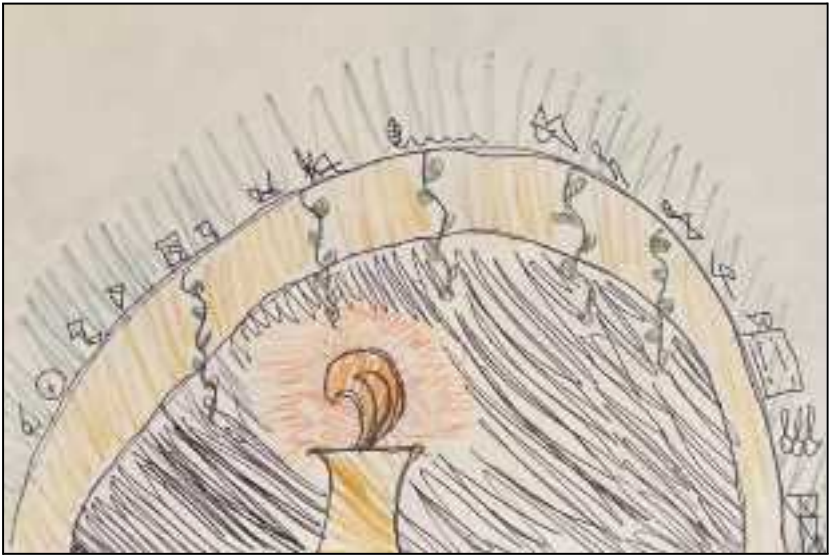


The Light of the Hallows



Alexandra Garncauz

Prologue

We approached the roof of the school, touching down in the helicopter just as the school bell rang, creating the perfect distraction. Quickly, we cut through the roof with a saw, dropping down into a classroom. As soon as we were inside we picked up five kids and the teacher, before any other students made it into the classroom. We scurried back up through the roof, securing the piece back in place and herding the kids and teacher into the helicopter.

We gagged them with the special potion and instantly they were attentive and responsive to us. Everything was going according to plan.

“Girl approaching school from the sidewalk, less than a block away. You’ve been spotted. Over.”

The voice came through the walkie talkie just as we began ascending into the sky. “Take care of her,” we responded.

Rick was closest to the girl. He grabbed his hammer and snuck up behind her. Just as she turned to run, he hit her without hesitation. She fell onto the sidewalk with a thud.

Rick ran to the meeting place to prepare for our landing above the tunnel to the lab.

Chapter One

I stared down at my getting to know you paper. I crossed out 'Alecsandra' and wrote 'Alexia Foister.'

I was twelve years old and had just moved from New York to Quebec, Canada less than a week ago. I loved gymnastics and making art. My mom was my teacher at the middle school I just started at. I still had to call her 'Mrs. Foister' at school, but when we were at home I called her mom. Her real name's Elizabeth. My dad always makes embarrassing jokes. He's a doctor, his real name's Steven. I don't have any friends yet, but I'd just have to wait.

"Honey, I'm home," called my mom.

"Hi," I said. "Where's dad?"

"He'll be home soon," said mom.

But dad didn't end up coming home until midnight.

When he got home, he said that he had forgotten where we lived! We lived in Sunset Village and were still getting used to the new house. It's small and cozy; my bedroom was upstairs in the attic, and mom and dad's bedroom was on the second floor. The kitchen's on the first floor, where I was putting plates on the shelf. Mom and dad's bedroom was very messy, there were still

boxes everywhere. In the basement there was a weird door shaped crack. I figured it was nothing to worry about, but I couldn't stop thinking about it.

My school was tiny, but the school garden was huge. I got tons of homework already. Tons! No thanks to mom, although I guess there are advantages to having her as my teacher too.

I was excited about getting gymnastics lessons each Friday at the community center. I would also be getting a cat! A cat! I was so excited. I'm going to get her a house and everything, it's going to be so fun. My old pet fish Joary had died a while ago, I was still sad about it. But I was looking forward to having another pet and not feeling so alone in this new town.

Chapter Two

The town was a mile long. It was very small compared to New York. I really missed my old friends. I hoped I could make new ones. I thought about trying to make friends with Katherine in my class, she seemed really nice, but also maybe like she was hiding something. She intrigued me. There was also a bully in my class. Maggie. She teased me for not knowing anything and being a dummy. Actually though, I had the highest marks in the class so far, but it was still September.

Anyway, I was walking to school and would be there just in time. I walked past a bird's nest hanging high in the trees. When I got to school I couldn't wait to start work. I loved school, it was my favourite thing to do, if it wasn't for Maggie that is. '*Oh yay,*' I thought as I walked into the classroom, '*My mom's here, that means writing.*'

"Hello class," I heard my mom's cheery voice brighten up the classroom. She wrote ' $X + 7 = 14$ $X = ?$ ' on the board.

'*Oh, that's not writing,*' I thought, but of course I raised my hand. So did Maggie.

"Eight," said Maggie.

My mom chose me. "Seven, because if you take seven away from fourteen, you get seven," I said.

“Correct,” said mom.

I saw Maggie’s face turn as red as a tomato. She glared over at me.

When we got to recess, Maggie said, “Know it all,” as I walked past.

“I am not,” I said. I heard even more laughing and pointing. I just had to leave.

