Before long everyone learned to simply stay out of their way, to let them serenade the entire mountain in the middle of the night at the top of their lungs, to let them steal what they wanted from the kitchens, and to let them toss their teddy bears over the railings to see who would be the first to bonk someone on the head.

Marigold was unbelievably taken with Renoya. The princess had hair as soft as sand and as dark as a deep, deep dream. She had a laugh like the chime of a bell, and moved like water would if someone taught it how to dance. Mari thought that she could sit beside Ren for the rest of her life, simply watching and listening, perfectly happy. Some nights the girls would stay up quietly whispering under Renoya's covers and fall asleep side by side. Had they not had each other they probably would have grown out of it all, but they never did.

Marigold knew that she was in love with Renoya the day the princess turned eighteen. Ren was sitting at her vanity, and Mari was standing behind her, gently dragging a hairbrush through her dampened curls. Mari caught herself staring at her friend in the mirror, and instead averted her gaze to a miniature painting propped against a jar of powder.

In the painting, the girls were seated across from one another with their foreheads pressed together on the floor of the library. They couldn't have been more than eight years old. Marigold's eyes flickered back and forth between the little girls with faces like dolls, and the women in the mirror, who had grown up with strong jaws and powerful smiles.

'We look nothing like we did the day we met,' thought Marigold, 'So why do I feel like no time has passed at all?'

She fastened a golden chain around Renoya's slender neck, letting her fingers graze her skin for just a second too long.

And that night, when they fell asleep inches apart for the millionth time in their lives, it was different. It took Mari ages to drift off; the rise and fall of Ren's chest, the steady sweep of her breathing, was a vibrant alarm blaring in Mari's heart. *'I don't have anything else but her,' thought Marigold, 'If I can't keep her, I will be nothing. And if anyone takes her away, I will break.'*

The next day, the eleventh mountain held a festival for the princess' birthday. Guests from every mountain were in attendance, and among those guests was Prince Lidius of the third mountain.

He was a stunning young man, with honey-coloured hair, eyes like ice, and broad shoulders to which his suit was perfectly tailored. Ren and Mari were huddled together on the sidelines when he arrived, dressed with all of the brilliance and none of the arrogance of peacocks, and spent a very rude amount of time mocking him behind their hands.

It was a long and lively night. Once, somewhere in the blur of the dance floor, Marigold thought she caught a glimpse of Renoya dancing with Prince Lidius, pressed tightly to his chest. The couple was swept up in an instant, and Marigold assured herself that she had been seeing things.

But when Marigold rounded a corner, on her way to the kitchens to see if she might snag a glass of something that wouldn't get her drunk, she found the love of her life in the arms of a prince, and she knew that she hadn't made anything up. His hands on her waist, her hands in his hair, their mouths melting together.

Marigold heard Renoya call her name as she took off, but she made no move to turn back. Instead, she ran until she reached the science wing. This was a place that was mostly full of life, of newness. But there was one particular lab, shoved way back into a gloomy grey corner, that was always utterly still and silent. When she was very little and Ren was busy with her parents or siblings, Mari had spent a lot of her time in this corner, her back leaning against the door, which, to her knowledge, hadn't been opened in a very long time. The gloom of it made her feel safe, like no one would bother her there because no one cared to wander that far.

Tonight, she didn't sit, just paced back and forth in front of the door. Tonight, she was older and taller, tall enough to see something that she hadn't seen before. A split in the stone high up along the wall, with something shiny glinting inside of it. She stood up on her toes and reached one trembling hand into the crack. She latched onto something cold and smooth. It latched right back. Marigold didn't let go. Someone she had never known but who still remained somewhere close by, watching her, told her firmly that she had no reason to be afraid.

She couldn't tell just how long it took her to collect every last bit of the ruined creature from the wall, but when she was sure that it was all there, she gathered it all into her skirt and hurried away to her room.

She had to pass by the princess' room on the way there, and held back angry tears as she did so.

In her own room, she tucked every bit and piece of what she had discovered in the wall into an old leather pouch. Most of it was dishevelled and shapeless, but Marigold could tell that it had once mimicked a human form. The head was in decent shape, and was much heavier than it looked. It had two mismatched buttons for eyes. It also had what appeared to be knives in place of fingers. One of the blades had come loose; Marigold admired it for a moment, and then slipped it into the pocket of her skirt.

Without a second thought, she shoved the pouch underneath her bed and got under the covers, where she lay awake all night, her mind trying to decide where it should land; Renoya and Lidius pressed together in the corridor, or the mangled-up mechanical ghost she had pulled out of a wall?

When Marigold began to hear the mountain waking up, she rose from her bed and dressed for the day in simple browns and beiges, slipping the blade from one pocket to another to keep it close.

By then, everyone was milling around in the dining wing, and Marigold wanted to avoid them all. She was wandering the halls of the floor above when she heard shoes slapping the ground nearby.

Lidius was strolling down the stairs, coming from the direction of the throne room. He placed her almost instantly. "Ah, you're Renoya's friend, aren't you?" he said.

Marigold said nothing in return. Ren's name was poison on his lips.

"Mari, isn't it?" he asked. Still no response. "You're not very chatty, are you?" Lidius said, laughing nervously.

Marigold sighed heavily, and kept her gaze locked on his.

"Have you seen Renoya this morning?" he asked, "I've been looking all over for her."

If he said her name one more time, Marigold was going to lose it. She shook her head.

"That's alright," the prince said, "I've decided to stay a while longer anyway, so I've got plenty of time. I want to get to know Renoya better, you know?"

The look on his face was really only a gentle smile, but to Mari it was a smirk, one he was putting on just to provoke her. And there was that name again, her favourite name in the whole world, the one that was only ever supposed to be hers.

"Well, I'm off. You have a lovely day," Lidius said. He gave a small nod and turned to walk away.

Without thinking, Marigold took a step after him. As she did so, she felt the blade in her pocket knock against her thigh. She wrapped a hand around its cool, clean edges, letting it prick her skin.

Her steps quickened, still trailing in the prince's wake.

It got very quiet inside of Marigold's head, for the first time in a very long while. There was nothing left but muscle and movement. Nothing left but force and fire.

She took Lidius' shoulder in one hand, whirling him around, and with the other, she drove the blade home. In and out of one eye, then the other, and then straight into the base of his throat. He sank to his knees. She could already feel the life seeping out of him and into the air around her. Marigold Mudd tipped her chin down toward her victim and watched the blood pouring from his lips, the same ones that had claimed a mouth that they should never have touched.

Lidius used up his last shred of life to reach out toward something over Marigold's shoulder.

She turned around, slowly. It hurt to move.

Renoya was there, alone, tears already soaking the front of her dress. She had seen everything.

The blade slipped free from Mari's hand and clattered to the floor. Others were starting to appear now, but the murderer could see only the friend that should have been a lover, that should have belonged to only her, forever.

Part Three

Marigold Mudd was sentenced with the same fate as her parents. She was hung by her neck, and all evidence of her existence was wiped away in no time at all.

That was what everyone was told. Everyone apart from a carefully selected few, the few who had to know that Marigold was alive. Alive, but very far away.

Renoya had watched her friend commit a murder right in front of her. But no matter how many times she replayed the scene in her head, no matter how many ways she thought of it, the word *friend* remained.

Because of this, because of all of those years of two spirits so closely entwined, Renoya decided to spare Marigold's life. Instead of death, she was banished forever from the mountains. She was sent away with a gifted soldier, a keeper of secrets. Plaige Belbone. No one quite knew what exactly he was, just that he claimed to have been everywhere in search of a father who had gone missing many years ago. He was the only one in the world who was known to have explored every inch of all thirteen mountains, and then moved on to the outside. That was where he took Marigold. Away from the mountains. He was the only one who could take her back, and he had been ordered never to do so.

Marigold was allowed to take one thing with her. She chose a leather pouch full of scraps and wires, snatched from beneath her bed.

It took Plaige and Marigold twelve days to travel to an island on the west coast of a place that Plaige called Canada.

Marigold recognized many of the things around her, though none were quite the same as she remembered, most of it was new. She had never seen a tree, or a flower. Never seen a sky. Never tasted fruit or felt the sun on her skin. She occupied her mind by trying to decide whether to cherish these things or to despise them.

Time began to pass, and Marigold began to grow accustomed to her new life; she couldn't help it. Plaige had a narrow little houseboat in the harbour, painted all over with blue and white sea stars, and this was where Mari stayed. She didn't know where it was that Plaige snuck away to, day after day, but she could guess that it involved his missing father.

Marigold was allowed to roam free, to go where she pleased when she pleased, but she never went very far. Something about her mountain blood just couldn't quite keep up with this new world, as Plaige had explained to her. He was the same way. They could touch and taste and see this new land, could leave their mark on it if they wished to, but it could not leave anything back. The people there couldn't feel the brush of Mari's breath on their skin if she got too close, couldn't hear her humming everywhere she went. No one could see her, apart from Plaige, the one man she so desperately wanted to hide from.

Marigold kept the bag of silver bones hidden safely in her pillowcase when she couldn't keep it with her. No one could see the soldier either, as she had learned when she used what was most likely a severed steel limb to trip an old man making his way down the dock one morning. He had stumbled, but taken no note of the large metal rod under his nose and simply chalked it all up to his two left feet.

Marigold had nothing to live for anymore. Her home was forbidden, she had no one to remember her in this new land, and she never had any family to speak of in the first place. Apart from Renoya. It burned to think of her.

