

Mysterious Cave Adventures

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 November 2024 creative writing contest.

We asked young authors to write about a character on a mysterious quest to retrieve a magic stone. We looked for forward-thinking tales that captivated readers with dynamic plots, compelling characters, and immersive settings.



THIS MONTH'S WINNERS

- **Ages 5-9 1st Place:** Sunny and the Healing Stone by Seulah (8)
- **Ages 5-9 2nd Place:** Mystery Cave by Lincoln (5)
- **Ages 10-13 1st Place:** The Power of Love by Adriana (11)
- **Ages 10-13 2nd Place:** Are you Ready to Rock?! By Amelia (13)
- **Special mention:** BlingBlingCave by Abby (13)

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BlingBlingCave

By Abby, age 13

You.

As the sun shines on me, I wake to see nature around me and I feel calm (Nope, never correct). If you ever want to see me, I am always there, even during winter break and summer. Don't worry, you don't need an appointment! You can visit me if you can find me, I live deep in the woods. I was made by the world around me and mostly made of fine, fine rock.

I am neither a hill, cave, nor a small volcano, but I still try to learn them; to be patient and wise is my specialty. Plants use me as a stable place to lay their roots; wildflowers wave and sway in the wind and flourish with others. They often say hi and I appreciate them and I try to say it back.

Animals are more complicated, as they try to survive with others and sometimes take hospitality near me. I especially connect with the raccoons who all hide their riches, I love anything with a shimmer, a bling. Sometimes I think of nature as the grass sways, the auburn leaves fall, and when nature sleeps, I rest again with it and dream about the gems and the sparkles.

Humans are different; they only try to come to me because of my precious stones, they are like magic to me. They are the sparkles of my life. These stones are like magic and I protect them. I will not let them take my prized amethyst, nor will I let them think once about it. No, no, no. Most of them don't care about me, but you do.

STORY STUDIO ANTHOLOGIES

You are reading, and you care, and if you ever need me, you know I'm there, so if next time your friends ask about me, just call me the

Blingblingcave.

The End.

The Power of Love

By Adriana, age 11

As my webbed hind paw pushed and paddled upstream, I could feel my body struggling to keep going. I felt as if the stream was fighting against me. I could feel my heart pounding like a hammer. I could hear the dreaded sound of running water, a sure sign that there was a leak in my dam. That was my biggest fear. I wondered if our beaver's den would stay up. The river seemed furious.

There were times like this when I was afraid, and then I would think about Gabbo. I wish I knew what had happened to my little brother, Gabbo who had disappeared two years ago. As a warm salty wet tear dripped over my whiskers I wiped it away. I had always felt somehow that my younger brother was still alive. My thoughts crashed against each other like a waterfall crashing upon the rocks. I heard a noise and spun around as quickly as I could, my heart hammering. It was the raven. He was watching me trying to collect logs and twigs. He gave me a kind and assuring look.

Before I could talk to the raven I heard the soft and gentle voice of my mother calling, "Gusto, Gusto, it's time for dinner!"

I shuffled and scurried with my logs and twigs to the den. As I rounded the corner I saw that my den was still standing. I was relieved; my heart was still pounding from struggling against the river.

The next day as I was collecting logs, Raven spoke to me for the first time. "I am so sorry," he said. I stopped in my tracks. He said it again. "I am sorry. The river is angry and knocking down your dam," said Raven.

"How can I help the river?" I questioned.

"There is a magical cave in the river. I can lead you to it, but I am forbidden to go inside."

"Why?"

"It is a mystery I can't tell."

"Okay, so where is this cave?"

"Follow me."

Raven flew above the river and I swam behind him. Soon we were far upstream. As I followed him, the night sky was growing dark.

Suddenly the Raven stopped and said, "This is the spot. Dive down deep and you will find a door. Push through the door into the cave to find the stone."

I dove into the deep and dark water. Down I swam further and further. It was deeper and blacker than I thought was possible. I couldn't see in front of me and suddenly **bam**, my head hit something hard. I pushed with all my might; I felt something scraping against my fur and then I saw a twinkle of light and I had broken through a door.

As I broke into the cave, I took a breath of air. This underwater cave wasn't full of water. What was going on? My heart dropped to my feet, and my heart pounded in fear. I saw a glimmer in the distance and I started walking towards it.

All of a sudden, I heard my biggest fear calling me, the sound of running water. I realised that the cave was under a waterfall! I thought about turning back. Then I remembered my family struggling against the river and I knew I was the only one who would dare to get the stone and make the river peaceful again so I continued forward. It seemed to get brighter the closer I got to the light. Suddenly I was there. I

looked down. There was the stone shining with brilliant colours, like the glimmering of a rainbow. As I grasped the stone in my paw I felt a whirl of peace wash through me. I turned and rushed back to the mouth of the cave and pushed through the hole I had made in the door. Then I swam up to the surface like a flash.

