



LANGUAGE LINK

twelve tales

written by students from
"The Art of Writing" Class
SUPER SUMMER

Hanoi, July 2009

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WRITTEN BY STUDENTS FROM SUPER SUMMER
'ART OF WRITING' CLASS

Editor:
James Brennan



LANGUAGE LINK, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The first Language Link "Art of Writing" class ran for six weeks during the summer of 2009. Our twelve participating students represented all three Language Link centers: Dai Co Viet (four students), Cat Linh (four students) and Lang Ha (two students), while two students were new to Language Link. Each student created one short story, nursing original ideas into well-crafted works through a total of thirty-six classroom hours. The students learned and thought about the variety of genres available, about plot development, literary themes, character development, point of view, basic style, and the use of dialog. The students also learned how to use a thesaurus to enhance their written vocabulary, and participated in numerous group and individual writing activities. The first step in the writing process was the choice of a genre. While these choices shifted once the writing began, the end result is a wide variety of genres including fantasy, animals (both natural and personified), sports, humor, autobiography, adventure, drama, mystery, detective and ghost stories. The themes expressed in the stories range from the value of friendship to belief in oneself, from perseverance in the face of hardship to the simple joy of living.

Each story started with a one-sentence plot, and was then taken through increasingly complex plotting stages into three separate drafts. At each stage, work was shared with other students for feedback. Some of the stories grew steadily out of the original one-sentence plots, while others completely changed along the way.

The system of student feedback was particularly useful in the creativity process. The students learned to give and receive constructive criticism in a supportive manner, and really enjoyed reading each others' evolving stories. The uniqueness of the stories reflects the individual creativity of these young authors and the respect each of them displayed toward their peers.

It is worth noting that each of these stories was written through a creative process conducted entirely in English. The students used a thesaurus and a Vietnamese-English dictionary, but their writing, from the very first sentence to the finished product, was done exclusively in their second language.

JAMES BRENNAN, TEACHER

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The Authors

*F*irst one Authors Fourteen-year-old Thao likes to listen to sad songs. She says that her name refers to meek and gentle autumn plants, but that does not describe her outgoing personality. Thao's story changed dramatically when she re-wrote it in the first person during a class activity, changing from a narrative to a monolog. God's Weekend is a humorous tale about the annoyances that can accompany responsibilities.

At age 11, Khoa might be a questionable person to be writing about childhood, but that's what he's done, and quite successfully. His story grew out of the autobiographical essay he wrote on the first day of our class, and he expanded it into a story about how life changes and remains the same.

A fascination with ancient Egypt was the motivation behind twelve-year-old Chau's story of an American boy who is experiencing problems growing up. Although she knew from the very beginning what story she wanted to write, Chau took her writing through numerous revisions before settling on the final format. Lost in Ancient Egypt leaves it to the reader to decide what is real and what is fantasy.

Hang, at age 13, says that she's trying to find out what her problems are. She likes to sing, and she has two dogs and a lot of chores to do at home. She likes to read comics and play basketball. Hang's story is written in a uniquely detached style, and is about the warmth and happiness felt among friends on an ordinary day.

Huong is 13 and likes to listen to New Age music and read adventure stories in her free time. She isn't a very good cook but eats more than anyone in her family. Her story is about a lion named Leo who sees himself as a failure, and who leaves his home to seek his fortune. Of course, things don't turn out the way he hopes.

At 16, Duong was the oldest writer in the class. The School Story is based on Duong's fascination with ghost stories and horror films, although you would never suspect these interests on meeting her. Duong also plays the guitar and enjoys flying kites. She takes good care of her two pets, a dog and a cat, and hopes to



study overseas in the future.

Nguyen is an effervescent 12-year old who likes jazz. He wants to be an artist in the future. The most important thing in Nguyen's life is his bicycle, and he's good at Chinese chess. Nguyen's story is written in the style of a Sherlock Holmes mystery, but with an interesting twist.

Quang Anh is 13. He has an older sister studying in the United States. His story, The Mirror, is written in the style of a folk tale and comes from his concern for the lives of poor people. He began writing this story as a fantasy, but as he wrote he discovered that a reality-based tale would have more impact on the reader.

Fourteen-year-old Nhat Anh is football-obsessed, much like the teenage characters in his story. He also enjoys listening to music and playing video games. He is happy when his favorite football team wins, and sad when they lose. He'd like to own a pet. Friendship and Football began as a pure sports story and evolved into a tale of friendship and teamwork.

Bao Linh is 12. She enjoys classical music and Sherlock Holmes mysteries, and enjoys swimming and drawing. Her story, Froggy? Froggy!, about an ordinary character who becomes a hero, went through many changes before reaching its final state, from an epic fantasy to a simpler tale with an interesting twist at the end.

Vuong, 13, writes that he is "intelligent, handsome and funny; well, maybe handsome and funny; well, okay, funny." Vuong likes old music, action films and detective books, and avoids activities that require him to move. His story, NYPD, is written in the style of a classic police drama.

Van is 12, and her love for her pets is reflected in her story. Rocky is about a girl and her dog (and a witch). In real life, Van has a dog, two parrots, and lots of fish. In the future she wants a bigger dog and a cat. She enjoys painting, drawing and swimming.





God's Weekend

by Phan Thu Thao, age 14

*I*n my heaven. Saturday morning. I - the Supreme God of the Universe - was having a big breakfast. I was very comfortable. "Yeah Me! Happy God's weekend!"

Suddenly, a man appeared. He had a suffering face, and his clothes were very frowzy. He seemed unhappy. That man spoke up. "God, I want to ask you a question!"

I became angry. "Keep quiet! Look at the internal regulations!"

He looked them up. In the regulations, a line of letters was twinkling: "Don't work on Saturday and Sunday..." The man was disappointed. And he started to cry. His tears created a storm, his voice made thunder. Everyone was scared. I yielded. "Okay, you win. What do you want?"

"I... I just want to ask you a question. Why did I die? I was just twenty-five years old."

"Hmmm. How did you die?"

And he began, "On the day before yesterday, I made a date with my girlfriend to go to a coffee shop. My name is Stupid, and my girlfriend's name is Clever. She is very different from me. So we quarreled. 'I can't endure you! You're so stupid!' she yelled. 'Just because stupid is my name?' I asked her. 'Yes! Stupid is your name, only your name, not my name!' What will people think if we get married and my name is Clever Stupid??" she shrieked. You know, God, at this moment I understood that we can't do anything together. Her speech stabbed my heart."

He continued: "I saw my girl run out of the shop. I was very sad. Unexpectedly, it started raining. I know you did that, didn't you, God? I left the shop and went under the rain. Nobody in the street. No star in the sky. No emotion in my heart. I'm so 'Stupid,' huhuhu...."

The man cried bitterly. I shouted: "Stop crying! Continue your story quickly, I don't have time for you. I haven't finished my meal!"

He was pale with terror, stammering. "I went under the rain until I got home. My clothes were soaked. And of course, next morning I was sick. But I had no medicines in my house, so I went to the drugstore..."

I lost my temper. "I'm not interested in your health! You went to the drugstore, you bought medicine, took medicine, blah, blah.... I want to know how did you die?"

"Let's be calm, God! This story concerns both of us. You can't imagine who sold me the medicine. He was very bizarre, with bulging eyes, yellow skin and disproportionately long fingers. But I had to buy it from him, I could not stop." He was choked by tears. "I bought three tablets. Two of them were pink and one was blue. The doctor -- no, the monster -- told me that I ought to take the pink tablets first, and the blue one last. I took the pink ones and felt much better. I was super engrossed by the third tablet, it has a mysterious blue color. I took it, and...." he screamed. "BOOOOOOM! BOOOOOOOOM!"