Then Katherine said to Maggie, “Leave her alone.”

Maggie glared at her and then stomped away.

“Thank you,” I said.

The rest of the day was boring, music class. I was happy to hear the bell ring at 3:15pm.

When I got home, I started to heat up leftover dinner, while I waited for my mom.

Mom walked in a couple minutes later, looking stressed.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Your father got his tire slashed by an animal while at work,” she said.

'An animal? Weird,' I thought to myself. "How long will it take to fix the tire?" I asked.

"About an hour or two. He'll be late again."

Dad walked in looking stressed just as I was going to bed. I went to bed wondering about how an animal would have gotten through the gate at my dad's work where he had parked.

Chapter Three

I woke up in the morning on Wednesday to my mom shaking me.

We got to leave a bit later today, my mom already had her schedule prepared for the day. We walked together, watching the buses and other kids pass us by. The bell rang as soon as we got there. Mom went in through the teacher door, and I met the rest of my class at our door.

When we got up to the classroom, mom was frantically searching her desk. "Where is it?" she said. "My schedule is missing."

"What schedule?" a few kids asked.

"The schedule for our day," Mom said.

She asked us all to search our desks and the rest of the room. She thought maybe it could have been the cleaner, moving it or not knowing what it was.

I thought it was too weird to be true. First dad's tires, now mom's schedule. Something weird was going on.

Later, when I got home I told mom my theory. I thought it was weird that so many things were going wrong. She didn't believe it.

“No, I suppose it’s just bad luck,” Mom said.

“But dad’s tires-” I said.

“No,” Mom said, cutting me off.

“But mom-”

“No!” she said.

‘If she doesn’t believe it, then who will,’ I thought. ‘If I was back in New York, I could talk to my friends about this.’

“I thought it was the cleaner, but maybe it was Maggie,” mom said. “I’ll talk to the other teachers.”

Chapter Four

On Thursday morning my dad woke me up. "You're going to be late for school!" he said.

"What?!" I said, "Where's mom?"

"She left early."

'Well, I've got to get ready,' I thought. In a flash I was at the door ready to go. "Bye," I said, not looking back. I saw a few birds flying away from the school as I got closer. The school yard was empty, everyone had already made their way inside.

When I was about half a block away, at the top of the school I noticed my mom being taken out of a hole in the school through the roof. Some of my classmates too! I turned and started to run home to my dad, knowing something was wrong, but I was too late. I felt something or someone hit my head, and then darkness.

~ ~ ~

I woke up at the hospital where my dad worked. Everything was blurry at first and then everything came into focus. I saw my dad sitting by my bed, and a book on the table that dad must have brought. There was also a nurse in the room, watching from the doorway. "Dad!!" I said.

“Honey, what happened??” he said.

I told him everything I remembered. The nurse was still standing in the doorway. He smirked as I finished my story.

“Do you think you were hallucinating?” dad asked, looking concerned.

“Dad, no. I know what happened.”

“It’s okay, I know you’re scared,” dad said.

Chapter Five

Dad and I stayed overnight at the hospital with no sign of mom. I couldn't believe he still didn't think mom was actually missing.

The chill in the room made it hard to fall asleep. I listened to dad snoring away in the corner, he's used to being in hospitals. Then I saw a nurse peek into the room, it was the same one as when I first woke up. 'What are they still doing here?' I wondered.

I didn't sleep well that night, the nurse kept coming back into the room but never said anything. The other nurses were always nice and talkative, but not that one. Dad said it was just his friend, Nurse Jerry, but I didn't get a good feeling from him.

I was excited to go home on Friday, I felt fine, but dad said that I could still stay home from school.

We got home around 10am. As we got to the door I noticed a pet carrier on the step. Inside was the cutest little kitten, with all of the supplies, including a little house! "Dad! Wow! Our kitty is here!"

Dad was trying to surprise me with the cat - and he sure did! "She's cute right?" he said as he grabbed the mail from the mailbox. He noticed a letter. It was addressed to him, but he read it outloud. "The handwriting is so

messy, I might get a few of these words wrong. *'Dear Mr. Foister, Your wife has gone on a busnapus - opps I mean Business Trip - to interview other schools. She'll be gone as long as it takes.'*"

Dad had a worried look on his face. I was scared, I knew it must have something to do with the kidnapping from the roof. I ran to my room, time to go looking. Now.

Chapter Six

The very next day I started planning. In my notebook, I wrote: *First step: go/walk to gymnastics. Second step: run away from gymnastics. Third step: Go into the plumbing area under the school to find the missing people. Fourth step: ? ? ?*

Well, that's all I know, thank you very much.

Gymnastics was after school on Fridays and on Saturday mornings. I did gymnastics back in New York too, I loved flipping on monkey bars and swinging off ropes. I also liked to rock climb, but not as much as gymnastics. I liked the group here, it was the same program as New York.

MY dad and I started the walk to gymnastics, at the community center. Dad went with me because he didn't want me to end up in the hospital again. I get it, I was scared to walk alone, it felt like someone was always behind me.

Once I got to gymnastics, I put my plan into place. But something weird happened, a girl in my class was sneaking out too. Her name was Aliethia, she seemed nice.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

“I’m going under the school to find the kidnapped people,” Aliethia said.