One night, sitting on the edge of the boardwalk with her feet dangling into the sea, Marigold had whispered Ren's name into the breeze. Afterwards, she had sobbed so hard and for so long that she made herself vomit into the water.

That night, Marigold decided that she would give herself something to live for. She would live for Renoya. She would live to return to the mountain and make sure that the princess knew that Mari loved her. Even if that was all she got, all she had time for, it would be worth it.

Plaige was her only way home, and he would be slaughtered if he took her back. She knew that he had something, a key that hung around his neck, that could get her where she needed to be, but Plaige was three times her size and possessed infinitely more skill and strength than she did. Marigold would never be able to take him on her own.

She would need a small army, just a handful of soldiers at her back. Her mind kept flashing back and forth, from the image of the key around Plaige's neck to the memory of a chilly metal hand clamping over hers in the darkness of the science wing, the weight of a metal skull pulling at her shoulders as she lifted it from the wall.

It took Marigold a year to bring life back to the very first Button soldier. In many ways, bringing them to life brought Mari back to life, too.

Each time her skin met the metal, the wire, or those beautiful button eyes, it was as if her hands were not only her own, but someone else too, someone who was at once a perfect stranger and an old, familiar friend.

When Marigold watched the soldier stand up on his own for the first time, she wept for joy and for relief that it hadn't all been for nothing. Then, in one swift motion, the soldier took a step toward her and clawed the flesh at the side of her face clean off.

Years ago, in a haunted laboratory, the very same beast had done the very same thing to a different woman, but one who had still had a hand in creating them. That woman had shrieked in terror and gone running the other way.

Her daughter chose to stay, to get a closer look at the blood melting into the beast's cold, hard flesh. She hadn't screamed, or ran, or even tried to wipe the blood from her cheek. She had smiled. Smiled and then laughed, because this thing standing before her was going to get her home to her princess.

Mari couldn't risk leaving her button-eyed friend in the boathouse, where Plaige would run right into them if he came back, so instead she went to find him a suitable hiding place. It wasn't terribly difficult, seeing as she and the soldier were invisible to everyone but each other. She chose an alley, an incredibly narrow and blissfully gloomy little strip of brick, carved among the busy streets of town. The alley was so humble and so small that Marigold had almost passed it right by without a second glance. The perfect place to hide her monster.

She had chained the creature's swinging arms to his side's for the journey into town, to keep it from tearing all the hair from her head, as well as crafted it a makeshift muzzle to keep it's gnashing teeth at bay. Now, in the quiet cover of the alley, she jammed a rusted stake in between the bricks with a mallet, then secured the chain to the stake, holding him down against the wall. Then, Mari instructed it to be still, and turned to leave. For a moment, she thought that her mechanical friend might actually obey, but as she was slipping away from the alley she heard the beast begin to thrash, his bones rattling against the cobbles.

The chains wouldn't hold. She had built too strong of a soldier. But Mari certainly couldn't have her escape route getting loose, so rather than leaving it as it was, she dismantled each of the creature's legs and one of its arms. That would slow it down, if nothing else, and she had taken it all apart and put it back together plenty of times; once more would be nothing.

Marigold left the alley armed with mechanical limbs. All that was left was to find her captor and lead him to his death.

Instead, Plaige found her. Bumped straight into her, in fact, a block down from the alley. He narrowed his eyes when he saw what she held in her arms, but asked no questions. Instead, the man plucked a dull, round bit of brass from his pocket, and held it out to Marigold.

She recognized it right away. It was a doorknob, one from the houseboat. This particular one had a black mark in the centre and was covered in scratches. Mari recognized it as the knob that would open her bedroom door from the inside.

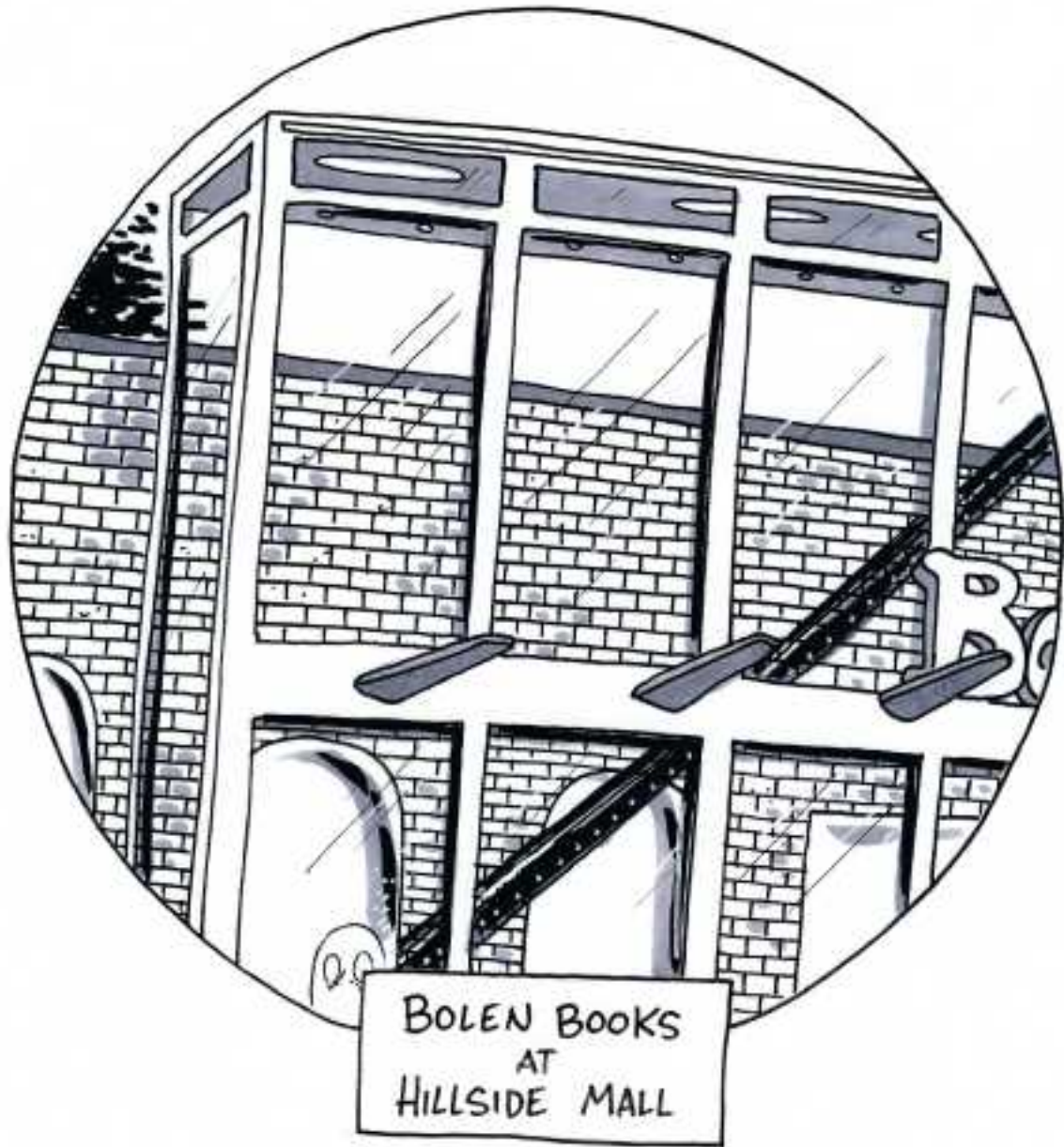
“I don’t know what it is you’re planning,” Plaige said, “But it cannot go on.”

A lens. The black mark in the knob was a lens, and it had been watching her all this time. Watching her craft a killing machine.

Plaige Belbone drew a knife from his belt and buried it in Marigold’s gut. Then he turned on his heel and was gone.

The pain was nothing whatsoever compared to the anger. It was the anger, the broken longing for the love that she would never find again, that dragged Marigold Mudd to her feet. She stumbled along the sidewalk, brushing past people to whom she was invisible, and when she arrived at the alley, she collapsed into the lap of the first and last Button soldier. The soldier absorbed her, all of her, piece by piece. Her tired bones, her torn flesh, and every last drop of her mountain blood.

No one ever went back for the soldier in the alley. It’s still there, stuck, unable to leave. It will be there forever, and so will Marigold Mudd, her icy anger sucked into the metal just like the rest of her. If ever you are making your way through Fan Tan alley and happen to feel a tugging on your hem, or a cold, sharp scrape along your ankle, know that it is only a messy, brokenhearted heap of nothing. And if you feel eyes at your back, just keep on walking. They’re only buttons, searching the crowd for a princess.



THE BOOK FAERIE

by
Zoe Haydock

IF THERE IS A SUCH THING AS truth, then one thing for sure: Magic can hide in the most unlikely of places...

Katia Tuairnear loved books. They were her life, her job, and her passion. Which was why she always worked overtime. Which was what she was doing right now. Her role at Bolen Books, the bookshop she worked at, (and badly wanted to co-manage), was to organize the new books coming in, and send back the new books that didn't exactly look... *new*.

She sat at her desk with her labradoodle pup, Marïssæñ, in her lap. "Mari," Katia said, "D'you think this is completely banjaxed, or is it just me?" She held up a book with a large tear on the first page.

Marïssæñ gave her a look, as if to say, '*And what in the world does banjaxed mean?*' and woofed.