The sun was just starting to rise to her spot in the sky. Raven was waiting expectantly on his favourite branch. I handed him the stone and to my surprise he gently licked the stone with his tiny tongue. He disappeared, and a tornado of dust appeared. When the dust settled, in place of the raven was a beaver.

"Hello brother," said Gabbo in a soft voice.

"How? Why?" I stuttered with my mouth gaping open.

He said that he had found the river's magical stone on the river bank and instead of returning it to the river he thought it was so beautiful that he decided to keep it for himself. That was what had angered the river. The river decided to curse him to become a raven, so that he could not enter the river ever again. And the magical stone was hidden deep in the cave so that the raven would not be able to lick it and taste its magical power and return to a beaver.

"Everyone thought you died," I said.

"I know. I wanted to tell you that the whole time but I was forbidden to say those words to anyone."

I ran up to him with tears dripping down my face and I grasped his arm into my paw and squeezed him with all my love. Gabbo and I gently picked up the stone and placed it in the river so it could harness the stone's power again and calm down. "I've never seen anything more powerful than that stone," I said.

"I have," said Gabbo, "The love of my brother."

The End.

Are You Ready to Rock?

By Amelia, age 13

Banners fluttered in the wind, with excited chatter in the background. The banners, and the chatter were the result of the final stop in the tour of Imogen and the Banshees, the most popular band this side of the Eragon Ravine.

Imogen and the Banshees began their rise in the ranks of rock stardom with their first album; Cavin' In. Soon, they sold out bigger and bigger arenas, amassing legions of fans. Alas, there comes a time in every artist's life when they burn out, and feel uninspired to the max.

Unfortunately, this happened to Imogen and the Banshees right before the last stop in the biggest tour they had ever done. What would you do to solve writer's block? Imogen took the obvious route and decided to set out on a quest.

Imogen started out at the northernmost point of Hearorshine, the town she was in. She set out to Mount Jubilee, because legend foretold of a magical guitar pick, The Deserie Pick, that had the power to cure any amount of writer's block.

With Imogen's map in her hands, she mounted her horse, and set off.

Night soon fell, just as Imogen reached Mt. Jubilee and started climbing, the eerie silence of the night only broken by small falling pebbles or Imogen's grunts. Hoisting herself up onto a small ledge, Imogen realized that for the first time since the band was formed, she was completely alone, and the world seemed completely silent.

Imogen liked that.

As she swung her feet on the edge of the ledge, Imogen found herself starting to sing a sweet song, one her mother sang for her. After the song was fully sung, Imogen felt compelled to laugh, she was all alone and singing like some sort of mad woman! Her chuckles were interrupted all too soon however, as the wall of stone started to crumble into sand that was whisked away by the breeze of the dawn.

Imogen warily stepped into the now opened cave, and peered inside. Standing on a pedestal was the Deserie Pick. Drawn to its glow, and the way the light reflected on the marble pedestal, Imogen forged onwards, towards the gem.

She had only made it halfway when the left wall started to move, revealing a stone troll, the keeper of the Deserie Pick. According to legend, the troll once tried to steal the pick, but was stripped of his voice instead, forever bound to guard the very thing that destroyed him.

As he stumbled forward, Imogen realised he was sleep walking, so she snuck past and ran away, towards the gem.

As she grabbed the pick, an unexplainable warmth filled her body, like she was home after the longest trip.

When Imogen arrived back in Herorshine, the concert began with only a few words, as Imogen, for the first time that day, let herself become engulfed in the noise, the crowd drew to a hush, as Imogen welcomed them.

"Are you ready to ROCK?!"

The End.

Grace and Harper's Great Adventure

By Grace, age 11

The air was crisp and it was black all around. All I could hear was the howling of wolves. I was terrified, but I knew we had to find it.

It was 8:00am on an October Saturday morning. It was moving day and it felt like it came faster than ever! My best friend Harper had slept over last night and was still fast asleep. I slowly got out of bed, but as I was getting out, I saw a strange piece of paper on my nightstand. I hadn't remembered seeing it the night before. I went over to look at this mysterious piece of paper and as I picked it up I saw that it wasn't just a piece of paper, it was a map. I looked closer to see tiny writing in the bottom left hand corner, but I could only make out a few words, *"To find the treasure you must proceed with caution, as you have to go in the right direction. This gem has great value, for it is worth two billion dollars."*

This could save my family from developers building condos on top of our neighborhood!

