This is *Overture Literary Magazine*, a new pursuit to expand writing, art, and imagination within the Hopkins Junior High School community. Join us as we share the creativity of students by publishing their work in a monthly magazine, distributed to Fremont City constituents.

In musical terms, an overture is an orchestral composition forming the prelude or introduction to a musical piece. Much like an overture in music, this creative writing program will serve as an introduction to the landscapes of creativity, self-expression, and imagination. *Overture* strives to inspire imagination, foster literary and artistic talent, and promote creative growth by teaching middle school students how to develop their own creative writing or art styles through mediums not offered at their own schools.

The 2015-2016 Fall theme, Futures and Fantasies, highlights on the different paths art and literature can take. It brings forward the two eclipsing genres in fiction literature, science fiction and fantasy, and examines their defining qualities as well as the inevitable overlap.

**FOUNDED SPRING 2011 BY**
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The View from the Stars

Seven Years Before

“Tell them I died,” Reevan said. His voice was hoarse, unbefitting the man of strength he had once been. His eyes were filled with fog, and his expression was distant, as if he was watching something that only he could see. Then Reevan stood, fingering the water just below the surface of the sea. It was cold, parting easily wherever Reevan’s hands turned. But in a sudden movement, Kelvin grasped Reevan’s arm and pushed it down, his grip firm and unrelenting. One of the many layers of mist cleared from Reevan’s eyes, and a frown settled on his face. His expression was lined with the creases of age that were ten years too early. “Kelvin-” he began.

Kelvin shook his head with a stubborn expression on his face. “They’ll want a body, my king,” he protested, searching for ways to convince Reevan to remain. His brain felt sluggish, and each idea it created was more desperate than the previous, “and there’s no way to fake one. No one looks like you in this kingdom. Not even close.” Kelvin glanced at Reevan’s dark red hair and silver-blue eyes, both of which seemed to be leached of color- old and fragile, with a shade of grey.

“Then tell them that I burned,” Reevan suggested with a careless shrug, “That ought to be simple.” He laughed, but there was little warmth in the sound. “I’ll be free of this nuisance soon.” Then he coughed slightly, his gills rippling at the sudden release of air. Kelvin was briefly alarmed.

“But who will believe me?” he questioned, but was not answered. After a period of silence, Reevan gave another ragged cough. Kelvin winced. “My king, you can’t-”

“Don’t tell me what I can or can’t do!”

“-possibly think of leaving the sea in this condition,” Kelvin insisted, “To try to take over the mind of a dragon… No one has ever done that yet.” A frown began to form on Reevan’s face. “I’m not doubting you,” Kelvin said worriedly, “But only dragon dreamers can leave the sea and survive.” He paused, and spoke more softly. “You know I’d go with you if I could.” Reevan gave a halfhearted shrug and glanced at the rippling ceiling of water, which was disrupting the light of the stars. The air made a more effective ceiling than stone or sand ever would.

“If only I were a dragon dreamer,” Kelvin muttered, frustrated now. “Then I could exit the sea and take over a dragon- or try to. And I wouldn’t need to be constantly watching the sky when I’m close to the surface of the ocean, as I wouldn’t die the moment I exited it.”

“Wishful thinking is useless,” Reevan muttered in a rough voice that Kelvin had never heard before. “You are not a dragon dreamer.” There was a long, tired pause. “But I am.” Then he sighed, and pushed himself up against the wooden wall. Reevan had spent many nights lying on the cold, hard ground, staring at the stars, just as he did now. Many nights, over many years, and he still had yet to glimpse a dragon. However, he felt slightly fortunate. Reevan worried that if he ever saw a dragon, he would be too daunted to overcome it.

“I should never have accepted the crown,” Reevan mused, “It was always meant for you.” He gave a short burst of laughter, the sound making Kelvin’s spine shiver. Reevan was not himself. Not tonight. Suddenly, Reevan tore the crown off his head, emitting an eerie, soundless roar. He threw it towards the sky, where it burst out of the water in a shower of droplets and light. Then the ripples on the water’s surface intensified as a gust of wind heralded the arrival of an immense patch of darkness.

A dragon, attracted by the shining gold. Kelvin froze. Although he had never seen a dragon before, he was sure it was one. No other creature had such an ability to instill fear, and, at the same time, inspire awe and wonder. Kelvin shuddered to think of what it would look like in daylight.
Though it was already nighttime, an even greater shadow fell upon the room. Kelvin was swung around in the water as the edge of the dragon’s wings skimmed the surface of the ocean. A cascade of water flew twinkling into the air, like a second layer of stars. Reevan was still by the sight, and a dreamlike quiet fell upon the two.

“This is the first time I have ever seen a dragon,” Reevan remarked after a long silence. His voice was full of awe, and felt oddly eager to venture into the sky. “Do you think it’s one of those signs the guards are always rambling about?” He turned away so Kelvin could not see his expression.

“Did you see how brightly the gold shone in the sky, even at night?” Reevan continued, his voice trailing off into silence. “We belong up there.” The night was unusually still, and Kelvin felt hesitant to speak, not understanding what Reevan was speaking of. He eventually stepped towards Reevan, but stopped once he spoke again. “What is it like to be a dragon?” Reevan asked, looking back at Kelvin. His eyes were clear now, which relieved Kelvin. But they were distant, as if he was within a trance. “All we know is the dark blue of the deep sea, and the color of the lighter blue waters closer to the sun. What other colors are there, hidden from our eyes?”

“We’ll find out when our days grow dark,” Kelvin replied carefully. And he meant it, too.

The world above held no interest for him.

“No I,” Reevan muttered, “I won’t wait that long.” He looked Kelvin right in the eye. “I’m a dragon dreamer. I need to do what I was born to do.”

“No human has ever returned to us once they leave,” Kelvin responded with a flash of sadness, “What if you’re never seen again?”

_What if I never see you again?_ He wanted to add, in a flash of selfishness. Kelvin felt desperate, knowing that in the end, Reevan’s longing for another, freer world would drag him away.

Reevan ignored Kelvin, whose desperation was growing. “I shouldn’t have worn that crown. The dragons- they’re the real enemy. So many lives have been taken by them. The kingdom will fall apart in a few years.” Kelvin glanced at him, startled. Reevan grasped Kelvin’s arm. “You need to face the truth,” he commanded.

“What have they ever done to us?” he asked, surprised. Reevan didn’t reply. Kelvin had always ignored the dragons’ existence, as if they were a legend. There was a barrier separating the two species, the line where the sea met the sky. An impenetrable wall, unless one was a dragon dreamer. Like Reevan was, and Kelvin could only wonder at how many more existed.

Kelvin had no interest in discovering what lay beyond the barrier. But he cared about Reevan, so he listened. He thought of Reevan’s words. _So many lives have been taken by them._ He shivered.

Reevan began to swim towards the surface, and Kelvin’s heart fell. _Stop, _he tried to say, quietly at first. _Stop. Stop! _But the words remained an echo in Kelvin’s mind. _It’s too soon. Too sudden._ Reevan’s image flickered repeatedly as he exited the water. Then, as he burst into a shower of light, the darkness was illuminated, and Kelvin thought he saw a hint of a rainbow.

Kelvin sank into a thoughtful silence. His eyes skimmed the sky of stars, which were distorted by the water. There were no dragons to be seen, and the stillness weighed upon him.

“Is the sky worth it, my king?” Kelvin whispered, wondering if Reevan had already died in the few moments he had already been gone. _He had not done anything. He had not pulled Reevan back down. He had watched, and he had let his friend go._

Kelvin hated himself already.
He grabbed on the poles, swinging for anything he could stop himself with. Tears streamed down his face. “I didn’t do anything,” he screamed. Guards slowly tugged him towards the door. A sudden jerk sent Ferrin flying. He landed at the feet of the Governor. He grabbed the Governor’s boots as he shrieked, “I’m innocent!” Ferrin looked up through his tears at the Governor. The Governor looked down at him, obvious disgust in his eyes. Slowly the Governor extracted his foot from Ferrin’s hold and slammed his intricate boot into Ferrin’s chest. Ferrin flew backward slowly heading toward the door. Guards slowly pulled Ferrin closer to the gate.

