

THE MALL AFTER HOURS

A Story Studio Anthology by Young Authors (aged 5-13)

Story Studio is a charity that **inspires**, **educates** and **empowers** youth to be great storytellers.

We create innovative, 'fun-first' workshops that develop narrative capacity in youth, and celebrate young writers by crafting beautiful publications from their words.

This anthology is composed of stories written by children and youth across Canada, between the ages of 5 and 13 as a result of our June 2024 creative writing contest.

We asked young authors to write a flash fiction story that takes place in a mall after hours. We looked for interesting stories with great characters and descriptive, imaginative settings.



THIS MONTH'S WINNERS

**Congratulations to Ilsabeth,
Roseanna, Talha and Declan!**

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Lock Up In The Mall

By Declan, age 7

One day, I was trapped in the Upper Canada Mall in Newmarket, Ontario at 10:00 p.m. The security guard did not see me when the mall was closed. The door was locked. The lights were turned off.

I felt homesick. I missed my family.

I walked into the bookstore. I read the comic book, Dog Man. Cat Kid came out from the book. He scratched the window. He wanted to get out, too!

I told him, "The mall is locked up! Let's go to eat some food."

Then we went to the food court and made some fried chickens. It smelt very good. We heard some footsteps.

We turned around and saw Bacon Hair from Roblox! He had oval eyes, brown hair, and a motorcycle shirt. He was hungry and tried to eat us. Cat Kid scratched his hair into bacon bites. We ate his hair. Bacon Hair was frightened and left.

We went to the food court again. We made some tacos. It smelt very good. We heard a sound, "Yum!"

Oh! It was Poopypants from Captain Underpants. He wanted to have one. We gave him one and we became friends!

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We all felt sleepy, and slept under the skylight. We saw two shooting stars. Then we made wishes.

"Let's share what wishes we made!" said Poopypants.

I said, "If we say them out, they will not come true."

We all smiled and went to sleep.

Suddenly, I heard a "poop" sound. I woke up and found myself in the toy store. I saw Captain Underpants. We played for two hours there. We became friends.

He met Cat Kid and Poopypants. Poopypants was surprised because he recognized Captain Underpants. They were both from the same book. Cat Kid did not.

So, Cat Kid introduced himself, "I am Cat Kid from Dog Man. Nice to meet you."

We found a box of jelly beans on the shelf. It was Jelly Belly Bean Boozled.

Poopypants said, "This is a great game. Jelly beans in the same colour could be in two different flavours, one would be tasty and one would be yucky. I want to go first!"

Poopypants spun the wheel. He got blue. It could be the berry blue flavour or toothpaste flavour. He picked one bean and put it into his mouth. He got the toothpaste flavour! Oh!

Cat Kid went second. He spun the wheel. He got yellow and white. It could be the buttered popcorn or rotten egg flavor. He picked one bean and put it into his mouth. He got the buttered popcorn flavour. Yum!

Captain Underpants went third. He spun the wheel. He got green. It could be the juicy pear or booger flavour. He picked one bean and put it into his mouth. He got booger flavour! Oh no!

Finally, it was my turn. I spun the wheel and it landed on white with sprinkles. It could be the birthday cake or dirty dish water flavours. I drew one. Oh no, it was the dirty dish water flavour!

We enjoyed the game a lot. We felt tired and went to sleep again.

A few hours later, we heard someone unlocking the door. It was the mall's opening time. My friends said goodbye to me, and went back inside the books. The security guard opened the door. I could go back home!

The end

The Overthought Problem

By Ilsabeth, age 10

At 7:39 p.m. on August 6, 2023, Ali was freaking out about Jack's birthday party. It was tomorrow and she still didn't have a single idea of what to get him.

Five hours earlier, Jack was getting super hyped up for his 13th birthday. He was the youngest kid in his grade seven, eight split class with some classmates being fourteen already. He was ready to be a teenager and start this new chapter of his life.

Jack had asked that people surprise him with what they get him for his space-themed birthday party this year. He was...

BRRRIIIIIIIIIIIIIINNNNGGG!!! The school bell rang out loud. School was over.

Now only a good night's sleep was in the way of Jack and his 13th birthday. As Jack walked home he started to get nervous.

'What if they laugh at me because I'm the youngest or make fun of me because of my new glasses or maybe they just won't show up or maybe or maybe... Calm down, Jack. Calm down, it's okay. It will all be fine,' he told himself. 'Take one step at a time.'

Back to the present.

'Come on, come on, think, just think. Ohhh maybe I could get him Pokémon cards. No. Those are for little kids. Maybe... ohh... uhhhh.... Maybe I could go to Thrifty Foods and see what they have? No. What about Walmart? No, it's too far away. Maybe the mall?? The mall, yes the mall. I've got to go right now.'