I woke Harper to tell her. "Harper!" I yelled.

"What?!" Harper groaned, still kind of asleep.

"Look at this!"

"What is it?" she replied, as I handed her the map.

"This could save us!" She said, eyes wide open, sitting up.

"I know! Let's go before we waste any more time!" Harper jumped out of bed.

We raced down the stairs and out the door. We stopped on the sidewalk and opened the map. "We need to go to Whispering Woods!" Harper said, already running ahead.

"You know that Whispering Woods is haunted right?" I said.

"Those are just myths. It's not real."

I nodded and we ran as fast as we could to Whispering Woods. As we entered, I looked down at the map, and it led us to a dark cave. When Harper and I got there, we suddenly heard a loud breath coming from behind us.

"Grace? What's that?" Harper said and we turned around to see a giant dragon hovering before us!

"Run!" I yelled and Harper and I ran into the cave while the dragon was chasing us.

Once we had lost the dragon, we suddenly saw something shining in the distance. We started sprinting towards it to see if it could be the gem we desperately need, and it was! Harper grabbed it and we started rushing to get out of there. We came back to town just in time to see the developer just about to sign the papers to claim the land for themself.

"Don't sign that paper!" Harper yelled and handed the developer the gem.

"This is worth a fortune!"

"We know and we need you to build the condos somewhere else. This is our home," I said.

"Well with this offer, of course!"

"Yes!" yelled Harper.

Now everyone in the Kingsway was living happily in their homes.

The End.

Mystery Cave

By Lincoln, age 5

The cave is in Canada in the creepy woods. The magic stone is important to keep the world safe. All the creepy animals hate the floating stone. There was lightning and also bats. Then suddenly, there was a lion and a bear was sleeping in the cave. Everyone was running away. The robot saved the day with lightning punches.

A floating stone was in the lake. It was green. It makes pink lightning robots. The pink on the robots make them powerful and strong. We have a good adventure and the characters are scared of the journey. They are scared of all the creepy things. Suddenly, there was a spider. He helped them with his magic. He had all kinds of magic and powers.

Suddenly, a big, friendly cat came by to say hi. Then he followed us and followed us and followed us all the way and everywhere. Until a big vehicle was blocking the way. The cat used his magical claws to scrape it. There was a big, good robot so we used the help of the robot as well.

Next, there was a big rock blocking our way. We used the robot to laser it out. We were lost in the cave. It was scary until Aquaman saved our lives and gave us some light. He made a giant water slide to get out.

The magic stone helped us find our way out of the forest by showing us a map. The map said, "Go left, right, zigzag and you will finally get out of the forest."

The cat was still following us. His name was Mystery Cat. After the forest we were in a mystery train in a mystery world. A big, huge lion came. We went zigzag and loop de loop to get to ForestTowne. We were still on the train - there is a world in the train as well with so many wagons and places. The crystal gem stayed in the forest to help people get out.

A big spider came all the way to the mystery train world and it webbed the train up outside. The train could still go with its wheels. The train was too unstoppable. We could stay on the train forever and keep going to places that are fun. The cat got to stay with us too.

The End.



You Get What You Forget

By Megan, age 13

"C'mon, we're almost there!" Jewel exclaimed. Her breathing heavy, Jewel excitedly ran through the cave, oblivious to the scattered pebbles amongst the ground and gagged rocks hanging from the roof.

"Jewel! Give me a break," Rocky huffed, not far behind.

"I can't do this anymore!" Collin collapsed to the ground next to Jade, who was already huffing and wheezing at the sky.

"I found it!" Jewel yelled.

Jade and Collin slowly walked the remaining distance, following Jewel's excited shrieks. In the heart of the cave, on a pedestal, a bright blue sapphire glowed.

Together, the four friends simultaneously crowded together and touched the gem. At once, it brightened.

Jewel picked it up gently from the pedestal and peered into it. There, lying in the center, was a treasure map. It travelled from the bottom left corner of town to the top right, the arrival point marked with a purple X. Other Xs were also marked along the trail, three Xs in shades of blue.

Jade smiled and wrote down the places the sapphire treasure's would be.

The four friends exited the cave as quickly as they had come in. Their first stop was the town park. They began to search.

"Guys! I found my favorite jersey!" Collin cried after a few minutes. Behind a park bench, tears flowed down his cheeks as he clutched a red shirt close to his heart. "My dad got it for me when I was younger. I thought it was gone forever when I forgot it in the park a few months ago."

As the journey continued, Jade and Rocky's once lost desires were discovered. On top of a bookshelf at the library, Jade found her headphones that had been missing for weeks. She had been having the worst nights of her life without having music to help her sleep. Rocky found his collection of marbles, neatly packed in a case. He had been collecting for years and was devastated to have lost it. Both of their reactions contained tears, smiles, and laughter.