I was startled. The chicken's leg which I was eating dropped to the floor. "Oh my God!" I said. "Oh, I forgot, I'm God," I realized. "Oh Me! So that's how you died!?"

The man was enraged. "Hey, it's not funny! I don't understand why I died."

"Man," I replied. "Unluckily, you met my Devil. He kills anyone he wants, it's his power. I can't help you."

"But why? Why me? I lost my love and I lost my life!"

"Oh, man. It's your destiny. But do you want to be my assistant? You can use magic and maybe I can bring Clever to you."

The man was excited. "Oh, thank you so much. I love you God. Muuu... aah..."

I smiled. "Good. And now, go out. I want to eat my breakfast." I snapped a big chicken's leg: "Yeah me! Happy God's weekend!"

Suddenly, a man appeared. "God, I want to ask you a question..."

"Oh, Me. Is this My life?"

Childhood

by Hoang Van Khoa, age 11

Sometimes I still remember the past -- the winter days in Moscow, those were beautiful days. Snow was falling, we played with snowballs and I made a snowman. It wasn't easy to make a snowman. You had to be careful with the nose, which was a carrot. I had a lot of friends. Pasa and Little Pasa, and Christina, who was beautiful, with brown curly hair and black eyes.

I loved the park when snow was falling and people were walking and talking. Their faces were red from the cold, and they were all wearing scarves and winter coats.

I remember flying a kite in Red Square and walking past Kremlin Palace. I always played there when I was younger. I spent hours there, and I remember my father bought me a huge kite and helped me fly it. The kite was blue and square. When I flew it, it felt so nice, and it looked divine in the sky.

Red Square was enormous. The red walls, the roof -- it was all red. There were parades in the square. The Kremlin Palace was big, and looked like a church. The president lived there.

When I was two years old, I went to kindergarten for the first time. I was very scared and nervous because I had to stay away from my mother. When I saw the other students I was a bit happier and I hit a boy. He was Pasa, the oldest in the class. I remember that Pasa always made noise. He was one year older than me. Anastasia was funny, and she had lots of toys. Little Pasa was the same age as me. He was quiet but friendly. Christina was talkative and sometimes big-headed.

The kindergarten was a big old house, but it was strong. In the main room there was a parrot and a fish pool. The parrot was colorful, and when it saw me each morning it spoke, saying "Do-bra pa-zha-la-vat! Do-bra pa-zha-la-vat!" ("Welcome! Welcome!" in Russian). The fish pool looked nice. There was a swimming pool, too, a low swimming pool for us to practice swimming.

I loved kindergarten. It was clean and tidy. After three weeks, I spoke Russian like a real Russian. The teacher liked me. I learned hard, and I ate a lot. I ate two big dishes of soup and a bowl of spaghetti for lunch. And when my friends were sleeping, I jumped on my bed and threw things at them. The teacher hated that.



My father was born in Quang Binh, in central Vietnam, and my mother was born in Ha Noi. I was born in Moscow. My mother told me that when I was born, the snow fell hard, people were walking in the square, and dad was standing outside the room. She told me that she and my father were so happy when I was born. That month, nearly all the babies at that hospital were boys. They named me "Khoa." It was the name of a famous poet, and in English it means "science."



When I was five years old, I first saw Viet Nam. I remember, I felt happy and excited when I saw it.

Viet Nam was different from Russia. In Viet Nam, the weather was very hot, but in Russia it's very cold! The cities were different. Moscow was rich and full of life, with tall buildings and a huge square. Hanoi was smaller, with a peaceful life. The people were different. In Russia, some people had blonde hair and blue eyes, but in Viet Nam everyone had black hair and eyes. The important thing was the language. I didn't know a single Vietnamese word!

Schools were different in Viet Nam, too. They were big, and didn't have lockers. Russian schools were smaller, but had lockers. I loved my locker because I could put my clothes and books in there.

My first day at school in Ha Noi was terrible. I went to school with mum and dad, and when they left, I cried so all the school could hear it! But I met lots of new friends. Days at school weren't hard for me, but after I learned Vietnamese I talked too much. But who cares, my grades were still good. It was great to be at school, meeting my friends and teachers, learning new things. My best subject was English, and I got second place in an English competition.

That's one part of my life. Life is so nice. There is sadness and happiness and I have to accept it. A lot more things are waiting for me. •



Lost in Ancient Egypt

by Dinh Hong Chau, age 12

"Hey everyone! I'm going to have a party this weekend. Whoever would like to join, send me a reply!" Brad, the best boy at school, emailed to all the students in his class.

"Can I join, Brad?" replied Mike.

Brad answered, "Are you telling a joke? You are so poor, how can you send me an email? You are so ugly and stupid, too. You failed all the exams! That's why you will never be able to join a party. One more thing: PRACTICE WRITING!! It looks so Egyptian!!"

Mike went home sadly. As usual, he took his dog, Jake, for a walk. Jake was a small black dog, and he was Mike's only friend. Mike told Jake while they walked, "You know, it's not easy being thirteen. I'm the most useless guy at my school. I wish everything could be different."

Suddenly, he saw a bright light ahead. He came closer and "BOOM!..... Jake had turned into a camel! The wind stopped blowing and Mike realized that he was in a desert. "Oh, no, Jake!" Mike said, scared. "I've messed up everything again. How can we go home now?"

Looking ahead in the sand, Mike wondered, "Oh, is that a lamp?" He picked the thing up, and suddenly a genie came out of it. "Hello, Master!" greeted the genie. Mike was extremely surprised. He asked the genie, "Do you know where I am and why I'm here?"

"You're in Egypt, master. You're the Deity of Intelligence. Your mission is to save us from the evil Babylon King," answered the genie.

"But I failed all my exams. How can I be the Deity of Intelligence?" Mike asked shyly.

"Don't worry, Master! You're very intelligent! You're the one who invented Egyptian letters. If you don't remember anything, ask me!"

The genie of the lamp took Mike and Jake the camel to Cairo on a very big magic carpet. On the way, Mike thought, "Maybe this is why my writing looks Egyptian!"

They arrived in Cairo right after an attack by Babylon's army. The Babylonian King took the memories and knowledge of all the people living in Cairo, even the Pharaoh. Mike had a quick meeting with the other deities. They were all worried. Mike had an idea: he would teach the Egyptians English and modern knowledge. Every deity thought that it was brilliant. They were happy.

And Mike was even much happier. "This will make my writing better in the future, and I'm gonna be a better student, Jake!" he told his camel.

Mike started his project by teaching the other deities. He became more confident and thought that he was improving in some subjects. Soon the deities started to teach other Egyptians, who understood the lessons very quickly. After only a week they had recovered their minds. Unfortunately, the King of Babylon sent the Pharaoh an ultimatum: "If you do not surrender, Babylon will attack!"

Everyone was worried again, but Mike had an idea. People from Babylon were good at algebra, but they weren't very good at geometry, so the Egyptian army would use geometry in a trap for their enemy.

Mike and the army used all day to make the traps, and all of the traps worked very well. The Babylon navy was trapped by a triangle of stakes on the river Nile, and the army was trapped by a circular scorpion trap in the desert. The King of Babylon had to surrender.

Everyone was happy again, but Mike was a little bit sad. He missed his family back in the USA so much. He asked the genie of the lamp: "Egypt is safe now. Can I get back home?"

"It's up to you, Master," the genie answered.

