

6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

Short Story

1<sup>st</sup> Place

Felicity S.

The house was already there when I came, the people however, where not. The family barreled in arriving in a big rusty truck. There was a mom, who's face looked like it had smiled all its life. There was a dad, who was old but strong for his age. There were also three kids, the first two being twin boys around the age of 13. From the moment they walked into my sight I knew they were trouble. It was the way they whispered in hushed tones, like they were planning some diabolical scheme. Then there was the girl. She was 12 years old and I knew she was a bit different from her family. She was quiet, with brown hair and bright green eyes. She was gentle with her few possessions and she seemed determined. Before she went inside, she looked at me, the sickly garden in the corner of the yard and she said:

"Don't worry, I'll begin fixing you up as soon as its morning." And then the door to the house closed behind her.

I sat there all night and thought. It had been so long since anyone had put any work or care into my soil. It had been so long that I was overgrown with weeds and brambles. Nobody would want to look at a sad looking garden like me, they would want to look at a flourishing garden full of flowers and butterflies. This was not me, but now that this girl was here, maybe I had a chance.

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*Slice.* A big shovel sank into my gravel filled dirt, scooping out all of my rocks and putting them off to the side. The girl had kept her promise and had started the next day to bring me back to life. The rocks being heaved out of my soil felt like a huge wight being lifted off my shoulders, a weight that had lived there a long time. Bit by bit all of the rocks were cleared away. The girl looked at me as if she was not looking at the garden that I currently was, but at the

garden that I would soon become. Her work today did not make much of a difference in appearance, but I felt it, I felt the change.

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I stretched and yawned. It was a beautiful and glorious day. The air was fresh and I was in a much better state than I had been a month ago. A few things had happened over that month. I found out that the girls name was Jill, and Jill had come out to work on me almost every day for a whole month. Today she had laid out a checkered picnic blanket on the grass. She ripped open many different packages of seeds and poured them onto the blanket. All of the different piles of seeds had made the blanket look like it was infested with anthills.

Marigolds, sage, lavender, sunflowers, peonies, and zinnias. The seeds were planted into my dirt. A little here, a little there. Over time the flowers grew and I was beautiful again. This was the peace before the storm.

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The night was dark and a gentle wind rustled the leaves of the trees. The grass was dry because there had been no rain for a week and the sun had been unforgiving. Strangely enough, the night was cold. The shadows leaped to life, becoming monsters and beasts that wanted to eat you alive. The shadows where really just shadows, but tonight they looked hungry. Then I saw two dark spots creep out the door of the house. They tiptoed to the driveway holding some things in their hands. Then another dark spot came from down the street. These where not dark spots, they were people. They gathered in the middle of the yard and started to create something on the yellowish grass. They took what was in each of their hands and made a pile. Then I realized two things. One was that the twins were two out of the three people who were in this yard. The other thing I realized was that they were making a fire.

“Now we can finally show those ridiculously independent camper boys from down the street that we too can cook our own sausages,” one of the twins said. “When we bring them one of our sausages tomorrow, they will have no choice but to bow down to our amazing cooking. We obviously couldn’t do this in the day because the grown-ups would definitely stop us, but we can handle it. Right guys?”

“Right,” they all replied. One of the twins rubbed his hands together.

The match was lit and the fire was aglow. There was only time for a minute of celebration before it all went downward. A sudden gust of wind pushed through the yard. The fire swayed back and forth like a block tower that was about to fall over. Then the fire spilled over the edge of the wood and started devouring the parched grass. I watched the fire eat up the whole yard then make its way to the house. The silent roar of the flames caught the bottom of the house. The boys ran to get everyone out safely. The family tumbled over each other to try to get as far away as they could from the fire. They all made it out safely but me and the house had no protection. The fire grew so close that I could taste it. The pain was unbearable. By the time the fire truck came I was charred and smoked. I was melted and heated. I was dreams and work turned to dust.

All of the family’s possessions were burnt in the fire so they had no choice other than to leave. There was smoke everywhere and even though everything was doused with a lot of water, the air still remembered the fire.

Before the family drove away, Jill walked over to me. “I won’t give up on you,” she said. And then she got in the truck and they all drove away.