“Me too!” I said. This was proof that the kidnapping had actually happened!

“Cool, let’s go!” she said.

We did a flip for gymnastics and jumped out the window.

Once we got to the tunnel area under the school, about a block away, we jumped in. It was very slimy, but there were dim lights so that we could see. Our voices echoed, but other than that it was silent. We walked slowly in the middle on our tiptoes, trying not to touch the slime from the sides of the tunnel. At one point Aliethia slipped. I caught her before she fell into the slime.

Suddenly we spotted a metal porthole type door and we heaved it open. Surprisingly it was unlocked. Inside we found weird instruments like switches and buttons and a few bottles, but that was all, no kidnapped people, and no clues either.

Aliethia was as silent as a mouse.

I was a little shocked, “Uhhhh,” is all I could manage to say.

Finally, I came to say, “Let’s go back to gymnastics, it should be over in twenty minutes.”

We climbed back out of the gross, sticky tunnel, happy to breathe in the fresh air! We ran as fast as we could back to gymnastics. We didn’t want to miss free time!

We both swung back in from a rope by the window landing on the mat without anyone realizing we were gone. “I’m glad we got back for free time!” Aliethia whispered to me.

I was sad that we didn’t find anything, but I was glad I had made a friend. And I was also glad because I knew that wasn’t the right place and we needed to look somewhere else. I was already making a list of places in my head. *‘Tunnels, abandoned building, second abandoned building, abandoned warehouse, through the trapdoor in the grocery store.’*

Once I got picked up from gymnastics, dad didn’t notice I was gone at all. We walked back home while I continued planning my next move. I would have to fill Aliethia in at school on Monday.

Chapter Seven

Back in New York I used to spend my Sunday with friends. Dad worked on Sunday's so I was home alone today. He worked late too so I had all day to go looking.

I decided to head to the first abandoned building. I knew what road it was on, but I wasn't quite sure where it was. So I stopped at the supply store for a map. Next, I need to find where the road was on the map. *'Good thing it's a small town,'* I thought, *'Oh, it's actually an hour away.'* There was only one way to get there and it was past a bunch of tiny roads. *'Great, looks like I'll have to start now. I was hoping to go to the coffee shop first, guess I'll have to do that after.'*

I grabbed my backpack, and some spare rope just in case, and started my walk. I had my gymnastic leotard on underneath just in case I needed to be flexible. *'Opps, I almost forgot water!'* I thought, running back inside. *'Okay, ready. Wait! A snack!'* I ran back inside, quickly chopped up some apples and grabbed some chips and threw them into my bag. Now I'm ready!

There were lots of beautiful trees here, unlike New York's dusty buildings. The walk was long, but nice, plus I got to see more of the town. I even spotted a good coffee shop to check out later, I smelt yummy hot chocolate!

When I made it to the street I had to go left a little bit and then I spotted the building, hiding amongst a bunch of trees. It had a crooked chimney, the only thing you could see from the street. The building was deserted and covered with vines. I peered in a window and saw a couple of old and rusty crates. The window was thin and I broke it open easily and climbed inside.

I decided to check out a few crates first. When I opened one it was just empty wine bottles. Then I decided to open the trap door on the floor in the middle of the room. I ripped it open and saw a purple liquid that smelled like hot chocolate. Suddenly the floor gave way! Everything fell into the purple liquid. I tried to hold onto the floorboard above me, but I slipped and fell. Luckily I landed on a floating floor board just above the liquid. I was hanging on to the ledge. I pulled myself up onto the ledge, about twelve feet under the floor. I took off my clothes from over my leotard and threw them up onto the floor. I grabbed my rope from my backpack and then threw my backpack up too. I took my rope and made a lasso out of it. Since I had great eyesight, I looked up and noticed a huge wardrobe attached to some of the crates. I threw the lasso over the wardrobe, it was probably twice my weight so I knew it could hold me as I climbed out.

But I realized there were no places to put my feet, and I couldn't climb the rope with just my arms. So I did a backflip off the ledge and landed halfway up the rope. I had sharp fingernails so I dug a little hole into the rock,

just big enough for my feet, creating a ledge. Then I did another backflip off of that. I landed back up on the floor. I took off my lasso and pulled up my rope. I ran out of the warehouse as quickly as I could before all of the floor gave way into the purple liquid and the warehouse collapsed. I stopped for a second watching everything fall into the purple liquid. It was all just a giant pool now, but it smelt so great! I really wanted to sample some, but figured it was probably poison.

I ran all the way home, which only took thirty minutes. I didn't even stop for a nice cup of hot chocolate. I ran into my room and wrote into my notebook what had happened. I couldn't wait to tell Aliethia. I wondered what would happen to the purple liquid.

Dad came home and peeked into my room just as I was finishing writing in my notebook. He asked what I was doing, and I just said that I was doodling. Then I quickly locked my notebook, and locked it up into a locked box, inside another locked box, inside a locked drawer.

Chapter Eight

'That was close!' I thought as I got on my pajamas.

When I was falling asleep I wondered why the liquid wasn't on the news that night.

The next day was a Pro D day so I went back to the purple liquid hole, but it had all turned to water. This time I tasted it, and it just tasted like water. Weird. It didn't do anything to me. Weird again.