Ferrin ran up to me and Father. “Please stop them, Father,” he sobbed. Father stared forward impassively. I forced myself to do the same, as if my brother were nonexistent. Silence hung in the air between us. My brother turned my way, begging me instead. I poured all my willpower in to staring straight forward. My brother paled, sheer terror consuming him.

Father finally spoke, “You are no son of mine, Ferrin Albrich. Disappear.” Ferrin’s expression was one of pure shock. Father returned to his state of lack of emotion. Ferrin slowly dragged himself up, attempting to force himself away from the Gates. The Gates to the End, we called them because once someone went out, they never came back in. Slowly Ferrin was dragged backward and the Gates were opened. As Ferrin approached the door, he suddenly hurled himself against the chains. His voice rose in pitch, to the point where it could shatter glass. I couldn’t bear to see my brother in this state. I mouthed his name, and watched the doors slam shut as my brother disappeared from my life.
Silver Fur

It was quiet. The sun slowly dipped below the earth, the sky a bright orange that gradually faded into a cerulean sea. A whispering breeze brushed past clusters of trees, gently shaking the leaves piled heavily on branches. As a creature with tiny horns and two tails chittered loudly, whirling around trees and darting into puffs of dotted green, the forest sang a low, breathy song. There was a strange feeling surrounding the forest, animals strolling about as the sun set and night steadily fell. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Just another day, another night soon to come.

Something rushed past the horned animal, and ran towards a tree, jolting birds and sending them flying away in panic. The figure grabbed the branches of the tree and hauled themselves up, not pausing for a breath as they scrambled up higher and higher.

Suddenly, the boy’s head broke through the dome of leaves, and finally stopped. Evan breathed heavily as he shifted his legs so the thick branch lay between them. He stared at his surroundings as he realized that the ground was so far away. He let out a little superior laugh, and lay forward on the rough bark of the tree.

“I finally made it to the top without resting. That must have been my fastest time yet!” Evan grinned at the setting sun, and spread his arms wide like tree branches reaching for the sky. He let his hands drop limply and sighed softly.

He turned around and squinted at the village that seemed very far away. He could barely make out the little houses that lay right next to a trade route. Trade had always brought new and strange ideas and objects to his quiet society of farmers. He supposed that it was one of the reasons why his town was always with the newest creations, including magic ones.

Evan closed his eyes and remembered the day he had managed to slip away after running into the village boys. “Why would it matter to you?” Their leader had sneered, plucking the book from his grip. “If anyone were too become a mage, you wouldn’t be the one.” He had thrown the book into the pigs’ pen, and left, laughing, as Evan had climbed into the smelly muck. Only his desire to do magic had kept him stomping through pig feces.

That had always been his greatest wish. That after so many years of telling himself that having the power of magic at your fingertips was so much better than being brawny or muscled, or being able to wield a sword, that it would be true. That skinny Evan would be able to do so much more than the village boys who taunted him over his meager frame and skinny limbs. Maybe, perhaps, he could be strong. Powerful.

Evan slung the old, dirty satchel from his shoulder off. He opened it and took out a small book, about the size of his hand. He flipped to the first page and silently read, thinking the strange words that crowded the tiny pages in his head. He had never seen such writing or language, and had decided that they must be magic. Villagers said that books of magic were very rare, and hard to come by. Evan tilted his head and tried to make out the scribbles. It had been a week since he had found the journal tossed aside in the woods as the traders had rolled away in their wagons, and he still could not make sense of it. He went over the pages, stopping when he found something legible.

He had never seen this before. He thought that he had studied the book to death, but here, on the last page of the book, was a tiny inscription. Evan stared at the words. They were written neatly, and he wondered why he had never spotted it. He excitedly picked up the book, and opened
his mouth to speak – then he stopped. What if the incantation created an explosion or storm or something? Or a monster. He hesitated, not wanting to see the wrath of unfriendly magic. But… it was the first spell he could read, if it was one at all. He cleared his throat and pushed away his nervousness.

The words rolled over his tongue like sweet tree-sap balls that were sold by merchants. He chanted the seven words, and waited still with bated breath for something amazing to happen.

Evan exhaled as he sat frozen, and then relaxed his shoulders. He sighed, and closed the book. It had been too good to be true, anyway.

Evan stuffed the little journal in his bag. He slunk down the tree, and was just about to touch his feet to the ground when he heard a trembling boom. Slowly looking up, he stared above as an explosion of silver and sparkling blue light shot out in all directions. It was coming directly above his tree.

Evan shot back up the rough bark, his hands and legs desperately searching for ledges or footholds. He finally got to the top, and as he did, he stopped just as his hand reached for his sitting branch.

“Beetle’s bottom,” he whispered.

Suspended in wavering light was a creature with fur the color of a cloudless sky, which seemed to fade into lighter or slightly darker shades of blue. It had gently tapered ears and a long, glistening tail with…. Were those scales? Long, gleaming claws protruded from four paws elegantly curved with the rest of its graceful figure. But the most magnificent thing was its horns, great antlers that curved this way and then another that shone a golden-hazel, with glowing silver swirls and curved lines that went down its neck and around its back. Its eyes were closed, and for a moment Evan felt nothing but awe in the beauty of the animal.

Then the light faded away and the creature crumpled onto the tree. Evan flung his arms over a branch as the tree shuddered and groaned. Little fractures appeared on the branches that the beast lay on. The animal was still unconscious, its body limp. Evan carefully climbed his way over the creaking branches and hovered his hand over the creature.

“Okay,” he muttered. “You’re going to have to trust me, okay?” He tried to ignore the fact that it was as big as a horse and gripped the warm fur from the massive body. He slowly moved to a lower branch, tugging the creature with him as gently as he could. Evan slowly made his way down the tree, guiding the body beside him to a lower branch until they finally reached the bottom.

As the creature lay sprawled on the grassy floor, Evan fell backward, breathing shakily. “You’re really heavy, you know?” He panted, staring up at the starry sky. Night had fallen, and the forest was already darkening.

Something glowed silver and light blue in front of him, brightening until it was almost as blinding as the sun. Evan pushed himself up. The creature was staring at him, standing frozen like a statue. Then it placed one paw forward, and then another, moving towards Evan. It stopped an inch away from his feet. It gazed into his eyes, Evan trembling as he held his head high, then slowly bowed its head. A tiny spark from its horns flew in between them, and grew into a swirling ball of light condensed into a small orb. It flew to Evan, and without thinking he held his hand out. It lengthened in his hand, until it solidified into a sleek hazel staff with a small pearl of pale sapphire.

The creature looked back up to Evan. “My…. It had a strong, feminine voice that rang out like an echo. “My name… I am… Kadis.”
Evan slowly stood up, his eyes never leaving the creature’s face. “My name is Evan.” He stared at the staff in his hand, then back to Kadis. “Who…. How are you here? What are you?” he blurted out, feeling his face grow hot.

Kadis raked her claws into the earth. “…I do not know. My memory is muddled. All I know is that one day I would meet someone who would be my partner.” She tilted her head. “I think that you are the one.”

Evan let out a tiny laugh. “Me? Me? What would someone want to do with me? I can’t do much…. Much less… do magic…” He looked away, thinking about that. Kadis stared at him in mild confusion.

“But you summoned me. From the… blankness. Is that not magic?”

“I… summoned… you…. I summoned you?” Evan whispered. “I… I did, didn’t I? That spell….?” Evan closed his eyes for a second. Then they popped back open. “What do you mean I would be your partner? To do what with you?”

