

Tall Tales

A short story
collection

by Grade 10

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Judgement

by Aletta van der Merwe

As the last rays of sunlight disappeared behind the old abandoned skyscraper, bullets racked its walls and windows, making dull echoing noises inside. Meanwhile, Alexis was busy writing, with her papers scattered all around and Yuki, her white pelt stained with blood and ink, on her lap gently purring. She couldn't have been in a better mood, yet her green eyes and young face still looked troubled, and this time it wasn't because of the noise from outside. Throwing down her pen, she pushed her hands through her short dark brown hair and gave a sigh. It had been hard these past days. Having so many questions with no one to answer her, the only comfort being Yuki and these words on paper. She had forgotten how hard it was to be alone for so long. She always hated it when people checked up on her, but somehow she knew it only meant that they cared. But there were so few to care for her now. Giving herself a shake she grabbed her pen and started to write again.

"May, Friday the 13th."

"How ironic," she muttered to herself.

"Year? I have no idea right now, or in fact, ever. The DustAngels came by as usual this morning in the street announcing it to be the year 2065. But somehow I doubt it. It couldn't possibly have already been 52 years since the war. Mom was only 18 when it broke out, and she disappeared last year, January, on her 43rd birthday. I can't remember that much about her, but I do remember her smile, her laugh and her eyes, they were the most beautiful blue/green colour. But that's all. Anyway, back to the DustAngels. I mean, sure, we all follow them and their rules. And we do depend on them for food and water, but everyone knows that trusting them with information is a mistake, or rather, a risk. Mom told me that the only ones we must truly trust and depend on are the Guardian Rebels. They were said to be the ones who wanted to prevent the war, who only wanted to bring peace, equality and protection. But the DustAngels turned us against them with lies of weapons, destruction and betrayal. So another war broke out, only this time, the one side won and the other side was completely de-"

A harsh cold voice cut through her thoughts and writing.

"Alexis, what the hell are you doing?"

With a sharp jerk of her head she looked up to find her father, with a scowl on his face and his rifle slung across his back. He didn't seem to have shaved at all since he had left two weeks ago, but he still stood proud with his shoulders squared and his tall frame leaning against the open door.

"Nothing much," she mumbled, and with a quick flash of her hands she quickly stuffed her papers into her backpack and jumped to her feet. Yuki,

surprised by the sudden movement, gave a short meow of protest and then settled near her feet.

“We have a new target today, we leave in 5, so get your stuff and let’s go!”

“Already? But I terminated three targets on Tuesday! Shouldn’t I lay low for a while longer?”

“Did I ask for your opinion?” his father growled. “No? Then shut up and get ready.”

As he walked out of the door he paused and looked back at Alexis.

“You know, asking too many questions and always writing crap won’t save your life. So do something productive for a change.”

And with that he walked out of the room and could be heard stomping downstairs.

Alexis gave a sigh and set off towards the cupboard in the corner for her equipment. She took her McMillan Tac-50, nicknamed ‘Shi’, which meant ‘Death’ in Japanese, and swapped her backpack for the one which had all the necessary equipment. Then, with Yuki settled on her shoulders, she set off towards the door. But just as she wanted to close the door, she realized she had forgotten something. Dumping her bag, she hurried inside and grabbed the necklace her mother had given to her on her sixteenth birthday, a good luck charm, a strange flower which had only four green petals. It was the only thing she had left of her.

They traveled fast and silent. The moon was shining like a silver sun and a cool breeze would rustle the few leaves or paper that were lying about. Alexis snuck through buildings and streets like a shadow, her father keeping behind to make sure they weren’t being followed. Every now and then they would ask around, or track their target. Alexis was used to this, following leads, silencing those wanted to know why or who they were. Often they would find a lead which ended up being the wrong person; they only found this after killing.

It was around 2 am when the fifth bullet struck home. A few seconds later the body tumbled off the roof and landed with a thwack on the ground. Alexis nodded her head and spoke into the mic.

“Got her, body is on the north side of the building, estimate 5 meters from the road.”

There was a crackle of static and the reply came.

“I saw, thanks to the moon that is. Go check if she’s the one and report back.”

“Got it, I’m on my way.”

Alexis slung her rifle onto her back and hopped down the stairs, Yuki once again settled on her shoulders. She checked to see if all was clear and quickly ran across the road. Safe! She never quite did feel comfortable when the moon was out like this, she felt too open and exposed. And then there was the task of checking the bodies which she didn’t exactly feel comfortable with either. Especially when they turned out to be the wrong ones. But she still nudged

the body with her boot and turned it on its back. A shot sounded off inside the building opposite her and she dove to the ground, cursing.

“The hell was that!?” she almost shrieked into the mic.

“Nothing, just a pest, it’s all taken care of.”

“I hope so,” Alexis mumbled to herself.

She shook her head and got up from the ground, checking that Yuki and Shi were okay. She glanced at the body and frowned. She shook her head again and took out the papers from her bag, which stated the target and their mission.

“Target is female, dark brown hair, blue/green eyes. She was seen communicating with the Guardian rebels. Mission is to eliminate her and track down any relatives who might be in connection, guilty or not. No given name/s”.

Alexis shrugged and got on with business. She dragged the body out into the street where she could see better and examined it properly.

“Yep, she’s the right one this time, I think. Nasty fall though and it’s hard to see much of her face. Can’t I just use a flashlight? The moonlight is a nice effect but seeing if she’s really the one is pretty hard.”

“No, flashlight might catch unwanted attention. Just get her ID and a few photos of her face, we need proof.”

“Okay, whatever then. I got the ID, definitely her, strange name though. Teresa Griffin.”

There was no reply, only static. Alexis frowned and then gave a shudder, the strangest feeling of fear in the pit of her stomach.

“Father? What is my last name?”

But even as the words left her lips Alexis already knew the answer.

And with the answer came a sudden sharp pain and then blissful darkness.

The Three Little Men

by Andrew Kim

The bell startled me as I was thinking about what kind of delivery my sister had sent me. I rushed to the door with a smile on my face, as I was opening the door, I was expecting to see Mr Daniels, my mailman for the past 3 years throughout my stay in Seattle.

“Mr Daniels! You’ve kept me waiting!”

“Umm, I’m afraid Mr Daniels won’t be coming anymore.”

A middle aged man, about 5 foot high, was taking my package out of his oversized bag.

“James Todd?”

“Yea, that’s me.”

“Here is your package, James.”

I saw the name on his name tag and tried to get rid of the awkwardness that was flowing between Mr Reephur and I through the open door. “So are you new? What happened to Mr Daniels?”

I handed the signed receipt back to him as he hurriedly closed his bag. He snatched the receipt out of my hand and stuffed it into his pocket. All I could see was the train of his navy green coat swinging around the corner of the corridor before I could thank him. I set the package on the kitchen table and went to search for a knife.

As I was opening the delivery, a sudden gush of disappointment went through my body as I realized that my sister had sent me the exact same tea package that she had sent me last year for my birthday.

“Need a cane? Jack?” I examined the extraordinary way the way Jack was limping to get more packages to deliver. He had no reaction, as I took the last long drag before lunch break was over, I thought of something that could teach Jack Reephur, the new delivery guy, a lesson.

“Hey Reephur!, I’m talking to you!” I raised my voice; he stopped and turned his head in my direction slowly. His stare at me made me speechless; it was not fear I saw in his eyes, it was anger. As I was left dumbfounded, I saw him walking back to the truck with a bag loaded with packages.

As the roaring of the delivery truck descended, my co-worker asked me “What was that all about Tony? Got scared?” This must’ve been funny for them since Reephur was not staring at them. I could not forget the stare he was giving me.

This was no more a joke when the time passed 13:45. The company had promised that the package would be delivered by 13:30. As I was walking out of my office, I noticed a delivery man coming out of the elevator.

“Delivery for Mr Richard Bronwen!”

I heard his weak trembling voice as he was trying to make an attempt to find out who I was. The accountant near the elevator pointed at my office which guided him and his weird steps to my desk.

“Mr... Richard...Bron...Bronwen?”

“Yes, that is me, and I must state that you are 15 minutes late.” His discrete mumbling made it practically impossible to hear on this huge floor with constant phones ringing. This man was staring at the ground the whole time and couldn't lift his head up. I was suspecting that it was because of his guilty conscience at being late. But, as I was planning to forgive him after I finished signing, he quickly snatched it out of my hand and left the office.

The bell woke me up. It was just past 11PM. As I was wondering about who it could be, the bell rang again.

“Who is it?”

“Its an emergency delivery from Israel.”

‘Israel? Who could it be from Israel?’ I thought to myself. I put the safety chain on the door and peaked through the gap. There was an intense moment of silence as I stay quiet watching Mr Reephur take the package out of his bag. I closed my door to open up and receive the package. Before I could realize what had happened I felt a sting on my neck and everything blacked out.

I was on duty that night filling in for the security guard. The time was almost midnight. It was not hard to notice that the short man in the pixelized monitor of the surveillance camera was Jack. He was standing with his head down: it seemed like he was waiting for something. But as I squinted my eyes to catch the most out of the small man in the monitor, I was in great shock. It looked like he was laughing at something.

He was slowly turning his head towards the surveillance camera, and when he looked into the camera, I ran to the door and locked it as fast as possible. When I came back to my seat to check where he was, the man was gone.

The continuous fear that was flowing through my guts while trying to spot the man in the monitors made me sick. I could feel cold sweat running down my back, I looked at every floor and every corridor, there was no sign of him.

I stayed alert for about 20 minutes with my eyes wide open, staring into 6 different monitors hoping to find the man who had just stared at me through the surveillance camera.

As I was slowly getting relieved by the fact that I was the only person in this building, the stress pulled me back towards the chair.

“Hi, Tony”

I heard Jack's voice right behind me as I was comforting myself on the chair.

“Tony, Tony, Tony, Tony, Tony, Tony”

As I opened my eyes, I felt a gush of pain in my head. As I was moaning to search for balance. I realized that I was tied onto a bed. The tight restriction of my hands and feet alarmed my instincts and I was trying to figure out where I was.

“Tony, Tony, Tony ... Why did you leave me”

“Jack? Jack Reephur?”

“That ... is correct.” His voice did not sound like anything at work, I could hear a strain of joy in his voice.

“What is this Jack? Where am I?”

“Tony... Tony... We had such good times together... ”

“Jack, talk to me, where am I? Was it you at the parking lot?”

“Tony... Why did you leave me...”

“Jack what are you talking about? We only met each other 2 weeks...”

Before I even finished that sentence, a peak of pain went through my throat and it was impossible for me to talk. I could feel the warm liquid pumping out of the slit in my neck every time I tried to breathe.

As my vision blurred, I saw Jack, looking at me with empathy filled in his eyes.

“H...he..l...p”

“Be quiet Tony, you’re going to wake our baby”

“You...crazy...son..of...a...”

“Ugh.....” the light was too bright for me to open my eyes. I turned my head sideways and squinted my eyes. I saw a man with the navy green coat.

“Mr...Reephurs?”

“Hold on James, I have to clean up the pieces that flew out of Tony’s head when I combed his hair.”

I saw red liquid and small pink colored chunks. I threw up on my side when I spotted a deformed eyeball on the floor.

“Oh boy...seems like I have more work to do, hold on James, I’m going to get some more plastic bags.”

I pretended to faint, I did not know what do to. Every sound of his footsteps leaving the room made me shiver.

I walked faster and faster, trying to avoid the man who was following me in the parking lot. There were 7 more pillars to pass until I reached my car.

“Mr...Mr Bronwen?”

It was a familiar voice, after stopping my footsteps I thought about who it could be.

“I’m...the...m...mailman...”

I then remembered his face: the slow mailman with the limp.

“Oh, hello, Mr ...”

“Jack, my name is Jack”

“Hello Mr Jack. Do you need something?”

He approached me slowly, so slow that I did not notice until he was about 10 inches away from me. I spotted a hammer in his hand, I turned around and started walking again, my fastest this time.

“Mr...Bronwen!” My steps were faster and faster. I could hear multiple steps that were close behind me.

‘2 more pillars left...E6...E5...’ I saw my car, took the keys out of my pocket. I turned around to check if that maniac was near me. As I turned around to my car to open the door with shaking hands, I saw the mailman, with the hammer, behind me, with a grin, in the reflection of the mirror.

I grunted to take my hands out of the leather belt that was just about the size of my wrist. I made a last attempt to pull my hands out, but it did not work.

I heard footsteps that were closing in to the door from the outside, my heartbeat was increasing rapidly and the intensity of the situation made me throw up again.

“Police! Put your hands up!”

I was saved, finally.

After knowing that my new mailman was a crazy serial killer who killed guys who had names of his exboyfriends, I decided to start a new quiet life in Virginia.

Life here has been amazing here, I found a nice job, have a nice girlfriend.