"But I'm so scared to go back there. Everyone seems to hate me. Can you give me some advice?"

"Don't worry, Master! You're very brilliant! But you should be confident and everything will be fine."

So Mike decided to go home. "But what about Jake? My house is too small for a camel!"

"Don't worry, he will return into the dog when you get home," the genie answered. "Here. Read this spell." He gave Mike a piece of parchment. Mike read the spell:

"Tamehoma, Tumadoba!" and "BOOM!" he was at home with Jake, who was a dog again. He immediately began to prepare for his tests. He thought he would do well and he was right. He had the highest marks in the class in most of the subjects.

The cutest girl in the class wanted to have a date with him. Brad also invited him to his party. Mike felt so lucky. He thought "Maybe I'm not so useless after all." But he refused all their invitations. "They want to play with me just because I got high marks. Who needs that kind of friend?" he thought to himself. He didn't need the fame at school. He went home and took Jake for a walk, just like any normal day. ●



Lulu and the Cakes

by Pham Boi Hang, age 13

*T*here is a girl. Her name is Lulu.

She lives in a big villa. She lives with a horse and a monkey. 'Mr. Will' is the name she calls the monkey.

Lulu is a strange girl. Her face has freckles and red hair. She wears a dress and big black shoes. She is very strong. She can lift her horse and carry him around the garden, and she doesn't feel tired. Maybe she is the strongest girl in this world.

She has two friends. They are Thomas and Annika. From the start, they liked Lulu very much. They play very close, and Lulu makes the kids feel very glad. Daily, the kids stay at Lulu's home. Lulu usually makes cakes and dishes for them. They like this very much. She makes up stories to play. All the games make Thomas and Annika feel interested. One day, like every other day, the children are at Lulu's house. It's a sunny day, brimful with laughter.

Thomas feels bored, and asks Lulu, "What can we do now?" Annika says they can go to the lake to swim, but there the water is too deep, and they don't want to die.

Lulu keeps thinking. Suddenly, she cheers. "We can make a camp!"

"Camp?" Annika is surprised.

"Yes, why not? We can go camping, sleep and eat in the jungle, go for an adventure in there, just in one day. Is that cool?"

Annika is preoccupied. Thomas feels right. "Right! I like that! And we can make food, too. To eat."

Annika is still worries. "But, what about our parents, Thomas? Will they consent?"

"Oh, don't worry! We will ask permission."

"Yes, I will help you," Lulu blinks.

Then the job starts. They take the raw material and turn it into dishes: chicken, soup, rice. How delicious! They have juice, too.

"But, what kind of cakes should we make?" Annika suddenly asks.

"Subject to you!" Lulu answers briefly.

Thomas gets his idea. "Can we make glutinous rice cakes?"

Annika thinks that dumplings and grilled cakes of fresh rice are a better idea, just because she prefers them. But Thomas doesn't seem to like that idea very much. He starts to scorn Annika's cakes, saying that this cake is too insipid, and that cake is too sweet! Annika gets angry. They quarrel. Lulu thinks. Oh, she has an idea.

"Hey, guys, listen to me," Lulu says. No one hears her. Bearing a grudge, she lifts the horse and carries it into the house, stands on it, and cries at the top of her voice: "HEY!! LISTEN TO ME!!!"

Thomas and Annika turn back with a start. Now Lulu comes down off the horse, who was still scared because she yelled. The yelling made some of the glass in the kitchen to be nearly broken.

"Listen to me, okay? I have an idea. We can each make our own cakes. And then we will share and taste the other cakes. And no more quarreling. Okay?"

"Alright," Thomas and Annika grumble.

"I said 'OKAY?!'" Lulu cried again.

"YES SIR!!!" Now it is their turn to cry.

"Good. Now go to work."

Maybe they are scared of Lulu, or maybe they think the quarreling isn't necessary any more. Suddenly Annika screams: "OH NO! We don't have enough raw materials!" Thomas frowns.

Lulu says, "Calm down." She tries to think of some way to get more meal when

Thomas remembers.

"Ha!" he says. "I remember, Annika. In our house we have a little extra meal, and I can ask mom to buy a little more. How is that?" And he runs to his home, and deep in the cupboard he finds the meal. So lucky! He runs to Lulu's house. "Here it is!" he says, very glad.

The job continues and finally they finish. Thomas has glutinous rice cake, Annika has dumplings (they may be a little flat, but very delicious) and grilled cakes of fresh rice, attractive and sweet. Lulu has her own cakes: moon cake, white coconut cake, rice cake, and marble dumplings made of white rice flour. Wow! They'll be delicious. They all seem very happy with their work. They take the juice, the tent, and of course the cakes. Everything is so perfect!

They go to their camp. Lulu brings her horse and Mr. Will. They look very happy, too. They go in the jungle, adventure in nature. So great! When it is nearly noon, they sit and have lunch. Now is the time to taste the cakes and the dishes. What they made. Three people trade their cakes. Delicious. After eating and drinking, they lie down in the meadow.

"How do you feel?" Lulu asks. "Do you like this idea?"

"Of course! Too fun ! You're a genius, Lulu!" Thomas and Annika answer at the same time.

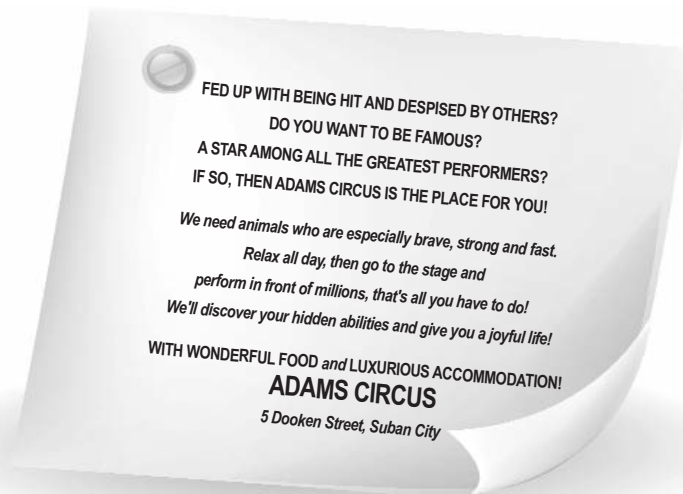
"Ha ha! I'm a genius?!" Lulu laughs. This makes Thomas and Annika have to laugh. Maybe with these kids, this day is the funniest day in their life. Lulu always gives the great ideas, and that's why they like her.



Leo the Lion

by Nguyen Thao Huong, age 13

I wake up with an empty stomach, as I've been eating nothing but plants for three days. "It's so embarrassing that a lion can't chase or kill any animal!" I talked to myself. "But can't anybody understand or believe in me?" I walked, bored, out of my poor house and picked up the newspaper which was lying in the yard. I didn't know there was a solution to my problem inside that paper:



'Lion Leo.' It has meant 'loser' for years. My parents - the leaders of the lions group - couldn't stand educating me, a small, thin and useless son, and they didn't let me live in the group any more. Because I had to live independently, I couldn't develop my skills, I still behaved weakly and insensibly. Even monkeys

despised me and often hit me. But that was yesterday, before I read the advertisement for Adams Circus. "Two months from now, I'll come back, and No-Name Jungle's members will look at me in another way!"

I left the jungle with these thoughts and went to the city to ask for a circus job. The feelings of the boss there changed quickly as we spoke: suspicious, surprised, and, at last, happy. I guessed he didn't believe that a talking lion would work for his circus. He said, "Even though you're thin, weight isn't important here. You can help me direct the animals, as you can speak English," he said in an excited voice. "And you can sometimes stand in the spotlight and perform for the viewers." That last thing he said more quietly, with a dark look.