In the distance, there was a thundering explosion, not too far from the village. Kadis turned to the noise, then slowly back to Evan.

“I am not sure. But I believe that if we do not go now, we will not live to find out.” She turned to Evan with her side to him. “We shall ride.”

Evan glanced at the place of the noise, then back to Kadis, and her back where she wanted him to mount.

Evan climbed on as the heat from another explosion warmed his face, and Kadis leapt into the inky night.

To be continued…
Last One Standing

Part One

It has been over a year since the robots had dominated Earth during the World War V.

Every single human had been slaughtered and killed brutally before my eyes.

During the war, the first landmark that was destroyed was the Statue of Liberty. I can still visualize the flames that licked at her crown and body, her strong arm shrinking and collapsing into nothingness. The pieces didn’t burn were thrown into the New York Harbor and they sank helplessly into the murky water. I can also hear my mother crying uncontrollably, her tears soaking my shirt, and my younger brother, Zach, gripping my hand as tears pricked his eyes. The feelings of helplessness and defeat were thick in the air, people screaming and shoving one another, trying escape the nightmare that was destroying the monument that symbolized their freedom and hope, as their own futures were being demolished alongside it.

And the letter, the letter that was given to my mother near Christmas, handed to her by a freezing mailman at our front door. He had opened his mouth a bit, lips frostbitten and cracked, attempting to announce whom the letter was from, but closed it and shook his head. He left, his worn-out boots crunching beneath the thick snow as I shut the door, the hanger decorated with holly looking as miserable as the mailman himself.

The letter, sent from the army general whose name I cannot recall, announced “with broken hearts and sorrow”, that my father, who was in the army, had been “slaughtered by the opposing robots”. That was when my mother’s face scrunched up a bit, wrinkles creasing with anguish. She sighed shakily as she closed her eyes, teardrops slowly rolling down her cheeks and transforming into streams of agony. She had wiped her eyes so much that they became red and swollen, and her gaze seemed to be clouded with worry. Zach reacted first and wrapped his arms around her and whispered something I couldn’t hear, as my mother hesitantly nodded and bit her lip. I walked toward my mother and hugged her too, the three of us, silent, still, and grieving.

Those memories are faint now. The Statue of Liberty burned three years ago, we received the letter two years ago, and Zach and my mother, while sending Zach to school, were killed by the robots one year ago,

And World War V ended two months ago, eliminating the entire human race.

All except me.

I am the last human on Earth.

I am the last one standing.
My Maze Running Experience

I slowly open my heavy-lidded eyes. Exhaustion bears down on my beaten soul but as my surroundings come into view, I feel confusion and, slowly, fear. I am not in my bedroom under my comforters. Rather, I am on the stone floor of... somewhere. But where? My hysteria mounts.

The stone walls are covered in ivy, but instead of there being walls on all four sides, there is only two walls on either side of me. As I look forward, I notice a mossy sign. My heart beating fast, I tenderly stumble to it and gingerly brush the moss away. In blood red letters, I see the words “You have one hour, don’t touch the walls, and this is your only clue: This is a resemblance of what you have spent many hours doing in the past few weeks”

I shakily took a breath. What had I been doing these past few weeks? Nothing out of the ordinary. Just homework, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook… wait. On Facebook, I had been obsessively playing “Maze Runner”, a game where you had to try and escape a mossy, stone-walled maze in one hour.

Now completely alert, I look around me. The sign says I have one hour; the game was one hour long. I am surrounded by mossy stone walls; the game had mossy stone walls. I look around in paranoia and see the turns ahead and the twists behind me. And, suddenly, realization hit me in the face. I am in the game, “Maze Runner”. It becomes more obvious as I think it through. Last night, I had been playing the game till three in the morning when lightning abruptly struck. The power had gone out and the game had blinked away too. But oddly enough, before blanking out, the game had said something. What was it?! I am positive it would help me in this scenario but I couldn’t remember the words! I look down at my watch. Out of the 60 minutes I had, I have already wasted 15 of them thinking. I don’t see any belongings of mine around, just stone walls, ivy, and the occasional moss patch on the walls. I look up at the walls and think, I need to get a bird’s eye view of this. The stone wall has some nooks and crannies, but nothing too spectacular to climb on. However, in the game I always used my “bird’s eye view points” to help me get out of the maze. I figure that is my best shot. The wall is 8 feet high. I put my foot down on a minuscule edge and, by some miracle, manage to make it all the way to the top. I look ahead of me and see a warren of stone walls. Glancing down at my watch, I see that I only have 30 minutes left in this “game”. I know that I need to start moving forward at some point and I understand that I had to get down. I hope that my luck going down would be as good as my luck climbing up. But I had no such luck. After trying to put my foot down on the small edge, I slipped. I land in a weird position with my foot under me and, with the sharp pain in my ankle, I know there is something definitely wrong. I look down at my watch, fourteen minutes left! I stand up and my pain shoots up my leg. I whimper as I see dark spots appear. I try to limp forwards. That doesn’t hurt as much, but I really wish I could activate some of my “save me points” from the game. However, for the time being I limp forward past the sign. The effort left me panting. I check my watch: ten minutes left. It had taken me four whole minutes to limp three feet! I struggle to make progress.

After I had gone another thirty feet, my surroundings were the same. The only difference is that my foot is numb and swollen too. I collapse on the ground and looked at my watch despairingly: thirty seconds left. Game over, I think leaning back against the wall, although I realize too late. As time ran out, a figure looms over me. Out of the blue I finally remember what those five important words were in my game. I slap my forehead as I knew those words would be my downfall. The creature finally came into focus and chuckled in the silkiest voice I had ever heard, Well, Well, Well, what do we have here? Anf as i look my heart literally stops.
Bella always believed in magic. But the people of Avalon rejected her ideas as easily as they rejected her. After all, who wants to befriend a human with a spiky purple tail, and flimsy pink dragon wings? She'd been telling the council about her theories of magic being found, but they always told her to save her silly stories for the little creatures, and that they, the council, had stamped out magic for once and for all. When she showed them the signs of magic, they pretended it was a well thought out trick. But they couldn't hide from facts for much longer. Already, villagers had begun fleeing their homes in search of a safe refuge to hide. The council must face it. Morgana Le Fay had returned, along with her evil magic.

Bella hurried back to her home, on the verge of tears, after another failed meeting with the council. They told her to stop dreaming, and do something useful. But to her, this was useful.

Inside her bright yellow cottage, she ran to the wooden cabinet next to the grandfather clock, and wrenched the metal handle towards her. She pulled out a worn book, and flipped to the very back. Bella stared at the strange words etched onto the last page. She knew it was a magic spell, or incantation, but had never dared to try saying it. It was the only one she had ever heard of, or even seen in her life. Underneath the words were directions. Bella knew they lead to the crumbling oak tree in the forest. She stared at the words until they were a blur.

She thought back to the day she had found the book, tucked under a pile of leaves in front of her house. The book had seemed hastily hidden, and Bella was sure it hadn’t been there the night before. She pondered the possibility that it had been left for her. But who would do that? And why?

A sharp knock brought her back to her senses.

“Bella? Are you there?” Willa’s voice rang out. The only person in the whole town who understood her was Willa. She was Bella’s best friend.

“Yes, Willa, come in,” Bella took a deep breath. “I have something to show you.” Instead of tucking the book away, she made up her mind to show Willa the words.

Willa poked her head around the door, and then walked in, staying clear of Bella’s tail. “What?” she asked.

“I have something to show you,” Bella repeated. “I think it’s a magic spell.”

Willa sucked in her breath at the sight of the words. “Oh.” Despite Willa’s discomfort, Bella thought she saw a hint of a secretive smile play on Willa’s lips.