It was my birthday, when I came home from dinner with my girlfriend, I noticed that I had a package delivered to me. I expected it to be my sister.

As I was reading through the paper attached to the package, I saw “Delivery by: Jack Reephur.”

The Examination Day

by Julia Bauerschmidt

It wasn't unusual for her not to go her family's birthdays. She was always too busy with work and therefore just called her nephew and congratulated him on his twelfth birthday, but they quickly had to leave, because he had to go to some kind of appointment. It also wasn't unusual that they didn't tell her to what kind of appointment they were going, because she never spoke of her work or her life either. Apparently it had to be kept a secret. After a few minutes she realized that she was late for work and quickly rushed out.

"You're late. Go behind the mirror and get ready to ask the questions. The boy will be here soon," her boss said harshly.

She did as he said and sat down behind a mirror where she could look into the room, but nobody could see her. It was a very plain room. There was no color on the wall, no pictures hung on the walls and there were no windows. It was a very depressing room, but she'd gotten used to it. While she was getting ready for the what they called the 'exam' the boy was probably already being given the drink that would make him tell the truth. It was scary what they did here, but she was paid well and she'd learned not to get emotional.

The door opened and she said: "Sit down, please!" to the young boy while she was still fiddling with some stuff with her back towards the mirror. As she turned around the pencil fell out of her hand and dropped on the floor, her jaw dropped and she just stared at the boy. She looked at him as if she had just seen a ghost.

"Ehm, just... ehm.."

She didn't know what to say and in that moment another voice said, "Is your name Richard Jordan?"

"Yes sir." the boy answered.

"Your classification number is 600-115. Just answer these questions, please," the boss said. He gave her a very suspicious look and left the room.

She started the recording; the boy answered all the questions and all she had to do was record the answers.

After he was done he just said there and waited while she gasped at the score. Her boss once again came into the room to collect the results. He looked at them and said, "I will have him escorted now. Inform the parents that his intelligence quotient has exceeded the Government regulation, according to, oh, you know the drill," and once again he left the room.

She walked out of the room as if she was paralyzed. She only looked forwards towards the phone. With a shaky hand she slowly dialed the family's number. After a few seconds a friendly and relieved sounding man picked up the phone.

"Hey, sister...."

The Businessman

by Dennis Yang

The rays of sunlight sailed their way into the city. The blanket of clouds cast its enormous shadows below. The shiny Chicago buildings reflected the grey sky above creating a skyline of mirrors. The average city day, filled with noise. Commuters were on their way to work. Cars were battling their way through the traffic. Hot-dog stands piled up in street corners and the smell wavered in the air.

The man perched on top of the office building lay still. He was in prone position. Sweat was dripping down his forehead. He was lying on his stomach on the corner of the roof. Watchful eyes focused on the building opposite across the street. They had a gleam like an innocent teenager, but his face had the look of a hardened criminal.

He knew that in a few moments, a rich businessman would appear on the 25th floor of the opposite building. The entire building was coated with bullet-proof glass. But the man had secretly carved out a tiny, barely-noticeable hole in the glass the night before. The hole was angled so that he could shoot a bullet through it making it land directly in the chair that the businessman was about to sit in.

The Businessman was not a good man. He was more than not good. The man was a drug dealer. He was responsible for exporting cocaine on a massive scale. The sniper knew the man's real name, but never used it. Whenever he referred to him mentally, the sniper simply called him "The Businessman". This was to ensure he didn't get personal with his target. It could cause hesitation. The sniper moved his hand along the smooth surface of his rifle as he prepared for the kill. It was sleek and custom-made. The biggest advantage was its compatibility. With just two screws, he was able to put the rifle together. He had been able to carry it in a large backpack all across the city.

He centred his eyes against his scope. He adjusted the cross-hairs on the hole in the glass. He loaded a single cartridge into the rifle. One shot was all he needed.

The Businessman arrived on time as predicted. The plump man was wearing a top of the line black suit with a thick cigarette in his hand. He was accompanied with half a dozen body guards.

In front of him were three other rich businessmen and one women. They were sitting in front of a poker table made out of a wood that was now extinct.

However, to the sniper's surprise, the Businessman had been interrupted with a phone call. This caused some panic. Had he just been informed he had an important meeting to attend? People like him were always busy. Or perhaps he had cancelled the game. How long was he going to talk? The

sniper needed him seated perfectly at the chair. Otherwise, he was always behind bullet-proof glass. This was trouble.

The sniper was horribly exposed. There were crowds of pedestrians down below. Over a dozen police officers were on duty. Someone simply needed to squint their eyes up the rugged building and they would be able to see a hooded figure with a rifle protruding out. There would be a full alarm and there would be no escape from that. Or suppose someone in the building decided to climb on to the roof to take a breath of fresh air. Smokers frequently came up to take a drag. He would be spotted. The person would quickly call for help. The police would be waiting for him at the base of the building. There was no lock on the rusty roof door. It was risk he was going to have to take.

Suddenly, he started to question himself if this was actually a good idea. Perhaps it would be better if he fled now before getting caught. The sum of money he was paid for this task was a considerable amount, but he could easily earn double of that in another mission.

No. Patience, he tried to tell himself. A large organisation had hired him to complete this task. They would not accept failure. He wiped the bead of sweat off his forehead and readjusted his grip.

After what seemed like an eternity, the Businessman ended his call and made his way to the table.

This was the sniper's chance. He forced himself not to get too excited. His wide eyes were eagerly glaring through his scope. His finger was twitching as he placed it on the trigger. He steadied his breath.

His rifle and him were one. At that moment, everything was irrelevant. The people in the streets, the birds in the sky, even the \$50,000 he was paid to complete this task. He controlled everything at the moment. He could make the decision between life and death. The sniper was god.

The businessman seated himself comfortably at the head of the table.

The sniper fired.

The bullet pierced through the air. It soared through the hole in the glass before burying itself in the businessman's heart. The businessman suddenly dropped his cards. He froze as if surprised. He put a hand to his chest and slumped down. His head slammed against the table before he doubled over. One arm was on the bullet wound, the other outstretched. His face, frozen. His eyes, popped out as a pool of red began to spread.

It took the people in the room a while to take in what just happened. Seconds later, the bodyguards reacted. They turned around, scanning the opposite buildings for the shooter. But the sniper was nowhere to be seen. As soon as he had fired, he began to pack away his things. Within seconds, he dismantled his rifle, packed it neatly in his bag, and existed through the roof door.

The people in the streets had heard the shot fired. There was an immediate panic. The people were screaming. Half a dozen police officers drew out their guns while another half dozen were desperately trying to keep everyone calm. This provided the sniper the perfect cover. He put on his hoodie, exited the office building and joined the chaos.

The sniper didn't stop to catch his breath until half an hour later. He was in a telephone booth. The street was deserted. He could hear the faint sound of an ambulance. He reached into his pocket. He pulled out a crumpled piece of paper with a phone number scribbled on it. He was told to call the number at the specific address when the job was done.

He punched in the numbers. Then, waited. The call was answered with a cool female voice.

"It's done", he said coldly. "I'll expect my payment in the usual manner."

There was a long pause. Then, there was no answer. The receiver went blank. Confused, the sniper called out for a response. But there was none.

There was a flash followed by a deafening roar. The trash can beside him had exploded. The shrapnel pierced through the glass in the telephone booth. It sliced into the sniper's flesh. The force sent everything flying in all directions. The sniper was thrown off his feet.

Suddenly, the street was littered with shards of glass, pieces of plastic, and bits of human tissue.

The sniper was no more.

The Red Jinn From The Golden Lamp

by Michelle Tham

A dark stormy night. The sky appeared dull and grey without any beam of rays from the sun. The weather had stayed like that for around three months in Tiree, Scotland. On that afternoon, the presence of thunder flashed through the sky a number of times, usually accompanied by strong winds and heavy rain. “Scarinish only experiences maritime climate with cool summers and mild winter. The current weather is odd though. It is already May now,” Gregg muttered to himself. Reeves was making a cup of coffee for himself in their house whereas his son was frozen at a spot in the garden, looking over the dying crops which was due to the stormy weather.

All of a sudden, something caught Gregg’s eyes, something gleaming through the mist and rain around the withered crops. It was like a gold coin standing out amongst a bunch of bronze ones.

“Oh heavens...what on earth is that?” Gregg approached the object close enough for him to see what it was.

To him, it looked like a magical item, an Arabic lamp to be specific. A golden, shiny and well-polished lamp. He had a second thought and believed it was just an ordinary teapot which his father used for his coffee break. Gregg, soaked and cold to the bone, brought the lamp into the kitchen and placed it on the dining table.

Unaware of the new ‘tea pot’, Reeves stood up from his armchair and was preparing to make another cup of coffee by filling it.

“Nothing tastes better than a fine brew cup of coffee”. He always had this habit of filling coffee in a new teapot once he had finished his hot drink. As a result, Gregg’s dad had a massive collection of them displayed in his kitchen cupboard. He mistook the lamp that his son had fetched from their garden for one of his teapots as it was the nearest to him. When he was about to open the lid of the golden lamp, a bright loud deafening thunder flashed at the dull sky, lighting up the upper atmosphere, thus distracting Reeves away from preparing his coffee. Everything seemed to be fine later on. But the next minute when he turned around to continue what he was doing, he immediately came face to face with a 2 foot tall smokeless flame.

The first impression which Reeves had when he first saw the mythical creature from Arab folklore was, “Tiny indeed. How tiny,” which he mouthed quietly to himself. His father had always been really quick when it came to making himself a hot drink like that. Gregg wondered and laid down the newspaper slowly, to only find himself in the same position as his dad: speechless, frightened and astounded at that red small figure.

Both of them were looking at it. That mythical creature which had just burst out from the Arabic-looking lamp, crossing its legs and arms as if it was waiting for something impatiently. It wasn't possible for both the father and son to distinguish the gender of it. From their point of view, it looked partially woman and partially man at the same time. The body was red in color and it was dressed in simple Arabic women's robes as well with a lot of golden jewelry worn from head to toe. Long black silky hair was growing out from its head, tied neatly in ponytail braids. However, there was thick facial hair on the outer surface of its upper lip and it seemed like the mustache had been shaved not long ago. It did confuse Gregg and Reeves at that point but they had overcome their surprise after looking at it for quite some time. It hadn't spoken at all ever since it popped out from the lamp until Gregg spoke to the figure. It replied back to him with an impenetrable answer accompanied by a strong deep manly voice. That was when they concluded that it was a regular human being despite its appearance which resembled a half man and a half woman. They had a nosy neighbor who practically had a depth of knowledge about folklore and mythical creatures. They called her over and all she needed was one look at it and she could indicate their mistake.

"It is a jinn of course," the woman replied. "By rubbing the magic lamp, the mythical creature will appear and usually grants you three wishes. How, where and when did you obtain the jinn's lamp? Did it just fall from heaven to earth? Please do tell me. I am really eager to know."

With her questions whirling around in the house for further details on the jinn, Gregg became rather irritated. He straightaway shoved his nosy neighbor out of his house and shut the door right in front of her. Reeves and Gregg once again gazed back to the spot where the jinn appeared. This time, the mythical creature was nowhere to be found. Neither hints of any shadows nor muddy footprints could be seen. The only thing which stood still at the jinn's spot was that same golden shiny lamp they had seen earlier.

News had spread quickly by mouth around the area where Reeves and Gregg dwelt. On the following day, neighbors already knew everything about Gregg's encounter with the jinn from the mysterious lamp. Reeves gave a big sigh while staying up late at night, staring at that golden object. He was wondering when the jinn would appear again right before his and his son's eyes. His mind flashed back to the day before when the nosy woman who didn't seem to know when to mind her own business came. She did give him a piece of advice on how to summon it though. Reeves thought hard, really hard, as if his mind was drifting away and gradually turning into a piece of blank white paper. Gregg's dad unfortunately gave up. He went to polish the golden lamp instead although it was already shiny looking. He gave a few rubs against the surface of the lamp and the spout of it began to cover in a chunk of red smoke that later dissipated into the air.

Alas! Reeves had discovered the secret of summoning a jinn out. He chuckled darkly and was proud of himself.

“Master, your wish is my command. Nevertheless, beware.”

Gregg woke up from his sleep as he was disturbed by the deep intense voice of the jinn and joined his father at the kitchen table. It was still late night: around 2 o’ clock in the morning when everyone else was fast asleep. The environment was quiet as well as peaceful, only the chirping of a few crickets away in the silent night could be heard from the inside of their house. Gregg was surprised with what the jinn had spoken earlier to his father because he had tried to communicate with it once but all it did was answer him back in an incomprehensible manner.