Adams Circus wasn't as big as I expected, but it had lots of animals. There were dozens of monkeys, five bears, and lots of dogs. There were sheep dogs, house dogs, and black dogs (who were very strong and violent). The dogs howled and barked all day and always broke the rules.

I had to watch them carefully and hit them if they paid bad attention.

There was an old panther named Hut, who was always bored and sleepy, and easy to anger. He only seemed happy when he was on the stage, performing for the crowd. On show days, he was eager and excited. I felt the same way at first, so I quite liked him. But I had to be careful around him, or he would shout at me easily.

The opposite of Hut was Laya, the only other lion of the circus. She was really beautiful, but I didn't like her character. She always avoided practicing and she avoided the boss. She hated performing in the spotlight. The boss didn't fire her, because she was the best performer when the show started. She was too proud to perform badly.

As the time passed, I was more and more disappointed with about my job. At first, I could eat delicious meat, but gradually there were only vegetables and rice to eat. The boss told me that I had to hit the other animals to make them stand in line or go round the circle. I didn't ever see the natural world, but stayed in a tiny cage. I began thinking that standing on the floor, jumping over the wood things, and smiling to the viewers were silly. I began to recognize that Adams Circus didn't give me the halo I'd wanted, but took my freedom away.

At the end of each performance, we were all ordered to jump through a ring of fire. One night, the animals complained. The fire was too dangerous, they said. Laya was too tired, having been performing for several days, and two bears had been hurt while climbing the day before. So I told them they didn't have to jump. "Just walk around the ring and pretend to perform. The viewers won't mind, I suspect," I whispered. But things didn't happen this way. The viewers were angry and disappointed about us. They had been waiting for this part and didn't find it satisfactory. The boss was really angry about all the complaints he received. After the show, the boss called me out to talk about the "mistake" I'd made.

"Leo," he started. "Let's have a clear conversation. I don't know what happened with you, but, whatever, you have to do your work as I order. You are paid by me, and you will jump through that fire, and you will make the others do it, too." He smiled cruelly, and began to hit me with his whip.

"Please, sir!" I cried. "You didn't say I had to do all of these things, you didn't say I had to hit the others." He didn't listen, and continued whipping me. I begged, "Aargh. You promised not to behave terribly to me. It's unfair!"

When my wounds bled, he threw his whip away and said with a dry voice: "Fair? Animals are directed by humans. Animals are stupid and useless. They can't resist us, so the way belongs to people, the stronger, the more intelligent."

"Stupid and useless," I thought. I had heard those words in the No-Name Jungle. That night was the most terrible time in my life. I knew there was no way for me to hope more about the wonderful life with humans. I knew all my pride about fame and power were superficial. I missed my peaceful jungle and my beautiful home so much. It was time for me to go back.

I took the boss's keys while he slept, and I unlocked all the cages, and I took all the animals out. I explained to them all I thought, and about how we had withstood the unfairness of the circus for too long. I asked them about escaping with me from the terrible place, to go to peaceful No-Name Jungle.

All the dogs barked: "Why didn't you tell us before? This is the solution for our lives!"

"It isn't too late. We have enough time to go and begin a new life," Laya said, with a warm look for me.

"I disagree!" Hut yelled. "This circus is my life! How can I live without it?"

"It isn't wonderful at all," I said firmly. "The boss has taken advantage of us." We all tried to persuade him, but poor Hut just cried, "How can you leave the great boss alone here? You aren't good enough to be performers! No one can change my mind, I belong to the stage!"

That was the last thing I heard from old Hut, that he was too stubborn to leave behind his despair and dream to escape. All the rest of the animals left Adams Circus and went to the No-Name Jungle with me. Now I live happily with my wife Laya, and I have fun with my new friends from the circus. The jungle has never looked as nice as it looks now. ●





The School Story

by Pham Thi Thuy Duong, age 16

The strong wind was blowing outside, everything felt frozen. Sitting beside a big heater, Trang was searching for some documents and files about recent murders, whose victims were all the best students in the Art class of Vietnam National College.

Suddenly the clock bell rang. "I suppose it's time to call it a day," she sighed. Having put her jacket on, Trang locked the police station and left. While walking, deep in thought about the murders, she felt a chill running through her spine, and when she turned around, the image of Vietnam national college appeared behind the mist. Someone was staring at her. She could hear the footsteps. She ran as fast as she could, with the thought in her head: "I'm gonna die!" She was the best student in the Art class that year.

The next day was Monday...

Trang had taken charge of the provincial police station where she was living. She didn't have much interesting work to do in such a tranquil province, so she decided to take part in a summer art course in a university nearby, so she could study and go back to the police station if necessary. Today, she came to the class as usual. It was quite early in the morning, and the school was quiet and deserted. Trang wanted to enjoy the peaceful and fresh air of the dawn.

Right after she came into the classroom, she heard two girls passing and talking about the murders. "Have you heard the story of the Art class? People say that class is haunted by bad ghosts, and the best students are going to die," one whispered. "I wonder if the same thing will happen this year," the other replied. Trang sat quietly at the corner of the room, thinking about what she had just heard. She was thinking confusing thoughts when the bell suddenly stopped

her. And there came professor An, the teacher of this class. He was sixty years old, with white hair and a round, kind face. He was always smiling and gentle to his students. But as a sophisticated artist, sometimes he did strange and perplexing things. And following him then was a girl who looked pale and very tall and thin. Her lengthy, lustrous hair covered most of her face.

"This is our new friend. Her name is Lan," Professor An announced. Lan's seat was just behind Trang, and our young policewoman was very interested in that new friend, who seemed mysterious, like she was keeping a secret. She tried to talk and make friends with Lan, but there was a problem: Lan did not talk at all. She sat still and quietly with a sallow face, seeming exhausted. "Or maybe she's mute," Lan thought. After class, Trang went to meet Professor An. "Teacher, my new friend, Lan, seems to be a bit of a freak. She doesn't talk at all," she said.

"Maybe she's too shy to communicate with new people. You should help her then," he answered. "Yes, maybe. There's still another thing I want to ask you. Is the rumor about the dead students in this class true? I mean, were all of them the best students in the class for the past 3 years?" she added.

"Yes, that's true. But everyone knows that they died suddenly without any suspicion. Even the police didn't care about those accidents. Why did you ask me that question?" He demanded, surprised. "Nothing, sir. I just want to know. Thanks for your time. Goodbye," she replied. She walked out to the streets, hoping to find something to eat. It was nearly 1 pm.

That night...

She was lost in the school's library. She couldn't find the exit. Then she saw a group of students studying at the corner of the library. "Hey there!" she shouted. "I'm lost! Please show me the way out."

But it seemed that they didn't hear her. "Excuse me!" she yelled even louder and ran towards the students. But... to her terror, she realized that they were the dead students! Their eyes and faces were white, and their bodies were just skeletons! They silently pointed to a door, and when Trang looked at it, there was a big sign above it: "HELL." She screamed wildly and ran away. But when she turned back, she saw Lan wearing a long and white dress with much more long hair than in the morning. She was star-

ing at Trang with wide-open, red and bloody eyes. Then she smiled, the most cruel and inscrutable smile Trang had ever seen. Slowly, Lan came towards Trang, and Trang's feet couldn't move. Trang was horrified. Lan's hands nearly caught Trang and Trang's feet still couldn't move...