“I’m going to go to the tree tonight, and I will take this with me. Will you come?”

“Oh,” Willa repeated. “It really does look like magic.”

Bella looked imploringly at her.

“Okay, fine! I’ll come!”
“Good. Meet me here at 9:30. If you’re not here by 9:45, I’ll go alone,” Bella sighed, hoping Willa would come, as she’d be less afraid if Willa was there with her.

After Willa had left, Bella slowly walked to her bedroom, and closed her eyes to think. Willa had been smiling when Bella showed her the words. Why? Did she know something Bella didn’t? Deciding she had imagined the smile, she sat down and waited silently for Willa. Within moments, she had fallen asleep, and Willa was shaking her awake.

“Come on! Unless you don’t want to go anymore?” Willa said hopefully.

“Let’s go.” Bella replied.

They walked in silence on the cobblestone path to the old oak tree, and waited. Just as Bella was about to ask Willa if she wanted to leave, there was a sudden POP! A shimmering lady in a white dress appeared in front of them.

“Good. Willa, I thought you’d never gain her trust.”

Willa bowed.

“What is going on, Willa?” Bella cried. “Who’s she?”

“Oh, didn’t Willa tell you? She isn’t really your friend, she’s just been posing to bring you here. To me. Because I know you will be the one to overpower me, defeat me. That is why I must kill you first.” The lady laughed, a harsh, cold sound.

“Willa?” Bella trembled, and looked, pleading at her only friend. Willa did not meet her gaze. She turned to the lady. “Who—who are you? How do you know about the book?”

“Me? You’ve been trying to tell everyone about me. Open their eyes to the facts. But the council is so ignorant, they’ll never guess. They’ll be happy you’re gone, won’t even bother to find anything out. As for the book, who do you think sent it to you, and hid it under the leaves, so you’d find it?” The white lady swept her shiny brown hair aside. “Have you realized who I am, now? I am Morgana Le Fay.”

“Now I shall do away with you, for once, and for all!” Morgana Le Fay cackled.

“No!” Willa shrieked, and planted herself between Bella and Morgana Le Fay. “You said you wouldn’t kill her!”

“When have I ever not killed anyone after capturing them? Now move aside, child.” Morgana Le Fay sneered. “Or maybe, you will give your life to save her? Maybe you’ve become her friend, after all. Well, let’s see.”

Morgana Le Fay grinned cruelly, snapped her fingers, and Willa crumpled to the ground. “Run!” Willa managed to croak out, before Bella saw her pass out. Morgana Le Fay watched the scene with amusement. Bella locked eyes with her, screamed, and bolted into the forest, Morgana Le Fay’s spells narrowly missing her.

Bella ran on for a while, but soon paused at the base of a wide birch tree to catch her breath. She looked around wildly, for a sign of Morgana Le Fay, but didn’t see anything unusual. Her heart thumped loudly in the silence. It almost seemed Morgana Le Fay had let her escape. She must do something. But what? How could a girl lost in the forest alert the kingdom to Morgana Le Fay’s return? Bella shook her head. She smiled, even in the danger her kingdom was in now. She knew, despite the council’s efforts to stamp it out, the kingdom would soon return to magic.
Blue and Silver

Part 1 - Prophecy

The night was bleak. Cold, austere wind whistled through the branches of the poplars. High in the sky, the full moon shone brightly, washing the ground with a pearly glow. Under the fluorescent silver beams of the moon, all shadows were banished. The clouds were thin, left tattered by the spiritless willows with their tangled branches reaching out as if trying to grasp something it could never hope to reach.

In the distance, one lone wolf howled with a sadness that choked the air and sent a wave of shivers down Lumina Carson’s back. She knelt to the ground, intently studying the piece of silver moonstone that had caught her eye. As she turned it this way and that, parts of the stone caught the moonbeam and reflected sparks of light into the darkness. Was it one of them?

Gazing upon the sky, she was struck by the darkness of it, darker than smeared charcoal, darker than spilled ink, with small splashes of gold glittering here and there as if an artist had brazenly attempted to color it without aim.

It stole her breath away.

The wolf howled again.

Lumi shuddered, but not because of the cold. Pulling her flimsy gray cardigan tighter around her, she stood to leave. This was not one of the nights the prophecy had referred to, and the shard not one that it had described, even though it fit the description perfectly. She was sure of that now. The thought sent another wave of goosebumps down her arms. The prophecy.

It was embedded in her memory, after nights of falling over herself trying to decipher it, to understand the ancient words of the lords. She couldn’t forget it now, even if she tried with all her will. And even though it had been twelve years ago, now those fateful words came rushing back, along with her recollection of that first night, the night everything changed.

Lumina, whose nickname “Lumi” meant “snow” in Finnish, had been five years old when it happened. One night, in its darkest hours, her Grand-mère had taken her from their humble home in a small village abruptly, to a cottage in the middle of a plain with no end in sight. The cottage—which turned out to be the home of Analise, guardian of the great Book of Prophecy—had a low thatched roof and two simple green doors. It’s modest appearance hinted at no importance,
therefore allowing no one to suspect that a powerful document was being well contained behind the abode’s walls.

There, Lumi had met Analise and her son Adrian, two people who later helped her significantly in her quest.

They reached the end of the hall and turned to the left, into a room that expelled the darkness by only candlelight. The walls were covered by bookshelves of all shapes and sizes, to the point where only small patches of the plain, yellowed wallpaper underneath could be seen. A vast selection of books filled the shelves, varying from atlases and cookbooks to fairy tales and ancient translated scrolls.

The room resembled a library of sorts, with two circular tables on either side of the spacious room, both made of gleaming, polished mahogany. The tables themselves were spotless, with nothing but a stack of plain white paper in the middle of each. Four matching chairs with ornately embroidered seat cushions surrounded each table. In the exact middle of the room stood a small stand: a pedestal, with a rich red velvet cloth covering it. Placed on it was something similar to a display case: a glass box with elaborately carved golden corners. Lumi could immediately tell it protected something of great importance, something most people weren’t worthy enough to even look at.

Everyone in the room—Lumi, her Grand-mère, Adrian, and Analise—seemed to take a collective deep breath before setting foot into the room. Lumi stayed tense near the door, watching as Adrian walked towards the glass case. He turned back around and motioned once with his hand, telling her to come closer. She moved slowly, counting her steps. He smiled at her benignly, his eyes twinkling, beckoning her closer yet.

Soon she stood right in front of the mysterious box. Peering into it from the side—she wasn’t quite tall enough to see from above—she saw an ancient book. It looked like a magical spell book from the pictures of her favorite fairy tales, encased with faded leather and traced with flowing calligraphy in a time-worn language she had never seen before. The cover and spine were a deep amber color—like fine wine, with the same cinnamon tint and luminescent glow—with gold lettering and a leaf-and-vine pattern along the edges and corners.

Creamy white pages with silver edges seemed to spill out the sides gracefully and wrap around the book delicately, as if they were protecting it. As Lumi looked closer, streams of golden light shot out of the pages and intertwined with other threads of light, whirling and dancing around the book. Lumi held her breath, as if a single gust of air could make the magic disappear. She blinked. The book dropped back down to the pedestal. Lumi was surprised; she could not remember when had it started floating in midair.

Adrian placed his hands on the sides of the box and lifted the glass case slowly, setting it down on one of the large tables. Lowering his hands to the book even more cautiously, he lifted it out, laying it on the other table. Everyone crowded around to look.

Lumi gazed at it in wonder for a minute more, then turned eagerly to Adrian. “Is that the prah fessy?”

Adrian reached out to stroke the cover. “Yes, Lumina, this is the Book of Prophecy.”

Lumi blinked. Usually, people didn’t call her by her full name.