The father and son had no idea what the jinn meant. Both of them were left clueless, stunned with those few words - *wish, command and beware*. They had a strong impact on Gregg and Reeves as the words kept deliberately crossing their minds. It was stuck in their empty head like a gun’s bullet, leaving behind an extremely deep hollow in their minds, cavernous and intense. “*Wish. Command. Beware. Wish. Beware...*” Gregg repeated to himself. The jinn was again sitting there with that similar impatient pose he had seen before. It seemed like it wanted to say something to break the silence in the house.

“Unlimited wishes.”

It didn’t speak much. Only these three sentences poured out from its mouth. The jinn didn’t appear to have a care in this world whether Gregg and his father understood what he really meant. It left the rest of the puzzle for them to figure it out. Reeves was frustrated from thinking too much about it until he heard “*unlimited wishes*”.

“That was weird,” he said. “Our neighbor said a usual jinn only grants three wishes for the person who awakens it whereas this jinn grants unlimited wishes.”

His eyes begun to shine with greed and he straightaway decided to wish for more crops to harvest in order to earn more money. With a snap of the jinn’s finger, the surroundings of the house at once began to shine really bright. It was beaming and gleaming for a few seconds, similar to the sun’s rays that used to fall on the ground of Scarinish. Gregg’s father went out to examine the result of his crops after his wish was fulfilled. He chuckled and clapped both of his hands together as he was lost in his thoughts on the money he would earn in the future. However, to his dismay, all he saw was more dead crops surrounding his house’s garden. This time, the foliage of the vegetation had only turned more brownish and was drooping heavily on each of their nodes. There weren’t even any ripe fresh colored fruits growing out of the plants which were supposed to be ready to be harvested. Reeves and Gregg had a puzzled look on their faces.

“What sorcery is this jinn? My wish was supposed to come true but all I get is just land full of more dead crops!” Reeves had an unsatisfied look on his very sad face. All his hopes of becoming the richest man in the neighborhood had been completely crushed as he was now left with nothing. He was about

to put the blame on the jinn for the outcome of his wish but it had already drawn itself back into the lamp.

Hence, after his experience, Reeves came to his senses and apprised his son that they should make a profit out of the fact that the magical being grants unlimited wishes despite reversing them instead. They tried to take advantage whenever they could as it never went against its master's commands. It happened so that every single day they looked forward to their own business in the Scarinish neighborhood, in hopes of being able to make big money by simply just forcing the jinn. A huge crowd of visitors increased day after another at their doorstep and the family business depended on the admission fee they had collected. It was unhappy somehow but it had no choice. The jinn gradually day by day wore a really grumpy look upon his face, a frown which matched his eyes and brows that furrowed deeply. Its face used to bear a very confident look whenever he appeared out from his lamp but now it had been replaced with a much different one instead.

With the money Reeves and Gregg had saved, they rebuilt their current old house into a larger two-story mansion, accompanied by balconies and a better garden containing rich fertilized soil for growing their crops. The father and son were practically enjoying the life they had long desired especially on the weekends. All they had to do was to take care of their crops without worrying about their financial problems.

“Isn't this magnificent, dad? A week after our business and we are already filthy rich!”

Gregg gave a gentle tap on the jinn's lamp after placing it on the mini coffee table and went to sit next to his dad. Reeves put down the newspaper with a smirk. Their business was as usual for today. It was going to begin in less than five more minutes. As soon as Gregg's father tried to bend over to reach for the lamp, he felt cold air at the tips of his fingers. He tried to grasp hold of the object, that round-shaped figure of it together with its spout, similar to an appearance of a teapot. Unfortunately, he still felt nothing, only the surface of the mini coffee table.

“Where is the golden shiny Arabic lamp, Gregg?! Where is it?!?” Reeves anxiously yelled out.

The Hunt

by Jalen Cleary

It was just another ordinary day for Nick Jones. Every morning he would wake up at 6 o'clock, and go for a run around the city of Melbourne. He would also go the same way, and half way through the walk, order the same coffee, from the same cafe. Things were good for Nick: he had a wife and 2 kids, and lived in a lovely house in St. Kilda. He owned and worked at a local Italian restaurant in the city. Little did Nick know his violent past would soon come back and bite him. He had been in the Army, part of the ASF (Australian Special Forces), which was a team of specially trained men, with many years of experience in a variety of different fields.

Some of the fields they specialized in were bomb defusing, building raids, and gun combat, just to name a few.

But Nick was on his routine run, and suddenly, out of no where, a parked car on the side of the road exploded, just as he ran past. He was thrown into a nearby newspaper stand. He got up and was in total shock; he had no idea what had just happened. Nearby pedestrians ran to his aid, and asked if he was okay. He simply replied "I'm fine". He was. He was used to that kind of stuff, but what he couldn't work out was why a car had exploded in the city of Melbourne at 6:30 in the morning.

He walked over to what was left of the car. He looked for anything that stood out, anything that would show whether it was intentional or accidental, and he had a bad idea that it was intentional. There was only the main body of the car left, so he looked under it for anything suspicious. He found two cylinders directly under where the gas tank would be. Suddenly the police came swarming to the crime scene. He quickly grabbed the two cylinders and carefully placed them under a bin nearby. He was then confronted by two police officers.

"Are you the one who was injured because of the explosion?"

"Yes, actually, doesn't the blood give it away?"

"Being a smart ass isn't going to speed this up anymore. Would you mind coming with us back to the station? We have some questions to ask you."

"Well I do have a business to run."

"It will only take half an hour, sir."

"Uhh, its Nick, and well if I must."

"You must."

They drove him to the nearby police station and lead him into an interrogation room. Nick's first remark was "Am I being charged with murder?"

The police officer simply said "Of course not."

"So why am I in here?"

“Because all of the other more friendlier rooms are unavailable.”

“Oh, so the real criminals get the nice rooms, and the innocent victims get stuck in here?”

“No sir, that’s not at all how it works.”

“Oh really ?”

“Yes sir.”

“Stop calling me sir! I have a name.”

“Okay Nick, we have some questions to ask, simply reply with a Yes or No, unless requested for a different response.”

“Fine by me..”

After one hour of questions, Nick was finally released. He got the first taxi he saw, and drove straight back to the crime scene. As soon as he got there, he ran to the bin he had placed the two cylinders in.

“Thank god! They’re still here!” He took them and went straight home; he had a long night ahead of him.

When home, he went straight to his basement, which is where he had all of his “old” work stuff, such as old files, and papers, the occasional service medal. When he finally began to work on the cylinders, he noticed something. There was something engraved on them. He grabbed a magnifying glass to take a closer look. “Next time, you die” had been engraved on what nearly killed him. He instantly dropped the magnifying glass. It dropped and smashed on the ground. His wife had heard, and ran in asking what had happened. He lied to her; he told her the cylinders were from the oven at the restaurant, and that he would clean up the glass. He had convinced her to back upstairs. He knew instantly who had planted the bomb under the car, and most importantly, who was out to kill him.

The next day was different to every other day. He did not go for his routine run. He did not get his usual coffee from the same cafe. He was now going to attempt to find the man who had tried to kill him, hopefully before the man found him. Luckily for Nick, he knew exactly where to look. He knew the exact house he lived in.

It didn’t take long for Nick to get to the house. It was a large mansion in suburban Melbourne. It had a large wall surrounding the house with security cameras in every corner. He soon realized that he wouldn't just be able to jump over the wall to gain access.

Nick went home all frustrated, to find a broken window. Someone had thrown a brick through the window. Luckily his wife and kids were out for the day. On the brick was a note. The note said “Don't come looking for me, as I will have already found you.” This upset Nick so much he did not sleep that night; he stayed up all night thinking of a way to get inside that house.

The next day, he drove to the house wearing a chefs outfit from his restaurant with a big pizza. He simply waltzed through the front gate and knocked on the door. A guard answered the door and asked “Yes?”

“Hi, I’m here to deliver the pizza you ordered.”

“No one here ordered a pizza.”

“Oh, are you sure?”

“Yes, yes I am.”

“Oh okay, well sorry to waste your time.”

As Nick turned and walked away, just before the guard closed the door, he turned, pushed the door into him, then grabbed him and head butted him. The guard fell to the ground. He was knocked out. This gave Nick access to the house. He looked in every single room for anything that could link the owner of the house to the attempts to kill him. Luckily no one else was in the house at the time.

He eventually found a room that was locked. He assumed there would be something worth hiding inside. As soon as he got in, he straight away saw bomb making materials. He took one step, and tripped on a wire running along the floor, which triggered an explosion that destroyed all the contents of the room. Some how it did not kill him. He turned around to walk out of the room, and carved into the door was “Lucky you, that one was close.”

The message was right; this time, it was too close. Nick got out of the house straight away. As he hopped back into his car, he noticed a piece of paper on his front wind screen. He jumped out of the car and grabbed the note. On the note was written “Hello Nick, I know you know who this is. I also know that you know why I am doing this. What you did to my father was unforgivable. You will pay the consequences. I have placed an arsenal in your trunk. I hope that is all you need. The hunt begins tomorrow at 12 in the afternoon. Go to 132 Swanston Street. Then to go to the top floor. Then enter room 913.” Sticky taped to the note was a hotel key card.

Back in ‘92, Nick had raided a known terrorist hideout. The mission was to capture the leader, unharmed. Unfortunately, he tried to escape. Nick had to take the shot. He did; it took the target down, as head shots do. But when he had taken a closer look, he saw he had not shot the target; he had killed an innocent electrician, who happened to be working on the building they had raided at the time. That innocent electrician was the father of Paul McManus. Paul was only young when Nick had killed his father. When Paul had found out his father had been killed, he wrote to the American government and, astonishingly, the letter actually got to Nick. It had basically said that, some day, he would kill him for what he did to his father. Nick was well aware that he was not joking.

Nick inspected his trunk: there was a high powered 50.cal sniper rifle, with all the ammo needed. There were also a few smaller guns as well.

Nick was smart and did not go to the room at 12; he went to the building across the road and surveyed the room. Unexpectedly, a man walked into the room. Nick was looking through the scope of the sniper Paul had given him. The man was not Paul, it was a man wearing a bullet proof vest, and it looked like he was searching for Nick.

Suddenly, Nick heard a loud bang, and the window directly in front of him smashed. Someone from the roof of the hotel was shooting at him. He jumped out of view of the window, and the shooter. Nick needed to get out of the room; except now the shooter from across the road was shooting at the room he was in, with a machine gun. He had to crawl through the room to get to the door. He eventually got to the door; he opened it and instantly got punched in the face. It was Paul. "I changed my mind, I think I'll just kill you now." Nick tried to tackle him to the ground but was still in shock after the punch he received. All he could do was knock the gun out of his hand; that was all he needed. He then sprinted out of the room. He didn't get far before Paul had started shooting down the corridor. Nick eventually made it to the elevator and hit the "G" button. While in the elevator he made a quick call. Paul had taken the stairs. Nick got there first. A few seconds later Paul made it down to the ground floor. Nick had his gun aimed at Paul, and Paul was aiming right back at Nick. Suddenly a squad of police charged through the lobby of the hotel, and were all aiming directly at Paul.

"It's the end of the road, Paul" said Nick.

Paul grunted, dropped his gun, placed his hands on the back of his head, and got on his knees. Three officers rushed to him and hand cuffed him. As they escorted him to the police van, he looked directly at Nick and said, "Next time, you will not be this lucky".

Examination Day

by Jessica Yoon

“Where’s your father?”

The thin-lipped woman broke the tension of David’s world. David Jsahze was alone in the crowded hall, both sides of his seat empty. Actually, when David looked around the room, everyone was alone in their own bubble of air.

One father was staring at his daughter; that daughter was captivated by her new shoes. The boy next to the new-shoes-girl was biting his nails, definitely not listening to his father lecturing him about something he wanted the boy to know. Were they tips on how to get good marks?

Nearest to David were another set of father and son. The blonde kid was reading the paper written ‘Examination at Government Educational Building Room 404’ stuck on the faint-blue door. The father ruffled the blonde hair that was the same color as his, and called out.

“Dick, I need to tell you something.”

He kneeled down, face to face with the boy named Dick, mumbled so subtly David saw his lips move, but the boy couldn’t hear.

“My boy? I asked, where’s your father?”

This time the woman shoved a paper in front of David’s eyes, rather irritated

“Sorry, madam. I must’ve been a bit nervous.”

He wasn’t.

“I’m Jsahze, David Jsahze. Neither of my parents were able to make it today. Business. But they’ve done this two times before me, with my brothers, so they called the governor and I think it worked out.”

The thin-lips had turned into a pretense mask, honey-licked voice,

“Oh, you’re the Jsahze. Then no need for these papers. I wish you luck, you’ll need it.”

It was disgusting to see the woman turn back and hand the paper to the father of the blonde boy with a smile of hypocrisy. The father filled out the form, submitted it to the clerk and went back to sit next to his son.

“It won’t be long now. When they call your name, you’ll go through the doorway at that end of the room.”

The man, Dick’s father’s hands, pointed to the blueish grey portal then came back to rest upon his son’s hand.