"Oh, Marïssæñ, stop acting the maggot, would ya? You know very well whot banjaxed means, or else you'd not have understood a word I've ever said," Katia replied, as if she'd understood the dog. Her accent was Irish, as her mother and father's were, though she was born here in Victoria, BC., and had never even visited Ireland. The best they could come up with was that her parents just talked too much.

Marïssæñ woofed again, and Katia clucked her tongue. "Fine. Be like tha', will ye?" She turned back to her book piles.

Marí made some half-hearted whining noises, but stopped when Katia patted her on the head.

A few minutes passed, and Katia was still wide awake for some reason. She checked her phone, and saw that the time read 12:23. “Woah, Maríssæń! Did’ja see the *time*? It’s past dark noon already!”

Maríssæń just looked disapproving. It was always a battle between the two when it came to Katia’s slang. Marí always looked disapproving when Katia said so much as ‘ye’, and Katia thought that Canadian English was boring.

“Well, I’m going ta work a tad longer, if that’s all right, Ms. Toff!” she exclaimed in sudden anger. “Ye know, ye don’t have to be so high and mighty!”

‘*What in all the universal craziness is a toff?*’ Was all she got in return.

“Toff. Fancy-pants. Y’know, someone all *high and mighty*. Posh.”

‘*Oh.*’

Katia realized she was talking to a dog, and went back to her book sorting. She opened Spotify on her phone, and played one of her favourite songs, Daydreamer by AURORA, and sang along. Maríssæń whined, as if in pain at her terrible voice. “Oh, shut it,” Katia told her.

They spent a few moments of ‘silence’ together, as Katia had decided that music was only white noise, and so it counted as silence. Eventually, Around one in the morning, Katia put down her books and stood up. She sighed.

“Mari, I think it may be time to attempt at some shuteye, don’t *you*?” She emphasized her use of ‘you’ rather than ‘ye’. “Or shall I keep on workin’ while ye get all the ZZZs?”

Marissæñ snorted softly, and Katia stood up, promptly knocking the sassy dog to the floor. She instantly regretted it, and bent down to see if the pup was alright. Mari stood up fine, and shook herself. Then she began to growl. Not at Katia, no, never at her beloved owner, no matter how insane she was, but rather at something behind them.

Katia turned just in time to see an elbow swinging at her face. It came with supernatural speed, and hit with a pain she wouldn’t wish upon her worst enemies—if she had them. Marissæñ yipped, then whined. She blacked out, worrying about her poor pup.

~ ~ ~

The floor shook. Katia Tuairnear knew there was something wrong, though she kept her eyes closed. She wasn’t sure why, but she did. It wasn’t that there was an earthquake, though that was quite unusual, but that—Wait. There was an earthquake. Where was Marissæñ? She must be near...

Katia opened her eyes, and let out a small shriek of surprise. Beside her sat a wolf. A *purple* wolf. Wearing Marïssæñ's collar. She grabbed the wolf, for no particular reason other than she didn't want it to die, and dove under her desk, shoving it in with her.

The wolf looked at her with its familiar ice blue eyes, and Katia said tentatively, her voice barely above a whisper, "M—Marïssæñ? Is that you? Or am I less than half a shilling now?"

The wolf shot her a look, ruffling its purple fur. '*Half a shilling? What are you going on about?*'

Katia sighed in relief, "It is you. I was scared for a sec... And less than a full shilling means not all the way sane, if ye know whot I mean.

'*Sure.*'

Katia rolled her eyes, but then remembered what was going on. She looked down at her hands. They felt wrong. They *looked* wrong. "Mari, whot's up with my hands? They're all slender and strong." She didn't actually think Marïssæñ would respond, as the 'conversations' they had were only a part of Katia's imagination, but she asked anyway. Maybe her mind would come up with something. "Any why're ye all... Wolfish? And *violet*?"

Mari tilted her head to the side.

“And whot’s with this earthquake? I swear, I’ve never been in one that lasted longer than a good five seconds.”

“Look in a mirror,” Marïssæñ said. The *wolf* said. The. WOLF. “Look at your ears and teeth. And *then* look at your hands. And a book of Irish mythology too.”

Katia almost fainted. Her head spun. She remembered now what had happened. Someone had knocked her out. Then she’d awoken to an earthquake. And her dog turned... Whatever Marïssæñ was now. And could *talk*. Which was telling her she was...

“Marïssæñ... You talk.” It wasn’t a question.

“Sure.”

“Are you saying I’m an Irish mythological creature?”

“Yeah. You’re Fae.”

"Whot... whot type?"

“What element, you mean?” Marïssæñ asked.

Katia nodded.

Mari shook her furry head. “None. All.”

Katia stayed silent for the next twenty-five minutes, as they waited for the quake to stop. When it did, Katia ran out of her hiding place, completely forgoing the count to sixty she was supposed to do. Looking around, she was astonished.

There was nothing—absolutely *nothing*—out of place. No fires, no broken shards of whatever. Her piles were even upright. She dashed out of the ‘employees only’ door and into the shop. It was if the books were glued to the bookshelves, and the glass reinforced with iron, or something. She’d imagined the lights on the floor at least. But they, too, were exactly as they’d been before.

Katia spun on her heel, and ran towards the door leading to the rest of the mall that Bolen Books was in. As she peered through the wood dust-stained glass, she felt something smash into her again. This time, it wasn’t an elbow. It wasn’t visible. It slammed into her chest, knocking the breath out of her. She gasped, and fell to her knees.

She lifted one hand up to her face to wipe away tears that had been knocked out of her. She saw the weird new structure of her hands again. This time, though, she saw her veins. Her hands were slightly transparent. She, again, almost fainted. Her wolf pup ran over to her, probably having followed her scent. She nuzzled her belly and helped Katia stand up again. There was only so much Katia could take at once. She wasn’t like anyone from a storybook, with some sort of magical resistance against pain.

She leaned against the door, and yanked on the handle. It wouldn’t budge. She tried the front door, Marïssæín helping her along. When she got there, she looked out to see a horde of police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks. Her boss, too.

She opened the door, and limped out. When she was on the cement of the parking lot, she turned to look at the building. Hillside Mall was in ruins. The Tim Horton's sign beside the bookstore was a few feet away from the building, crushed by a rock twice it's size. The rest of the mall was unrecognizable. All but Bolen Books. The bookstore was exactly as she'd seen on the inside: normal.

A magnified voice yelled behind her, "Hands where I can see them!"

Katia spun. All the police had guns trained at her. She freaked out completely. Her arms were heavy, and her palms felt slick with sweat. Her head pounded like it was being hit with a metal pan or something of the like. Falling to the ground beside Marïssæñ, she curled into a little ball.

Katia heard shouts, footsteps coming towards her. A voice said, "Katia Tuairnear?" It was her boss.

Katia looked up into Samantha Bolen's eyes, and replied, "Yes?"

Her boss turned back to the police. She nodded, saying to them, "This is my employee, Katia Tuairnear. She's worked here for a year. She did not do this." She turned back to Katia, "What happened? Wait—don't tell me. Tell the police."

Katia stood, suddenly over her mental breakdown. She and her boss walked over to the cars and trucks and blinding, flashing lights. The medics sat her down, and the police tried to fend off Marïssæñ. Katia stopped them.

She began to explain. The staying to work late, being knocked out, waking up as a faerie, having her dog turn into a purple, talking wolf, the earthquake. The police wanted to know how she knew she was Fae. She told them about her ancestry, and her boss confirmed it. Because of all the magical occurrences reported in the city that day, they believed it. Then she was sent home. Or, rather, she was driven home.

When she got inside, she promptly fell asleep on her bed, Marïssǽn tucked in with her.

~ ~ ~

Katia awoke to her wolf yipping and her skin scalding. Marïssǽn danced around on the floor, trying to yank the burning sheets off of her owner, but failing, as the sheets were on fire.

Quickly, Katia kicked the sheets off, yelled “Damn!” and ran to her washroom, grabbing her toothbrush cup, and throwing water onto the bed. Instead of splashing everywhere, the water flowed directly to where the fires were, and didn’t stop coming until the last flicker of flame was extinguished.

She couldn’t think, she was so tired. “Now I’ll have to buy new sheets.” She didn’t want to consider where the fire and water had come from.

But Marïssǽn, bless her irritated soul, said, “You did that, y’know. The fire. I saw. It came from your hands. And the water too. I don’t know if you noticed, but the water literally flowed from your hands, around the cup, and *through* the

bottom. Katia, I'm so glad I get to blow your little Irish mind. Victoria's gone magic. There are faeries, trolls, merpeople..."

"Ye'd be a gud story tella'," Katia responded. She always got a little more Irish when she was tired. "I'd bet more 'n a few people 'd come 'n' listen to a talking wolf tell a story."

Marïssæñ snorted.

"Ye got snot on me," Katia complained.

Marïssæñ snorted harder.

Just as Katia was about to start cursing at her wolf in spoken Irish, her phone rang. It was work. Picking it up, she cast Marïssæñ a warning glare. As a dog, Mari had been known as 'Call Breaker,' as she always wanted to know who Katia was talking to, going to the last resort of grabbing the phone in her mouth, putting it on the floor, and barking at it. Katia didn't trust her even as a wolf.

"Hallo?" Katia asked.

"Hi. This is Madeline Holmes, Samantha Bolen's daughter. Is this Katia Tuairnear?"

"Yes. Whot's the craic?"

"Sorry?"