But Trang woke up right then. It was a terrible nightmare! Her body was full of sweat, when a hand squeezed Trang's hand. And beside her bed stood Lan. Trang shouted, and this time she really woke up. It was 5.30 pm.

Trang drank a cup of water to get calm, and she knew that she was in danger. She took out the documents and files, and began to read them carefully. "Why did those students die?" she wondered. But one of those files was lost! Trang couldn't find it in her bag. "So I must have forgotten it at the school," she told herself. She intended to go back to school to find it, but firstly, she decided to read the rest of the papers. The first student was Tan, a boy who had been crazy about drawing. He was killed by a heart attack, but he used to be a superior marathon runner and he was chosen to represent the city. How come such a strong man had heart problems? The second one was a young girl, Thuy, who was a national swim athlete. She died unexpectedly while taking photos of the library. Yes! That's the library Trang dreamed about, and she determined to go back there. "Those deaths are so strange and unusual," she murmured. "Something must be wrong here, they were so strong and athletic. No way they died of diseases." Having these thoughts in her head, she rode her bike back to the school.

It was wintry outside. There she was, in front of the library. She looked at her watch, it was 6 pm. "I do not have a long time here. So I must be quick," she confirmed. She was a bit afraid, but her curiosity had prodded her to go in. She wanted to figure out about this library and her strange, horrible dream about it. The sky had become dark as soon as she got into the building. She had to turn on the lights to see things more clearly. But she couldn't. "Oh God! Come on, lights," she whispered. She started feeling scared... Suddenly... BANG!... The windows opened, and a strong wind blew into the room. Hurriedly, she tried her best to close them.

Right at the moment she touched the windows, a decomposed hand pulled her fingers. She hollered and stepped backwards. But she knew that it wasn't safe to keep the windows open. So she tiptoed over and closed them quickly. Turning

away, she still felt the wind blowing at her back. She turned around, and.... "Ahh-hhhhhhh!!!!!!!" There was a skull outside the window. It had no eyes, but red lights coming from the eyes' holes and its mouth was wide-open. To be worse, the skull was full of blood! It smiled mysteriously at Trang and disappeared. Too scared to stay there, Trang tried to escape. But she couldn't open the door. Suddenly, the lights went on. She looked around carefully and noticed that there was something beside the biggest shelf. Yes, Trang could also hear its cry. Cautiously, she came nearer and nearer to it. It was Lan with the long, black and shiny hair.

Too surprised and frightened, Trang couldn't say a word. But at last, she asked: "Can I help you, Lan? What's wrong?" Lan looked up, and her face was as white as a sheet, full of tears. She pointed at the shelf. Trang examined the shelf thoroughly, and turned it over. To her amazement, she found a large catacomb behind it. It was so dark inside, Trang had to use a torch. It was shallow, and inside she found two dead bodies. "You should be the students I'm looking for," Trang guessed. Someone had built the catacomb and put the bodies there. Trang came out, wanting to ask Lan some questions. But Lan had disappeared. So Trang called the police station, and asked her colleagues to help her.

She dug graves for dead students immediately. "Poor you! I will find out the truth – who put you here. Rest in peace, my friends!" Trang prayed. She was so sad and still worried and confused. Who put the bodies there? Was it the murderer or someone else?

When she had finished, Trang rode her bicycle back home. Suddenly she realized someone was standing on the street. Trang turned the bike to avoid the person and she crashed against the signpost, falling over the bike. Her head hurt, and when she looked up, there was nothing in the street. "Too tired to be dazzled," she thought. However, she couldn't get rid of the puzzled and terrible feeling even though she had many explanations for the "thing" she had just seen. Eventually, she made up her mind to continue the trip. But, while riding, she noticed that the rack behind her was too heavy to be empty. Trang shivered and turned back. Professor An was sitting there, staring at her with completely black eyes and a furious grin. There was a knife on his hand. "This is so much fun!" he groaned. Trang screamed, but no one could hear her, as it was an isolated street...

Trang's funeral was very crowded. All of her friends and relatives cried very

much. And behind the crowd stood a little girl wearing a black, long overcoat with a large hood covering her face. She watched the funeral quietly, and left quietly too. Her hand held bloody papers which were about the death of a young girl. She was strangled as the police found finger marks around her neck, but policemen could never figure out whose fingerprints they were. The body was found lying on the floor of the library. On the top of the first paper, there was a name. It was LAN.



Professor An was welcoming the new students. Another new term had just begun. One of the new students asked him to take a photo with them. But when the photos were made, the image of the teacher faded and disappeared...

And, behind Trang's grave, nobody noticed that there were two other graves. On the stones in front of them were written: Lan – born 1990 - died 2006 and Professor An – born 1945 - died 2005.

A new term had begun. Day after day, eyes behind the bookshelf were watching the students silently..... •



The Mirror

by Nguyen Tien Quang Anh, age 14

Hien and her daughter, Ha, lived in an old, small house in the countryside. Hien was very poor, she had no good job, so she had to grow vegetables to live. The money she earned each day wasn't much, so they were always hungry. Next door was their neighbor, Tuan. This guy was mean and selfish. He was rich, but he wanted to be more rich. Tuan was blind in one eye. Tuan was always fighting, and this left him with a lot of ugly scars on his face, so he looked evil.

On her ninth birthday, Ha asked her mother to buy her a mirror. All of her friends had mirrors, but Ha had never owned one. "I'm sorry, daughter. But I cannot afford to buy anything for you," Hien smiled sadly. "Maybe in the future I'll earn enough to buy some things for you."

A few days after that, when Hien was digging in her garden, she found something strange in the ground, and picked it up. It was a mirror, an old mirror that seemed to be made of old gold. Hien didn't know what to do. She could sell it to have more money, her life could be better, but something told Hien to keep it. "This mirror could be useful one day," she thought. "Besides, old gold isn't very valuable." She decided to give it to Ha, to keep for a time.

Time passed, and Ha grew into a beautiful young woman. She and her mother continued to live in poverty, with no hope. On her twentieth birthday, Ha was taking vegetables to the market with her mother when they saw a paper on the wall. Hien read: "EVERYONE! THE KING IS LOOKING FOR AN OLD MIRROR, MADE OF OLD GOLD. IT WAS OWNED BY THE KING'S FATHER AND WAS LOST IN THE WAR! THE MIRROR IS VERY IMPORTANT TO THE KING. A REWARD WILL BE GIVEN TO THE PERSON WHO FINDS IT!"

Hien wondered if the old mirror she had found eleven years ago was the same one the King's father had lost. "Mother," said Ha. "Maybe we should bring our mirror to the castle."

"Yes, daughter, but not tonight. The way to the castle is far, and it is late, so we will do it tomorrow."

When Tuan heard this news, he remembered. He had seen that mirror in Hien's house. He decided to steal it. That night, something crept Hien out. She woke up and took a staff. Opening the door slowly, she saw a robber in the kitchen. She hit him in the head with the staff, and he ran away. The light of the moon helped her to see the robber's face clearly.

The next day, Hien went to her old friend Quang, who was a blacksmith. "Good day, Quang. I want you to do something for me," she said. "I want you to make a false mirror just like this one."

"Of course, Hien. I am happy to help you," Quang smiled warmly. "Your husband was such a dear friend to me."

Quang made the false mirror that afternoon, and Hien left it in her kitchen that night, hiding the real one carefully. Just as she expected, the thief returned and took the false mirror.

The next morning, she heard her neighbors talking. "Did you hear about Tuan?" they asked. He was arrested for trying to sell a false mirror to the King! Now, Hien was still worried. How could she take the mirror without making Ha sad? But Ha was happy to return the old mirror to the King.