At five minutes of eleven, the name Dick Jordan was called and the blonde kid stood up. David heard the blonde man wish,

“Good luck, son.”

No one noticed, but David stood up.

“I’ll call for you when the test is over.”

David had to leave the spot right then for some reason. He did not turn back. He did not look up, up at families, up at fathers and sons.

Only out of Room 404, David confronted an obstacle. The man at the front desk had blocked his way,

“You are... Let me look at the list... Jsahze? Oh, David Jsahze, do you need anything?”

A scent of suspicion was definite in the question, but the name Jsahze roused a lonesome disdain. David remembered the power in that name. His name was commonsensical; how many times had he read it mentioned on the cover of economic magazines, seen signs in the streets of the company’s name. Jsahze was worth something.

“Bathroom. Where is it.”

Downright commanding but the man accepted it.

“Down the hall to the left, around the corner.”

David did not thank the man nor even listened. He strode along the hall, with each step creating new thoughts.

First, why couldn’t his father be here?

Second, what was with this exam that every other father came to?

Third, what was wrong with this family Jsahze?

Fourth, was this what his brother Tate felt three years ago on his day of the examination?

Fifth, well then, this was enough to make the cleverest, most tolerant, most benevolent person David knew a runaway boy.

But the sixth step didn’t come. David had to stop just around the corner. Urgent voices materialized.

Annoyed, stifling complaints of two.

“Really, I don’t see why my invention has to be used this way.”

“What, making those 12 year olds tell the truth? By that age, they should reply truthfully without the drinks in this tension of the building. No need to make sure by ‘drinks’ I mean.”

“Yes, that. And the whole system is just.. absurd.”

“Shh...”

David frowned, curiosity and puzzlement aroused in his face. By now he had to lean close to the wall, all his thoughts erased, focusing only on that conversation.

“Hush down. I know what you mean, I felt guilt in the current system too. Look at those kids, just 12 years old, my granddaughter’s age, and if they’re too smart, just because of that, too smart, they’re executed.”

David couldn’t process that statement. Too smart?

“I know, it wasn’t this tough during the initial stages. Do you know how they informed the parents? Cousin of mine picked up the phone for his grandson’s information. They told my cousin who they were, didn’t even check if the person on the line was the boy’s parents. And said they regret to inform him that his grandson’s intelligence quotient exceeded the

Government regulation, so they killed him. Regret? You see any regret on those attendants? It's us scientists feeling guilt and condemnation."

"I told you to hush down... You're getting too high there, pal. Let's get back to work."

"Alright, alright.. But really, asking if you want to specify by phone whether you want your grandson's body to be interred for ten dollars by the organization who killed them is..."

The voices muffled away with footsteps but the words remained.

Too smart? Intelligence quotient? Government regulations? Execution? Ten dollars?

David's head was spinning around; he was getting to something, and he got there. But he was scared, his body was shaking, lashes trembled, lips dried. He had found out something he wasn't supposed to know, didn't want to know, and he was in the middle of it. What was he to do even after he found out the truth?

Instinctively, David knew no one must find out he knew what was going on inside those doors.

He stumbled trying to ignore the terror. David was on the way back to Room 404; it was the only place in his hideous building he knew a place to sit down. He thought to himself, how much can a 12 year old conceal? Was he acting strange? Were his eyes swaying? It felt like someone could look into his eyes and shatter the truth out of him. Unconsciously, David hunched.

Only when David sat down on the bench again he looked up from the ground. It was 15 minutes of eleven, 10 minutes had passed and the blonde father was gone.

Strained, David pulled together the verity he got.

Children of this country took a government-lead examinations at the age of 12. If one's intelligence was over the government regulation...

Not daring to think more David thought about lying about his answers. No, the truth-drink mentioned by the scientist impeded the idea. A truth-telling drink, ridiculous as it sounded, was plausible. There it was, a government killing smart children, so why couldn't drinks force the truth out.

Confusion. Were there any ways to escape? This was the fourth floor; he did not know any if there was any staircase. No, even if he knew, a staircase would be the first place people would search. An automatic elevator was what brought everyone up to Room 404; David tried to remember the marble floored, pillared lobby, the archways before the elevator.

The loudspeaker hissed.

"David Jsahze."

"Once again, David Jsahze. Please enter."

David started and reluctantly stood up. There was no way to resist.

David walked to the door thinking of the possibility of himself going back home safe. Jack, David's other elder brother, came back after his exam. David encouraged himself, he might not be even smart enough!

Sanity had escaped from David. Feeling the coldness of the steel knob, a face came up to David's mind. Tate had turned the same knob he was holding right now. But Tate hadn't come back, unlike Jack. Tate had been murdered. Must have been, Tate was always too smart. He was dead. Absently David let go of the knob and stepped in.

The dimness of the room made David barely sense the gray-tunicked attendant.

"Sit down David, David Jsahze am I right? Classification number 600-118. Drink this, David."

David stared at the plastic cup the attendant was handing.

Tate was dead. Dead. Tate wasn't a runaway boy or anything like that, simply dead. Not here anymore. Death. Other kids were dead. In a flash came an image of himself being burned down. Now, he was dead.

No.

David suddenly felt the urge to live. He needed to live, he just couldn't die. Why did he need to die?

"It's alright, no need to be nervous. Take. The. Cup."

No, he wouldn't. But David did, which gave the attendant satisfaction. Again, why did he need to die? This man was perfectly alive, why did he need to die, die like all the others who had before him? Why? David took a deep breath. There was no reason for him to die.

The moment the attendant took his eyes off David, David splashed the liquid in the attendant's eyes. And before the man could scream, he took the clipboard from the man's lap. Bang, smashed it on the man head.

From then it was a run. David shot out of the room and out of Room 404. People whispered and fumbled at this sight, nothing mattered.

Red lights appeared, machines whirred and footsteps echoed along the hall way. The echo rebounded and came back to its origin accompanying more footsteps.

"Code 12, an examinee has absconded. Stand by your positions, block all paths."

"Get him!"

The gray governmental building was behind him. David camouflaged himself in the crowd, He still wasn't safe and he knew it. His face could be uploaded in the bus stations and on to the screens in the streets and the whole city would be after him.

David ran back home; where else could he go to? He kept on running, nonstop.

By the time David saw his house, the sun was setting from the back of the house. It looked as if the house was shining, blinding him. David made a shade with his hands, slowly restraining his pace. Soon he was walking. He stopped in front of the resplendent gates.

Nothing was there anymore but the mansion. Vacant. Tapes of 'Government Property'.

Alive, but the things that had made him alive till now were alive no longer. Alone again. David turned back. The sun created a long distance of shadow. He walked away, the shadow with him. He might not be as alone as he thought.

Mr. Tompkins

by Lauren Zammit

He puts on his familiar, checkered cap, his fingertips quivering with excitement at the thought of what today will consist of. Will he finally be the knight on the white horse? A protagonist in a fantastic love story? Combing his fine, silver strands of hair, he visualizes the role play. "What actions, what words will take place today?" he asks himself.

With that, just like every other Sunday afternoon, Mr Tompkins picks up his walking stick, standing upright against the umbrella stand. He turns the key in the door slowly, until he hears a satisfying click, and emerges into the outdoors.

The spring atmosphere wraps around him like a blanket. He walks past the local group of youths, sharing a packet of cigarettes between them. Usually he would growl at them - muttering something about how such foul habits will eventually kill them all. But today is a different day. Instead, Mr.Tompkins walks past, removing his hat from his almost-bald head.

"Good morning, Ladies, Gentlemen," he says with a half-toothed smile. Their chatter comes to a sudden halt, as they stare at this unfamiliar cheery old man in disbelief.

He doesn't scowl at the lateness of the bus. Nor does he attempt to scare dogs away with his walking stick. Today he walks with a spring in his step, exhilarated by the thought of seeing her once again.

The park greets him with its usual chatter. Mr. Tompkins notices that there are far more people there than the previous Sunday. But this change in population doesn't disturb him, as there is only one individual in particular that he wishes to be seeing again.

A young man in a vivid, yellow sweater guards a small flower stall on the sidewalk. Mr.Tompkins plucks an individual rose, tossing a coin to the store-tender. The band plays loudly and cheerily, as if the song was specifically composed for his personal role-play. This would be the song that he and his love would discuss in the years to come and dance to on their anniversaries.

She's perched on her usual bench, her well polished, black high-heels, pressed side by side. Her soft, wrinkled hands rest upon the plain black skirt she wears. She has ignored the beautiful, spring day, wearing a vintage, fur coat around herself. Oh, her wild, unpredictable nature!

And just as she always does on these Sunday afternoons, the beautiful lady with the soft curls sits. She does not talk, she does not smile. She merely sits, waiting for something exciting to happen. The lines on her face are like a dried apricot, producing a faraway expression.

Mr Tompkins sits on the bench opposite her, concealing the rose in the darkness of his velvet jacket. He wonders what her story was. Perhaps she was a journalist when she was young. Wild and adventurous. Married at a young age, fooled by the idea of teenage love. "Well, there is only one way to find out..." Mr Tompkins thinks to himself.

Suddenly, two teenagers, both beautifully dressed and drunk on love, sit on the same bench as the woman with the soft curls. The boy towers over the girl, stroking her face tenderly.

"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy. "Why does she come here at all – who wants her?"

Mr Tompkins feels his fists clenching. How dare that sly child say such a terrible thing! This is the part of the role play where the hero saves the day, sweeping in on his handsome white horse and saving his damsel in distress.

Just as he is about to stand up, Mr. Tompkins feels his body paralyzing with fear. Doubts circle his mind like a hurricane. What if the woman rejects him? Surely she would never even look at an old man such as himself. Look at her, so beautiful and elegant. And him, so dull and inferior. What if he makes a fool out of himself? What if he gets his heart broken? What if life really isn't like a play, with a happy ending? What if, what if?

He feels his eyes lifting towards the park seat in front of him. An action which he has grown to master. He feels his heart sink in his chest at the sight of the bare bench. Because during his pathetic time of doubt the woman with the soft curls has already gathered her things and left.

Mr. Tompkins travels swiftly to the bakery, where the woman usually likes to purchase a honey-cake on her way home. But today, she is nowhere to be seen.

He doesn't say excuse me when pushing past people on the bus. He doesn't smile at the sight of the freshly bloomed daisies on the sidewalk - something which he has looked forward to for weeks.

When he reaches the front of the apartment complex, the group of adolescents are still smoking.

"You're second hand smoke is poisoning my lungs. I'm already old, and going to die soon - stop speeding up the process!" Mr. Tompkins barks.

He gets inside, presses his walking stick against the umbrella stand, takes off his hat, and un-buttons his coat. He makes his way to his favorite room, dull as a cave, nothing illuminated but the rocking chair, facing the window.

Mr. Tompkins sits down slowly, slightly trembling as he eases into his chair. As he sits and reflects on the days events, out he pulls the red rose, beautiful and slightly wilted at the edges. He holds out the rose in front of him, and just like he does so often, perhaps too often, he does little but stare.

The Scope

by Lucas Baumgaertel

The short night in the warm August of 1916 was about to fade into another long day of fighting and death. The sun rose at the horizon like a fiery red balloon. Every now and then, machine guns were fired on both sides of the battlefield and magnesium capsules were shot in the air to spot attacking enemies. Scott was standing in the British Trench. He was a sniper, a British sniper fighting at Verdun, against the Germans in World War One.

Hidden behind a few bags of sand, the sniper safely observed secret enemy movement through the field glasses which lay next to him; he was covering friendly troops during an offensive. 'Sharpshooter' was another name, a name which was feared by the enemy. He was thin, tall and had dark brown eyes which in a way were similar to the color of the muddy battlefield. He had a little pistol on the left side of his belt.

It was always risky to raise the sniper and fire, because the scope could flash and reflect the sunshine, which would reveal his position to the enemy. The biggest risk was still the exploding artillery shells, which could rip him into pieces if they landed right in the trench.

It was time for breakfast; a little piece of bread was given to every soldier. He ate it quickly. He was very hungry, since they didn't receive enough food. After he ate the bread, he took out a metal water bottle and drank a sip from it. He now took out a cigarette and lit it. This made him forget most of his experience, at least for a few minutes. He sat down to relax for a while and took out a picture of his girlfriend. Immediately some tears flew out of his eyes. "I miss you!" he murmured.

Right after lighting the cigarette the alarm was yelled and the silence was broken by exploding artillery shells and constant machine gun fire. The sharpshooter stood up, took the sniper in his hand and aimed. Many German soldiers were approaching. He aimed at a German soldier in the first row and fired. This soldier immediately fell. He was crawling in the mud. "Horrible", the sniper thought, and reloaded. Machine guns roared and killed most of the German attackers. The sniper followed this event. In that moment, he heard a bullet going into one of the sand bags in front of him. Shell-shocked, he crouched and breathed slowly and nervously. In that moment, another bullet flew right over his head. He realized that he had been spotted. There was nothing he could do right now other than wait!