Finally, Jewel's item led them to a cafe, bustling with people and chatter. Together, they looked for hours for an item that Jewel may have lost, but they found nothing.

"Children, are you all right?" a barista asked from behind the counter.

"Oh yes, we were just looking for something," they replied.

"Oh! Something was left a few days ago after closing hours."

The children sat at the edge of their seats as the barista disappeared and reappeared with what was lost. It was a single diamond earring, which glistened in the light.

"Oh, that's not mine," Jewel casually said.

"Really?" the three friends cried.

"Someone also left their donut without getting a chance to eat it the same night," the waiter commented.

"That was me!" Jewel exclaimed.

"All of our items were so valuable, how is yours a donut?" Collin asked.

"I don't lose things," Jewel replied with a smirk.

The End.

Tree Top Village

By Nevyn, age 11

The sights were incredible. My little brother Liam and I, along with our reliable Border Collie Aspen, were exploring the vast and exciting woods behind our new house. We had just moved into a small stuffy cottage near our Grandmother's house so our mother could take care of her better.

"This tree looks like a duck. Sort of."

I sighed as I watched Liam peer curiously at a tilted knobby maple tree. I usually got along with him, but he was starting to get on my nerves. He was full of energy and running back and forth investigating everything and asking questions. He reminded me of a puppy, never staying in one place for more than thirty seconds.

"Liam," I snapped, "Will you quit it."

Liam glanced up with a playful grin. "Sorry but how else am I supposed to get more salamanders?" he retorted.

Ugh, my brother had an obsession. Ever since he had discovered a tiny salamander under a rock at our local park he had been obsessed with amphibians. He would bring them home and keep them in a small container and treasure them like they were pets. I, on the other hand, thought it was the most revolting thing ever. Aspen leaped forward with a bark and furiously sniffed at a rock. Liam rushed forward and lifted the rock no doubt looking for salamanders. He sighed which meant there was nothing there.

"Come on Liam," I said. "Let's go back."

"Wait Mackenzie!" He pleaded, "Not just yet, we should explore that cave. I bet it's crawling with salamanders."

I glanced up. Right in the middle of the forest lay a cave. It was a dark blue colour, and dull green ferns and moss grew along its edges. It also looked like it was pulsing, and every few seconds I saw little flashes of electric blue light. I shook my head. It was just my imagination. But my curiosity got the better of me. "Fine." I relented. "But only for five minutes and then straight back."

Liam nodded and eagerly stumbled to the cave. When I stepped into the cave my jaw dropped. Massive stalagmites that hung from the ceiling loomed out of the shadows and everything was a dark blue. But it was too dark to see anything.

"Liam," I called shakily. "We should leave, it's too dark." I blindly looked around for Aspen and Liam. All of a sudden I heard Liam shriek and Aspen howl. "Liam!" I hollered. "Where are you?" I blindly stumbled forward reaching for him. "Liam this isn't funny come out right now-ahhh!" I plugged forward and I felt myself plummet. I screamed at the top of my lungs the whole way down. This was such a horrible idea. Why did I think it was a good idea to go into a creepy, dark, probably bat infested cave? I squeezed my eyes shut and kept screaming, and waiting for the impact to come. But it never did. I opened my eyes to see my brother and Aspen peering down at me. "Liam!" I cried, and I tackled him in a big hug. I was so worried. Then I realized we hadn't hit the ground. "Wait, how are we alive?"

Liam didn't say anything but just pointed down. I glanced down then gasped. We were floating on a fluffy white small cloud that seemed to be holding us up. How was this possible? We must have hit our heads on the way down, that was the only logical explanation. Small circular lights that were hung on the cave's walls illuminated the section we were in. How were there lights here? As far as I knew we were the only people that had ever been in this cave.

"What do we do?" I asked him.

"I say we explore the rest of the cave and enjoy ourselves and then figure out how we get back."

"But..." I trailed off. I knew he was right, there was no way we could get back from where we fell from unless we sprouted wings. I was reluctant but I agreed. The three of us hopped off the cloud and began to walk along the illuminated path.

We walked for about thirty minutes before we reached the center of the cave. This part is definitely the brightest part of the cave. It's circular and right in the middle of it is a glowing purple stone. I can see it pulsing almost like it's alive, almost like it's drawing me to it. But before I even got close to it Liam and Aspen began investigating it. Liam picked it up and examined it.