“It contains all the prophecies that have ever been made. And it’s got all the possibilities the future holds in it.” This he said with such an air of awe and respect that no one made a sound, just looked at the book—no, not
looked, regarded. They regarded it so profoundly, their eyes darting over it, as if trying to memorize every last detail before Adrian opened the book.

And then Analise spoke softly, as if not to disturb the power pulsing in the room. “Let us proceed to the prophecy. There’s not much time before it will be too late.”

“Was that corner always so tattered? And I thought the cover had some gold leaves on the edges, not just the corners,” Adrian asked suspiciously, ignoring Analise’s warning.

“No, it was just like that last time. Now, we should get on with the words,” Analise answered impatiently.

Adrian nodded distractedly. He wasn’t focused on Analise; he was staring at the book again, in amazement. Lumi poked him on the arm, and he jolted out of his trance. “Right,” he said. “The prophecy.”

Adrian set the book on the pedestal again, this time without the glass case on top. “The Lighté prophecy,” he enunciated, then blew on the cover gently. They turned of their own accord and landed on a page with elegant script and detailed drawings in shining blue and silver: of the moon, wolves, diamonds, and little curlicue designs along the border. Before anyone had time to read it, the words danced off the page gracefully and arranged themselves in the air, much to, Lumi’s delight, quivering ever so slightly as if they longed to escape for good from the pages of the book that bound them, so the whole world could read them.

Blue and silver shall reign forth
In the Lighté princess’s thirteenth year,
Beyond what powers can control
Shall bring magic to those tears.

On those blessed fifteen nights,
The girl shall find those fifteen shards,
When the moon doth shine bright
and the wolf doth howl.

The shards that hold the powers of the moon
That hold the spirit to the night.
Moonstone, diamond, crystal shard,
All that give her hope and courage.
She shall gather a group of five
Made of friendship and of trust.
Three will possess the words to Light
Two will keep the secret of Gold.

Together they will defeat the Malicénign,
End the suffering and the pain,
Bring back peace into the world,
Restore everything they have lost.

Everyone was silent.

Then Lumi broke it. “What does it mean?” She sounded more grown-up, mature, like she had more experience. She didn’t sound like a five-year-old girl anymore. Her voice resembled that of the Lighté princess she would grow up to be, and her glowing demeanor fulfilled the meaning of her full name, which meant “light” in Romanian and Latin—two languages so ancient hardly anybody knew how to speak them anymore.

Grand-mère released a shaky breath. “I don’t know. This is the most complex prophecy I’ve seen in my life.”

“How many have you seen?” Adrian asked.

“Hundreds, maybe. I don’t... I’m not sure. But I’ve certainly never seen anything like this in my life. The general message is clear: the Lighté princess will save the kingdom from destruction, but we don’t want the general message. We need the details. It’ll take months—five at least, is my guess—to decipher it, unless we have a Reader Of Prophecies here other than me.” Grand-mère closed her eyes and rubbed her temples. “I won’t be able to stay and Read for long. Maybe two weeks, then I’ll have to go do... something.” Lumi’s grandmother hesitated, not wanting to tell her granddaughter why she had to leave.

Lumi let out a wail, sounding like a little girl again, and ran to her grandmother. “Why do you have to leave so soon?” she whispered through her tears, “I thought you said you would stay with me for about five years?” She buried her face in her grandmother’s arm.

The old woman blinked back her own tears, refusing to allow herself to cry. “I’d wanted to reassure you that I would stay longer. I couldn’t have you dreading my departure at every moment, could I?” she whispered back.

“Yes, you could! At least I would’ve prepared myself,” Lumi sobbed.

“I’m sorry,” Grand-mère murmured quietly.
Shaking from the memory, Lumi took a breath and looked up at the moon. It seemed to stare back at her, pearly light shining in her face.

When she’d finally been privied to the fact that she was a real princess that night, she had been very excited, more than she’d ever been in her life. And at barely five years old, her reaction was understandable.

She knew she should go back cottage now. It was getting even darker, and she didn’t want that lonesome wolf to stumble upon her, but something was telling her to stay. She didn’t know what, but something kept her from walking back in the direction of safety.

But she couldn’t stay, not now, not when the wolf—and the hunter—was out there. Moving in the direction she came, Lumi trudged back to the cottage.

To be continued...
Sidetracked

Huyang hadn’t expected this. He was a highly trained operative, skilled in the arts of magic and espionage, and he wasn’t about to stand there and allow himself to be subjected to the indignity of--

“Admit it, boy. You’re lost.” The speaker cocked an eyebrow.

“I’m not a boy. And I’m not lost, either. I’m just taking a shortcut to the library, that’s all.”

She smirked. “Library’s that way,” she commented, jerking her thumb in the opposite direction.

“I… knew that.”

She snorted.

“I did!” he insisted.

“Of course you did. What’s your name, boy?”

He felt his chest puff with familiar pride. “Huyang the Magnificent of the Mages’ Guild, pupil of the esteemed sorcerer--”

She held up a hand to stop him. “I said name, boy, not lineage.”

“Actually,” he corrected, his tone automatically condescending, “that’s not technically lineage. It’s just a list of titles.”

For a few long seconds the girl stared at him. Huyang shifted nervously. Suddenly she laughed, and he unconsciously relaxed. “You,” she choked out between chuckles, “have got nerve.”

Confused and irritated at the same time, Huyang frowned. How dare this-- this peasant, this nobody-- how dare she laugh at him? “Who are you, anyway?”

“Oh,” she said airily, shrugging her shoulders, “I’m just a friendly girl looking to help a very lost little boy out.”

“You do realize that tells me absolutely nothing about you, right?”

She grinned at him. “And that is as it should be.”
She’s weird, he decided. I kind of like her. Even if she doesn’t show the Guild the respect it
deserves. “Well,” said Huyang, “are you going to tell me where the library is, or not? I have places to
be.”

She smiled, genuinely this time. “Come on, then. Follow me.”

* * *

Huyang lingered outside the room, wringing his hands. This ceremony would decide whom
he would be apprenticed to for the next four years. He wasn’t nervous, exactly, just...

Pull yourself together, Huyang. Breathe. You’ll be fine. He straightened his spine and strode
inside. “Hello,” he began, deciding to start the conversation. “I’m Huyang. I’ve, um, been assigned
to you for, um, the next four years, so... hi.” He winced at how unsure he sounded. Blast it, Huyang.
Now they’ll think you’re some wobbling coward.

“I know what your name is, Huyang the Magnificent. And I must say, you were much more
interesting the first time I met you.”

Her voice seemed awfully familiar; when had he heard it before? Oh. “You? The library
girl?” He gaped openly at her. “You’re my teacher?”

“Yes, me, the library girl,” she replied. “Name’s Jocelyn Archer. Level 7 mage. Former pupil
of Finlan Ayen. Your mentor for the next few years. Nice to officially meet you.”

“But... you can’t be more than seven years older than me. How are you a Level 7?” As an
afterthought, he added, “I’m eleven, by the way.”

“Practice, boy. Practice. What level are you?”

“...Two. Could you not call me ‘boy’?”

She laughed at that. “Come on, then, Huyang. Let’s go.”

He walked over to her, brimming with questions. The woman-- Jocelyn, he reminded
himself-- ruffled his hair, snickering at his discomfort. “Why are you so... informal?” he asked. “All
the other mages I’ve met have been all stern and twiglike.”

“Twiglike. I like that. ‘S because I’m younger, probably. Now, come along, small apprentice.”

“Where are we going?”

“The guild house, to find you some proper robes. I’ve got a question for you now. What
were you doing at the library?”
He grimaced. “Master Jax-- Jax Mason, have you met him?-- made us listen to a lecture about the dangers of wyvern hunting, of all things. I mean, wyvern hunting? How’s that going to help us with our apprenticeships?”

“Yes, I’ve met Jax. Crabby old thing, isn’t he? Who’s ‘us’?”