He moved a bit further down the trench to a different position. He put his helmet on the rifle and raised it a bit, so that only a little part of the helmet was seen, in order to find out if he would be spotted here as well. Nothing happened. He put his helmet back on his head and the rifle over the shoulders. Using the field glasses he slowly rose, to be able to see across to the

German trench. He now tried to spot the German sniper. Something flashed in the distance. The British sniper hid again safely in the trench. He took the rifle and slowly went back up. He aimed where he had seen the flash. A bullet went through his left arm. "Ahh!" he screamed. He was injured. But this was his chance, his chance while the enemy sniper would be reloading. He used this chance and fired. His wound was in pain. The only thing the British sniper saw was blood, which splattered on the mud behind the shot German soldier and him falling back into the trench. A headshot.

The British sniper dropped the rifle and ran to a little 'field hospital' which was located in a dugout. He lay down and the doctor took out the bullet. He was about to scream full of pain. The doctor now took iodine and let the liquid run into the wound. It burned and the sniper was about to scream. The doctor put a piece of cloth on top of the wound. There was no time for the him to relax. He had to get out and back to battle. After quickly thanking the doctor, the sharpshooter was on his way back to where he had dropped his rifle after being shot. In that moment, the British soldiers were ordered to go over and attack. The sniper was lucky. He never had to go over and attack. He followed every action during the combat. Many British soldiers were killed by machine gun fire as usual. Those who survived turned around and ran back to the British trench. A soldier jumped back into the trench close to Scott's position. Scott ran to him and tried to help him to get back up.

He turned him around and saw into his best friends eyes.

The Training Exercise

by Isaac Eastland

Frederick was no ordinary soldier. He had been selected to become a special forces officer, but stayed in his regiment. He had no desire to die or to be a hero; he did his job and followed orders. Today he was following orders. He had just returned from Afghanistan where he and his squad had managed to capture more jihadists than any other squad in the British army.

His orders were to go to a general's house. As Freddie drove his battered blue jeep up the general's large driveway he wondered who took care of the large grass strips on each side of the driveway and if it was the general who watered the large flower beds. His question was soon answered when he saw two gardeners mowing each side of the driveway. As Freddie reached the house he wondered why the general would require such a large property and decided he couldn't call the house a house but rather a mansion. Freddie drove the jeep up and parked next to a blacked out limo. When he reached the front door he was greeted by the butler, who told him to wait in the living room. Freddie sat down on one of the expensive looking sofas and wondered why anyone would ever want such a thing, as it had about the same level of comfort as a seat in one of his squad's army Land Rovers. Freddie then started to look around the room, which had various pictures of art in it. Freddie didn't see the point in art: why draw and paint something when you could take a picture of it? His house had a few large photos of family and landscapes but he would never buy a drawing.

When the general came in, Freddie was surprised. He had expected an old man in his 50's wearing military uniform, but what he saw was a middle-aged man wearing a dark navy T-shirt and dark denim jeans.

"You are here because I want to invite you to take part in a training exercise," the general said.

"With all respect, sir, aren't I more useful in the war zone?" Freddie replied.

"Don't worry. This training exercise will only last one day," the general said. "But it is off the record, OK?"

Freddie was speechless. The general's tone of voice sounded like he was expecting a decision. Freddie was fast at making decisions; for him it was a matter of life or death. In Afghanistan he had saved people from IEDs and managed to escape ambushes, but felt there was something wrong with the General and he decided to make an excuse.

“Sir, I would have loved to take part in this exercise but I’m going on holiday with my girlfriend tomorrow. However, I would love to become a training officer afterwards so I can spend more time at home.”

“Well, I’m sorry, but you have no choice,” the general said as he reached for his holster to pull out his pistol. “You’re coming with me.”

The General marched Freddie out of a back door into a large garden with a helicopter in it. As soon as the pilot saw the two men he started the engine and the blades started to turn with a loud humming noise. As Freddie got into the helicopter the General shoved a helmet onto him with a microphone so that they could talk to each other above the loud noise of the aircraft.

Freddie was scared; an unusual feeling for Freddie, but it was the uncertainty of the situation that he was scared of. In a war he always thought of the chances of being injured as being 50/50; either you get the bad guys or the bad guys get you. While he knew he had a better chance normally with better training, strategies and equipment, the 50/50 idea always gave him a sort of buzz and a will to do better. But now he didn’t know his chances. He had no idea what was ahead of him. Then the General spoke.

“We’re going to a urban training ground. You are to pretend to be a felon on the run. You will have no weaponry and I will be the only one chasing you, with the assistance of some dogs and a CCTV system that is there.”

“What happens when you find me?” Freddie said.

“I will shoot you,” the General said, followed with a small chuckle.

“You’re going to die,” Freddie said.

“If you say so,” the General said. “Once we land in the compound you will have two hours before I start looking for you. If you survive forty-eight hours you will be released.”

The helicopter landed and Freddie got out and ran. He knew he would have to find a good place to hide but he also needed the ability to defend himself. He decided a residential compound would be a good place to hide. The helicopter had landed in a park and Freddie saw a block of flats. He decided that if he ran straight to it the General would think it was a trick. But then he remembered he wasn’t in war-torn Afghanistan anymore; there were cameras everywhere. He knew that if he ran to the tower block the general would know if he was there or not. But if he ran there and went off surveillance the General might waste his time searching the tower block. It didn’t take long to reach the block; it was only a few hundred metres away. He decided he would go up the elevator then find some rope and abseil down. He looked in the apartments searching for weapons, but while they looked completely authentic everything that could be turned into a weapon had been taken out; there were no knives in the kitchens and the beds didn’t even have legs on them. It quickly became apparent that there would be limited chances of finding something to abseil with but he could probably climb down from a lower floor if he had to.

It took Freddie only a few minutes to climb the stairs to the top, and once he got to the top floor he realized that while every precaution had been taken

in the apartments none had been taken on the roof. Freddie saw several different objects that could be made into weapons but he was most attracted to a hammer that been left there. He walked across and put the hammer in his jacket pocket. He realized that they probably thought no one would be stupid enough to go to the roof where they can be easily cornered. He then saw his way down: there was a long metal cable with a large hook on the end. As Freddie looked down from the edge of the building he noticed a grassy patch just the correct distance away so that he could zip wire down the cable. However, he needed a way to get the hook there as it was too far for him to throw. There was a lot of junk on the roof and Freddie decided he could make a catapult; and when he decided something, most of the time it got done.

Freddie found some wooden poles that he could use to make an A-frame , and then found some small bits of rope which he could tie the poles together with. He made the catapult but couldn't find a heavy object to build up the tension. He looked around, then decided he would have to use his own body weight. He created a trigger that could be used to build up pressure, stepped on the rope at the end of the catapult and pulled the trigger. He body fell with a jolt and the hook went flying and hit the grassy patch first time. Freddie checked the rope and it felt stable. He took off his jacket and put it around the cable. He decided he needed something to slow him down, so he found another cable, attached it to the side of the block and wound it around a pipe. He attached the cable to himself and set off. He was going quickly and he was scared that his jacket would break, but it didn't and just before his feet were going to hit the ground he jumped.

He decided that he wasn't going to wait forty-eight hours; that was too long. He was going too ambush the General or escape the compound. He needed a plan. He knew the General was in the apartment blocks but he decided that he was going to run in one direction; if could escape, he would. He ran for about two hours. The compound was huge; in that time he had left the urban area and was in a forest. The trees were young and had not created large roots to disturb his running. He was just about to give up when he saw a fence. He ran to it. He still had the hammer. He couldn't hear any humming to suggest the fence was electrified. He got the hammer and used the nail remover to rip up the fence. No sooner had he made a hole big enough to escape than a siren sounded. Freddie knew he didn't have much time so he ran to the closest tree and climbed quickly. He waited for a few minutes when a jeep with two guards came. Both guards started to inspect the fence. When they found the hole Freddie jumped down silently and ran at them with the hammer. The guards were knocked out before they realized what had happened. The guards both had pistols. So now Freddie had weaponry. The hunter was about to become the hunted.

Freddie climbed into the jeep and drove in to the compound. He was thinking of how to find the General. He decided the easiest way was to just to get caught on camera. It was a tough drive through the forest he had just run through. Freddie managed to find a rough track which was laden with bumps

and huge roots of some of the large oak trees in the forest. It only took Freddie a few minutes to reach the end of the forest. He decided to ditch the jeep as he didn't want to attract the General's attention. Freddie thought that the guards had probably not been missed yet but they would be found soon. The only communication systems he had found on the guards were their mobile phones from which he had taken the SIM cards and the batteries. From the edge of the forest he ran across a park and onto the street. It didn't take long to find a camera. He pretended to be scared of it and dived for cover. It took ten minutes for the General to come in another jeep but it only took one pull of a trigger for him to die. Freddie got into the jeep and drove off. He assumed no one apart from the General knew who he was and if he was there.

Berlock Nolmes

by Tomas Branco

Mastersville was a peaceful and quiet town, and all its people were very kind, but an unexpected incident occurred that night. Evil lurked around the town while everyone was asleep, and that was when the tale of Berlock Nolmes begins.

T'was a young summer evening in the small town of Mastersville, and the most unexpected had happened. There was a shriek in the middle of town, and as the townspeople gathered. They had a look of horror, looking down at the woman, just lying on the ground, cold as ice.

“Coming through. Come on, keep moving people.” This voice was deep and rough; it was that of the head detective of the small town. He was a big man; he was indeed fat, but tall as well. He was very strict, and took pride in his work. He would never admit he was wrong, but by the end of this story, that would all have changed.

As he was going through the crowd he kept wondering what had happened to gather so many people in one spot, and just as he was about give up thinking, he set his eyes on the poor woman lying on the floor. Her whole body lay there, and her eyes had been kept open, with a look of horror. There was a hole through her heart and some blood on her face.

As soon as the detective had seen all of this, one thing came to his mind, and one thing only: “Call Nolmes.”

As Berlock approached the body, his expression remained unchanged; he was calm, and observed the body.

“Well, it is obvious that she has not been dead too long, and that she was stabbed to death, but this killer was sloppy.”

“How on earth do you know he was sloppy?” asked the detective.

“Well,” answered Nolmes, “she has a stab wound through the heart, and yet she also has a bleeding head which looks like it was done with a blunt object. If it had been a sharp tool, there would have been no need to stab her. She was fighting back, and even scratched the killer; you can see there is a little skin under her fingernails, and the killer had to use something to keep her quiet, therefore the blunt weapon. If he had been organized he wouldn't have allowed her to fight back, he would have just struck her from behind. Also, if you are stabbed in the heart there would be a lot more blood, and judging by the amount of it here, it is easy to conclude that this is not the spot which she was murdered, merely the spot in which she was dumped. The question now is why not quiet her instead of killing her right there? She must have had useful information that was needed, meaning that there was a connection between her and the killer, so this was not a random act. Also,

there is a curious little lump on her stomach, we wonder what that could be, right?"

The detective and the other police men just stood there, baffled by what Nolmes had discovered by just having a quick look at the body.

"Do we know who this woman is?" asked Nolmes.

"We still don't know, we've been asking around, someone's bound to know who she is," said the detective.

A few days had passed and there was still no word of who this lady could be, and Nolmes was getting very impatient. I was going to his apartment to ask if there was any news, and as I got there I found the door had been unlocked, and on his couch lay Nolmes, a hat over his face and a mysterious white powder on his table.

I was about to ask several things but, before I could, Nolmes had gotten up and said, "I've got an idea!" and rushed away at that very moment. I was confused, but I raced after him wondering what had happened.

Sherlock had got into his car and drove to the police.

Almost immediately, he asked, "Any word on our victim's name?"

"No Nolmes, and we told you we'd call, so go away" snapped the detective, but Nolmes already had an idea.

"Detective, have all the doctors of the town meet us in the centre of town, in no less than an hour. That includes all nurses as well."

"Nolmes are you mad? These people have to work, they have to treat the sick!"

"Just do it, it won't take long."

About an hour later, several medical professionals had been gathered in town, pharmacists, doctors, nurses, all of them. I as well as the detective were wondering what was going to happen. Soon enough, Nolmes stood up on a platform and started to speak.

"This woman had come to one of you for medical help as to her lump on her stomach, and I know exactly who it was."

Everyone started to turn around and wonder who it was, looking around with puzzled faces.

"You, lady standing right there, you were her doctor. The rest of you can go back to work."

As everyone went back to work, the lady accused of being the doctor had tried to make a run for it, but it was of no use, since there had been guards all over town. She was a very weird looking person; she wore a long sweater, all black, and had short blonde hair.

"Let go of me, I did nothing!"

"Well then why did you run? Only the guilty refuse to go with the police." said the detective.