"Liam don't!" I cried. "It could be radioactive or something." But I spoke a moment too late. All the lights went out and a gust of wind blew into the room. All of a sudden I smelled a pleasant aroma. It smelled like lavender. Then my stomach flip-flopped and everything went blurry and I felt a strong sucking motion that felt like a whirlpool pulling me in. Then I realized it was coming from the stone. It was sucking me in. I tried to scream but I already had been pulled in. I hit the ground with a thud. I rubbed my sore backside.

Liam and Aspen were recovering beside me. I looked around and we were outside again but all of a sudden I gasped and reeled. Staring at us from all directions were fairies. When I mean fairies, I mean goblins too. They were round and bowling ball sized and a green the colour of the grass we were standing on. They had horns and wide mouths, long noses and grubby little hands with long filthy fingernails. They carried clubs and sticks and they looked a bit menacing. Flitting above them were tiny sprites. They were about the width of a pencil and had slim limbs and delicate fingers and their wings glimmered beautiful pastel colours and matched a butterfly's. They wore clothes made out of flowers and shoes that were made from dandelion fluff. They all glared at us suspiciously.

Aspen licked his lips hungrily and drooled a little. I quickly grabbed his collar to make sure he didn't try and eat one of the sprites as he loved eating butterflies at home and I didn't want him to attack one as that would surely start us off on the wrong foot.

A goblin stepped up that was presumably their leader. "Greetings stranger, I am Boris, leader of the fairies. I hope you do not mind me asking you, who you are and how you came here?"

"Oh well we are Liam and Mackenzie O'leary and-" Boris turned an odd shade of red and I stopped talking. Was it something I said?

"O'leary's are not welcome here!" he screamed. "Nettle, Thorn, take these humans to the structure," he spat. "As for the dog we shall have him in our frog pudding stew!"

The other fairies cheered and we were overwhelmed. The goblins grabbed us and led us to where Boris was going and the fairies pulled at our hair and only annoyed us.

"Please, we didn't do anything!" I yelled. But no one was listening. I glanced at my brother and he was trembling. We really were in a bit of a pickle. They led us up a flight of stairs that took us to the top of the trees. Nestled in the trees was their treetop village. Their houses looked like beehives and were bright yellow. There was a series of rope ladders that connected all the houses together. The sprites had mini versions of this hung up in little branches in the trees like bird houses. We were led to the biggest one which I guessed was Boris's house. When we stepped inside I was quivering with nervousness. The room was decorated like a honeycomb and at the very end sat a throne and Boris leaped on it and kicked his feet back. "Please Boris, I begged. Please tell us why you are keeping us prisoner."

Boris's face went red again. "Fine selfish human I will tell you. For many generations this village was watched over by a human guardian. For each generation there was a new one and no one could refuse as it was their duty. The family that was destined to do this were the O'learys. It was a guardian's job to protect this place from harm. Now our most recent guardian was a foolish one and dreamed of the bigger world. We were kind to her and gave her everything she could ever want. But it was never enough. Guardians aren't supposed to leave, but she did. One night she left us and left this diary." He held up a red leather diary. "She left us high and dry and now all the O'leary's will pay!" he screeched. The fairies cheered.

That night I waited till all the fairies were asleep and I crept to Boris and tugged the diary out of his hand. "Liam!" I whispered. Get over here." He silently came to me and we read the diary and what we read made us gasp. "Liam! The guardian who ran away, it-its grandma!"

The End.

Echoes of a Silent Plea

By Rory, age 13

Walking through the trees
As innocent as can be
Grabbed by my bare knees
Something bad guaranteed
My scream was too soft
He put me in the back
I thought all was lost
Everything went black
The truck was too fast
It woke me with a start
About two hours had passed
I was banging really hard
That's when I heard the sirens
They sounded like dying lions
Someone's coming closer
I can hear them saying no sir
That's when I was freed
Someone heard my plea
I was let out of the truck
Grateful for my luck

The End.

The Red Diamond

By Roseanna, age 11

Salisbury was a quiet town, because everyone lived in fear. Not because of a dictator or criminals, because of the cave. The Salisbury cave was not normal. Its depths held many secrets, but none more legendary than the red diamond. Every year, one fourteen year old was selected at random to try to retrieve it. None ever succeeded. None ever came back. The only thing anyone knew about it was that it was extremely dangerous. The people that were sent were all sent with the best cameras and technology, including a camera that fed back to a monitor in the top secret building used as a headquarters in Salisbury. But, the camera always went black as soon as the person entered the cave. The cameras and microphones were retrieved from the cave by helicopter, and they never explained anything, since they never showed anything either. The photos never developed... For these reasons, the cave was shrouded in mystery. The one proper piece of information anyone had was a photo of the cave. It showed a small clearing, with a large stalactite hanging from the top. But other than this, nothing was known about the cave.