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Today was a new day. It was a year since the fire and not much had happened. A few brave foxes had made their homes in the remainders of the charred house, but that was it. Until one day I had an idea. What if I didn't need Jill? What if I could regrow myself? Yes, this could work. Some of the seeds that Jill had planted were still there. I pushed and twisted and hoped for the best.

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Birds where chirping in the trees and I had done it. It took many years but I had regrown myself. It wasn't beautiful and it wasn't perfect but it was something. My own kind of floral art. Then there came a rumbling from down the street. A bunch of cars and trucks were headed my way. They all had the same logo on the side. *Build Your Dream Home*. This place was getting built on? But what will happen to me?

A lady got out of one of the cars and started ordering everyone around.

"If this house is going to get built I need all hands on deck!" she yelled. "Just, nobody touch the garden, that's my job." she yelled again.

"You mean that pile of junk?" a man said.

"It won't be junk for long." She replied.

"Hey Jill, where do you want this tool box?" a different worker asked her.

"Put it over by the water bottles."

Did I hear correctly? The woman who was staring at me in the way Jill used to stare at me, was Jill?

"I told you I wouldn't give up on you." She said and then walked away to begin her work. Jill was back and I was filled with hope and joy. Tomorrow was a new day. Who knew what could happen?

6<sup>th</sup> — 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

Short Story

2<sup>nd</sup> Place

Emilia M.

Molly Finigan quickly slid into her usual seat at morning announcement. She had slept through her alarm clock that morning since she had been so tired from the midnight exercises that Mr. Dumpster for some reason thought took priority over a good night's sleep. Apparently that was just another thing that she would have to get used to if she wanted to pass her agent tests at the end of the year and finally become a full agent after 7 years of hard and rigorous training at the Lady Liberty Facility. When Miss Homeds had decreed that all 18-year-old agents-in-training couldn't use hot water anymore in showers she had thought her life was going to end but then when she'd turned 19, Mr. Dumpster, the Physical Education Agent, had announced that all 19-year-olds had to do a special midnight exercise twice a week and every single agent-in-training hated it.

"Where were you?" whispered Jolie, her best friend. "You're lucky they didn't take attendance yet or you'd be sunk." Suddenly each Lady Liberty pin on the shoulders of the agents-in-training began to buzz, signaling that it had registered.

"What'd I miss?" Molly whispered back, too tired to explain that she had slept through her alarm clock.

"Nothing except Mr. Homtilton trying to lead the anthem. I seriously think my ears are broken now," joked Zellie, Jolie's twin. Molly giggled at Zellie's joke. It was a known fact that the Headmaster of the facility couldn't sing a note and even he knew it. Suddenly the loud speakers that blasted the morning announcements every day were again turned on, which was quite a surprise. There were rarely extra announcements.

"Attention, agents-in-training," began Miss Fiddler, Mr. Homtilton's secretary. "Instead of the usual coding classes this morning there will be an assembly at 9:00 sharp in the meeting hall. All students are required to attend." Miss Fiddler's words were greeted by a general groan since Mrs. de Jouli had announced last week that they would be building and programming their own robots.

"Maybe Karl burned up Mr. Dumpster's desk again," giggled Jolie as she curled a lock of her black hair around her finger. "He's been going bonkers for weeks." About once a month Karl Hophenlourgen would decide that school was too quiet for his insane spirit and he would go and do

something rash like burn up Mr. Dumpster's desk or steal Miss Hotlou's Service Dog, Dex, and hide him in the laundry closet.

"Probably not," put in Caruna, Molly's cousin. "He switched the labels on all of the chemistry ingredients last week and Mrs. Narshkavick hasn't even found half of the ones he switched yet."

"How'd you find that out?" giggled Molly although she really wasn't surprised because Caruna always knew everything.

"Stephanie Bower told me. She was in the office getting a gadget from Mr. Homtilton that her mother sent her from Spain when Miss Fiddler told him. Karl has detention for four months now; maybe Joey Lochart pick-axed the jungle gym." Joey Lochart was super rich and puffed up so he was always doing stupid things that he thought he could get away with.

"I don't think so," chimed in Alexine, the class beauty. Molly was considered pretty with her long chestnut hair and ice blue eyes but Alexine had curly blond hair, deep teal eyes, and the perfect figure, not to mention she knew everything about everybody. "Joey locked Mr. Hariburton in the teacher's lounge for five hours while everyone else was on the school trip and he got suspended."