Nolmes had walked up to her, and calmly said something none of us had expected, "So you were the victim's doctor, as well as her sister correct?"

The woman had stopped struggling, and had a sad expression on her face.

“How did you know it was me?”

“Well, when I told everyone I knew who it was, everyone turned and tried to see who it was, everyone except for you. You stared straight at me nervous of who I would accuse. You did not have to look for who it was because you knew who it was. You are her sister because you have similar cheekbones with the victim. Although that was just a hunch, the expression on your face confirmed my theory. Now, the question at hand is why did you kill your sister?”

“I did not kill her! I would never do such a thing!”

“Then why not come to the police and tell us her name?”

“I, I uh, do you really think I would want to tell you? You’re just a deceitful person and you’re an old detective.”

To be quite frank, I was rather happy that she had said nothing to me, and I actually chuckled quietly when she called Nolmes deceitful. Apparently, she did not know as much about Nolmes as I did. Deceitful is such a weak word.

“Take her back to Scotland Yard. She didn’t do it, but she is hiding something.”

After he had said this, I saw a smile on his face. I was going to ask, but before I could he interrupted.

“Wasn’t this one a boring one, eh Watson?”

She then left the site with the detective.

“OK, here’s how I see it. You are suspected of murder, so you’ll be going to jail for a long time. If you don’t start confessing, you are going to stay in jail for a long time,” said the detective, and yet the woman stayed quiet, and simply said, “It wasn’t me.”

Nolmes then entered the room.

“I know you didn’t do it, but we can very well say you did, and that will ruin your career, and those people who your sister owed will come after you once you get out of jail, because she owed them money, which she can’t pay anymore since she’s, well, dead.”

She sighed, and then with a quick look towards her right, as if she was thinking, she started talking.

“My sister was sick, so she had come to me for help, and I gave her something, just to relax her, and then she started blurting out some things, such as how she owed money to some people and they were very angry with her. I thought that they had followed me, so I thought that if I did not tell the police, then they would not come after me, but I didn’t do it, I swear.”

“So, Nolmes what do you think of her story?” I asked, curious to hear the answer.

“She is probably telling the truth, but it wasn’t some people who needed money who killed her.”

“Well, why not Nolmes? It seems pretty straight forward.”

“Oh Thomason, you must think harder. People who loan money would not be sloppy, they would kidnap and demand ransom. They would not kill or else they wouldn't get their money. They would most probably threaten, not kill.”

As I was about to say something, the detective barged in.

“Nolmes we know who the girl is. She's called Nora Jane, an American who came here, and guess what, she came here because she had been stealing money from banks in America. She probably stole from the wrong people here, that is what got her killed. I guess the case is -” but before the detective could finish, Nolmes instantly asked, “Have you interviewed the boyfriend.”

“What boyfriend Nolmes?”

“Well, didn't you see the lipstick that she had on? Why would someone have lipstick on if they were going to just stroll around? Or to meet some bad folks?”

“OK Nolmes, you may have a point, but if there is no boyfriend this case is closed, got it?”

“Yeah sure, I just have to go and see the sister.”

Nolmes had knocked several times on the door, and yet no one had answered. He looked around and saw a trashcan; in it was a rug, and it looked old and wet. There was no key under the mat and therefore no way of getting in.

“Berlock, allow me.”

And I simply turned the knob to open the door.

“Hm, thank you Thomason, but I'll have you know that I was about to do that.”

As we walked in it was dark, and in the middle of the living room lay a body, the body of a woman.

“Berlock call Scotland Yard, she's injured, possibly dead. She was stabbed, like the other victim.”

As we turned the body over we saw something that shocked us both; this was not the sister, it was some other woman that was also blonde.

“Wait, this isn't her. Oh dear, Nolmes, we're in the wrong house.”

“But we are at her address, 232, it says so on the door.”

“Let me see that Nolmes. Nolmes, that a 3 at the end, not a 2.”

“Give me that. Well then, that's rather terrible handwriting. Lets go and check her house then.”

A little after 5 minutes, Scotland Yard had arrived, and we had knocked on the actual door of the sister. We were relieved to know that she was fine, but the question still remained, why would someone want to kill her? She must know something.

“We're going to have to take you back to Scotland Yard, we still have a few more questions.” I said, and she went with us, but not in the best of moods.

“Alright Nolmes, the case may not be closed, actually far from it, so what do you reckon?” asked the detective, quite impatiently.

“Oh, it is so very simple, isn't it?”

Puzzled, both the detective and I had the same question, but did not want to ask it, knowing how impatient Nolmes is with these things.

“Let the woman go,” said Nolmes, “and tell her to walk towards the dark alleyway behind her apartment. Follow her and you will find your killer.”

“Nolmes that’s putting her in danger! We won’t do that!” shouted the detective, who was for once concerned for the well being of others.

“Well, alright then, let’s go, Thomason.”

“Nolmes, what do you plan on doing?” I had asked him, but all he said was to focus and follow.

How stubborn Nolmes can be. I decided to go.

It was nearly dark outside, the moon was full, and I had lost Nolmes. He had simply told me to meet him outside the alleyway. That was exactly when I saw a woman. I did not see her face, but she was blonde and suspiciously like the sister. I waited for Nolmes, and the time was passing. Fifteen minutes, then twenty, then thirty, and he had still not shown up, and the girl remained in the alleyway. As I was about to leave, I heard a yell, a manly one at that. Confused, I ran towards the alleyway, and there I saw two figures, one the girl, whose wig had fallen off, and a man, pinned towards the ground. With a closer look I saw Nolmes, wearing the sweater which I had thought was on a woman.

“Thomason would you be so kind as to help me hold this man down, you can clearly see his knife, can you not?”

“So, you’re the victim’s boyfriend, are you?” shouted the detective, impatient because he wanted to end this case.

“What’s it to you, you old man?” murmured the man, expressionless.

“You were holding a knife against another man and attempting to kill him, that’s what it is to me.”

“I have nothing to say to you, old man.”

As the detective kept shouting, the sister had walked into the room, and the boyfriend and her shared a look. His was a look of loathing, while hers was one of disinterest.

“Excuse me, detective, let me,” Nolmes said, interrupting the interview.

Nolmes had a habit of looking at people and understanding them. I never understood how he did it, nor what he thought of whilst looking at them.

“Well... you have bags under your eyes which suggest that you have not slept much, and considering the fact that you were carrying a knife around I would have to say that you have some guilt in you. Your trousers are not clean nor are they ironed, which means that you are not a very organized person. That shirt smells very strange, it seems as if you have been wearing it for quite a while. You probably have not changed since the event, meaning that you are nervous that we would find out something about you. You have a tattoo which is very unique, one that I am assuming belongs to a criminal group, so you were involved with the money that the girl had stolen. You were probably

posing as her boyfriend to get close enough to her to get your hands on that money she had, and when you asked for it she fought you, and you ended up killing her.”

“That is not true I did not kill her! Sure I am from a gang and she did take our money. I was told to get close to her so that she could get back our money, but we ended up falling in love. I wanted to flee the country with her but she did not want to. She was convinced that she could pay back the fines! I swear I did not kill her.”

Berlock had a look of disbelief. He was convinced that this man was the one, and without another look he said, “Arrest him”.

“Well then, Nolmes, that one was quite easy was it not?”

I had said this with hopes that he was in a good mood, because I was sure that what I was about to say would offend him.

“I guess that the simplest answer is always the right one!”

Nolmes was tuning his violin, but then his arms fell, and in a deep voice he said, “Thomason say that again.”

“The simplest answer...”

“...is always the right one! Thomason that’s it! Come we have work to do.”

It was a quiet afternoon, and I had hoped that it would stay like that, but I guess I was hoping for too much. Nolmes had told me to meet him at the sister’s house along with the detective. We were waiting outside for a few minutes, then decided to enter her house.

“What are you doing here? I thought you had caught him!” asked the sister.

“Don’t worry we’ll leave soon.”

Then, quietly, the detective said to me, “I hope Nolmes has a good reason for this.”

After a few minutes, Nolmes had come in, and a horrible smell came along with him.

“Nolmes tell us why we’re here! Oh god what is that horrible stench?” the detective demanded.

“It will all be explained shortly. Now, we know that the boyfriend looks to have done it, but there are still questions left unanswered, and I would like them answered. Where is the weapon used to kill her? Where was the murder site? I would love to bore you with all the things I’ve found, but why not tell you a little story. There was once a girl, who had a bad life in America. She decided to change all of that, and start a new life here, but she had a few debts here as well. Turns out the boyfriend was telling the truth, he did fall in love with her, and she had a plan as to how to pay back her debts. Her parents had left her and her sister quite a lot of money, and that money was to be shared between them. Nora wanted to use it to pay back her debts, all of it, and guess who didn’t want that to happen, hm? You right there!”

“What? I’ve never been informed about any of this!” exclaimed the sister.

“It was quite obvious you had money. That rug that I saw in the trashcan, it was very well made, too well made for the common person to have, and yet you threw it away, and it was wet as well. Now why would that be? Perhaps it was bug infested? Or perhaps it was stained with blood! Because this is where Nora was murdered! As to how you knew all of this, you told us yourself, you gave her a drug to help relax her, and she probably blurted out this story of how she would use your money to pay off her debts.”

“I demand you to stop this insinuation right now! I have done nothing! And besides, you have no proof!” said the sister, in a rather loud voice.

“Well then, for one thing, there is the rug.”

As he said this, Nolmes had tugged in a wet and stained rug. He continued to unfold it and it was quite obvious there was a large stain of red, dark red, and it had a horrible stench along with it.

“Then, if you are still not convinced, then might I ask you to take off your sweater.”

“What!? I would never do such a thing!”

“Well, there were no scratch marks on the boyfriend, the detective simply arrested him because he looked right for it, and he wanted to finish what he had started by going after you as well!”

“Ma’am, take off that sweater!” demanded the detective.

“No, I would never do such a thing!”

“Then you are under arrest, and we will continue to question you in our office, unless you can prove that you have no scratch mark on your body.”

“... It wasn’t supposed to be like this, OK? I got angry with her, she didn’t even ask to use the money, she was simply going to use it. I got mad and I grabbed the broomstick and whacked her with it, she scratched me before I could hit her, but when I did she fell cold on the ground. I thought that she would tell everyone what I had done, I would go to jail for assault and she would take all the money, and my career would end as a doctor right there, so why not stop her right there? Then I dragged her out to the middle of town to make it look like it was random. Didn’t work did it?”

“No it didn’t” said the detective.

“How long have you known that it was me?” she had asked, with a rather surprised expression on her face.

“Well, I’ve had my suspicions since the first time I met you,” said Nolmes. “When I said that your sister’s murder seemed boring, you did not react. If you cared for her, you would have fought me back for insulting her murder. Also, when one looks to the right when they talk, they are usually using the part of the brain that is used for imagination, which is what you did during your interview.”

“But wait Nolmes, what about the woman that died next door?”

“Well, the boyfriend killed her. You see, Nora’s boyfriend saw all of this, I don’t know how, and then tried to get revenge, but apparently, like us, he mistook the numbers. After all, it was dark, and he killed an innocent woman.”

“Well, why didn’t he tell us who killed Nora?”

“My god, detective, think for yourself a little! He tried to get revenge, correct? So he wanted to kill the sister himself, not let her go to jail.”

The rest of that summer was rather calm. Berlock had a few more cases to solve, but he solved them easily. This is the story I chose to tell since it is the one that has stayed with me for so long, the story of the two evil sisters, the thief and the murderer.

The Selection

by John Kim

The Jones family never stopped talking about the exam. All their advice, actions and conversations were based on it. And Nick, on becoming seventeen years old, received a phone call and was notified, or rather warned, of the upcoming last chance.

“You got a morning appointment tomorrow Nick,” his father said with his face, oddly enough, filled with guilt and uneasiness.

It had all started when he got to know about the exam at the age of twelve. And since then, all he had done was grab a pen.

“It’s a traditional test Nick. Now its your turn,” Mrs. Jones had said.

With her eyes towards the sink she explained that the drastic changes in the Earth’s environment by the continuous human activities against nature had resulted in an irrevocable situation. Natural hazards dominated the landscape and, by the time it had all stopped, nearly everything had vanished from the earth. But as time passed, things became settled and through the government people managed to get their lives back with jobs and family. But with nothing left but the devastated earth and shortages of food and water, drastic actions were needed. The government, being committed to being efficient with what they had, divided the people up into two categories known as ‘Yi pan’ and ‘Sa pan’ through the forementioned test. In passing the test, people were regarded as ‘smart’ and were able to enter the Sa pan group to study and research solutions to the crisis the world was in. They were fed, paid and relatively well treated. The ones who failed were, when lucky, placed in the Yi san category to work in factories or mines as helping-hands, but were mostly killed off to save supplies. Naturally, the people formed bloody competition modes to get into the Sa pan group. Nick’s parents reminded him of this at least once a week. To get him to know what he was studying for. To save himself.