“Me and all my year-mates. We’re all getting apprenticed this year.”

“Oh. Well, then. One last question, and then we’re off.”

“What?”

“Huyang the Magnificent, really?”

He blushed. The next few years, he reflected, were going to be very interesting.
The Babysitter

“Why?”

“Because,” Valorie paused, for an unfathomable reason. “It’s freezing cold outside. Gracie, you might hurt yourself and break your neck while climbing that tree. And besides, your parents will break my neck if that ever happened.” Valorie looked up at the little girl, praying for her to stop attacking her with absurd questions.

“Then, there’s nothing to do!” Brian cried helplessly. “We still have hours and hours and more hours before Mommy and Daddy comes home.”

“How about . . .” Valorie pondered for a moment, wondering how she would entertain the children. She didn’t want to admit it, but Gracie and Brian were somewhat infuriating. It was only her first week and she already began to grow irritated. “A board game,” she finally exclaimed, not that she really wanted to play.

“Okay, but the only one we have is upstairs and it’s in Mommy and Daddy’s room.” Gracie pointed towards the narrow staircase.

Valorie hastily rose from her position of comfort and faltered up the stairs. Her legs felt numb and stiff after not moving them for so long. She stopped in front of the master bedroom and took a deep breath. She didn’t know why she felt unsure and a sense of foreboding. Mr. and Mrs. Lynn did not tell her whether it was appropriate to enter their chamber but never had they strictly informed her not to. She made up her mind and grasped the handle.

A musty, dank odor crept into her nose at once. The room was dead silent except for the sporadic creaks and moans of the hinges on the door. Valorie entered the dark room with caution. She noticed that the draws to the windows were firmly clasped and no light whatsoever filtered through. Forgetting the purpose of entering the room, she explored the furniture with keen observations but not touching anything. A grand bookcase stood at the corner of the room, undisturbed for a long time. Law 101 caught Valorie’s attention, and beside that particular book was a picture frame with no picture. She crept towards the frame and flipped it slightly to its side. She emitted a frightened gasp. after starring at the two men in the picture.

“What’s taking you so long? We’ve been waiting for hours!” Brian complained. “Mommy and Daddy, especially Daddy, don’t like it when people search through their things. And you didn’t even find the board game!”

Valorie stuttered of shock. “Uh, oh yeah, t-the board game.”
Mrs. Lynn sat down at the dinner table. She crossed her legs and smoothed down her blouse, raking her brunette hair with her fingers, before picking up her fork.

“So, did you guys do anything fun or exciting today?” She helped herself to a full spoonful of gravy.

“No,” Brian held a chicken drumstick in each hand and gobbled down the food as if he hadn’t been properly fed for days. “But Valorie went into your guys’ room and she was staring at the bookcase.”

“Huh? Was she?” Mrs. Lynn gradually slowed her chewing to a stop but quickly resumed. “Well, she must have found our collection of --” BANG! The slam of the front door could only mean one thing. A mid-aged man in the late thirties strode into the dining room. He smiled and pecked Mrs. Lynn on the cheeks, “Evening Steph, there’s lots of work today and I might even have to work overtime again tomorrow.”

Mr. Lynn took off his coat and hung it on the coat rack. He washed his hands in the kitchen, grabbing a plate and fork. He took his seat next to his wife, “How’s that new babysitter going?” He popped a beer bottle and took a sip.

“Well, the kids say she’s fine but she was looking at our bookcase upstairs, just this afternoon. Probably because she’s--” Mr. Lynn’s face turned pale, wide eyed. He coughed and began to breathe rapidly.

“Michael! What’s wrong?” Mrs. Lynn stood up, grabbing her husband’s shoulder while patting him on the back.

“N-No thing! Just, uh, choked. Continue.” Mr. Lynn drank five large gulps of beer and returned to the fridge to retrieve another bottle.

“There’s nothing more to it and Michael, please don’t over drink tonight.” Mrs. Lynn held the beer bottle firmly against the table. The two couples played a game of silent stare before Mrs. Lynn pursed her lips and reluctantly withdrew her hand.

Valorie knelt as she cleaned up the mess Brian made during breakfast. While she soaked the puddle of milk with a sponge and wiped off the stain, that disturbing picture she discovered a day earlier really perturbed her. She heard the doorbell ring and Gracie informed her that Mr. Lynn returned home unusually early. With that, Valorie had a premonition, which couldn’t be good.

When Mr. Lynn walked towards her, she glanced up at the man. He looked slightly different in that picture, perhaps younger and more lively than he was now. Michael saw Valorie for the first time, a young, slender woman of about 5’7. Her long blond hair hung down over her shoulders front and back. Brian and Gracie were entranced into a game of tag, running around wildly.
“Kids, why don’t you two go outside and-um, play.” Mr. Lynn suggested.

“Why? I’m freezing cold already and you want me to go outside?” Brian nagged. They both scurried out reluctantly when they saw their father’s piercing eyes.

“So, I take it that you have no idea who I am besides Gracie and Brian’s father, correct?” Mr. Lynn gave Valorie a quizzical look and waited for her reply.

Valorie fidgeted, she had an awful feeling that she had perhaps met this guy before in somewhere. But she couldn’t be certain so she merely just nodded.

Valorie continued on. “Mr. Lynn, what was the reason you came home so early? If I am not mistaken, Brian did mention something about working overtime today”

“That is nothing of your concern, Ms. Dellinger.” Valorie’s pendant caught his eye for it was one of a kind and it had a V imprinted on it.

Valorie cleared her throat and began to pace around, “I came across an old photograph on the bookcase in your bedroom while I was cleaning.” Mr. Lynn grew tense and pursed his lips. “If you don’t mind me asking, when was that picture taken?”

“Oh, that’s Alan. He uh, was my friend in highschool. Why do you ask?”

Ignoring his question, Valorie asked, “And where is Alan right now?”

“We haven’t been in contact ever since. One day he moved and mysteriously . . . disappeared.”

“I thought so.” Valorie murmured to herself.

“What’s that you say?”

“Nothing. So, um, when did he disappear? And do you happen to know why?”

“If you don’t mind me asking you a question. Why are you so interested in this man? Do you know him? And I believe my wife hired you to babysit and not go through our property!” Michael was close to bursting.

“I’m sorry. But it’s just that--

“You know the man don’t you?” Mr. Lynn was raged, he flared his nose. Without waiting for her answer, he dragged Valorie down to the cross-space underneath the house.

“Tell me how you know the guy!” He threatened as he pulled out a sharp blade. Valorie backed away to the wall, breathing hard and crying. She bit fingernails, her eyes wide open. Her eyelashes were drenched from her tears and quivered as she replied.

“H-He’s my brother. But one d-day he just disappeared. When I saw that picture with you and Alan, I thought you probably knew something.”

“Right you ar, I do know something.” He paused, “I know everything.” They stood for a second facing each other, and with one thrust, Valorie fell to the ground.

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He pushed himself off the bed and trudged slowly to the bookcase, a beer bottle in his left hand. Michael felt nauseous due to the overdrinking and in fear of anyone finding out about his secret. He knew what the babysitter was looking at, oh he knew it all too well. The babysitter his wife had hired was no one other than Valorie Dellinger.

The man reached out his trembling hands and flipped the picture frame to its backside. He touched the face of his old friend Alan Schole, the face of himself back when he was so young, and the necklace, imprinted with the letter V. It now hung there to remind himself of his heinous crimes. He lamented his action towards Valorie and Alan, for they had no fault. He couldn’t believe that he did it again. That he couldn’t control himself again.

A repulsive feeling began inside of him and he vomited. He was trembling of fear and sickness. The beer bottle blasted and he fell to the ground. He gave up. Finally, all the stress, anxiety, and depression was too much. He was in misery. His cheeks were stained with tears. Suddenly he fell into an involuntary sleep, his mind tangled. If this was a dream, the dreams he had were all too vivid.