Ali said bye to her mom and her mom told her that the mall closes at 8:00 p.m. so she only had five minutes to get there. She didn't have any other choice so she went anyway.

She arrived and to her dismay she was five minutes late. The doors were closed and the lights were off. She checked all the doors, but they were locked. She kept checking the doors, but they were all locked.

Suddenly she remembered there was a parking lot underground with a door inside. She searched for a while and eventually she found it.

The door had a sign on it that read: *Employees Only Storage Room.*

She opened it anyway...

It was dark and dusty. Boxes upon boxes of everything from food to shoes and microwaves to hats. Everything anyone would need or want. It was like a dark, but bright dream that was weirdly disturbing.

She thou-

"Hey Jeff, do you ever wonder why we have to work at night?"

"Jeff, we've been over this, it's because there's no customers at night so we can do our job."

"I know, but don't you ever wonder why..."

"Why what?"

"Just why."

"Come on, we have to restock the shelves in Shoes For Days, aisle two."

"Fine, let's go."

Ali heard their footsteps fade away and she got up off the ground where she was hiding. It took her a minute to process what she just heard, but once she did she would be ready to sneak around.

4:01 a.m. August 6, 2023, a group of 17-year-old boys snuck into the mall. One after another they set up pranks/traps for the customers and employees. Two, three, four, eight. One in every store, two in some others. They set them up in corners and shelves. Roofs and on floors. In the parking lot and in the storage room.

When Ali finally understood what people were talking about, like Shoes For Days is a store not a saying or something silly like that. Ali started to hear footsteps in the distance and they were getting louder.

"Hey Jeff, do you ever wonder why we have to work at night?"

"Uuuuuuhhhhhh!!"

The two employees walked out the door Ali had come in through and she could hear keys clattering and suddenly they were in the key hole. Once she no longer could hear anything, she tried to open the door and just as she suspected, it was locked.

Ali, with no other options, decided to start to look around for an idea for what to get Jack. She searched for over an hour because the storage room was humongous but she could not think under the pressure of being trapped, so she decided to focus on getting out.

She thought it would be best to look in boxes to see if any employees forgot their keys in them. The first box she looked in had headphones and charging cords, and the second weirdly had rubber duckies.

When Ali opened the third one, she saw keys.

'That was so fast,' Ali thought to herself. But when she tried to grab them, hundreds of toy keys fell onto her head. *'What was that? Is there security? That can't be what if they need to go into this box to grab keys. Weird...'*

Ali decided, with nothing else to do in the storage room, to go into the actual mall and try to find a way out. Once she navigated through the storage room, she found the hallway and in the hallway she saw a furniture store, a bookstore, a gaming store, and a sign that read food court and pointed down a hall.

She had so many options, but the bookstore was giving her a weird vibe so she decided to go in there first. When Ali got into the bookstore, everything seemed normal but as soon as she got to the bookshelves, everything felt off.

So she started to investigate some of the books on the shelf. One of the books she looked at was all about turtles. The second was all about crayons and how they make them. The third book she picked up had no title, so she opened it and, all of a sudden, a balloon starts to inflate and once it seems like it can't fit any more air in it...
POP!!!

'Ahhhh.' It scared her so much that she ran into the hallway and all of a sudden marbles fell from a bag on the roof. As the marbles fell, Ali looked back and saw that she had triggered a trip wire. The marbles started to roll around and she slipped and slid on her bottom down the hall and into the food court.

Smelling food reminded her that she hadn't eaten dinner and she was very hungry. Ali decided to go to A&W and get some cold fries that she warmed up in a microwave in the back of the stall.

Ali thought it was best if she looked for keys in the other stalls and maybe have a small... okay, a couple of small snacks. Ali had been looking in all of the stalls for

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over an hour. She didn't find any keys - well, she found keys to the bathroom, but no important keys - so she decided to look under and on top of all the tables.

TWO HOURS LATER..

Ali was so bored and tired and lonely that she went over to the front doors and said, "Please, oh please open, please God of the mall, save me."

After this, Ali tried to open the doors and they opened.

'What. What? Just what?'

Ali looked around and saw a sign that read: On the inside, the doors are always unlocked and on the outside, doors are closed from 8:00PM-7:00AM.

"Well, I'm out of here. Bye mall. Ohh, I must be going crazy. I'm talking to the mall," Ali whispered under her breath.

When Ali got home, she went straight to bed and fell asleep in under a minute.

When she woke up, she was so rested and excited for Jack's birthday party at 12:30 p.m. that she almost forgot she hadn't gotten him a present yet.

'OMG OMG what do I do?'

"Ohh mom, can you order something online and we'll pick it up?"