The three of them gathered around the dinner table, oddly dubious and afraid to speak a word. His mother soon spoke about the exam in an anxious manner which caused her husband to cut it sharply.

“Forget about it. It’s all in the past. There is nothing left besides doing one’s best. You’ll do alright Nick... You have to.”

With his clenched fist, Mr. Jones’s face showed his determination and Nick gained his.

“I will.” Nick replied.

A strange tension flowed through the atmosphere.

They passed through the entrance of the Government Educational Building ten minutes before the appointed hour. They crossed the marble floors of the lobby and moved towards the elevator, then headed towards the 13th floor: the testing grounds.

The Jones family were put to rest along with some other families in the waiting room. Nick then noticed some kids his age crying. Their groans and tears that seemed limitless had gained the secret attention of all the people in that room. Nick, being caught at staring, quickly turned back and began to tremble. Until he felt his mother's warm hand that grabbed his shoulder.

"You can do it Nick," she reassured him.

Clenching his fist, he regained control over himself. A few minutes later, a black man in a neat suit came with a red pill and a cup of water. He had heard about the pill before, a GPS used to locate anyone who had taken the test and decided to deny the judgement by the government.

"Nick Jones?"

"Yes."

"Your classification number is 700-A27. Swallow this and follow me to room D-242."

He dropped the small pill on Nick's hand. Looking at the foreign object, his face showed puzzlement, distrust and a touch of fright while his mother composed her face into a misty smile and said,

"You've done so well until now Nick, let's make sure your effort pays off."

"I know, and you know, that you'll make out fine. Just do your best son." His father helped out.

Nick nodded and gulped the pill down his throat.

"Let's go," Nick said, gazing at the black man.

After sticking his classification number tag on his chest, alone, he was instructed by the man on how to head to room D-242.

The door was already half opened, and inside was a room as cold and dim as a storage freezer with a single desk, a machine with a clean, white design and two chairs facing each other. One was already taken.

"Sit down."

The examiner spoke softly, indicating a metal stool.

The chair was a bit warm despite being in this kind of room. Nick assumed that there was another person who had taken the test and left not long ago. He felt the urge to quickly join the person, whoever it was, and leave this room.

"Nick Jones, classification number 700-A27 right? I am your examiner. This machine will speak and you just have to answer by using this microphone on this headset. You are allowed to have as much time as you like. Need anything?"

"It's a bit cold here."

"It's to provide the best conditions to concentrate your head into focusing on the exam."

Nick silently nodded, put on the headset and started the examination.

“Good luck.”

Mr. Jones and his wife had said nothing since returning home. They didn't drink, eat, speak. They just played priests on the couch, praying. Just as Mr. Jones ended his prayer the telephone bell rang. The woman went for it but the man was quicker.

“Mr. Jones?”

The voice was stiff, brisk and official.

“Yes, speaking.”

“This is the Government Educational Facility. Your son, Nick Jones, classification number 700-A27 has completed the government examination, but has gone missing. And is assumed to have escaped. We will locate him as soon as possible from the GPS, but we will need your cooperation. If you know the whereabouts of Nick, alert us immediately.”

Right beside him, the woman, unable to deduct anything from her husband's face, kept staring at him in a curious anxious manner, waiting eagerly for him to speak, when suddenly the door bell rang.

Growing Up

by William Ye

There she is, sitting on the floor in a dark room, glaring at a little girl in the mirror. She saw the little girl with tears falling off her face, with swollen eyes, and the wound on her shoulder still bleeding. But she didn't really care about anything that much, she just had one question in her head: 'Why does daddy always hit me?'

She looked away from the mirror, staring outside the window. After the little girl's mother passed away, her father had changed into something she never knew before. Every time her father lost his temper, she was always the victim. How could a nine year old girl handle so much when she's so young.

'If only I was a cloud, I wouldn't have to go through all this, I could...' she thought, looking outside that small window. 'If only I could...'

This had already become her only way to escape from reality. The clouds in the sky, the birds on the tree, or even a butterfly with a few days of life, became her imaginary self.

Just when she was enjoying her time in her own world, she heard footsteps... It was like her heart stopped beating, fear came dripping out of her eyes. The footsteps becoming louder and louder, louder and louder... Finally they stopped. Then came the sound of the doorknob twisting.....

8 years passed.

She gently opened up the window, seeing her fathers back slowly disappearing. The innocence of her childhood had become the past. The beautiful young girl is now out looking for her life. Her father's orders have already made her sick. Now you cannot see fear in her eyes; replacing it is a firm hope. She looks down to all the scars on her arm and then says 'This is it'. She quickly packs her few clothes into a little bag and stares at her room for a few seconds, then slowly turns around and walked away.

"I'm free!"

She took a deep breath. Turned around and stared at the house she had lived in for seventeen years. "Seventeen years..." she said, having a feeling that she didn't want to leave. After all, she had lived here for seventeen years. Her tears almost came out of her eyes.

"No!" She shook her head. "I need to get out of here!"

She turned and walked away. The house slowly disappeared into the background.

30 years passed.

“I go anywhere I want, it’s none of your business!” said her son with a ‘boom’ after that.

She stood in front of the door and a sigh came from her mouth. She walked back to the living room, thinking how children now are so hard to teach. She wasn’t like this when she was young.

‘When she was young...’

Memories started coming back, of life before nine years old, of life after, and of when she left when she was seventeen.

Actually, when she had been adopted by a kind couple, she had decided to forget everything before, but memories just kept flashing into her mind. Her husband had died from cancer last year, so she had to raise her son by herself. She always felt lonely. Suddenly, she remembered when she had been adopted by the kind couple she told them she had run out of an orphanage. What would happen if her father knew?

Memories about her father became blurry as time passed. All she remembered was her father turning into someone else, always taking the anger out on her. But why? Why does she miss her father in some sort of a way, miss the old house she lived for seventeen years? Now she realized what her father was going through, losing his love, pressure from work. Her hatred for her father was extinguished in just a second, replaced by guilt. Why didn’t she look after her father, instead leaving him by himself? Was he still in this world? When she thought this, her tears dropped to the floor...

Cried enough, she fell asleep on the sofa. In her hands were her husband’s and son’s photographs.

The Big Exam

by Laurence McLellan Bastidas

It was coming closer and closer to Jack's thirteenth birthday, a day which once was of celebration, the becoming of a teenager, the best and worst years of one's life. The day walked hand in hand with the national exam. Jack's parents never spoke of the exam. No one spoke of the exam.

Jack, who was naturally curious, asked about the exam as he knew it was coming up on his birthday. As a family they never spoke or had spoken of the exam so Jack pressured his parents with questions about the exam;

"Dad, what kind of questions will this exam have, like will it have math in it or questions about science?"

His dad paused and looked blankly towards his mother, who turned away to do the dishes from the warm meal they had just eaten. He cautiously replied, pausing to make sure he said the right words.

"Jack, the exam is just a standardized test which the government requires you to take when you turn thirteen. Your mother took it, I took it... There is no need to worry about it don't stress about it."

Jack could see the contours of his father's face shift as he clearly lied about the last part of the statement, although he did try hard to conceal it with a stern poker face. Jack, you see, was no ordinary boy. He was a genius; he could read his parents like books and could answer any question anyone would ask in their right mind.

The exam was in three days (72 hours, 4320 minutes, 259200 seconds), Jack thought to himself as he wandered around his room, looking from the dull grey carpet to his tiny bed which he would trade with no one. For it was his bed. That night Jack snuck out of his room in the late night, like he did every other day to do something he wasn't meant to. He had to be careful, the current curfews in place meant severe punishments for those who dare broke them.

As he walked through the empty streets in the night, the light from the new moon glittered beautifully off the wet tarmac. The street lamps, which no longer functioned, just cast shadows on the empty roads; the dead city which once never slept. Jack sometimes felt like he would be better off on his own.

It was around 2 am as Jack, wandering along his usual route down the city's alleyways, trying his best not to get caught by the night patrol, thought about the exam. And what he had heard from his friends and the rumors of children disappearing for "further testing". He had asked his parents about his, but they and everybody else just kept insisting that the rumors were fake and that the test was really just a normal thing, 'not to be feared'. They said it was to help create a demographic view of the country in terms of intelligence.

Jack bought none of it; he wanted nothing to do with this country or its government, and he wanted nothing at all to do with the exam. He may be just turning thirteen but Jack knew he was no ordinary child, simply in the sense that he could see the lies the government was feeding the people, and he knew that there was something missing from this world. He just didn't know what it was. He needed to somehow flunk the exam and keep his ideas and views shut. And most importantly avoid this unknown, unspoken 'further testing'.

As Jack wandered around, thinking about what the possible further testing could be, he thought to himself 'How do I flunk a test in which you can't lie? How can I lie but tell the truth without them knowing...'

As he pondered these questions to himself he must have strayed off the road and into a main road. He quickly jumped back into the alleyway, Fortunately he felt like he had gone unnoticed. Once out of danger, his eyes looked away from the road and up to the sky. He lost himself in the beauty of the new moon and the stars above. Nights like these were the best; he could roam freely as he pleased and do just what he wanted. Though the important part was being cautious enough and making sure to go unnoticed. The sun was dawning upon the new day and Jack knew he had to be home soon if his disappearance was to go unnoticed, especially by his overbearing parents. So he quickly and quietly made his way home.

He was a good ten minutes from away from home, where he would lie sound asleep only to be woken later by his father. However, just as he was crossing the intersection to the road which his house was on, he heard a scuffling noise behind him.

The first thought which flashed through his mind was "*What if I didn't go unnoticed and they were just stalking me, waiting to take me away at the right time.*"

Jack then began to sprint for his life, like anyone would in his situation,. Unfortunately he was not the most athletic person and soon had to stop and take a breather. The chilly air was like needles in his throat, as warm sweat trickled down from his hair onto his cold cheeks and down his spine creating an uncomfortable feeling. Stuck in the moment he looked back and realized that no one was chasing him! It must have been a stray animal looking for trash or something. Well at least that was what he hoped. As he made his way into his house, out of breath and shaking from the sudden fright, he didn't have any idea what close encounter he had just experienced.

That same morning, as usual, Jack's father woke him up painfully early and just like every usual morning Jack wrestled himself out of bed, fighting the overwhelming power of when sleep commands the body. He spent his day like he usually did. Dad drove him to school, he spent his day in class listening to a "history" teacher go on and on about nonsensical things which they were told to say and teach. Although they seemed very unlikely and improbable there were no other truths in this country, no other way to prove those teachers wrong.

It was around 1 am when Jack decided it was time to sneak out again. He wanted to enjoy his day before the exam, which was to be the next day. He went about his usual path as always, but something felt off that night. It was unusually silent like there was the presence of someone or something over the night. He wandered the alleyways, aimlessly getting himself lost more than usual throughout the night. Jack was very careful to avoid the main intersections and possible patrol areas due to the insecurities created from previous nights events. He wandered and wandered past closed shopping centres, grocery stores, government buildings and, before he was completely lost in the silent night, he decided to make his way home. Through the winding streets in which he had wandered before, he knew the city like the back of his hand. Every nook and every cranny was something familiar to Jack.

Pretty soon Jack was almost home, when a chilling feeling went down his spine. He stopped, paused and looked around. This was the road in which he had had the close encounter with the patrols. A nervous feeling came upon him, driving him to speed up the return home and get to the safety of his warm covers. As he changed and went into his bed he fell right into a state of thought about tomorrow's exam. He wasn't sure about what he would do to pass the exam and avoid further examination. And it was undecided about taking the exam at all. He had never felt less decided, but sleep got the better of him, so he set his alarm for one hour before normal wake up time in order to properly decide. The act of doing this just made him realize how exhausted he was. He could no longer fight his heavy eyelids, but just as he was getting to sleep his window, which faced the sky, went dark. Something had blocked the moonlight, but only for a brief second or two. Jack was tired and drowsy thought nothing of it; maybe it was a tree swaying in the wind. Jack then fell into a deep uninterrupted sleep.

The day for the exam dawned upon all the children turning thirteen. The day which determined their futures. The class in which they would be put in terms of work and whether or not they would proceed for further "examination". Jack's dad burst into his room at exactly 7:15am in anticipation to get to the examiners early and get in and out as fast as possible. He looked around and Jack was gone.

He had disappeared without a trace.

Examination Day

by Se In Park

Young ladies (better to say girls) from noble families with splendid jewelry and accessories, sitting on chairs in a line with exactly the same masks as expressions. Court ladies busy as bees to do up the girls' hair, adorn their looks. Above their hair, the sky seems gold with red showy patterns.