They both went to see the King. He was happy to learn that this was the real mirror. And when the King saw Ha's reflection in that old mirror, and he saw how beautiful she was, he fell in love with her.

Now, Hien and Ha live in the castle. Hien doesn't have to work any more, but she has never forgotten the poor people, so she goes everywhere to help poor families. She is called 'Queen of the Poor People.'

Everyone lived happily ever after. •

Friendship and Football

by Huynh Nhat Anh, age 14

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are here in the High School Championship Cup Final between Tigerton and Louisville. The score is 2-2 with one minute left on the clock. Tigerton has been given a direct free kick. Frank Gordon, number 10, will take the shot. The last chance, the big moment of this match! He moves slowly to the ball, and -- OH YES! What a goal! What a finish! Tigerton wins the championship! Gordon punches in the air! What a hero!"

"Frank! Frank! Get up! You're going to be late."

"Mom! What are you doing here? Look! I'm the hero, we won the Championship!" Frank's mom smiled. "What are you talking about? You were dreaming. You have to wake up now. This is your first day at your new school, you don't want to be late!" his mom continued.

Sleepy Frank finally woke up. "Okay, mom," he yawned. "But he thought about his dream, the one he dreamed every night. The Championship, the worst day of his life..."

Tigerton was a strong football team, but most of their strength belonged to three key players. David was the Team Captain, the tall and thin goalkeeper who was as good at studying as he was at sport. The second was mid-fielder Toni, short but very quick, able to run in circles around defenders. Toni was not a good student, and often found ways to cheat in school. The third player, Frank, was handsome and also very skillful on the field. Frank was smart, but he didn't pay attention to his studies, always dreaming football. The three boys became best friends and shared the same hopes to become professional footballers. Last year, they had led their Tigerton team to the Championship Final against Louisville, the cup holders. A few days before the match, the key Louisville player, a bad guy named Samuel, invited the

boys to join in a friendly match. David was visiting his grandfather, so Toni accepted.

"I think this is not a good idea," worried Frank. "Maybe we should wait and ask David what he thinks."

"Oh, don't worry, we don't have to get David's permission to do everything. He's not our boss! Let's show them our power!"

The truth was, there was a plot inside of that friendly match. That guy Samuel didn't play, but his worst players did, and they cheated, pushed and tripped Toni, who got angry and started fighting. Frank joined in the riot to support his friend, and the security had to come. The result, Toni and Frank were banned from the Final, and Tigerton lost, 0-2.

But they lost more than that football match. As a result of the fight, Toni and Frank were forced to change schools. They were sent to Southampton High School.

Frank quickly ate breakfast. Toni was waiting downstairs for him. "Let's go," he said, chewing on some toast. "We're going to be late."

They didn't talk on the way to their new school. When they got to the school gate, Toni said, "I miss David." "

Me, too. We can't play without him."

Southampton Secondary School was a big school, but they had a small team, and last year their position was ranked eighteenth out of twenty, and they lost to the Tigerton Tigers, the boys' old team, 0-3 during that bad season. "They don't have any good players," said Frank. "But the worst thing is that I heard they don't have a soccer field!"

"What!? How can we play soccer without a field?" Toni complained.

"Calm down, this can't be true. Let's find the school sports club room, and check it out."

It was hard to find the club room. Finally, after going up four floors, they were disappointed to find a small, boring room with only a few old desks and chairs. It was dusty. At Tigerton, they had had a great shiny sports club room, with computers, music and a TV. Inside this gloomy room sat a big man, rather

young. "Excuse me," said David. "We want to register for the football team."

The man looked up and smiled. "Welcome, he said. "You must be Toni and Frank, right?"

The boys were quite surprised. "How did you know our names?"

"You guys are famous," he said. "I knew you were coming. I'm Mark, the sports club leader. I want to build this sports program here, and you can help me. This season, we're going to defeat Tigerton, AND Louisville!"

"Well, we're ready to help you. But this school needs some changes. We can't practice without a soccer field."

"Oh, you heard that old rumor. We do have a soccer field, it's just that no one was ever interested in it. When I heard that you two were coming to our school, I went to work on repairs. It's ready to go. Would you like to see it?"

The field was beautiful, and Toni and Frank had new hope. "But we're still missing something. Our friend David. We can't defeat Tigerton if he's playing for them, and we're not going to beat Louisville without him."

"Are you sure, guys?" Frank and Toni couldn't believe their eyes. There was David, leaning on the gate, with a football in his hands.

"W-what are you...?" both boys stammered.

"Guys, my marks were so good at the end of the term, my parents told me I could choose any gift as a reward. So I chose to change schools!"

"You chose us instead of a new X-Box 360?!" Frank was shocked.

"Of course. If it were you, which would you choose, some stupid toy or your best friends?"

They hugged each other, three friends reunited, and passed through the gate, onto a new field, into a new school, a new year, and new challenges. ●



Froggy! Froggy?

by Mai Phan Bao Linh, age 12

Far away from the earth, distant from the Milky Way, at the end of the universe, the place that our sunlight can't touch, there's Animals Planet, an advanced world where all kinds of animals live and act like people.

All kinds of animals live happily, except the frogs. All of the frogs, except one, disappeared many years ago. There's one frog left, the one and only frog: Felix. Felix is an orphan. His life is not special and sometimes may be hard. He lives with his foster parents, a pair of foxes who don't really care about him.

Felix isn't a famous kid at school, everybody hates him because he's poor. His only friend is Patty. She doesn't care about Felix's condition, she just wants to be friends. Everyone at school hates both of them, because Patty is a princess and she is a pig.

Every day after school, Patty and Felix take a walk around Ducky Lake and take a rest under the zebra tree, a special and scarce kind of tree, tall and big with a trunk like the zebra's skin, black and white. Its leaves are really big, as big as a zebra's head. Patty and Felix sit under there because zebra leaves stop sunlight and rain water.

Resting under the tree one summer day, Patty saw a flickering light, far away. She couldn't resist her curiosity. "Felix! Look at that light! It's moving! Let's follow it!"

They followed the light, running faster and faster to keep up. They ran into a forest, and ran so fast that they didn't see the sign. This was a "Do Not Come In" forest! In the middle of the forest, they came to an old door. There was no wall around the door, it just stood there. Felix opened the door and went in, and Patty came after him. They groped in darkness, and suddenly they were falling. Then the flickering light appeared, and they realized that they were standing on the ceiling. Patty hid behind Felix, she had had enough 'falling down' feeling. Walking on the ceiling, that was just their first surprise.

"Hellooooo.....!" Is anybody here?" asked Felix. But there was nobody there, just Felix, Patty and Felix's question, resounding. They followed the light down a long corridor, and suddenly came out to a really present-times city. It was early morning, sunrise, but the sun rose in the west. They could see the whole city. Every house and building was beautiful, but they were built upside-down. All the chimneys were planted in the ground! Suddenly, a voice.

"Hello. I'm Moses the mouse. And you're....?" the mouse spoke quickly.

"I'm Felix, and this is Patty, and --- "

"Wow! You're a frog! Come on! You're in danger here." Moses pulled them away.

"Wait! Wait! Where are we going?"

Moses led them into the upside-down city, through a gate and through a door into a small, dark, old and dirty room. Moses locked the door and turned on a small and weak light. There were three stools around a table, and they sat down. The corners of the room were dark.

Patty was a bit scared of this place. "Now, can you tell us what is happening? Why'd you take us here? Why are we in danger? Can we go home now?"