"Yeah sure, honey. What do you want to get him?"

"I don't know, maybe some Pokémon cards and a toonie."

"Okay, I'll order the cards. You go get a toonie."

"Okay. Thank you, Mom."

"Well, thank you for remembering that."

"You're welcome, Mom."

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"Ohh, and why were you at the mall so late last night?"

"Uhh, well, it's kind of a long story. Okay..."

"Tell me everything."

"Mooom, we don't have any time."

The end

The Haunted Mall

By Roseanna, age 10

Elena Greene was a normal kid. Her mom worked at an arcade in the mall, running the concession stand. Every day after school, she would go to the arcade and help her mom. At around six, she would go across the hall to get dinner.

One day, she got there after school and her mom wasn't there. She thought she might have gone to the bathroom or on a break, so she decided to wait. She sat down in the back room and started her homework. Fifteen minutes later, her mom still wasn't back. She decided to check the bathroom. She wasn't there. She called her. no answer. She checked all the other stores in their wing of the mall. She couldn't find her anywhere. The mall was about to close, and it was getting dark.

If she waited any longer, she was afraid she would get locked in, so she went to the security desk. But no one was there. She looked around. The stores all had closed signs on their doors. Almost immediately, she heard music.

It was coming from a restaurant. She decided to look. But when she got to the restaurant, the music immediately stopped. Suddenly, without any sounds.

But then she heard a strange, rattling noise in the back cupboard. The pop cans were moving! Not much, just enough to knock against each other. She decided to ignore it, and waited for the night guard.

All night, there were strange noises. Like running water even when there was no tap on. Or footsteps, but most strange was that the night guard never came. But at around midnight, she saw a ghostly figure of a person.

In the morning, her mom seemed to appear out of nowhere. So Elena told her about the noises, and the figure. But her mom said it must have been a dream. But even after that, Elena told everyone she could about that night. Everyone tried to explain it.

"It was the night guard's day off."

"There was a broken CD player in the restaurant."

People even started going to the mall's owner.

She said, "Fine. You can all come right here after the mall closes, if you'll shut up after that!"

So, at 8:50, people started coming into the restaurant. They sat with bated breath, waiting for the stroke of nine. And, when the doors closed and the signs went up, no one could explain the rattling coming from the cupboard.

The end

Mannequin

By Talha, age 12

A single drop of sweat trickled down his face. He didn't mean to do it. Not really. He was with his friends, and it was impulsive. Just a candy bag, he thought.

First was the vacuum. It invaded his dreams, sucking them away, only piloted by a glove.

"Come," it had said. "You cannot escape."

Roc wasn't like his uncle. His nice, pure uncle who had turned out to be not that pure at all. That crook ruined dozens of lives, none of his wealth his own. He was a thief.

"If you aren't a thief, then come here and prove it."

And that was why he'd come to the mall in the middle of the night. He tried going back to sleep, but every time he closed his eyes the glove appeared.

"Thief," it called him. "Robber."

Roc heard skittering noises behind him. He turned around. And he jumped back.

Snakes with faces of fans circled around him. The fans emitted a cold wind that reached into his bones, leaving an icy chill.

"HEY! THIEF! Came back for more?"

Roc turned around, startled at the sudden flashlights trained on him. Mall cops surrounded him in every direction, except something was wrong.

They all had his uncle's face, twisted into a vicious grin. He began breaking into a sprint, escaping the voices. They were just figments of his imagination.

A fist collided into his face, and he fell to the floor. It was the glove.

All of a sudden, his classmates and teachers appeared.

"Who threw the...? Must have been the thief kid... Crime is in his blood, it was probably him... he must have done it... Roc did it..."

Roc shouted, piercing through the voices. He shoved the shadows away, trying to breathe.

The glove closed around his throat, choking him.

"Looks like the thief kid's having anger issues again..."

He tried running, escaping the glove. Shadows from his past surrounded him, all saying the same thing. Their faces morphed, and turned into hellish grins with warped faces.

There were monsters everywhere. They closed in on him, making him feel claustrophobic. He knew they were fake, but it felt like they were tearing his mind apart.

Dozens of hands grabbed his body, moulding him into the villain that they imagined. His face contorted with pain, every negative thought in his mind ripping free and taking him over. His body stiffened, and he couldn't move. His skin was glossy white, almost perfectly the shade of mannequins.

He closed his eyes, and resigned himself to his fate. There was nothing left for him in this world. He gave up, and blended into the line of mannequins next to him.

He was wrong. Every moment he had, he thought about how crying was better than a constant stoic smile. The years went by with his paint peeling, with every spare moment spent pondering.

One day he had seen another kid come after hours, running and screaming. And so, another mannequin had arrived.

The end

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