At least, until the expedition of 2025. That year, instead of the usual one, two fourteen year olds were chosen to go into the cave. The people at headquarters thought two people had a better chance of surviving than one. They were right. But, these two that were chosen would have survived on their own in any conditions or circumstances. The first, Valentina, was an unlikely choice, since she came from a poor family, and had been hungry her whole life, and as a result was skinny and small. No one knew it yet, but she was a perfect candidate. She had grown up on a small farm, and had done farmwork all her life. But, she was terrified. She had lived her entire life being told to stay away from the cave, and she was now being forced to go in. Anyone else would have spent the remaining weeks before the expedition

doing everything in their power to get out of going, except perhaps, Liam, Valentina's companion. He was almost the opposite of Valentina, the son of a rich businessman, he had grown up in a large house in the nice part of the town, and had always had enough to eat. The only thing that was the slightest bit similar between the two was that they were both natural explorers. Even their names Valentina and Liam, meant strong and brave. They were perfect for the job.

They set out on May first, with a bag full of supplies. They arrived at the cave at dawn, and spent the day hiking through the cave. When Liam started taking photos, Valentina said, "Do you think we can do anything to make sure the photos develop since all the photos that everyone else took here were lost?"

Liam replied, "No, I don't think so. And even if we could, would we really want to? I mean, who would benefit? Those awful people from the headquarters? Do we want to help them? They sent us here, and have sent so many other people just like us here, and what happened to them?"

As if on cue, just then, Valentina stepped on a human skeleton, her foot going straight through the ribcage. She jumped, and Liam screamed. They both froze and then after about two seconds, they both broke into a sprint, Valentina not even bothering to dislodge the ribcage from her foot.

They didn't stop until they arrived at a small cove, and set up camp. They turned in for the night. But in the morning, they were trapped in the cove, because a wolf was standing in the entrance. This time, they didn't hesitate. Valentina picked up a stick and lunged, but the wolf ducked to the side. Liam darted to the back, and tried to get it with a rock from behind, but it was too quick. Valentina tried to get its side, and it jumped in the opposite direction but Liam jabbed his rock into its other side, just in time. But it stood its ground. It became clear that the wolf would need to be driven away with more than a sharp stick.

'What are wolves afraid of?' thought Liam feverishly. *'Light!'* He had matches, but nothing to light them with. Okay, what else are they afraid of? Loud noises! He started clapping loudly, and Valentina got the message and started doing the same. After only a minute, the wolf slunk away, with its tail between its legs.

"That was close," said Valentina, breathlessly. "And strange. Why is there even a wolf in here? This is a cave!"

"This cave is not normal!" Liam said, shouting. "Wolves aren't even the strangest thing that's in here! Don't you know why we're here? We are trying to get a magical diamond. You just stepped on a skeleton, and countless people have died here! Don't you see there's something wrong with this place?"

Valentina countered, "Do you think I want to be here?! It's awful! It's damp, cold, dark, and dangerous! I get that you don't want to be here, but we're here, and we might as well try to get OUT."

They continued on in stony silence. After about three hours, Liam said, "You're right. Neither of us wants to be here, so we might as well try to get through it, and get out. And part of that is trying to get the stone."

"You mean that legend?" scoffed Valentina. "You believe that?"

"Well, that's why we're here," responded Liam. "And it might be our only hope of getting out."

"And how will it get us out?" asked Valentina, in a rather condescending way.

"When we get it, the headquarters will send a helicopter to take us out," Liam said.

"How did you know that?" asked Valentina, surprised.

"Well, it figures," said Liam. "I mean, we have the camera that they see all the time. If we get it, they wouldn't want to risk something happening to us, and losing it."

"I guess that makes sense," said Valentina. "Well, let's get going!" she said cheerily.

In the morning, they started immediately. They studied their maps of the caves, and decided that their best bet was the very center. It took them about four hours to get there, crossing mud and streams. There was one point when Liam fell into a stream, and Valentina had to pull him out with a stick. And, a few hours later, Valentina slipped, and fell. She would have fallen down into a chalice that was fifteen feet deep, but Liam grabbed her wrist just in time.

But when they got to the center, it was all worth it. They stepped into a small area of the cave. And in the very center, was the diamond, stuck in a rock that was sitting on a larger rock. But, before either of them had time to consider what that meant, several dark figures emerged from the gloomy ceiling.

"Bats!" cried Valentina.

"Not just any bats!" hissed one. "Vampire bats!" and it proceeded to lunge. It was about to sink its razor sharp teeth into Liam's neck, and Valentina reacted just in time. She picked up a razor sharp rock, and stabbed the bat. It shrieked, but the problem was far from over.