No sooner had she said this than all the agents-in-training began making their way to the meeting hall. Five minutes later Mr. Homtilton entered the hall and began to address the agents-in-training.

"Attention, everyone. Due to some unfortunate circumstances we are in urgent need of several agents and therefore all final year trainees will be taking their final exams today." The moment he said this he left the room, leaving many panicked final year trainees. Miss Fiddler ascended the podium once he left and directed all of the final trainees out the side door into the testing hall and allowed all other trainees to return to their classes. At 9:00 that night Molly staggered into her tiny room where she bunked with Jolie. Jolie was already sitting on her bed and she had already changed out of her grubby uniform.

"That was insane." commented Jolie as Molly dug around in her tiny dresser, looking for her pajamas. "I thought Miss Jenningtil was literally trying to kill us with all of the clap push-ups she made us do."



"Yeah." agreed Molly slipped off her filthy uniform, pulled on her pajamas, and fell on her bed." I thought that during my science exam Mr. Sennypacker would bore holes in my head since he was staring at me so much."

"Do you want to get chosen as an agent?" Jolie asked.

"Definitely." answered Molly. "It's been my dream since I was twelve. Do you want to be chosen?"

"Absolutely." responded Jolie as she climbed out of bed to turn out the lights. Almost the moment she turned out the light, Molly was asleep and Jolie was sleeping a minute later. The next day at morning announcements both Molly and Jolie stumbled in two minutes late and they barely missed being in trouble for being late. Almost the moment they stumbled into their seats every light in the building went out and the agents-in-training were plunged into darkness.

"Oh boy." muttered Molly as she fumbled in the darkness for her emergency pack. "This is gonna be interesting." She pulled a headlamp from her bag and switched it on. In the dim light she could see Jolie fumbling for her light and switching it on as well.

"What happened?" whispered Jolie to Molly in the darkness.

"I'm not sure." Molly whispered back. "Do you think we should check Mr. Homtilton's live school map?"

"Probably." Jolie replied. "But we need to get going then because it's in the bunker and you know how hard the bunker is to get to." Molly did. In her fifth year Molly had taken a test to get to the bunker and the doors had coded locks, the floor dropped out, and there was a laser maze. The two girls grabbed their emergency packs and raced for the hall. When they reached the hall they made a quick turn and bolted for the door that they could faintly see by the light of their headlamps. Suddenly their lights went out and Molly crashed into a mop bucket and muttered something about the janitor.

"You okay?" Jolie whispered through the darkness.

"Yeah," Molly replied. "Do you think the battery went out?"

"No," Jolie whispered, shaking her head. "I think somebody messed with our lamps. Thank goodness I keep a spare in my pocket." Jolie helped Molly up and by the light of Jolie's lamp they ran to the doorway and began to descend the stairs to the security bunker. When they reached the bottom Molly took a quick right and both girls ran until they reached a large door that contained the first problem, the fifty lock door. Both girls quickly began to work on the locks and within half an hour forty-five locks had been decoded and Molly was completing another.

"There," Molly said, stepping back. "That makes forty-six. Are you done with that yet?"

"Almost," Jolie whispered. "But I can't remember the last decoding symbol. Can you do it?" In response Molly bent over and decoded the lock. In five minutes the girls finished the locks and pushed open the door. On the other side was the drop chamber.

"Do you know which ones drop?" Jolie asked.

"No," Molly replied. "They change every day. Let's try the grapple rope?"

Molly pulled a rope with a hook out of her bag and threw it onto the beam. She quickly swung across the room with Jolie following her. They landed on the other side of the room and both girls ran through the hall to the final one, the laser maze. Both girls surveyed the maze, looked at each other and with a nod Molly ran, leapt, and began to backflip over beams and army crawl under lasers with Jolie close behind. After nearly fifteen minutes of this Molly and Jolie were both sore but they could faintly see the door that led to the bunker. They carefully wove their way through the end of the maze and dashed into the well lit bunker where to their surprise the entire faculty was sitting. They all lept to their feet when the girls entered and Mr. Homtilton walked over, took their hands, and exclaimed

"Congratulations, girls! You've done it."