Today I went back to the hot chocolate place and got a hot chocolate. I took a big slurp and drank it all. Once I got home I read, 'The Adventure of Sandy Campbell' by Doctor Sentha. I had picked up the book last year from a local thrift store. The weird thing was that what happened in the book was happening right now. The people missing. The purple liquid. '*Weird*,' I thought again. I could use this book for clues! I wondered what would happen next.

"Dad," I said.

"What's wrong?" he said.

"Something weird is going on," I said.

"No honey, nothing is happening," Dad said.

“Aren’t you noticing anything?” I asked.

“No,” he said, brushing me off.

“What about the missing kids?” I asked.

“Their parents said they like to run away a lot,” he said.

“But they always come back.”

‘Will he ever believe me?’ I thought. “But -” I said before dad cut me off again.

“No buts,” he said.

“But dad-” I insisted.

“Go to your room,” he calmly said.

I walked into my room and quietly closed the door. Being in my room wasn’t so bad actually. I wrote in my journal for hours. Then I decided to just go to sleep and forget about today. But I had a weird dream. It was me, drinking the purple liquid and then obeying boys, no matter what they said!

In the morning I told dad about my dream. He said it was just a dream, but I think it meant something. But, what?

Chapter Nine

When I was walking to school the next day, I saw missing posters of the kids that were gone. When I got to school I found Alethia to tell her what had happened.

“Alethia!” I called.

“Alexia, I’ve been looking for you!”

“Alethia, I need to tell you something.”

“What?” she said.

“What’s happened in the last few days. Well,” I started off, “I went to an abandoned warehouse, there was purple goop everywhere. When I opened the trap door I fell in and landed on a floating floorboard! I did a backflip from the ledge to get back to the top and then the whole warehouse collapsed into the goop,” I said.

“Woooooow!” Alethia said with a shocked look on her face.

“Wait, there’s more,”

RIING. The bell rang.

“I’ll tell you the rest at recess.”

When we walked into school we heard lots of kids talking about the missing kids. I wondered what dad thought.

At recess I told Alethia the rest of what had happened, and about the book that I was reading. She was shocked, again. She suggested coming over after school to make a plan.

We left class together at the end of the day and walked over to my house. My dad was still at work. We created a 'sneak downstairs plan' in case dad came home early.

After making the plan I remembered the crack in the basement. I called Alethia to follow me downstairs. Just as we were about to push it open, I heard dad come in. I rushed upstairs, leaving Alethia in the basement because I didn't want dad to know she was there.

"Honey, I'm home!" Dad called.

"Hi dad," I said in a high pitched voice.

"I have to go upstairs to do some work for a couple hours, will you be okay down here alone?"

"Yepp, sure!" I said.

I raced back into the basement after he went upstairs.

“Coast is clear,” I said to Alethia. “Let’s try to open this door.”

At first we just tried to push it lightly, but it wouldn’t budge. So we stepped and ran at the door and kicked and pushed until it finally opened.

Inside I saw a weird tunnel. There were torches, but they weren’t lit. We ran upstairs to grab flightlights. We started to walk through, and luckily it wasn’t as slimy as the gross pipes under the school.

Once we got deeper, it wasn’t slimy at all. We kept walking and walking. Finally, I saw a huge doorway. But the door was sealed shut. There was cement around the edges. It looked like it had been blocked off for some reason. We were both angry. Another dead end!

We ran back through the tunnel and into my basement. We shut the door and Alethia was so angry and mad. We really thought we were going to find everyone, plus we were exhausted from running through the tunnel. Alethia slammed the door shut on her way home.

I ran up to my bedroom and shut my door as quietly as I could, hoping dad wouldn’t hear us. I wrote in my journal about what had happened. I was very upset.

Alethia and I decided to quit looking until we found some more clues.

Chapter Ten

A week went by and Alethia and I were still looking for more clues. We didn't know where to look next. The missing signs of the kids were still up, and everyone just thought my mom was still away on a business trip. We've had assistant teachers covering our class. None of the other kids seem to care, they just figured the adults will deal with it. But we kids needed to figure it out!

I continued reading the book, and realized how many clues there were in it. Alethia and I still weren't sure what to do next, but I knew I needed to convince dad that mom was also missing - and not on a business trip.

That afternoon, I said to my dad, "Dad, are you noticing the missing kids posters everywhere?"

"Well, I guess it is weird," he said.

"And mom? She's been gone for a month now," I said.

"Well, I suppose you're right," he said. He looked like he was finally beginning to believe me.

I pushed a little further and told him about the places Alethia and I had been looking. "What do we do? Alethia and I have been searching but we need an adults' help."

“I can help,” he said quietly, maybe still a little unsure.

“You will?” I jumped up and hugged him.

He smiled and hugged me back. I was excited to have his help, especially if anything like the purple pit happened again!

The next morning dad let me skip school so that we could go looking together. He had the day off work. All we did was study the book. Dad thought it was very weird, especially since the main characters in the book were just like Alethia and I. I told dad all about the same things that had happened in the book as they happened to Alethia and I. Plus, we even found a picture of our house in it, which was really weird. It was in black and white. The book had been published in 1888, so it was probably a different house, but we wrote it down anyway.

At school the next day Alethia asked me why I wasn't there.