“Whot’s up?”

Madelaine paused. “The store’s been sold.”

“Whot?!” Katia exclaimed. “Ye mean—”

“Yes. We’ve sold Bolen Books. I’m afraid the new owner isn’t taking on any of our employees.”

“Whot, so I’m unemployed now? Yer jokin’, right? Cause that’s gas.” Katia couldn’t believe this. She was basically being fired. No one knew the bookstore like her. No one could ever. Her dreams... They snapped, crumbled into tiny pieces, and sparked into flame. She’d never work there again, let alone manage.

“Um, I’m afraid not. What—what’s gas?” The lady sounded confused.

“Oh—right. Gas means funny. Y’know, like, someone is an amusing or funny person, they’re gas,” Katia explained.

“Oh, well then, no, it’s not a joke. Nor would it be funny if it was. I apologize for the inconvenience.”

The—the *inconvenience*? What? Katia wanted to smash something. Burn something even, if Maríssæin was to be believed. She held her phone tightly to her ear. “So,” Katia said

“So?”

“Why did you sell it?”

“Oh, because we didn’t think that anyone would come to a store touched by magic.” And with that she hung up.

Katia *really* wanted to burn something now. Her anger bubbled and frothed, rising up into her head, making her see colours she never imagined before. It was as if she’d never felt anger before, this was so strong. Maybe being a faerie made you see emotions, for that’s what was happening. Anger was a bloody red in her eyes. Red, with swirls of iridescent yellow. Yellow for disappointment?

The phone in her hands grew hot, boiling like the firestorm inside her. She dropped it into the discarded toothbrush cup, and it began to smoke. This was not acceptable. This was not... Then the turquoise rose. Sadness. She felt sadness in her chest now. Less of her fire bloomed, and the phone stopped smoking. She would miss working at Bolen. It had been her *life*. She fell onto her bed, forgetting about the ashes, falling asleep in seconds. Marissæn stood – or rather, slept – at guard behind her.

~ ~ ~

This time when Katia woke up, she was ready to venture outside. According to Mari, it was the third day into the “Magic Pandemic”, and half of Victoria was already in shambles. Katia had brushed this fact away with, “Well, this little island was always dilapidated, wasn’t it?”

But she hesitated before exiting her door. She lived near Bolen Books, and so it was easy to get there in the mornings, but she wasn't sure if she wanted to. Perhaps she'd just walk around her neighbourhood. Her neighbours were sensible people. They *probably* hadn't messed anything up *too* bad...

She was right, for once. Or was it that Marïssæñ was wrong. Maybe she'd been dreaming? Katia looked down at her hands. They were as they'd been yesterday. She sighed, "C'mon Marïssæñ. Let's go."

They began a loop around their block, and were only halfway around when Katia remembered her phone. She rushed back to her house, and grabbed it, seeing if it still worked. It didn't. "Damn!" she cursed. "Whot am I to do now? How will me 'n' you SOS, Marïssæñ?"

"I don't know!" said Marïssæñ, clearly offended. "Why do you always think *I* know everything? *You're* the 'mighty human'!"

Katia rolled her eyes. Marïssæñ was a strong animal-rights defender (obviously), and she always took it a little far. She walked to where she stored her laptop, pulled it out, and logged in. Immediately, she opened Gmail. There were about five thousand emails from her twin friends, Pine and Fern, all asking if she was all right, and one from Bolen Books. She sighed, and opened the one from the bookstore.

It read:

‘Dear Bolen Books Employee,

We are sorry to inform you that Bolen Books has been sold, and the new owner is not taking anyone from our previous staff on. We will not expect you to come in tomorrow, or the day after, though we will miss you.

We wish you well in your next occupation,

Sincerely,

Samantha Bolen and Madelaine Holmes.’

Katia scowled, and clicked reply. She drafted many messages that all involved crude wording, before promptly deleting the drafts altogether, leaning back, and sighing again. She did not know what to do. But lucky for her, Marissæn began to bark.

Mari was facing the front door, her hackles rained, and teeth bared. Katia had never seen her so riled. She walked over, and peeked out the window.

There, in the middle of the street, was a giant, club-bearing troll and three sword-bearing humans (two female, one male) battling. She watched them for a second, then said, “Those ain’t humans, are they?”

“They’re *mer*people,” Marissæn seemed to spit.

“That’s quite a spat they’re havin’, ain’t it?”

“You call that a *spat*?” Marissæn asked, incredulously. “That’s more like a duel, or *battle*! Spat’s a word for a petty fight between people!”

“Eh, tomato-tomato, potato-potato,” Katia pronounced it: Eh, tomayto-tomahto, potayto-potahto. “Whot’s the difference?”

Marïssæñ just kept growling at the door, ignoring Katia.

Katia rolled her eyes. Then, “Who should I help?”

“*What?*”

“You heard me. Who looks like they deserve it more?” Katia eyed the troll, “I’m not sure I agree with the use of a *club* when battling creatures that move so fast. But you seemed so disgruntled at the fact there were mers here. So. Who?”

Marïssæñ said, “Mers?”

“Really? You seem to have some beef with them.”

“Nope. Go get killed.”

Katia raised her brows, and opened the door. Immediately, the troll turned to her, distracted. Taking advantage of the moment, the merpeople launched at the troll, slaying it in seconds. They looked over at Katia, and nodded. She heard Marï snort behind her. The mers did too. They looked over, and saw Marïssæñ. They looked at each other, and began to walk over.

“Close the door. Close the *door*, Katia!” Marïssæñ whispered.

Katia did, but not fast enough. The merman threw a dart, which hit her in the shoulder. She fell to the ground, and then to sleep. Mari closed the door as fast as a wolf could.

~ ~ ~

She woke to a blood curdling scream.

It was a horrid thing to come into consciousness and hear, full of agony. She jerked up from where she lay on the front mat. Looking around, she could not see Marissǽn. She called her wolf's name, and Mari came bounding over. She wagged her tail so hard Katia was surprised it didn't fling off. After a few licks, Katia fended Marissǽn off, and asked her, "Who was it that I heard screamin' like a troll was on their tail?"

Marissǽn put her head to the floor, and placed her paws on her ears. Then, "Someone bought a book."

"A whot?"

"A book. From Bolen Books."

Katia was confused. "Why in all the worlds would Bolen have anything to do with a scream that practically shook the earth?" She shook her head. "Marissǽn, how do you even know these things?"

Marissǽn replied primly, "I'm *smart*."

“Sure,” Katia was unconvinced. “So, how long...?”

“Three days. You have an awfully good habit of falling asleep nowadays.”

‘Three days,’ thought Katia, ignoring the jibe. ‘How strong was that thing the gombeen merman shot at me? WHY did he shoot it at me? I’m a nice person, ain’t I! Wasn’t I about t’ go help them damned mers?’

“So, what’s with the book-screamin’ thing?” she tried to not let her irritation get through her poker face. Not that she was ever *good* at poker faces, but Faekind was known for coldness and no emotion. Maybe she would be able to at least *fake* that now. Or maybe not.

“Y’know, I bet the merpeople—regret?—what they did?” Marïssæn said, her tone abnormally nurturing.

Katia rolled her eyes.

“Fine. If you want to know why, maybe open your computer.”

Katia complied.

“Open any news site, and search ‘Bolen.’”

Katia, again, complied. Well, sort of. She searched up ‘bolen books’ on google, and opened ‘news’. There were many articles, but Katia didn’t read any of them. Her eyes flicked up and stuck to the google logo.

It depicted swirls of blue, pink, red, and purple, an orange phoenix, and the letters: M-A-G-I-C, rather than Google. It sort of freaked her out.

“Now what?” she asked.

“Read the *damn* article titles.”

So Katia did, ‘*Bolen Books: Best & Most Dangerous Bookstore of All Time, Thanks To New Manager and Owner: Lindsae Hawcorpthe. New Owner of Bolen Books, Lindsae Hawcorpthe: Irish Water Fae and Full-Time Book Lover Tells Us About What Happened With The Case Of Brenna DeCuix. Disappearance of Young Brenna DeCuix Put Into New Light: Bolen Books New Owner, Lindsae Hawcorpthe In Suspicion.* And then, lower down, *Daughter of The Founder Of Bolen Books, Samantha Bolen, Sells The Beloved Bookstore To Lindsae Hawcorpthe After Hillside Mall’s Collapse.*’

“What is this all about?” Katia asked, flabbergasted. “Who’re Brenna DeCuix and Lindsae Hawcorpthe?”

“Well,” Marïssæín began, “When your boss sold Bolen Books, another faerie snatched it up. That’s Lindsae Hawcorpthe. Brenna DeCuix is a five year old who disappeared from her parent’s home two days ago, after buying and reading a book from Bolen.”

“So, wait...” Katia thought for a second. “You’re saying that Lindsae Hawcorpthe is kidnapping people through her books?”

“Almost. She’s a Water Fae, a Selkie. She can manipulate water and cast minor spells, and brew a few potions. She has no need for humans, as she, like all *real* Fae, don’t care about humans, thinking you’re beneath them. All she might want humans for is magic, but she doesn’t need any more.”

“So, why’s this Brenna girl gone, then? And whot’s with th’ *scream*?”

“*Well*,” Mari said, acting, in Katia’s words, ‘all high and mighty’, “Ms. Hawcorpthe has hexed all the books that come in to transport the reader into the book’s universe.”

Katia stared at the pup in horror. “Nay.”