All the other bats swooped in at the exact same time, hissing and shrieking. Valentina reached for her stick, but one of the bats knocked it out of her hands. Liam tried to get a stick, but half a dozen or so bats blocked him, and he couldn't reach it. They were going to have to fight with what was in their bags. Valentina reached into her backpack, and took out a match, and scraped it against a rock that was at her feet. Before the bats could get the rock, it burst into flames, and Valentina threw it without a second thought. The bat that it hit burnt into a crisp and went spiraling to the floor of the cave. As soon as it hit the ground, the cave burst into flames. The bats caught fire instantly, but it was only a matter of time before the rest of the cave caught fire. Liam grabbed the piece of stone the diamond was encased in, and they ran.

Almost as soon as they got out, they heard the chopping of helicopter blades. It landed, and they got in. When they got home, they were greeted as heroes, with parades and celebrations. They attended a ceremony, where they found out that the gem could give anyone amazing powers, flying, invisibility, and X ray vision. But best of all, no one ever had to step foot in the cave again.

The End.

Sunny and the Healing Stone

By Seulah, age 8

Once upon a time there was a brave girl named Sunny. Sunny heard about a magical stone with healing powers, so she was out on a walk to see if she could find it. You see, Sunny's mom was sick, so she needed that magic stone to make her better again.

Sunny kept walking and wishing that she could somehow find that magic stone. Suddenly, something fell from the sky and smacked Sunny right on the head. As she unfolded this mysterious paper, she realized it was a map to find the magic stone! Soon, Sunny's journey started.

The map navigated her to an enchanted rainforest. As Sunny got deeper and deeper into the forest, it got darker and darker. Suddenly, twelve angry bees appeared and chased her down the path. She began to run like a cheetah! She saw a big ocean in the distance and jumped right into it. She held her breath under the water with all her power and swam toward some rocks in the distance. As she swam she realized she didn't need to go up for air!

She found a cave - the cave from the map! As she swam closer she could see something shining. But before she could get a better look, a sea dragon swam in front of her. It was guarding the magic stone in the cave.

"Dear dragon, I have to use the stone to help my sick mother."

So, the dragon said, "You can take the magic stone if you find my daughter, I am very worried about her. I lost her when we were playing hide and seek earlier."

"Yes, I will find your daughter!" Sunny replied.

Sunny looked behind the sea weeds and the gigantic seashells but couldn't find the sea dragon's daughter. Suddenly, she saw the tail of a little dragon stuck behind some rocks! Sunny found a long stick and she put it under the rock and began to move it up and down. The little dragon wasn't stuck anymore! Sunny quickly brought the daughter back to the sea dragon.

"I will keep my promise. You can take the stone!" The sea dragon said and swam away.

Sunny went into the sea cave and took out the shining magic stone. She went all the way back to her house, and just as the map said, she placed the stone in boiling water and waited. The magic stone melted after three minutes. Sunny quickly gave it to her mother to drink. Her mother didn't believe her but drank it anyway. When her mother drank it all she looked up with surprise.

"It tastes like candy clouds and sweet rainbows!" Her mother said. And then her mother gasped again because she was totally better. "How did you do this, Sunny?" Her mom asked with wide eyes.

But Sunny didn't tell her because the map, the enchanted forest, the sea dragon, and the cave was her beautiful secret.

The End.

The Heart of Eternity

By Zaria, age 11

As my heart quivered, my trembling hand stroked Aspen, the baby reindeer lying on the rough barn floor. His coat was as soft as silk, and his eyes, one blue and one brown, ached with pain. "I wish you had a voice to tell me what is wrong," I whispered to my sweet little calf.

"Felice, stop fussing over that reindeer!" I heard from behind me. It was my older brother, James. I turned to defend myself but my words got caught in my throat.

As I stormed into my room slamming the door behind me, a hurricane was growing inside me as my pounding heart hammered hard against my body. There was a slight opening in the door and there was Grandma. "Every time I get pushed around I can't find my voice to stand up for myself!" I sobbed.

"You have a voice; all you have to do is find it," Grandma replied.

"I want Aspen to be healed," I whined.

"Let me tell you a story about the Heart of Eternity," Grandma soothed. "In an evergreen forest with tall trees mimicking skyscrapers, layers of ice follow a narrow trail awaiting a dark cave where inside is a magical stone, and more than that it lies on top of magical moss that heals the broken."

"Let's go get the stone!" I exclaimed excitedly.

"There are dangerous wolves who are said to protect the stone; do not go!" Grandma warned.