“Dad and I went reading the book, he decided to help us,” I said.

“Wow, I can't believe it!” she said.

“I know, he finally said yes,” I said. I was so happy.

At school I sometimes felt like someone was watching me. Speaking of which, Katherine had been acting weird lately. She was paying attention to us a lot more, watching our every move. She was also being a lot quieter in class.

“Hey, do you think Katherine is acting weird lately?” I asked Alethia.

“Yeah,” Alethia replied.

“She’s paying more attention to us in class,” I said.

“Yeah, I noticed that too,” Alethia said.

Then we saw Katherine nearby and quickly stopped the conversation.

Chapter Eleven

The next morning as I was looking through the book I noticed the cover peeling slightly. I ripped it off, you don't need a cover anyway. I gasped. I saw the colour of the book, it was brown underneath and the title said, '*Secret Recipe to Find the Dark Scientists.*' The title worried me, but also made me excited. I must be getting closer to the truth.

I ran to Alethia's house before school. We had started walking to school together so she was already waiting for me. I showed Alethia the brown cover and the book's real title. She was really surprised, but also scared and excited.

We heard the school bell ring in the distance, not realizing we had been talking for so long. We were only a block and a half away so we ran the rest of the way. Luckily we made it right before the doors were closing. We ran through the school to our lockers, thankfully most of our class was just getting their things from their lockers too. We grabbed all our stuff and raced into the classroom. Surprisingly we were the first ones there, with Katherine trailing close behind us, as always.

It was hard to focus in class that day, Alethia and I were so excited about the new find. We planned to search for the house that was in the book after school.

We had a girl substitute teacher today. When she asked Katherine to stand up and answer a question, she wouldn't budge. She's usually a teacher's pet when it comes to substitute teachers. *'Weird,'* I thought.

The rest of the day went by like a lightning bolt. Alethia and I met up in the park after school to start our search. But then we realized we should go get my dad to help us. I suddenly remembered that dad was still at work today and wouldn't be home in time.

So first we grabbed a hot chocolate, and then we began touring the town. The strange thing was, after all that searching we did today, we didn't find a single building that looked like the picture in the book. We had gone down every street in the town. The only house that looked similar was still our house. We figured that maybe the house had been torn down, the book was published in 1888 afterall. Although, nothing else about this town was different from the book.

Alethia and I weren't sure what to do next. The picture was our next lead. Our only hope was to search my house again.

I read the book a bit more and noticed a picture of a garden that looked exactly like the one in our backyard. It was zoomed in on one plant with an arrow that said, *'Entrance behind.'* I recognized the plant.

Alethia and I ran to my house to search the garden. We walked behind the plant.

I saw a weird wooden trap door that was covered with dirt and grass, almost unrecognizable. We were able to grab the latch. Alethia and I heaved it up. Inside we saw a dark ladder, lit by only two torches.

Chapter Twelve

That night when Dad got home I told him about the plant and the trap door, and the tunnel in the garden.

He was very surprised, “Are you telling the truth?” he asked suspiciously.

“I’ll show you!” I said, pulling him out to the garden.

I went behind the plant to the trap door and lifted the latch, pulling it open. He was extremely surprised to see the trap door in his very own garden! But this time I noticed that the two torches weren’t lit. Dad and I didn’t investigate any further, it was too dark out.

The next morning I called Alethia to tell her what had happened. Dad was off today so I asked her to come over. Dad was going to come with us this time.

When we lifted the trap door and dad had brought a bucket of cement from the garage, just in case we needed to seal it off quickly. Alethia and I had our gymnastics stuff. We were wearing our leotards and brought a humongous rope to lower ourselves down.

Dad tried to go in first, but when he took a step onto the ladder, the ladder disappeared and the trap door shut as dad quickly pulled his foot away. We all looked at one another in shock.

I opened the trap door again and the ladder was gone, but I climbed halfway in without the door shutting on me. Without the ladder we needed to use the rope. Dad held it as Alethia and I climbed down into the tunnel. Once we hit the ground the torches suddenly started lighting up in front of us. We saw that the torches lit a path about three kilometers long.

I yelled up to dad that we were going to make our way through the tunnel.

“Be careful! I wish I was down there with you, yell if you need me!” Dad called just as the trap door slammed shut once again, with the rope hanging down and a crack of light streaming through.

We could hear my dad’s muffled yelling. We were alone in the tunnel. It was bright because of all of the torches, lighting up the purple paintings all over the walls. They had been painted with that same purple liquid. One of the pictures was a huge hot chocolate cup. I wanted to lick it, but I told Alethia that it was the same purple liquid I had seen before.

“So that’s what it looks like,” she said, “It sure does smell like hot chocolate!”

As we made our way through the tunnel the torches got brighter and brighter. Suddenly as Alethia was walking

she almost touched a tripwire. I quickly pulled her back before she tripped.

Suddenly a wall rose in front of us. We had to wait ten minutes for it to open back up into the tunnel for us to get through.

A little further down the path I almost fell into a huge pit of crocodiles! Luckily Alethia pulled me back.

Suddenly, we noticed a little light at the end of the tunnel and we raced toward it. We came to a stop. There was another door, unsealed. Alethia and I easily opened the door, but then a creepy voice said, **“Who disturbs my slumber?”**

“Um, it is us, Alexia and Alethia.”