*~*

“Daddy, why is the babysitter not coming anymore?” Brian asked.

“She has a family of her own too. So she decided to quit her job to take care of her kids,” Michael replied at ease.

“Well, looks like we need another babysitter then.” Mrs. Lynn chuckled. The family had been switching from babysitter to babysitter ever since Brian’s birth and none have lasted over a few months.

Just as the family was about to leave for the park, there was a knock on the door, three loud sharp taps. The couple looked at each other, puzzled.

Mrs. Lynn reapplied her lipsticks and smoothed out her hair before opening the door. A tall man stood at the threshold with a grave and stern face, resembling that of a wolverine.

“My name is Cory Dellinger, Valorie’s husband. She has not return home for several days and I believe she last mentioned that she was here,” he paused suddenly, “babysitting,” he uttered with much effort.

_He knows_, Michael thought. Mrs. Lynn turned to Michael panic-stricken and a sense of decisiveness fell upon her. Michael froze. His throat constricted. He could hear the blood pounding in his ears. Every muscle in his body screamed at him to flee, but he remained frozen.
“Launch in 5...4...3...2...1,” the white capsule shot into the air leaving a silhouette of smoke and gas. I stared up into the smoke-plastered sky.

“Wow! That was...wow?”

Sebastian sneered at my “excellent” word choice. He twirled his Adidas basketball on one finger, watching as the ball swirled continuously. Taylor, who never strayed far from Sebastian, stood by him laughing.

I inhaled the muggy and warm air as dozens of students from Hopkins Junior High flocked to the parking lot to admire the launch. Scientists had finally discovered a way to time travel and this was their very first test trial. In an hour they forecasted a rip in the sky or a swirl of darkness where the unmanned capsule would be sucked in.

School was off for the momentous day, but Hopkins was the ideal spot to watch the take-off, as Hopkins’s very own science teacher, Mrs. Arancia was the head of the experiment, and she had arranged for the launch to take place in the parking lot of the school.

“Hey! Wasn’t that cool!” Nikita exclaimed and I turned in surprise. She flicked her ponytail and pushed up her glasses.

“That was more than cool, that was….cool!” I exclaimed in awe.

“Oh yeah, my mom said she can take us all out for lunch. Than we can come back and watch the rip in the space time....”

“Yup! I’m starving! Let’s go!” Rafael intervened. He smelled of egg and pee because he never showered, and he wore the same clothes throughout the week. Hey dude, ever heard of hygiene?

“Umm... sorry Rafael.” Nikita added in quickly, “my mom only has five seats in the car and..” More like, we don’t want to throw up at the smell of you.

“Fine! I see how it is! Anyways, I heard if you spend too much time with idiots, your brain gets hurt! Oooh BURN!” He shouted those last words and now I realized how dusty his toothbrush must be. Nikita’s face was turning red and I was afraid for Rafael’s life so I chimed in.

“What restaurant? Please, no Wendy’s. I hate Wendy’s!” I begged her, my eyes like those of a forlorn puppy.

“Don’t worry. My mom said she could take us to Chipotle,” she said; fortunately some of the red began draining from her face. After Rafael heard that, he glared at me and stomped away.
“Finally, he's gone. God, he is such a jerk. Why are you even friends with him?

“He used to be kinda nice and Sebastian is good friends with him so yeah.”

“I guess,” Nikita said exasperatedly and glanced at her watch. “Oh, it's 5:08, we have to meet my mom at 5:10 near the stairs.” She grabbed my hand, and we ran through the crowd toward the main entrance to the school. We slowed to a jog when we entered the indoor hallway. A huge glass case displayed glittering trophies and honorary plaques. A shelf held pictures of past classes and sports teams. Suddenly, I slipped, my back smashing against the tile. My glasses had flown off and they lay next to me cracked at the edge.

“Oh my god. Are you okay? I'm sorry I was rushing. Here, let me help you…”, shuddered Nikita. Someone from outside had let out an ear-piercing scream, and Nikita stepped back, frightened. Before either of us could contemplate what was happening, the ground began to shake violently. The display cases crashed to the floor, crushing my foot. Then the impossible happened. The hallway flew up. I knew, because the floor had jerked upward and no longer could we see the courtyard at the end of the hallway. All that could be seen was endless blue sky.

“Here, let me help you!” She tried to wrench the case off my foot, but her hands were drenched in sweat. Then I made an executive decision. I wouldn't be able to get up in time, and if we didn't get out of the hallway now, the jump would kill us. I kicked her ankle and she fell to the floor. The hallway tilted and she slid out. As the ground tilted, the case flew off my foot. I quickly got up and limped toward the end of the hallway. However, it was too late, the ground was too far. Fortunately I saw Nikita in the arms of the principal. I couldn't make out her expression but I was glad she was fine. Then I looked up. If I hadn't had an empty stomach, I would have puked. A huge black vortex, the rip in the space time continuum, had formed and now I realized why I was in this situation. The scientists must have miscalculated the size of the vortex and now I was flying right toward it. As I considered my very few options, the floor tilted again, and I slipped toward a trophy case. The last thing I remembered was smashing my head against the wall and everything turning inky black.

I slowly opened my eyes. The pain in my head, ankle, foot and everywhere else had mostly disappeared. The ground beneath me was softly carpeted with rich velvet frills, and I slowly caressed the comfy ground. I inhaled a shaky, slow breath. My nose was bombarded with a perfume of jasmine and rose. My beating heart had calmed, and I began to look around. The walls were beautifully tiled with red and gold carvings of flowers and abstract designs. The marble roof was suspended by four towering columns. The room I was in was small and slightly cramped. I looked around. In the back corner of the room sat a sink with a silver tap engraved with floral designs. That was the first thing that startled me. The second was the toilet that stood a few feet away. It was shining white with a padded seat. I got up and peeked inside. WOW! No leftover toilet paper or waste. Next to the toilet was a pedestal holding a bowl of mints. A sign poked up from the pile, demanding, “ONLY TAKE ONE”. My mouth was filled with a bitter burning taste, so I grabbed one mint from the bowl, unwrapped it, and popped it into my mouth. I slowly walked to the door. I glanced at the lock. It was a glass screen and it asked for a fingerprint. I placed my thumb on the screen and it began to vibrate.

“Thank you, and goodbye,” a robotic female voice chimed as the door swung open. I stepped out. I was in a hallway with a smooth velvet carpet with gold embroidery. The walls had a brilliant baby blue wallpaper with famous quotes typed upon them like, “I have a dream,” from Martin Luther King, and “Let them eat cake,” from Mary Antoinette. The jasmine fragrance followed me as I stumbled down the hall, a dull pain still residing in my feet. My eyes widened when
I saw the words Bathroom engraved in the door with petite cursive lettering. This entire thing is a…
bathroom. I pushed open the door, only to be blinded by a bright sun. I stepped out. As my eyes
adjusted to the strong light I began to study the area I was in. It was a startlingly beautiful courtyard
that was the size of a football field. A golden fountain sat in the center, with two marble fish
spraying torrents of water. Surrounding the fountain were rings of flowers, each ring designated a
different species of flower. The innermost was daffodil, next was rose, third was orchids, and last
were jasmine. That’s where the smell was from. Around the courtyard were six different Victorian style
towers, complete with gargoyles and stone walls. They looked as if someone had cut a castle from a
fairytale and pasted it here. Stone paths twisted and turned around the courtyards, each leading to
one of the towers. Then, my heart almost stopped. A fluttering banner hung on the tower, and
upon it was a crest with a double hawk and the words, “Welcome to Hopkins Junior High. Home
of the Hawks”. I wanted to plop down and cry. Cry till my head rang and my eyes were dry. I was so
confused. This was impossible. This makeover, this change, was impossible. I racked my brain trying
to find an answer. Then the pieces began flying together. I remember my science teacher, Mrs.
Arancia telling us that if something went slightly wrong the time portal may become a portal to an
alternate dimension. We had laughed at the prospect but now it was clear. At the time she explained
that everything would be opposite in an alternate dimension and it would be thoroughly confusing if
you ended up in one.