"Done what?" Molly asked, confused. "What have we done?"

"You've completed the tests," Mr. Homtilton explained, "The blackout was set up as a test to see who would realize what happened, make their way to the bunker, and solve the problems. And you girls did it! So welcome, welcome to Lady Liberty." Molly looked over at Jolie and both girls grinned. They were in Lady Liberty.

6<sup>th</sup> — 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

Short Story

3<sup>rd</sup> Place

Macy V.

The Missing

I've always been able to count on the weather. You see the storm clouds before you see the rain. You see the lightning before you hear the thunder. There are always warnings. There are always signs. Unfortunately, life never works that way. I must have missed all the signs that my little sister would go missing. It was like I woke up one morning and she had vanished. Nothing to explain the tragedy. The police scoured the house and area for days. Not one clue. That was 4 years ago. Now, I'm 16 years old and left with only small memories of my sweet little sister Bailey. She wouldn't look like the adorable 7 year old she was when she disappeared. She would be a pretty 12 year old. I missed her then, I miss her now. I miss her smile with the front teeth missing. I miss her laugh. I miss her light blonde hair which would shimmer in the sunlight. I miss her voice. I miss how she could always make me feel better even on the cloudiest of days. I miss Bailey with all of my heart. The police came to the conclusion that Bailey must have run away. They said there was no way that she could've been kidnapped. They said that they would have known. I don't believe them. Bailey wouldn't have run away. She wouldn't do that to me. She couldn't.

"Mya! Are you coming or not?" My best friend Aaliyah is waiting outside of my front door.

"Oh yeah, sorry Aaliyah. I was zoning out." I snap back to reality. I grab my backpack and walk out the door. Aaliyah and I have been walking to school together since we were little kids. The walk to school goes fast and soon enough I'm in first period science class. I listen to Mrs. Soren as she lectures us about genetics and DNA and cells, but I'm not really paying attention. I have more important things to worry about. Thankfully, the teachers have meetings today so it is only a half day. We all get to leave after lunch! After all my morning classes I walk to lunch and sit at

my regular table to wait for Aaliyah. Aaliyah storms into the cafeteria out of breath. She runs towards me and ignores the teachers telling her to slow down.

“What’s going on Aaliyah? Are you ok?” I can tell something is very wrong. She is almost in tears. Aaliyah doesn’t cry. I haven’t seen her cry since Bailey went missing. Those two were close. Aaliyah would babysit Bailey whenever I was too busy.

“Mya! You... I... Know.. Who did it.” Aaliyah is so freaked out she can’t talk straight.

“Calm down, just tell me what’s happening.” I try to comfort her.

“I know who.... Who kidnapped... Bailey.” She is trembling as she tells me this.

“What!? Who? When? How?” I’m almost crying now too. Aaliyah pauses for a few seconds.

“I don’t have time to explain now, but it is an organization called the ZWP. Meet me at the shed in the woods at 2:35 am. It’s going to be okay Mya. We’re going to get your sister back.” Aaliyah is talking really fast. I am in such shock. After years of trying to find Bailey, could it really be this easy? I guess I’ll just have to find out. I walk home alone. Aaliyah had to stay back for some track and field practice. It takes all of my strength to not break down in tears. I go into my room and mentally prepare for the night that is to come.

#### LATER THAT NIGHT...

I see the alarm clock in my room hit 2:30 am. It’s time. I get out of bed and pull my strawberry blonde hair into a messy bun. I tiptoe out of my room and slide my shoes on. I hold my breath as I pull the back door open and step onto my porch. I exhale in relief. Sneaking out has gotten so much easier now that my sister’s gone. My mom has gone numb. She just doesn’t have the strength anymore. It’s not like there would be any reason for me to sneak out if my sister wasn’t gone in the first place. I walk through the woods behind my house led by only the

2-5-3

moonlight. I finally find the flimsy old shed and step inside to join Aaliyah. If you took one look at us you would think we had nothing in common. Aaliyah has beautiful dark brown skin, I have beautiful light peach skin, Aaliyah is very loud, I'm very quiet. However, we have one thing in common. Both of us are determined to save my little sister. We know who took her. And we will not give up until we save Bailey. I can promise you that.