"Sit down, and calm down," said Moses. "I want to ask you a few questions."

"Then you'll send us home, okay?"

"You're a frog."

"Of course."

"You're an orphan."

"Yes!"

"Have you ever met any other frogs?"

"No. There's only me."

"Do you know any foxes?"

"Yes, my foster parents. Hey! Are you asking questions or interrogating me?!" Not listening to Felix, Moses spoke to the dark: "I think it's him!"

"Oh! We're saved!" A monkey jumped out of the darkness and did a dance around the table.

Felix whispered to Patty, "Hey, I think that monkey's crazy."

"Hello, good evening, hi there! I'm Banana, and I hope you'll collaborate with us!" he squawked as he shook their hands.

"Banana, this is serious business. We've been looking for him for years, don't make him think you're crazy," Moses grumbled.

Moses and Banana told their story. Many years ago, an evil cat named Caesar made a plan to take over the universe, but the machine that could make his dream come true needed a special fuel.

"That fuel was flies, but he needed so many flies that only frogs could catch them all," Banana explained.

"So he kidnapped all the frogs in Animals Planet, and brought them through the secret forest door," Moses continued the story. "Somehow you escaped, your parents hid you from him. When Caesar had enough flies, he tried his machine, but the power only reached our city, and turned everything upside-down. The only way out of here is through that forest door, but the door only opens 'in,' it is locked to go 'out,' and Caesar has hidden the key."

"Please," begged Banana. "Help us, and help your relations."

It wasn't hard to find Caesar, but it was difficult to convince him to agree with the plan. Moses and Felix were disguised as Caesar's guards. They told him that there were no more flies in Animal Planet, and that he had no more money to feed all of the frog prisoners. Caesar was exhausted and he capitulated. The city was turned right-side-up, and everyone could walk on their floors again. Felix got the key and freed the frogs. He found his parents and all his relations and many new frogs, too. Caesar's machine wasn't destroyed, they turned it into a giant washing machine. With Patty, Felix led the frogs through the forest and unlocked the door. And your dad returned home with his parents and lived happily, and he had lots of new friends. That is how the story ends. Did you like it?

"Yes! Yes!" tell us another, cried the little frogs who were gathered at Patty's feet. "Tell us another Felix story!"

"Hey!" called Felix, hopping home from work. "What's going on? Patty, are you telling them more crazy stories?"

"Oh, no, not at all," answered Patty. "I was just telling your kids what a silly dad they have!"

Nypd

by Nguyen Sinh Vuong, age 13

*I*t was a stormy night. Detective John Carmack was sitting on the old busted sofa, watching his favorite TV show "Cops." Suddenly the rusty yellow phone rang. Carmack started grumbling, walking discouragedly to the phone, answering it with difficulty.

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Joanne. Get to headquarters now There's an emergency!"

The detective sighed. He took his shabby brown coat and his smelly hat, opened the door, and walked toward the raging storm.

John talked to himself while driving his old Mustang. "I wonder why they're summoning me in the middle of the night like this. Must be something big." As one of the main investigators for the NYPD, Carmack usually had to go to work early, or go home late. But not when he was watching TV. Not at 3am. The car continued 'walking' like an old woman. Carmack kept thinking about Joanne's panicked voice. A Lieutenant like her shouldn't be afraid. "Got promoted from police officer to Lieutenant in two months. She's better than any man in the NYPD," he thought. "I wonder what could make her so scared?"

The car made a grinding sound as it stopped. Park Row, One Police Plaza, New York. John had arrived. He got out of the car and looked at headquarters, feeling bored, then slowly walked inside the big brown building. Carmack was greeted by Joanne as he took his first step through the door.

"John, we have trouble."

"We have trouble every day," John thought. "So why call me at this time of night?" he asked.

Come with me, this is a Code Red alert!"

"WHAT!?! A CODE RED!?!?"

Twelve years on the NYPD and John had only seen one Code Red. September 11, 2001. Joanne answered, with fear still on her face.

"This afternoon, Chief Kelly received an email."

"So?"

"Normally, it's nothing, but this one is different. Read it."

'Dear Mr. Kelly, Please look below...'

"Do you know what was below him?"

"What?"

"C4 explosive, under his desk."

"A top security place like this could get bombed? In the Commissioner's office??"
John was shocked. "What would the NY Times say!?!... But, how.....?"

"I don't know. In fact, no one does. we checked the security camera, but it was down. We interrogated everyone, we used the lie tester, but no result. We tried to use the Real Time Crime Center, too, but still no results."

"So.... what happened to the chief?"

"He quickly ordered the Special Team and they deactivated the bomb thirty seconds before it exploded. Trust me. It's a big party."

"You do have some sense of humor, don't you?" John said with a faint smile.
"Yeah, anyway, the bomb was dealt with. Chief Kelly was really freaked out." A veteran of the Vietnam War, Chief Kelly was the toughest man Carmack had ever met. "And he got freaked out?" Carmack thought the world had turned upside down.

Joanne handed Carmack a piece of paper. "It gets worse. Here, read this."
"Dear NYPD friends: I'm a fan of fireworks. Who isn't? I guess you'll be delighted to know that I set some c4 blocks somewhere in the city. Try deactivating them if you can. Here's a clue for you..."

42-47, you don't have much time, if you don't hurry there will be a crime.

40-53, you must get ready, if time runs out things will get bloody."

And yet another clue:

"Congratulations for finding the place, once you have been there prepare to embrace.

I hope you enjoy something to drink, I have Pepsi and Sprite, they're all the same ink."

"Damn," John muttered. "Looks like we're dealing with a freak around here."
"And from what I read," said Joanne, "it looks like the second clue is useful only after we solve the first clue."

"Yeah...the first clue... it's Times Square."

"What?" Joanne shouted. "Times Square? Nonsense! 'You don't have much time' doesn't mean Times Square!"

"No, it's not that. It's 42-47 and 40-53, they're the clues. You do know that Times Square includes city blocks stretching from West 42nd Street to West 47th Street and West 40th and West 53rd from south to north?"

"Okay. So it's done." Joanne took her radio from her pocket. "Jim? We need a bomb squad team, Times Square, immediately. John, we need to go, now." The fear in her eyes quickly disappeared. Her eyes turned cold.

When Joanne and John arrived, Jim Boston (captain of the NYD Special Response Team) was already there, sitting on a 90 km/hr brand new Chevrolet with a police light on its bonnet. "So, you're telling me there's a block of C4 hidden in Times Square and it's about to explode?" Jim didn't look happy. He looked like Chief Kelly did when he learned he was sitting on C4.

Twenty minutes later, Times Square was cleared of everyone and everything except the bomb squad. "Okay, men! Search the entire place! Don't leave anything out of your sight!" Twenty minutes later, nothing.

Jim seemed lost. "Are you sure there's a bomb here? I give up. I'm going to get a Coke."

Carmack started smiling. "What!? Why are you grinning?" asked Jim.

Then Joanne smiled, too. "That big Coca-Cola sign! That's where the C4 is hidden!"

"How -- how do you know that?"

"Pepsi, Sprite.... 7-Up, Coke! It's all the same company! Coca-Cola "ink"! That was the second clue!"

They found the C4 behind the sign, set to a timer that was due to explode in 30 seconds. Jim muttered, "No time to waste! Four wires. Red, white, blue and black. Cut the wrong one and we go 'BOOM!'"

"So do something!" said Carmack.

"I... I can't. It's too risky!" trembled Jim.