“Yes.”

She shook her head, trying to clear it. “Whot. So they can’t come back out again? Or is it just a deadly, yet fun, little game, where they’re allowed to travel to and fro between all magic and non-fantasy worlds?”

Marïssæñ sighed. “No. You can’t get out. Ever.”

“How do you even know this?”

Mari said nothing.

“What should we do, then? I mean, I’ve got all of the elements, righ’? So, what ‘bout we go to the store, I pin ‘er down, and you shove ‘er in a book?”

Marïssæñ muttered something Katia couldn't hear.

"Hm?"

"I said, you can go get killed, or worse, but I'm not coming with you."

"Aw, Mari, I know you couldn't let me do anything alone. Especially something dangerous. You always have to butt in somehow."

Marïssæñ rolled her eyes as best a wolf could.

Katia grinned. "C'mon!" She ran towards the door, grabbed her jacket, and ran out, pulling her arms through the sleeves as she crossed the road. She ran down Kingston Street, where her house was located, and charged in the direction of her old workplace. She turned left onto Menzies Street, then right onto Belleville Street. She kept going, her pace never so much as faltering, until Katia passed a road she had never been on before in all her exploring.

She was *pulled* by some invisible thread, and almost got hit by a car as she sped across the car lanes, not looking left nor right. She ran, and saw a building. It was large, and had a sign. St. Ann's Academy. Underneath it, there was a wooden board with the words: '*Magical Prison For Magical Creatures.*'

Immediately, Katia ran away, ignoring the yank in her chest. She did *not* want to be stuck in there.

She and Mari ran until they reached Bolen, which only took about eighteen minutes. They stopped when they reached the parking lot. No one had done anything about the rubble around the shop, though it appeared there had been some police cones around everywhere but Bolen. The bookstore looked exactly the same as it had six-or-so days ago.

“Okay,” Katia breathed in. “So, I hold her down, you shove her in a book. Got it?”

“What?” asked Marïssæñ. But Katia was already strolling in.

She looked around, and, irritatingly, decided that Lindsay Hawcorpthe definitely kept the store the exact same as Samantha Bolen had. It looked *exactly* the same. No faerie decorations and portraits of disturbances in the universe (don’t ask), no pixies buzzing around. Even the employees wore normal clothing.

Katia went up to the cashier, who was surprisingly, as far as she could tell, human, and said, “Hallo! Is Ms. Hawcorpthe in at the moment?”

The cashier nodded and replied, “Yes, but I’m afraid she is not available. Is there, perhaps, a message I could pass on?”

Oh, screw it. Katia was impatient. “No, I’m afraid this is too important.” She leaned a tad closer, and said quietly, “If Ms. Hawcorpthe can’t come and chat, this building will be incinerated in seconds.”

The cashier looked appalled. She was most likely human, as she didn’t have that haughty air around her that Fae were born with.

Also, she was scared of a seventeen year old with pointy ears. No way she was Fae. Maybe a mermaid, though...

“I—I’ll go get her...” The cashier looked slightly sick. She rushed away, as if the longer she kept Katia waiting, the more likely she’d be roasted to a crisp.

Katia felt bad. And hungry. She hadn’t eaten in *days*! That made her feel faint.

After a minute or two, the cashier came back. She looked behind her, where a faerie followed. Katia knew instantly she was Fae, not only because she had the ears and teeth, but because of the way she held herself. While being a few inches shorter than 5’10” Katia, she still managed to look down at her.

Katia smiled. “Mari!” She yelled.

Nothing happened other than the woman—Lindsae Hawcorpthe —looking confused. “Excuse me?” She asked, “I don’t understand you. Speak English?” She looked at her employee, who shrugged.

“Sorry,” Katia looked around. “Marissæñ, where are you?” she whispered.

‘*Coming,*’ she heard a voice in her head. It was Mari.

‘*Mari?*’ she thought.

‘*Yup.*’

‘*HURRY.*’ She turned back to Hawcorpthe and her employee. “I’m sorry, but I have an urgent matter I must discuss with you, Ms. Hawcorpthe.”

“You’re a faerie. But you smell human,” was all Hawcorpthe said. “I guess I must smell human too by now. I’m around them enough.” She sighed. “So. What do you want badly enough to threaten me for?”

“Well,” Katia started, trying to stall. ‘*Marïssæh. Book. NOW,*’ she thought before speaking. “I am here with charges of assault and trespassing.”

Hawcorpthe revealed nothing. She *was* Fae, after all.

“A few nights ago, you entered this bookstore, knocked me out, and fled. I’d like to know why. And how. You were faster than a subway train, and quieter than a flying bird.” Okay, that was a lie. She had no idea who had knocked her out cold that night, but this was a *pretty* good guess.

Hawcorpthe opened her mouth, and Katia sent a ripple through the earth, calling on vines to come up from the ground. She’d never done magic purposely before, so this freaked her out a bit. What if she exploded or something? What if it backfired? She still dug down, and yanked up the dark green and grey vines that erupted from the floor of Bolen Books and wrapped around both ladies. She hadn’t meant to capture the human, but didn’t know how to let her go while keeping Hawcorpthe still. They both thrashed in their prisons, but the vines grew thicker.

But a few vines wouldn't hold a Fae for long. Hawcorpthe wriggled her wrists slightly, and her vines burst into flame. She was already free.

“*MARİSSÆN!*” Katia roared. The wolf bounded around the bookshelves, an *enormous* book in her mouth. She threw it at Hawcorpthe, hitting her right in her forehead. She fell to the ground, and Katia managed to get her wrapped in vines again.

“Whoop!” Mari cried.

People were screaming now, running to and fro, throwing books at each other for no reason... It was chaos. But Katia just needed to get. The. Damn. Fae. Into. A. Book.

“Marissæń, can you get a book, *quick*? Thanks.”

Mari snorted, but did. She trotted over to Katia with a new book, and Katia smiled. It was one of her favourites, ‘Crescent City.’ She walked calmly over to the struggling faerie, opened the book up to a random page, and shoved it in Hawcorpthe's face. The faerie read a few words, wrinkled her nose, then realized what had happened. Her eyes went wide as she disappeared with a shriek like the one Katia had heard before.

She smiled.

~ ~ ~

Hawcorpthe was gone. Bolen Books belonged to the Bolens' again. And Katia was the *damn* co-manager. Life was bliss.

Unfortunately, those who had disappeared did not show up ever again. Not even five year old Brenna DeCuix. They were mourned, but honestly, Katia was a little selfish. She didn't feel bad about not getting rid of Hawcorpthe sooner. Yes, it would have been... Bliss-er, but she just... She was hungry.



POWER CORRUPTS

by

Kahlan Arnold

So I'm in jail. And there's a painting of Mary holding baby Jesus on the wall of my cell. It would be beautiful if not for the obscene graffiti added to the picture, and the giant stain of a lovely brownish reddish colour. I don't want to know where it came from. I can guess, though, from the smell. It stinks like something died in here. I don't have to explain the stench of death to you. You'll know it when you smell it. You'll wish you didn't.

Anyway, I'm in jail. But I didn't do anything wrong. Though if the man speaking to me now doesn't shut up and do something helpful, I'll have to be charged with murder.

"At the moment," he says irritably, "There is nothing I can do. With all this magic, we're a bit overloaded, and-"

"Just get out, will you?" I shout. He looks uncertain. "Oh, how hard is it?! Get out of here, and close the door behind you, Crabapple! Don't come back until I can talk to a lawyer." Crabapple! That's a new one. I surprise myself sometimes, with the genius that spills out of me. The prison guy is crabby and as round as an apple. I chuckle for a minute, then remember that I'm in jail and my face slides back into its usual sullen expression. I'm sure I must have been cynical as a human, instead of it being some magical-born nonsense. I was a human, you see, or at least I'm pretty sure I was. Despite knowing pretty much nothing about my life before the magic came, I have a strong sense of the way human things work, as well as some stuff about magic. Magic, man. It's whack. Goodness knows why it decided to take over Victoria. But it came, and now I'm a... Wait for it... An elephant pixie. Thought something exciting was coming, didn't you? No such luck. I could have been a dragon. Or a ghost. Or a zombie!

But a larger version of the stupid, bubbly pixies? Ugh. There's no way in heaven, hell, or whatever messed-up Victoria we're in that I'd be a real pixie. I look like one, to a certain extent. I'm sort of translucent, about six feet tall and I've got tiny wings that let me 'fly' - more of a glorified jump. Otherwise, I'm pretty human-looking. Hardly an elephant, but that's pixies for you - always looking down on anyone even slightly bigger than them. My hair is long-ish, dirty blond, and eternally tangled. I'm quite proud of my hair colour, considering that most pixies have hair that's either perfectly gold, black, or brown. Mine is a nice messy in-between. Take that, pixie perfection! Unfortunately, my hazel eyes aren't so rare in the pixie world. It's usually that or green.

After Officer Crabapple leaves, I take some time to explore my room. Other than the Mary mural, there's a chair, a sink, and an uncomfortable-looking bed I certainly will *not* be sleeping in, due to small black bugs crawling across the mattress. I cautiously step backwards into the wall. What can I say? Everyone's scared of something, and for me that something is bugs. The room begins to feel claustrophobic, and Mary seems to be glaring down at me. I have to get out of here. And I'll have to be the one to do the heavy lifting. The rest of the world is too busy trying to get rid of the magic. '*Am I really thinking about breaking out of jail?*' I may have said some things that weren't, in retrospect, particularly kind, but I never got into *big* trouble. I never broke any laws, or anything. It's the government who should be in trouble for locking me up! They were just throwing magical creatures in a truck, chucking them in like they weren't people. I may not be nice, but that sort of treatment makes my skin crawl.