“Are you here to find the lost ones?”

“Yes,” we said, our bodies and voices shaking.

“Then let the games begin!”

Chapter Thirteen

We walked through and into an arena. The first thing we noticed were all of the robots in the stands, glaring at us. They were cheering for a team of robots, who were in the center of the arena. There were so many of them, and only two of us. They looked ready for battle. The robots looked similar to humans, but you could tell they were robots as they were made out of metal. They had shiny faces and a couple of buttons, like an on/off switch and cheering/not cheering buttons. They were definitely programmed.

We quickly found an archery set and a grappling hook for me, and a sword and grappling hook for Alethia. With our tools we walked into the center of the arena. There were millions of robots, cheering for the robot team. The arena was full of boxes and places to hide, it looked like we would have to fight an entire team of robots.

“Alethia, we’re going to have to split up,” I whispered.

“You’re right. You head to the rope, and I’ll head to the pegboard,” she whispered back.

I heard the robot leader say, “Joe, you take the rope, I’ll take the pegboard.”

Meanwhile, I used my grappling hook to grab the top of the rope and pull myself up. Once I got to the top, I saw

monkey bars. It looked like it was the only way across. I thought I might have been about one hundred feet in the sky.

Once I finished the monkey bars, I climbed onto a moving platform with no railings, only foot straps. Then, an arrow came shooting at me from down below on the other side of the arena. I dodged it, but it almost hit me.

“Are you okay down there?” I called down to Alethia.

“Yepp. You?” she asked.

“Not exactly! An arrow just shot at me,” I said.

“Be careful!” she yelled up to me.

“Watch out!” I yelled.

Alethia ducked just as an arrow came whizzing at her head.

Once I finished on the moving platform, I got off and started a tightrope leading to the end of the arena. I held my breath and started walking, then - “AHHH!” I yelled as I fell off the tightrope. I grabbed the rope with one hand just before I went down, and managed to pull myself back up.

Alethia was crying. Her tear fell onto a robot, and disabled it. *‘Weird,’* I thought.

“Alethia!” I yelled, “I’m okay!”

She stopped crying. I had made it to the end of the rope. There was a platform, and then a door that said, *‘You’ve made it across. This is the end of the arena.’*

Suddenly a microphone wailed, “**Alexia and Alethia you have won. You may pass.**” And then stairs came out of the wall, allowing Alethia to climb up to meet me at the door.

“So do we go?” I asked Alethia.

“Yes,” Alethia said, in a determined voice.

Chapter Fourteen

Hoping that it was the door that would lead us to the group, we walked right through. But instead we were met with a humongous obstacle course in the shape of a lion with its tongue out.

As we climbed up the tongue, which was made out of metal, Alethia slipped and slid down the tongue like a slide. She climbed back up and that's when we saw a huge swing that looked like a hammer, that we needed to jump onto in order to get us across the lion's mouth.

We landed safely off the swing, and onto a mat. Next, we needed to jump on trampolines and swing from one trampoline to another with a rope. The rope was slippery, like it had been coated in fresh oil. It was hard to get across, but we finally managed.

We took a deep breath, hoping we were near the end. Then we realized there was more. We had to grab onto hanging ropes that spun in circles, making us dizzy. There were four of them to get across. By the end of it we were very dizzy and exhausted. We were hungry too. I thought about how dad was probably eating lunch up in the garden right now, with the cat snuggled in his lap. My stomach growled. All I wanted was a nice cookie to go with my peanut butter and jelly sandwich, with a hot chocolate.

Instead we were met with a pegboard that we needed to cross. But it wasn't a regular pegboard. The pegs were falling as we grabbed and stepped on them. We tried to stay calm and move quickly.

Once we finished the pegboard, we had to walk on another tightrope. I was not happy about that. Alethia was much better at tightrope than me. So she decided to go first. She handed me one end of a rope to tie around my waist as I went across. She had the other end tied around her waist to make sure that I made it to the end without falling. Just a few feet from the end, I slipped and fell to the bottom, just above a pit filled with water. I felt the rope tighten around my waist. Alethia pulled me back up. We stood in shock for a second, wondering what could possibly happen next.

Monkey bars. But like the pegboards, the bars fell soon after you grabbed hold of them. We needed to cross quickly. I'm great at monkey bars, but Alethia wasn't that good. We kept the ropes around our waists in case Alethia fell this time. I knew I would make it across.

I made it across quickly, and just as I reached the end, Alethia fell right as she touched the first bar - she had hung onto it for too long. I had already made it across so I grabbed the rope and just pulled her back up. Our arms were so tired and aching. Luckily Alethia had snacks and water in her bag. We took a quick break for a snack and a drink.

We knew we had to keep going. We saw another obstacle where you had to climb a huge rope. At the top was a button to press. We figured it would open the next door. But when we got to the top, there was a huge sheet of paper with the numbers one to ten on it. We realized it was a code to decipher using the numbers on the sheet.

We tried a bunch of different codes. The last one we tried was 2-7-4-8-10-8-6-9. The door finally opened for us.

We saw that it was another torch lit path. Alethia and I began walking down it. It was shorter than the last one, but still about a mile long. There were no traps down this path though. We held our breath and opened the door at the end. It opened with a loud creaking sound.