The room was silent as thoughts and ideas churned in my mind. The silence was broken when I said, "Could this cave be beyond the three hills in town?"

"Maybe," answered grandma, sounding promising, "But it's too dangerous to find out!"

That night I could not stop thinking about the Heart of Eternity and what it would be like if I could find it. I dreamt of Aspen drinking moonlight, his coat glowing with health, but when I woke, the reality was hard to face. It was a cold morning, and I ran to the barn, anxious to check on him. He was still weak, but there was a quiet strength in his little heartbeat, making me more determined than ever to find this stone.

I told my mother I was going for a walk and headed out beyond the three hills. As I climbed the steep hills, my legs felt like I was a newborn calf and I gasped for breath. The forest was exactly how grandma described it. The wash of blue and white reflected from the snowy ground to the intense but soft blue sky. Suddenly I saw the dark cave in the distance. I found my eyes fixed on the cave's mouth which was covered in moss and ferns. As I approached the cave I could feel my heart pounding hard; my shaking body felt like it was about to collapse. I entered the cave. It was damp and dark and I could hear the buzzing of bugs as my shadow towered over me. I could feel the moisture growing in the air and a swarm of flies flew into my face. I brushed them away and my eyes squinted as a man dressed in a black long coat appeared. His grey hair looked unkempt; his wrinkled face looked kind. *'Was his heart kind?'* I thought.

"What brings you here?" he questioned.

"My baby reindeer is sick and I am told that the Heart of Eternity that lies on healing moss could cure him," I answered timidly.

"Well, the stone is not magical and this cave is just dangerous," he said quite convincingly. I did not respond. "I am Stine, I know all about these caves," Stine said in a deep voice. The determination in me to heal Aspen was so strong that any convincing could not stop this quest awaiting to start.

"I am determined," I whispered.

"I can guide you to the Heart of Eternity if you like," said Stine. I nodded firmly. Stine began walking into the cave and I followed him cautiously. The buzzing of mosquitoes' wings colliding together echoed in the damp cave. Our dark shadows hung over us. I could feel the pinching of bugs on my arm and swiped them away. Every step I took I was only thinking about the stone. We walked for what seemed like hours, but could have been only minutes. Time seemed to stop in this place. My cold feet had blisters forming on my heels; my hands were stuffed in my pockets. As I gazed into the distance I could clearly see a slight glow that made my eyes sparkle. There it was! A stone, glistening in the darkness. As we turned to face the Heart of Eternity, Stine, who had been silent for a while, gave me a serious look.

"You can't just take the stone. There's a price to pay for it," he warned, in a low growl. "The stone heals, but it takes something from you in return," he remarked. I thought of Aspen's face full of pain.

"I do not care what it takes!" I said fiercely.

Stine's eyes met mine, and for the first time, I saw something other than kindness in them—a shadow, a burden he had been carrying for too long. I grabbed the stone and clutched it in my hand grasping the moss which stuck tightly on it. I turned to run and suddenly saw Stine transform into a snarling wolf. The wolf started to chase me. The rock was held near my heart and I could feel its power. A rising urge to speak was gifted to me. My voice was the only thing I was holding on to.

"This is my stone and it will heal my little Aspen!" I hollered. My voice made a sound like a million thundering hooves. It shook the cave and boulders fell like lightning, trapping the wolf in a prison of limestone. Just as I thought I was safe, more wolves approached me, snarling with giant jagged teeth and mouths open wide. Suddenly one of the wolves lunged at me but missed, and before they could try again I yelled, "Stop!" with all the power of the stone that I could harness. The rock that I was still grasping was pulsing. All the wolves cowered as I ran out of the cave full speed ahead.

As I emerged from the cave, the sky was dimming and I collapsed in exhaustion. I felt a warm nuzzle. It was Aspen's father, Charcoal. He gestured for me to climb on

his back. I mounted the kind and gentle reindeer. Charcoal started to gallop, and before I knew it I was back home. I leaped into the barn hollering to Grandma. I reached into my pocket and pulled out the magical stone and handed it to her. Her old frail hands grasped the stone as her glossy eyes were fixed on the beauty of the rock. She pulled a glass tube out of her pocket and placed the moss inside as well as the rock. She covered the mossy rock with snow and water and pulled the stone out and handed it to me.

"This is yours to keep," she said. The liquid inside shone like diamonds. As we walked out to Aspen's stall, grandma soothed Aspen as she poured the liquid in his mouth. We waited and soon his wobbly legs worked. For the first time I heard his little voice, as he nudged me and gave a little grunt of joy. I told Grandma about my big adventure as Aspen lay at our feet dozing quietly.

"I always knew you had a voice inside of you," said Grandma proudly.

The End.

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