All of a sudden, there's a quiet *pop*, and a bug is on the ground at my feet. I swear it wasn't anywhere near there before.

I take another step away from the bed and take a good look at it, and that's when I realize that the bugs are teleporting around the bed.

Oh. So they are magical. That's nice, I guess. Good for - GAH! THERE'S A BUG ON MY ARM. I wave it around and I think I'm shrieking, and dancing around like something possessed.

"HEEEEEELP," I cry out. "HEEEEEEEELP." This is not okay. This is a violation of basic human rights, and do they even apply to me anymore?! "SOMEONE GET ME OUT OF HERE THERE ARE TELEPORTING BUGS IN MY ROOM HEEEEELP." I bang on the door, staring through the tiny window into the graffiti-filled corridor. It's empty, but I bet creatures like me sit behind the other locked doors, innocent and confused. They can wait, though. BECAUSE MY ROOM IS INFESTED. I feel *things* crawling all over me. In my hair, on my back, on my arms and legs. I swear Mary's laughing at me.

This is *not* my best moment.

Finally, Someone - Crabapple - shuffles down the hall. I scream at him, and he rolls his eyes. The nerve of the man! How dare he! How. Dare. He. Here I am, locked in a jail for no reason other than that I sprouted wings. And he's rolling his eyes at me. Crabapple sticks his face against the window and sighs dramatically. Because life must be *sooo* hard for him. I make some rude gestures, and he smirks. *Ugh*. He makes a big show of unlocking the door, then slowly opens it.

I try to push past him, but he sticks out a foot and I go sprawling across the dirty floor. “Hey!”

“I hear there’s a couple bugs in your room. Do I need to kill them for you?”

“Shut up.” I try to crawl away, but he stops me with a single sentence.

“There’s a lawyer downstairs you can talk to. Maybe we can fix this.”

A lawyer! This could be the answer! There’s no way they can keep me here if it’s illegal. I hope. But at least it’ll get me out of my room. I stand up slowly, checking my skin for bugs. I don’t see a single one. Huh.

As we walk through the halls, I can hear other magical creatures - some yelling, some crying, others laughing or fighting - in their rooms. I can tell that this place, like my cell, used to be stunningly beautiful. The ceilings are high and arched, with large windows that let in the late afternoon light. Except there are cobwebs in the corners, more mysterious stains, and bars on the windows. I admit, it’s creepy. And if there are spiders in those webs.... Well, let’s not think about that.

Crabapple clears his throat, and I realize he’s holding a door open for me. “The lawyer’s in there. Don’t expect much. I’ll be back later.”

“Thanks, Crabapp - I mean -” Crap, I don’t know his name. “Never mind. Thanks!” I scurry through the door before I can get myself in trouble, or more than I’m already in.

This room is in better shape than the rest of the academy. There are paintings on the walls, depicting old-looking buildings, people, and landscapes. The walls themselves are a soft green. Light shines through wide, unbarred windows. I can't help feeling more relaxed here.

"Ahem." Ah, yes. The lawyer. He's sitting on a threadbare paisley-patterned couch, wearing a fancy black suit. He's a small man, especially compared to me, but he makes up for it in the I'm-far-more-important-than-you look on his face.

He gestures to the chair opposite him and I sit down.

"So you *are* translucent. Fascinating." He says this musingly, as if I am simply an interesting specimen for him to examine. "Forgive me, I've just never met one of you before." I roll my eyes. "My name is Alastair Harper. I was just meeting with one of the other inmates here. And you are?"

"Lupin."

"I'll need your last name as well."

"Brown."

"Why do you believe you need a lawyer?"

"I didn't break any laws but I'm in jail. Also, I think there have been some human rights violations."

“Given the nature of this situation, I’m not sure if you can claim *human* rights violations.”

“I am in jail. But I am not a criminal. I shouldn’t be here.”

“Perhaps,” he wonders, “We may have a case for animal abuse.”

“I am *not* an animal. I’m in jail despite committing no - ”

“Well, I think you would agree that you aren’t exactly a human.”

I give him the glare of death. Alistair doesn’t even flinch.

“How exactly did you find yourself in jail, Lupin?”

I tell him the whole story. I had been walking down Fort street when a troll barrelled out of Russell books and ran across the road. He was soon followed by a lady in a business suit and heels. “Get back here, you thief!” She screamed.

The screaming was totally unnecessary, because the troll had tripped in the middle of the road, and was lying there clutching his toe. I started to back away, because I was already late for work at the job I was barely holding onto.

By now there’s no chance that I still have it.

“Nobody move! I’m calling the police!” Bossy Suit Lady screamed. She said *nobody*, but she meant me. Ever since the magic came, the world has decided I’m automatically a criminal.

I was about to leave anyway, but suddenly a police officer showed up with a truck and dragged the troll into it. Then I realized Bossy Suit Lady was pointing at me.

They wanted my name. “Lupin Brown,” I said. “I didn’t do anything, so you can let me go.”

But they put me in the truck. I had thought about yelling something. ‘*Curse you, Bossy Suit Lady*,’ maybe. But I decided there was no use. And the truck smelled. It was the kind of thing people put horses in.

HEY WORLD. I’M NOT A HORSE.

But they don’t really care, do they?

Eventually I could feel the truck slowing, pulling into a driveway, and then I heard subdued voices. I peered through a tiny window in the back of the truck, and realized where we were: St. Ann’s Academy. When the magic came, the school - which had been part tourist attraction and part office building - reverted back to the way it was when in operation as a school. Offices turned into dormitories, modern tech changed into old-fashioned decor. I had heard that they were using this place as a jail for magical creatures, but I never expected to *be* here, especially not as a prisoner.

The truck driver came around back, and smiled at me. “Welcome to prison!” Then he stabbed a needle into my arm, and everything went black.

Yep. That’s my story. Woe is me. Life sucks sometimes.

“I’ll have to do some research,” Alistair says. “Thank you, Lupin. I will contact you sometime in the next seventy-two hours.”

“I - what - that’s... it?”

“Goodbye Lupin. I will send someone to take you back to your cell.” And then he’s gone. *Idiot*. Why did I think he would be different? They’re all the same. They’ll never understand.

The window’s open. I don’t know where this thought comes from, but once I realize, I can’t get it out of my mind. I only have a couple minutes, though. I peer through the window. It overlooks the back of the academy, where guards survey the area and gnomes in prison garb weed the garden. There’s no way I can escape without being seen, and my wings aren’t strong enough to fly me out of the property. But... I turn my head and look upward. A few feet above my head, the roof begins. A gutter hangs over the edge. The question is, will it support my weight? I pull myself back in. The door is still closed.

I stand on the window frame, a little terrified. When I was just looking out the window, the ground looked far closer. Bugs *may* not be my only fear, now that I think about it. *Wow*, I’m high up.

Whatever turned me into a pixie should have changed how I feel about heights before giving me wings. It's then that I hear footsteps in the hall.

I have to go, no matter what. I reach up and grab the gutter with one hand, then, carefully, bring my other hand up to join it. The doorknob is turning.

Deep breath in. Deep breath.

"Lupin, get back in here!" Crabapple. "I have a gun. Climb back in, slowly." I don't move. "Get. Inside. Now. This is your last warning."

"*Shield*," I murmur, and I can feel the magic, stirring in the air and surrounding me. The magic makes me feel a little drunk, a little intoxicated by the power within my reach. *Resist*, I tell myself. I know the phrase. Power corrupts and stuff. When I use magic, I can see how. At that very moment, there's the *bang* of a gunshot, and a pressure in my chest as my shield tries to stay strong. Crabapple swears, and I can hear him fumbling for something. "We have an escaping prisoner in room four-oh-four. I repeat, an escaping prisoner, room four-oh-four. She's very powerful."

Dang. He's calling for help. I need to go, now. I make a wish and pull myself onto the roof, which slopes sharply upward. This won't be easy to climb. Awkwardly, I stand up, wobbling on the edge. One wrong move and I'll fall.

'Okay, Lupin. This is not the time to be a klutz. Channel your inner award-winning gymnast. Channel a perfect little pixie.' We all do things we wouldn't normally do to stop us from falling off a roof.

The roof is steep, but there are little sections jutting out over the top floor windows. If I can just get to one of them, I'll have something to hold on to. From there I can make a better plan. Hopefully.

Suddenly, something grabs my foot and *yanks*, and I scream. The hand on my foot pulls harder, making me scream louder, and I slide dangerously closer to the edge. If I don't do something now, I will fall. I try to shake it off, but it's strong. Magic will have to do, then. I focus my energy and push magic at the hand. A rush of pleasure flows through me. Knowing I can do this to people - it's awful, but addictive. The hand releases, but why stop there? I smirk, and send a second wave of power my assailant's way. There's a scream. A second later, a sound of a sickening crack. I glance behind me. Crabapple lies crumpled on the ground, far below.

"The apple doesn't fall too far from the roof!" I say with a laugh.