Chapter Fifteen

With purple around their mouths, each lying on a cot, we found the kids, and my mom! They looked dazed and stayed in place when we came in. I hadn't seen my mom in months, she was skinny. In fact, they all looked skinny. Something was definitely off. Mom didn't even blink.

Alethia and I wondered what this purple liquid had done to them. We shouted at them, "Quick! Let's go! Come on Maggie!"

But none of them moved, or responded. We quickly grabbed them and pushed them through a small vent near the ground, it led up so we assumed it would lead us back out to the garden.

We were just pushing my mom, the heaviest of the group, out of the vent, Alethia and I ready to follow. But as we were slowly leaving through the air vent, a kidnapper came out of the dark. We weren't sure where he had come from.

Without hesitating, I shot an arrow as a distraction. We quickly climbed through the vent and I shot another arrow before we closed it behind us. We stuck the rest of my arrows into the vent so that it couldn't be opened without anyone getting hurt.

The kidnapper decided to take the long way out, back the way we had come, through the obstacle course and down the three mile path.

The air vent had led us right into my house. Right on the first floor. We quickly ran outside to the garden with the group. It was weird, when they spotted my dad, they suddenly walked out toward him without hesitating.

When dad saw us coming, he quickly poured cement over the trap door, using freeze spray to cool it down faster.

“I was so worried about you,” dad called.

“We’re okay,” Mom and the others said instantly.

“Us too,” Alethia and I said. That was the first time mom had spoken, I wondered if it had something to do with dad being there.

“Is there anything you want us to do, master?” mom and the others asked.

Dad and I looked at each other. Something was definitely off.

“Nothing. What happened to you?” dad said, sounding surprised.

“We were forced to drink the purple liquid. Now we must obey men forever. We overheard that there is an antidote though,” mom responded, sounding mechanical.

“What are the ingredients?” dad asked, guessing they knew them. We still weren’t sure what sort of control this purple liquid had over them.

“We overheard them say the ingredients - an alligator's tail, a poisonous mushroom, the ink of a ballpoint pen, a petal from a rose and a slice of pizza,” mom and the group said, sounding like robots.

“Okay,” dad said, looking like all was lost.

“Wait! The book!” I shouted, running back toward the house. I remembered that the book had mentioned the purple liquid and its effect on people.

Chapter Sixteen

I hadn't read that far into the book yet. I glossed over until I found the chapter on the purple potion. Word for word, it read the same ingredients that mom had listed. In the same order. I kept reading and realized why none of them had responded to Alethia and I. They were under a curse that allowed them only to respond to men. They must have thought dad was their new master.

I brought the book out to my dad, who was trying to corral my mom and the five others into the house, pulling the blinds down behind him. We brought them all down into the basement, where there were no windows. We just weren't sure what we were dealing with yet, and they wouldn't leave dad's side so there was no way we could bring everyone else home yet.

After we got them into the basement, I told dad what was in the book. "Dad, I read a bit more of the book and it says that the purple potion made girls only obey men."

"That's strange," he said suspiciously.

"I knowwww," I said. "Why would anyone want to do that?"

"I'm just glad they didn't kidnap you two," dad said.

“But the others? It’s not fair that they got kidnapped,” I said. “It’s time to make the antidote.”

There was a local pond nearby. We headed there first to look for an alligator's tail. I didn't feel good about taking an alligator's tail so I quickly made a prosthetic one before we left for the pond. I had my dad bring his doctor's bag, just in case! Alethia stayed at the house to watch the group while my dad and I headed out to gather the ingredients for the antidote.

When we got to the pond, we ended up easily finding a poisonous mushroom at the edge of the pond, but the alligator's tail was going to be harder. My dad found something to feed the alligators, and he had a sedative in his doctor bag. Once the alligator ate the fish we waited for it to fall asleep before taking a piece of its tail. My dad attached a small prosthetic so the alligator wouldn't even know. It ended up being easier than I thought it would be!

The last three ingredients were easy to find on the way back to the house - a rose petal from the garden, and the ink from a ballpoint pen at home. Then we ordered a pizza!

Chapter Seventeen

First antidote: **FAIL**

“Hmm wait a minute, what did dad forget?”

“THE PIZZA!” Alethia and I realized.

“Dad, you forgot the pizza!” I said.

“Opps,” dad said with a laugh. “I hate it for dinner!”

We ordered another pizza, but the next antidote we tried was also a failure. We forgot the rose petal this time.

“I keep forgetting an ingredient!” dad said.

“Try again dad,” I said with a hopeful smile.

“Okay,” he agreed.

Finally, we got the third antidote correct. We tested it on mom first. She seemed to be normal. At first she seemed to run in circles, then she sort of hovered and her hair turned to fire, and then she seemed completely normal within just a minute. Alethia, Dad and I just stood watching.

“**VICTORY!**” I shouted.

Mom seemed confused. She didn't seem to remember anything that happened after she was taken from the classroom. We had to tell her it had actually been months since that happened! Christmas had already passed! It was almost summer!

All mom could say was, "What?? Is this some sort of joke?"

"No, mom." We then explained everything that had happened, and the book that we had found with the picture of our house, and the tunnel from the garden. She didn't seem to believe us, so we went ahead and gave the antidote to the five kids as well.