I am a part of the line, waiting for a test that I've heard about since I was born, although I don't know what it's for. My parents didn't tell me a lot about this. Let... let me be frank, I know I'm trembling with a whirlwind of imprecise fear. I wear the same mask. Smile like a snob, behave like a queen consort. A old court lady walking in front of us glares us with her wrinkly, chunky eyes. Soon, a bell chimes and at the same time all the court ladies force me to stand up and walk towards a door, of course, in line.

Xu Zhen slowly opened her eyes against the beams of sun and shielded her eyes with her hands to the sound of birds chirping merrily. Water with red roses arrived to begin the day.

"Nanny! Bring the washbasin with rose water, I will wash my face!"

"Of course, miss"

"Nanny? I will go to exchange civilities with mother after this."

Walking on tiptoe, like a thief who wants to steal gold at midnight, smiling to the point of a facial tic, Xu Zhen looked like the rose that every human would pick to decorate their room.

"Mother? Can I come in?" Xu Zhen asked.

"Yes, of course."

She slowly bowed her head in greeting while her mother appraised Xu Zhen's beauty, as she did every morning.

"Extravagant," her mother muttered, but couldn't get through Xu Zhen's ears.

"I spend my time to be pretty, mother. That's all what girls should do at my age. Stop looking at me like a superintendent," she said in response to her mother's expression. Her mother was chrysanthemum; beauty in white. But her hair was un-decorated and so was her dress. Furthermore, what she was wearing brought up the image of death.

"I tell you again, mother, do not kill your flower, your beauty." Her mother's lip twitched and the look in her eyes was saying something.

"I heard that I'm one of the candidates for a test. Ha? What. A test for what?" Xu Zhen knitted her brows.

"For.. the emperor." Right after her mother said this, Xu Zhen's white flour skin, her chin, her lips turned to red.

“Nanny? Did you hear that? EMPEROR?” Her big eyes with double eyelids grew bigger. But, with her big eyes, she couldn’t see her mother’s pale, white face with all her fear within the beauty.

“W..Why don’t you go back to your room, Xu Zhen?”

Xu Zhen was seventeen years old. And she was well known among the people in her town for her beauty.

“Forget about it, everything’s going to be alright,” Xu Zhen’s father tried to set her mother at ease later.

Xu Zhen was at the dinner table with her parents.

“Father?”

“Speak.”

“Is it true that the test that I’m going to take part in is for the emperor?”

“Yes.”

“Is it like a test like in village schools?”

“Not really.”

“I knew it! It’s to be a royal concubine.”

“Yes. If you’ve finished eating, go back and read a book.”

Many emperors in history received hundreds of royal concubines through the test, mainly young ladies between seventeen and nineteen years of age. But only a few of the royal concubines remained in place to the end after the corrupted and bloody games played by the queen consorts. And the test that Xu Zhen was going to face was a game ruled by a particularly depraved queen consort.

Smile like a snob, behave like a queen consort. A old court lady walked in front of us, glared at us with her wrinkly, chunky eyes. Soon, a bell chimed and at the same time all the court ladies forced me to stand up and walk towards a door, of course, in line. The door opened, but I closed my eyes as soon as I saw the rooms with countless roses scattered across the floor. It was so beautiful; I mean to say, overly beautiful.

But, I didn’t know I would end up as one of those roses on the floor.

The Ideal Woman

by Emily McGlone

He was a blessed man, Mr. Aaron Sampson was. He lived the life of a fortunate, hard working American man. He had a house that was just the right size for a husband, wife, and, someday, children. His job had always been steady and he never had any thoughts of this ever changing. He had many friends who envied him for his wonderful life, but barely noticed. He truly felt like the most fortunate man in the world. But nothing made him happier and prouder than his prized jewel, his adoring wife, Gemma.

Mrs. Sampson had been his wife for four years and had never so much as said something out of line. She was soft spoken and pleasant, not to mention very on top of things at home. The house was never out of order and Mr. Sampson always came home from work to a clean home with the smell of a delicious meal being prepared in the kitchen. On the street in their small neighborhood, there wasn't a better cook than Mrs. Sampson. Upon entering the house, Mr. Sampson was greeted with a sweet kiss on the cheek and a 'how was your day' from a lovely and well dressed wife. She was truly a gem: her short black curls that reached her shoulders pinned back behind her ears neatly, her bright emerald green eyes shining, and her plump lips painted with cherry red lipstick that showed red as a freshly picked strawberry against her ivory skin. She always dressed in a stylish manner, but appropriate for a classy, respectable woman of society. Yes, Gemma Sampson was quite the catch and Mr. Sampson was fortunate to have her on his arm.

A cool, crisp April morning greeted Mr. Sampson as he opened the door to go to work. He hummed merrily as he grabbed his brief case and was about to head out the door.

"I'll see you this evening, darling," Mrs. Sampson cooed softly like a dove. Her husband looked adoringly into her eyes and kissed her quickly.

"Of course, can't wait till then."

He kissed her one last time before heading out the door to his car and off to work. As he pulled into the parking lot at the office building, he couldn't help but smile at the clock seeing that he had five minutes to spare before needing to go into the building.

"A wonderful day, indeed." He chuckled and headed into the building.

His day ran smoothly as usual without a hitch and by lunch he was contently eating his lunch at his desk. Gemma had packed his favorite: a roast beef sandwich with onions and cheese. As he enjoyed his lunch, he read further into the book he had brought with him.

"It makes me sick. His perfect job, house, not to mention his wife. He has everything and he knows it. And there he goes, Aaron Sampson, humming his cheery tune as he walks by."

Stopping mid-bite, Aaron's pleasant mood left him and he felt numb. He recognized the voice right away. It was his good friend who he had always seen as his right-hand man. It was obvious to him that this comment wasn't meant to be heard by him, so he didn't confront his friend about it. The rest of his work day went without any more rude surprises. But the words spoken of him did not leave him; they ran through his mind and taunted him.

Driving through the city, he noticed something he hadn't seen before. Grouped together at the corner of a run-down hardware shop was a group of children. They were circled around a small boy with a toy car in his hand. The other children kicked and hit the boy, as if trying to get him to give up the car. The shop owner soon was outside running the kids off with a broom as the street light Mr. Sampson was waiting at turned green. He slowly drove the rest of the way out of the city.

After this abnormal day, all he wanted to do was go home to Gemma. Darling Gemma. His wife, his gemstone, his everything, his ideal woman.

Pulling into the driveway at his home, he felt relief wash over him as he looked at his familiar lodgings. Stepping out of the car, he walked briskly, almost rushed, to the door, where he knew his wife would be waiting for him. He longed for her sweet kiss, soft voice, and caring eyes. Upon opening the door however, Gemma wasn't there. Puzzled, Mr. Sampson sniffed the air, but found no scent of dinner being cooked.

"Gemma? Darling? Are you here?"

He hurriedly rushed around the house, from the kitchen, to the living room, all the bathrooms, the laundry room. He began to feel frantic, though trying to convince himself that she was here somewhere, or maybe she had gone out with a friend. He shakily crept up the stairs to their bedroom, hoping, silently begging that she would be there at her makeup table, re-applying her red lipstick.

Swinging the door open, Mr. Sampson let out a sigh of relief. There, sitting at her makeup table, lipstick tube in hand, was Gemma.

"Gemma! Did you not hear me call? I was worried that you weren't home."

Setting down the gold tube, she cooed sweetly, "I was here. I'm sorry, I must have been distracted."

There was no 'How was your day?', and she didn't even get up to give him a kiss. This puzzled Aaron enough to make his mouth drop just slightly.

"Oh Gemma! It makes my day just to see you! The day has been just awful."

"Really? Well, that isn't good..."

Sweetness dripped from her red lips and tongue like syrup on flap jacks. Her hands were folded on her lap and her back was still turned to her desperate husband. A small giggle passed her lips, and in the mirror, Aaron saw something he had never seen before. A glint in her piercing eyes. No longer were her eyes filled with love and calm, but with a sick glee that froze her husband in place.

Finally, she stood, turned to face him, and, with her hands tucked neatly into the pockets of her apron, walked gracefully towards him. It must have been the light, thought Mr. Sampson, who opened his arms wide to embrace his dear wife.

Those arms soon flew to his left rib cage, from where a large carving knife stuck out. Slowly and unsurely, his face rose to meet shining green eyes, ivory skin, and strawberry-red lips smiling sweetly. As he fell to the floor, he looked at Gemma, dear Gemma, his precious gemstone, grabbing the ties of her apron and swiftly removing it. Coughing and sputtering, he began to suffocate on the blood that filled his lungs and stained red the carpet at the foot of the couple's bed, where they had lain together so many times. With one last smile, she leaned down and kissed his cheek and whispered to her gasping husband, "How was your day, Darling?"

Li'l Red Riding in the Hood

by Nishant Kulkarni

Once upon a time in Brooklyn lived a young, sweet, eight year old who was appreciated by every single soul on the planet, but most of all by her favorite grandma. The old loving grandma would buy her li'l child anything. Once she gave her a red hoodie made out of the finest cotton, which suited the girl so nicely that she wouldn't wear anything else. So in time, she came to be known simply as 'Red' or 'Li'l Red Riding Hood'.

Red had never had a real mom, she only had a stepmom. Her stepmom always said to her, "You go and do your work missy. You need to finish your chores. And don't you dare to go on the streets." Her stepmother was not her grandma. She was very mean to Red Riding in the Hood. However, this one time, her stepmom was allowing Red to go on the streets to go to her grandma's house.

She told Red, "Here's some cash, you are gonna take it to your grandma, she's very old so she really needs it. Now you better be careful on the streets. Do not run when you cross, don't go into any corners, and do not even think about getting into those small alleys, and when you reach grandma's house, remember to be polite."

"I got this momma, I won't mess this one up!". Li'l Red was very, very excited when she promised this to her mother.

Her grandma lived three blocks from her house, which was about five hundred meters. Just as Red was riding in the hood, she met a man. Red didn't know what a evil creature this man was, and was not afraid of this man at all.

"Yo girl, they call me W-Dawg round here. What's yo name girl?" Said W.

"My name is Red Riding Hood."

"Where you going in such heat?"

"To my Grandma's."

"What you got there in yo pocket?"

"Oh, that is some cash my momma gave me. My poor grandma has been sick these days. She needs to look after herself."

"And where's yo grandma's crib, Red Riding Hood?"

"My momma said she lives three blocks away from this traffic light you see on the right. Her house is right next to the local 7/11 and below an office called *NYCTC*. I think you should know where her house is," replied Red.

W thought to himself, "Such a lovely tender human! Imagine if I rob her. Then I can rob the old woman too. Maybe Imma kidnap the young one and then threaten the old woman. That is a real good plan."

W strolled around the streets for a short time beside Red Riding Hood. As W was walking he said, "See, Red, look how tasty them candies in the store

are. Here, why don't you look around? They must have the biggest lollipops in the world. You better move now 'fore them candies are finished."

Red looked carefully at the store. It did say it had the best lollies in the world. Red saw a giant slushy and she saw the cheapest candies you could ever buy in the whole city. As she was seeing this she thought, "What if I take one for my grandma. That would please her too. It is very cheap and the shopkeeper looks very friendly."

So she ran straight from the street to the candy shop to look for sweets. Whichever candy she chose, she always found a prettier candy which would just make her go deeper and deeper into her own thoughts.

Meanwhile W went straight to grandma's house. W imitated Red's voice.

W said, "It's Red Riding Hood grandma, can you please open the door?"

The old grandma replied, "Come in darling, it's already open."

As soon as W came in, he hit grandma hard with a wooden plank he had found on his way up. Red's Grandma was unconscious. Now W dressed himself in grandma's clothes and also put her cap on. He was waiting for Red Riding Hood to come to him.

However, Li'l Red Riding Hood was at the candy store picking candies for her grandma. Now she had gathered so many candies that she couldn't even carry them in her hands. She remembered grandma, and now she was again on her way to her house.

Now Li'l Red Riding Hood was at Grandma's front door. However, she saw that the door was open. Red went inside and said, "I'm home, Grandma."

She received no reply. As she went in Grandma's bedroom, she saw someone in grandma's clothes.

"Oh! Granny,' she said, 'What happened to your hearing aid?"

"Now I can hear you better, my child," was the reply.

"But, grandma, what happened to your walking stick!" she said.

"Now I can walk you around, my dear."

"But, grandma, your hands are so big now."

"Now I can hug you better, my girl."

"Granny, what's that the wooden plank in your hand?"

"Now I can WHOOP YO ASS!"

And now, very scarily, W started appearing from grandma's costume. Red started screaming and then she approached the window. As Red approached the window, W leaped right towards Red but Red ducked so W leaped through the window. It took Red two minutes to realize what had just happened; then she heard a faint voice.

"Red, it's all over now. Come, I will give you some of my freshly baked cookies." It was her grandma's voice that she was hearing.

The only thing that mattered to Red was Grandma, with whom she was enjoying freshly baked cookies.