No. *No!*

The rush of power has faded, and I suddenly don't feel like making stupid jokes anymore. Now I just feel empty. I hurt him, maybe killed him. This is why we magic-users are locked up. Because we have access to power humans can never imagine. They are scared of what the magic will do to them. What it will do to us. I am scared too. '*Power corrupts,*' I repeat to myself. '*Don't go down this path.*'

But there's still a part of me that is proud of what I did. And that scares me more than anything. I don't want to be a villain.

There are more voices coming. Do they know about Crabapple? I have to go, have to escape before I hurt anyone else. I start running, inches from the edge, abandoning any plans I had.

And then I'm falling.

Fortunately, forward into the roof. My nose smashes onto a shingle. *Ouch*. Waves of pain roll through me, and I hold onto them eagerly. If there's one thing I've learned since the magic came and my life went downhill, it's that pain can give you clarity.

I pull myself up. I start running again, kind of amazed I haven't fallen off the roof yet.

"Stop," says an authoritative voice. "Keep your hands where I can see them, and turn around slowly." I turn. A woman stands on the roof behind me, wearing a uniform that looks military-ish. She's pointing a rifle at me. Others climb through the window behind her.

I guess I can't plead not guilty anymore.

'You can kill them, you know,' the magic whispers to me. *'All of them. It will feel so good.'*

I hold the magic in, but it's hard. I know that the whispers are true: it will feel good. But afterwards, I will feel terrible.

“Leave me alone!” I shout. “I don’t want to hurt -”

“Shut up and stay where you are.” The officer stalks toward me, and I back away.

“Don’t move. I will not hesitate to shoot.”

“*Shield*,” I murmur again, then start running before I can be tempted to do more. The surging magic in me joins with adrenaline, giving me the strength to clamber onto one of the windows jutting out from the roof. From there, I run up the steep roof, and grab onto a small ridge at the base of the spire that juts from the top of St. Ann’s.

I can feel bullets colliding with my shield, and each use of magic pulses through me, until I can barely think. I reach up for another handhold, but the next is too high up, even for me. The ridge I’m clinging to is too small for me to stand on. I’ll need to try something else.

Deep breath in. Deep breath out. It’s time to put the stupid pixie wings to use. They’re too small for much, but maybe they will be enough for this. My wings pick up speed, and I push off from the ledge. It’s not really flying, but I manage to sort of float up past the glass windows, enough to get my feet on the ledge. Then I push off again, floating higher. The spire curves narrower, and I keep finding handholds and footholds, and pulling myself up. Finally, I come to rest. I cling to the golden cross that tops St. Ann’s academy. The officers stand on the roof, still shooting at me. Below, far below, guards wander the grounds, peering up at me. It’s an amazing view, but it doesn’t make me feel very safe.

The officers on the roof begin to come closer, while still shooting at me. I'm starting to feel weak. Magic might feel good, but it takes a lot out of me. But as long as I'm still being shot at, I can't exactly release my shield.

"Stop shooting!" I yell. I have no idea why. It won't do anything, I know, but I feel like I have to do something. "I won't hurt you!"

"What do you expect us to do? We saw what you did to that man. You certainly aren't innocent." The woman in charge has stopped shooting, and has one hand on her hip and another shielding her eyes as she peers upward.

I'm not. I'm not innocent. I don't deserve to be let free. I should just let them take me. But... I can't let go of the fact that people like them are throwing magical creatures in jail, just because. We aren't evil. We just have the ability to do more evil than the average human. To be honest, I don't know what that makes us.

"Is he okay?"

"He's severely injured."

Just for a moment, my tough exterior breaks, and a couple tears slip down my face. I never wanted this power. But now I can't escape it. And I *enjoy* it, no matter how much I hate it.

The officers are standing around the spire now. I'm surrounded.

“Get rid of that shield you’ve got,” the woman says.

“Will you shoot me?”

“Not if you take off the shield and come with us.”

“I didn’t mean to hurt him.”

“We’ll see about that.”

“I didn’t!” My voice begins to crack.

“You used your magic to throw him from a three-story window.”

“He had grabbed my foot.”

“You were escaping prison.” Even now, her voice is hardly raised, just stern and confident, like she knows everything she says is completely true.

“I didn’t do anything wrong!”

She gives me a look, doesn’t even have to say a word. I know I hurt him. I pushed harder than I needed to. I made a joke after he fell!

Suddenly, I have an idea. I don’t know if it will work, it’s something I’ve never tried, but maybe, just maybe, I can prove that I’m not a bad pixie.

“I’ll heal him.”

The woman scoffs. “Why would we let you anywhere near the man you tried to kill?” It’s the first time I’ve detected emotion in her voice.

“Because I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt him. The magic is - you don’t know what it’s like. Knowing you can kill someone with hardly any effort.” In a whisper, I add, “Power corrupts.”

“Excuse me?”

“Power corrupts.”

“Is that an excuse?”

“No. It’s just the truth.”

She sighs. “Get down here.”

And because I’m not a rebel, just a teenage girl who found herself with more power than she knew what to do with, I do.

An hour later I find myself handcuffed and standing in the office of the woman from the roof, who turns out to be the prison warden. She introduces herself as Sarah Crosley, “But you can call me Ms. Crosley.”

The posh lawyer guy, Alistair, is there too. I wish he wasn't. I can feel his eyes watching me, as if he's still amazed at my slightly translucent body. Fortunately, Ms. Crosley gets right to the point before I can snap at him.

"You can heal him. You'd better heal him, or you're facing charges of assault."

"And if I do heal him?"

"No one other than the employees here know of the situation. I'm willing to overlook this."

Alistair shoots out of his chair. "You can't do that!"

"Mr. Harper, please leave the room."

"But-"

She silences him with a glare, and he leaves sheepishly. Ms. Crosley comes around the desk and stands in front of me. She sighs. "I have to show you something. Don't tell anyone," she whispers, as she pulls back the curtain of auburn hair from her face. It takes me a minute to notice. Her ears.

Ms. Crosley is an elf. "You're an elf!"

“I didn’t want to run this place, but I was assigned this position, and as a woman in a man’s job, I can’t argue, can’t make mistakes. To have half the respect, I needed twice the skills. It’s... hardened me, I guess. Once I became an elf, I knew that I had to be careful. Just one slip up would ruin me.”

“You hurt people. I’m sorry you had it rough, but that’s not an excuse. I had power, and it made me want to do things I didn’t want to do, and that’s not an excuse either.”

“I’ll do better.”

“I will too.” We make this promise not just to each other, but to ourselves, and the world. *We will do better.*

“Now,” Ms. Crosley says, “we’d better heal that man before word gets out.”

“We?”

“I told you, I’ll do better. I think we all have to. And this is the first step.”

The makeshift infirmary is set up in the chapel. The wooden benches have been removed, but the dim light shows that the gorgeous murals and paintings remain. Various magical creatures lie on lumpy-looking mattresses, receiving treatment from doctors and nurses. I bet most of what they’re doing is guesswork. I think most of what I’ll be doing will be guesswork, too. We follow a flustered nurse into a side room, and wait until he leaves us alone with Crabapple.

Crabapple. He lies on a mattress in the desolate room, where a bare lightbulb dangling from a cord illuminates cracked walls and chipped paint. He's all bandaged up, and he looks to be in terrible shape.

Ms. Crosley and I stand on opposite sides of the bed. "Do you know how to do this?" she asks.

"Nope."

"Me neither."

Tentatively, I reach out with my magic. I don't know how to explain it, but it's like I can *feel* the broken parts of him, like he's a piece of fabric with a torn seam. He's delicate. I realize his life is in the hands of someone who can't say much about him other than he was fat and annoying. "What was his name?"

"Hmm?"

"His name. I realize I never knew it."

"Bowes. Jack Bowes."

"Huh. I called him Crabapple."

She snorts. "Ready?"

“Let’s do this.” We reach out with our magic, gently at first. It takes a minute, but suddenly I *know* how to heal him. I also know how easy it would be to kill him. It would take hardly anything, and it would feel so good. This is what the magic tells me, anyway. It would be simple. Just let the magic flow into his heart, and break it in two.

Almost without my help, the magic spreads, into his veins, through his body. Straight to his heart.

‘Kill him. Imagine how wonderful it would feel.’ I want to believe every lie. *‘Say the word, and he’s dead. You don’t have to do a thing.’*

But I don’t want to kill him. I don’t want this power. I can’t let it corrupt me.

‘Don’t be silly,’ the magic murmurs. *‘You want to be powerful. Everyone would know your name.’*

Okay.

Good.

The magic swirls from me, more than ever, until it’s all I can see. I swim through it, reaching forward until I hold Jack Bowes’ heart in my hand. It’s cracked. I just have to finish the job. The magic around me feels wonderful, and I know it will feel even better when I kill him. I’m ready. I’m about to do it.

And then Sarah Crosley's face appears before me. *Lupin*. Her voice is foggy. *'You promised. Power corrupts. It's lying to you. Don't do this.'*

In this instant, every ounce of pleasure within me turns sour. What have I done?

"What do I do?"

'Power may be harmful,' she says thoughtfully, as if she's realizing this for the first time. *'But the magic is good, and pure. Let it do the work.'* Suddenly, I realize what's happening. I am blinded by power. It tells me to take what I want from the world, like that will make me happy. But taking what I want by taking it from others won't make me happy. Slowly, I will steal everything from everyone, and I'll just be a very lonely, very empty girl. I don't want that to be my future.

Full of relief, I let go, and stop trying to control the magic. It flows through me, not the same intoxicating sweetness, but a calming purity. It heals Jack Bowes, and it heals me too.