But this time, when the antidote set in, all the kids remembered everything that had happened. They all started talking at once, asking us questions and telling us about the scientists. They were all interrupting each other and we couldn't seem to get a straight story. But mom sure started believing, especially watching them each receive the antidote.

We were really happy to have everyone back to normal, but we needed a good excuse for their parents. They obviously wouldn't believe the truth about the scientists.

Together, we worked on a story that they could each tell their families, luckily we had Mom's help. Maggie, Lisa, Samay, Sandy, and Senthia all had a story that they

could use, connected, but different enough that their parents would believe them.

“How about, ‘Hi mom, I ran away but got lost in the woods, luckily Alexia and Alethia found me before I starved,’” I suggested.

“Good one,” they said.

“But you need something to say too,” Maggie said.

“How about, ‘Yea, we had to pick them up, and we saved their lives?’” I asked.

Then dad came back downstairs and we shared our ideas with him.

“Good work girls,” he said.

“Thanks dad,” I said.

“Thanks Mr. Foister,” they all said.

It was time to take everyone home. First stop was Maggie’s house.

“Oh my goodness Honey, where were you?!”

“Hi mom, I ran away, but got lost in the woods. Luckily Alexia and her dad found me today,” Maggie said.

“We picked her up and saved her!” I said.

“Thank you! Do you want some tea?” Maggie’s mom asked.

“Of course, thank you for the offer,” dad said, giving me a look of success.

We stayed for tea and then moved on to the next stop, Lisa’s house.

“Sweetheart, I was so worried about you!”

“Well, I got lost out of town, and I was scared,” Lisa began.

“For all those months?” her mom asked.

“Yea,” Lisa said slowly.

“Well, I am very grateful that you found my child,” Lisa’s mom said.

“I am so glad I could help you,” I agreed.

Next stop was Samay’s house.

“Samay, what in the world happened to you?”

“Well, I got lost in the woods. Luckily Alexia and her dad found me, or I would have starved!”

“Thank you for saving my daughter,” Samay’s mom said.

“You’re welcome,” I said.

“Would you like to stay for milk and cookies?”

“Yes please,” dad said, excited about cookies.

Three down, two to go. Next up was Senthā’s house.

“Senthā Jon Zen!!!!” her mom shouted. “What happened to you?”

“Well,” Senthā began, “I was building a treehouse, and I got stuck in the tree! I forgot to build a ladder. Alexia and Alethia found me up in the tree when they were out looking for a good tree to build their own treehouse in. They saved me! They built a ladder out of the wood that they had brought and got me down. Luckily I had brought lots of food with me because I had wanted to stay for a week, but it was months!”

I had a hard time keeping a straight face as Senthā explained her story.

“Thank you for saving my daughter,” her mom said.

“You’re welcome,” I said.

“Would you like to come to my birthday party?” Senthia asked Alethia and I.

“Of course!” I exclaimed.

Now, last but not least was Sandy’s house.

“Oh sweetie, where were you?” Sandy’s mom said.

“I was climbing a tree and I fell! I think I got a concussion. I couldn’t move and when I woke up I didn’t know where I was. Then Alexia and her dad were out hiking and they found me and brought me home.”

“I am so grateful that you found her!” Sandy’s mom said.

“You’re welcome,” I said.

“Would you like to stay for a read-a-thon?” she asked.

“Of course,” we said.

After we left Sandy’s house, mom, dad, Alethia and I all looked at each other blankly. With both a sense of relief, but also wonderment as to what to do next.

Chapter Eighteen

It was the end of summer and I was going into grade eight!

On the night of the last day of summer, mom, dad and I looked through the book and the ending was the same! All the scientists were stuck in the tunnel that dad had cemented over. Whenever I walked over that piece in the garden, I would hear faint sounds of yelling. I wondered how long the scientists could survive down there for. But the book made no more mention of them.

The weird thing was, when I returned to school in September, Katherine wasn't there either. Later, I learned that Katherine and her family had moved away. The timing was very coincidental, I thought it was obvious that she had something to do with the scientists.

I decided to look at the book for more clues. I found out that Katherine had been working for the dark scientists. I knew it!

Now about nurse Jerry. The book mentions him as a spy at my Dad's work who was meant to watch him. I don't know why my Dad liked him! When I told him, he was shocked, changing his mind quickly. "That must be why he never returned to work," dad said.

Well, I'm really glad I made a friend like Alethia. Of course we're in the same class next year. Having her makes me even more excited to start school this year. The town may still be small, but having Alethia sure makes living here even more exciting.

Oh right, I forgot to tell you, the book I got at the thrift store in New York was written by "dark scientist" Dr. Senthia. He was a fortune teller, which makes sense as the book was written in 1888.

Signing off now. I really want to say, Keep Trying! Don't give up. That's what saved my friends, and my mom.

BYE - Alexia.

THE END.

About the Author

My name is Alex. I am 9 years old. I like to rock climb, read and swim. My favourite authors are Roald Dahl, JK Rowling, Shannon Messenger and Rick Riordan. I also really enjoy graphic novels by authors Raina Telgemeier, and Shannon Hale. If I could do anything, I would like to fly, so that I could get to school a lot faster! I love school and am excited to start grade 5.