CLING! CLONG! The chime of the bell chased my thoughts away and worry began to set
in. Who should I talk to? If everything is opposite, is first period the last period? Should I even try going to class?
My first question was answered for me. A boy with short black hair, wearing a collared plaid shirt
and jeans strode toward me. He smelled of cologne and spoke with great politeness.

“Hello Tavish. How are you? I was extremely worried when you did not show up to class
today. You know how both of us are so worried about studies.” As he said it, he engulfed me in a
hug. Then I had a realization.

“Rafael? Is that you?” I said as I began to chuckle. Why can’t we have this Rafael in our dimension?

“Oh, come now, Tavish. These practical jokes will not do. We must get to second period.”
He laced his arm with mine and dragged me toward class. He strode actually, he strode while I
tripped over my feet toward the furthest most tower. Its oaken door was ajar, and a spiraling
stairscase coiled around the inner wall of the tower. There were doors along the wall. I followed
Rafael as we hiked up the stairs until we reached a door two hundred feet above the ground. The
door was made of dark wood engraved with the number 32 in the same artsy print as the bathroom.
I reached for the knob but was pushed away by a girl with her hair bound in a ponytail.

Startled, but recognizing the girl. I piped, “Hey Monica. What’s up?”

“OH! Did I push you?” she said in a kind voice.

“Yeah, kind of.”

“Good. Never talk to me again, you human garbage”. It felt like someone had dumped a
bucket of freezing ice water on my head. I wanted to burst into tears. Monica was one of my best
friends, and though I knew this was an alternate dimension it still hurt.

She swung the door open and stalked in. I went in, and Rafael followed suit. I took a seat at
a desk next to Rafael who (I can’t believe I’m actually saying this) seemed like the only sane person
there. Sebastian was snoring on his desk, earbuds plugged into his ears. Monica was painting her
nails across the room and Nikita was flirting with a boy next to her. Then the teacher arrived and I
screamed.
“M-m-mrs. Medusa, I-I-I mean Mrs. Mackabee ?” It was as if someone had thrown me in a horror movie right at the climax. Mrs. Medusa had green scaly skin with warts under her eye, on her lips and above her cheek. Her hair was frizzy and tangled, resembling snakes, and her eyes were those of a reptile.

“OKAY classsssss. Pleasssse take out your notebookssssss.” she cackled, raking her nails down the chalkboard. Sebastian jolted up from his desk and Rafael clasped his hands around his ears.

I elbowed Rafael and whispered, “I don’t have a notebook.”

“What! You did not bring your suppliesssssss!” Ms. Medusa screamed. She grabbed my neck and threw me to the ground.

“You know what we do to little boyssss and girlssss who do not have their supplies,” she cackled, and grabbed a long yardstick. She instructed me to take off my shirt and turn around. I obeyed, violently shaking with fear. SMACK! She brought the ruler down hard on my back. SMACK! Again with an even harder blow.

I collapsed to floor, begging for it to stop. My back burned and I could see blood running down my back and pooling on the floor. Tepid tears flowed down my cheeks.

“Please! Make it stop! Please!” I was hacking and coughing, blood and tears now flowing together. I tried to get up but my legs were weak and I fell back down. CLING! CLONG! The bell echoed in my ears but I just wanted to curl up and disappear. Why? Why did it always have to happen to me? Rafael pulled me up trying to support me on his shoulder.

“Come on. Let’s go to third period shall we. We can clean up your wounds on the way,” he whispered, dragging me down the steps.

“NO! You didn’t help me! You just stood there! Y-y-you idiot!” I slapped him hard across the face and he whimpered.

“I-I-I’m sorry! I just- I mean it hurts. Everything hurts.” I whined. He still supported me and slowly guided me down the steps. And together we walked to third period. He renewed my energy and hope, but it was all drained after third and fourth period. Evil Teacher #2 reprimanded my lack of materials by forcing me to strip down to my underwear and run around the school. Evil Teacher #3 hung me from the ceiling until all the blood drained into my head and I fainted. I think my brain may be permanently damaged.

Fifth period I had it easy, or at least easier than the other periods. We had to run 16 cross countries continuously to gain a C-, and that was the highest grade you could get. But at least I hadn’t been physically tortured or whipped or completely embarrassed. But I couldn’t enjoy it. The weight of the fact that I would never see my friends, my real friends, crushed me. I began to stray from the track, deep in thought. Before I knew it, I was in a large clearing surrounded by tall pine trees. In the center was a small stone bench. A girl was hunched over, weeping, not even bothering to wipe the tears with the cuffs of her dress. Then I realized who she was.

In my astonishment I forgot all sense of secrecy and asked, “Monica? How could the queen of perfect be.. crying?”

Startled she looked up and wiped away her tears, “SHUT UP! Get away from me!” Then, she burst into another fit of tears.
“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be umm… mean. What happened?” I forgot Monica was an enemy. I continued trying to comfort her.

“None of your business! Just leave!” That is when I saw the paper clutched in her hand. It was sprinkled with tears but the huge lettering was still apparent. A big fat F on a test. Always a Debbie Downer of your day.

“It’s okay. I mean one F grade won’t kill you!”

Then she spilled, “To my parents, it’s everything. They want me to be perfect and push me so hard. They always tell me to be like my sister, who goes to Stanford and is becoming a doctor. To them there is black and white, A is good, anything else is rubbish. I can’t do it! I just can’t.” She stared at the red ink.

“And you know what, that is nonsense. You are the smartest girl I know! The Monica I know would never give up! You are smart in your own way, and if your parents are oblivious to that, then they should get to know you better. One test won’t decide your future. You were just having a bad day.”

“You-umm, really think so?” She sniffled.

“Yah! With all my heart and soul, I think so.” With that, I smothered her with a friendly bear hug.

“Thank you. And I’m sorry I was so wicked to you all these years. I promise to change.”

At that my head began to spin and a huge black rip appeared in the sky. Dark grey clouds whirlpooled around in a circle. The wind and air pushed at my body and I was thrown in the sky. My head smashed against the pine tree and everything turned inky black.

When I woke up I was lying on the ground of the courtyard. A crowd gathered around me, and at the front stood my ring of friends. Sebastian, Nikita, Monica, even Rafael. I sprung up. I was back! Back home! Tears sprung to my eyes.

“You’re back!” They all said in unison.

And I told them everything that happened, from the moment I landed in the other Hopkins to the time when I comforted Monica. I realized that when Monica promised to change for the better she had created a bridge between the two dimensions, which I crossed.

When I got back, I realized how lucky I was to have friends who supported me through everything. No matter how flawed a person someone was, I could always look past it to find the goodness within them. Friends are the beacon of light that brighten our world when all goes dark. So after everyone has finished reading this story, they should go thank their friends for what they have done. Everyone made me oblivious to the fact but friends have kept your life bright when it could’ve gone dark.

And don’t think I forgot the teachers. Though they may pile my life with homework and tests, it is all for the better. To help me and to teach me. And now I realize at least they don’t whip me, hang me by my toenails, make me jog 16 cross countries, or make me dash around the school naked.
ARTWORK

KAYLA CHEN; GRADE 7

THE UNFINISHED OWL
JODIE SUN; GRADE 8

MEDIEVAL MUSEUM OF THE FUTURE

Hey guys! Today we took a trip to planet #265277 and visited the Dragon Museum! It was...
Time Vortex
NICOLE LEE; GRADE 7