When the magic is finished, my head clears, and I stumble into Ms. Crosley's arms. "You did it," she whispers. I glance at Jack, who sleeps peacefully, a relaxed expression on his face.

"We did it," I tell her. "Thank you."

"Of course. Now, there's a lot of work to do, not just for us, but for all of Victoria. But I think first you should get a good night's sleep."

I smile. This isn't my happy ending, it's not like everything's perfect. I'll still make bad jokes at inappropriate times, and I'll still have to fight the urge to use my power for evil. But this is a start. Now that magic is a reality, the world will have to change. And it will. Tomorrow, we'll rise with the new day and begin our work to create a new and better Victoria.

AN INVITATION

The story of Imaginary Victoria isn't over, because there is one story missing.

Yours.

If you look closely at the map, you'll realize that there are still a few places that don't have stories attached to them. We want **you** to tell us a tale about these imaginary places – or any magical place in Victoria. (On the following pages, we've included some pictures to inspire you).

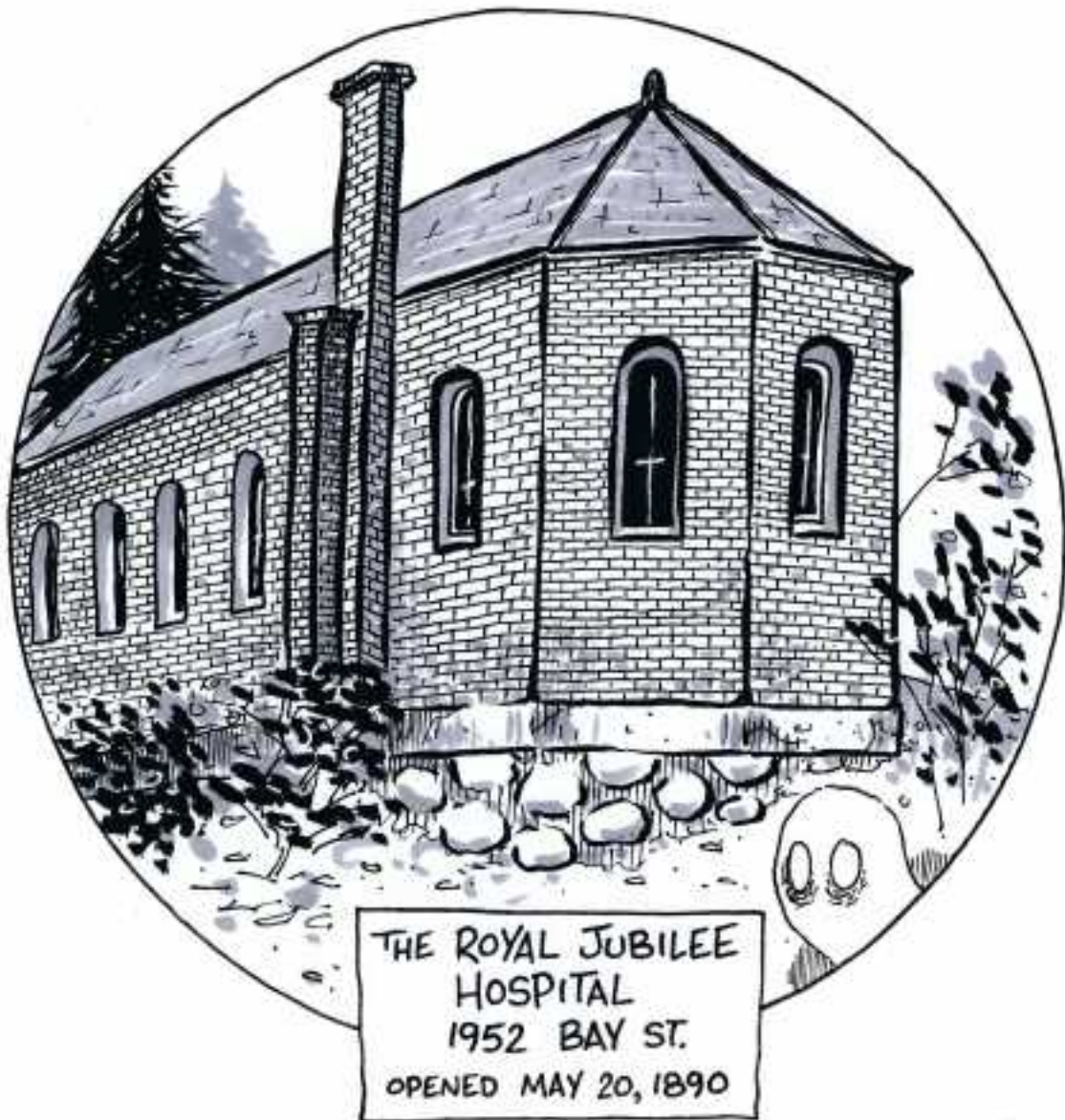
To get your story started, we suggest you visit www.storystudio.ca/learn

There, you will find free StorySheets to help you through every step of the process of writing your own fabulous tale, from creating curious characters to building tension with a hair-raising plot! These are the same tools that all the young writers in this collection used and you can use them, too. Of course, once you've completed your story, we'd love to read it!

Feel free to email us with your stories, ideas or questions at
info@storystudio.ca









ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kahlan Arnold ~ *Power Corrupts*

Kahlan is fourteen, and loves writing about aliens, magic, and politics. As you may have guessed, she is most definitely a nerd. Other labels she wears with pride include *weirdo*, *feminist*, *environmentalist*, and *X-Phile*. While not reading and writing, Kahlan enjoys crocheting, listening to musical soundtracks and podcasts, and making food. Also eating food. She lives with her wonderful family and adorable dog.

Kat Gillese ~ *Revolution Starts with an Ice Cream Store*

Kat Gillese is an extreme multipotentialite, which in case you didn't know means someone who has many different interests and creative pursuits in life. By that, they mean they couldn't possibly list all the things they find interesting because it wouldn't make for an interesting author bio and they would grow bored after the first 400 interests or so. To keep it simple, Kat enjoys making people laugh and doodling small creatures on whatever surface they can find. They have a huge family, which can be fun at times, and they really wish they had an animal of some kind. Most nights, they like to make complications to their plots instead of sleeping. Kat is a proud weirdo and thanks their many friends for being crazy and weird with them so that they could have made everything up 'till now happen. They hope to one day be taller than all their friends, but this sadly will most likely not happen.

Abigail Hawthorne ~ *The Spirited Softtails of Value Village*

Abby Hawthorne is thirteen and lives in Victoria. She's a short story author, animal lover and poet. She spends her time playing with her puppy, writing and reading - *a lot* of reading. She enjoys writing in her journal, and dances with no shame in her living room every day. She listens to music and loves doing karaoke, especially with her friends. Abby is a not-so-great-but-still-loves-to-sing singer-songwriter and is shy when people ask her to show them her songs which she's made. Whenever she wants to, she creates comics and loves showing them off to her family. She has two cats named Leo and Lily which she loves to cuddle and her dog Louie when he isn't being an energetic psycho. When she first joined *Imaginary Victoria* she thought it was a camp for geeks. Then Abby realized that it really *was* and was very proud to have been a part of that and to be one.

Zoe Haydock ~ *The Book Faerie*

Zoe Haydock is a thirteen year old British-Canadian writer, living in Victoria, B.C. She dreams of living in a houseboat with six pet rats and writing fantasy novels full time.

Sophia Herrington ~ *The Button People*

Sophia Herrington is a seventeen year old writer of violent, twisted tales. She grew up on the East coast and now lives on Vancouver Island, where she spends her days gathering inspiration from her wonderful family, dazzling friends, and the wild, wild wilderness.

Astrid Kim ~ *Ogden Point*

Astrid has been writing for five years. She enjoys reading comics and graphic novels as she finds they help her come up with better ideas. She prefers to write in the office at home where it's quiet and distraction free. Astrid enjoys sci-fi, heist, adventure, thriller/suspense stories and of course comics/graphic novels.

Isabella Piombini ~ *Mayfair Mall Mystery*

Isabella Piombini is an accomplished creative writer, having authored over fifty self-published mini-books. She is also an award-winning screenwriter as well as an actress, appearing in over forty movies and short films. She resides in Oak Bay, BC, and lives with her mom, dad, precious little Yorkshire Terrier named Simba, and pet guinea pig named Dollie.

Jakob Wiebe ~ *The Castle* and *The Museum*

Jakob Wiebe is a thirteen year old living in Victoria, British Columbia. He operates a YouTube channel, Randomness Central, where he posts scripted sketch comedy. He has ADHD, and his favourite animal is an orca. He enjoys writing, reading, drawing, watching YouTube, and playing video games. Besides from that, he is an enjoyer of memes and is good at editing videos.

Cathy Y ~ *Things Have Changed*

Cathy is fourteen years old and lives in Victoria, B.C. They have written over 49 short stories, and hundreds of poems, and that collection is ever growing each day. They wish to change the world one step at a time, but have no idea how to. They try to be funny, but of course, fail every time.

ILLUSTRATOR

Gareth Gaudin is a cartoonist from Victoria, BC who created The Monster Sisters and The Perogy Cat while writing, drawing, and publishing his on-going series "Magic Teeth Comics." He has a keen interest in this city's old buildings, wooden alleyways, and folklore and enjoys making up stories about giant monsters.

He works in a vintage comic book shop and his life is fun.