"Give me those wire cutters!" yelled Carmack. Grabbing the cutters, he reached in, slowly, and chose the red wire. He cut it. ●



The Limp

by Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, age 12

*I*n a dark night of December, 1919, when the First World War had ended, Sherlock Holmes received a telegraph message from Scotland Yard about a murder. In about a minute, Lestrade, a mature detective, arrived at the house of Holmes and Watson.

"What are you doing here on a very cold and foggy night, my friend?" asked Holmes.

"I'm here to talk about a very strange and difficult murder," whispered Lestrade. "Did you receive a telegraph message?"

"Yes, but I can't pay attention to this murder, because I am elderly," said Holmes.

"Yes, I have aged, too. But we must clear up this murder. Maybe we must depend on young Hopkins, he's in working now."

"Or my sister."

"Oh, Sherlock Holmes, I didn't know you had a sister!!!"

"Yes, I have. Helen is a good detective." Then Holmes sent a telegraph message to Helen Holmes. In half an hour, Helen arrived.

Lestrade said, "Hello, Miss Holmes."

"Hello, Lestrade," said Helen. "What about a murder?"

"Oh, let me tell you. The murder happened two hours ago. An Earl at Kensington is dead and it's defined a murder. And this Earl has a relationship with materials about foreign spies in London, in the government. He was killed by a revolver bullet. And the spy materials are missing. And we don't have any trace of the criminal."

"Oh, right! Let's go there!"

"Okay."

Helen Holmes was a good woman. She was born in 1876, when her brother was famous. She was tall like her brother. She had a smoking habit. She was a modern woman. She never got married because she made the detective work her first choice.

Helen and Lestrade went to Kensington Castle, a castle in the suburbs of Kensington. They met the Countess, a woman who people must respect. When detectives came, she was crying. Helen asked her something, and then they went home. On the way, Helen sent some telegraph messages and the next morning she got up early and went back to Kensington with young Detective Hopkins and Lestrade, to collect some evidence. When they arrived she said, "Oh my God. We lost clues, the criminal is not in England any more, he is in Italy!"

"What do we do now?" yelled Lestrade.

"Let's go to Rome!" Helen replied.

They searched for clues in Rome for three days, but it was not conducive to a result. They were so tired. That night they slept at the police station. At midnight, a man ran into the station shouting, "PLEASE COME WITH ME! PLEASE!" One policeman yelled, "What?! If it's not important, don't disturb me at this hour!"

"No, it's very important! They are fighting!" screamed the man.

"Oh, you can deal with it," replied the policeman.

"No, I can't deal with it, they have a knife!" yelled the man. "Maybe they have a gun!"

"Maybe I must go," spoke the policeman. Although in Italy it's warmer and brighter than in England, it is still cold at night and the policeman worried about going out.

Ten minutes later, the policeman escorted two men to the police station and requested of one man: "Why did you fight?"

"Because he overturned my trash can," the man quacked.

"Calm down, calm down," said the policeman. While they were talking, Helen Holmes came quietly through the door. She told the man who had overturned the trash can:

"Pablo Vacenloti! You are busted for the crime of killing the Earl of Kensington!"

First, the criminal denied it, but after that he accepted. Hopkins was so surprised, he asked Helen, "How did you know that he was a criminal?"

"Oh, it was easy," Helen told him. "The first time I went to Kensington Castle, I knew the Countess had seen the criminal, and I asked her to describe him. He was 1.7 meters tall and he was limping. I remembered a spy from the war. He was Italian and tall, about 1.7 meters," she reported. "The second time I went to Kensington, I looked at the footprints of the criminal and I saw that the left footprint was dimmer than the right."

Helen looked at Lestrade. "This criminal who overturned the trash can walks with a limp! His footprints here at the police station fit to the footprints from Kensington!" exclaimed Helen.

"When we were at the castle, I sniffed in the garden and it had a smell like Amfora tobacco, which has a vanilla smell and is used with Montebello pipes. This tobacco is the favorite of the Italian Spy Group. They were working on a campaign to spy in Germany and they summoned all spies to London to make a plan. And tonight at the police station, I saw the criminal's hand, the back of his hand has a special smokey gunpowder color, and I devised he is a professional killer," Helen continued. "When we left Kensington the first time, I sent a telegraph message for the police and next day I received a reply telling me the spy went to Italy. And here we caught him by chance! I can't believe the murder is solved early like this!"

And the criminal had the death penalty and this was the first international murder solved by Helen Holmes. ●

Rocky

by Dang Nguyen Khanh Van, age 12

I t is an unlucky Friday. I go home with a sad face. I open the door, and suddenly realize that something is missing: my dog's bark. Rocky is my friend, my best friend. For me, he isn't a dog. I'm not an energetic girl, I'm shy and I can't make friends, so the only friend I've got is Rocky.

Actually, he isn't a beautiful dog, he has tangled brown fur, only one eye, and he doesn't walk well. My parents don't like animals, they think they're stupid and dirty, but Rocky isn't. He's a smart puppy and really has emotion. He shares with me every happiness or sadness. I love him very much.

Usually, when I open the door, Rocky goes near me and shakes his tail. But these days, I ignore him, too busy with studies. Even yesterday, I kicked him just because he barked when I was angry. Today I realize how important he is to me. I remember the days we played together and had fun, but see what I did. I hurt him. I look for him all afternoon, but where is he? I realize my face is wet, tears all over. There are pictures of him covering my room. I miss him much. "Time for dinner Susan," I hear my mom shout to me from the kitchen.

"Here I come," I reply.

Suddenly I see a hole in the wall and some brown fur there, and a broken dog collar. I'm scared, but inquisitive wins. I jump to the black hole, and at that moment, I know an adventure has begun.

I wake up. Did I sleep? I only remember about the hole, the hole that I know I should never have jumped through. I feel cold and scared, the wind is very strong and makes me shake. All around me there are leaves, I'm in a forest which smells like rain, darkness covers the sky, I can't see a star. Then I see a house, actually just a big tent. One old woman with a scary face speaks in a smooth voice: "Are you tired daughter? Are you lost in the forest? I can give you some place to live."

I see her face, she has two red eyes with a terrible mouth, full of big white teeth and

a long tongue. I don't answer her, but my mind tells me to agree, I am too tired and hungry. I walk into the tent and I'm surprised because it's very comfortable. In the dining room is a big table, full of delicious food. After I eat, the woman takes me to a nice corner room, and I don't worry any more, and I fall into a long sleep.

The next morning when I wake up, the woman is cooking and cleaning. She tells me to boil a big pot of water. "Why?" I ask, but she ignores me. I start to get scared. She ignores me all day. I watch her set the pot of boiling water by a door, then she goes away. I can hear someone crying and shouting from behind the door. I walk closer. "Who's there?"

"Set me free, please! Take the key!" the voice begs me weakly. I follow the voice and find the gold key on the wall. I open the door and see a boy who looks really tired and frightened.

"Help! We must get out of here! That old woman is a witch! She's going to eat us!" he warns. "Look at the bones on the floor!"

There's a picture of the forest on the wall. It looks real. I touch it, and I realize that it is a way out. I take the boy and we go outside, back to the forest. We sit under a big tree. Unfortunately, the witch is coming close, her feet sounding angrily. Suddenly, I hear a bark. Is that Rocky? I look and there he is! He is thinner and dirty. I can't believe what I see. The barking, the brown fur, all the familiar images come back. I never felt this happy in my life.

But the witch is fast. She comes to our tree and tries to put us in a big cage. Rocky jumps to the witch and bites her hard. It really hurts! She shouts loudly and runs away. Rocky rescued me! I can touch that mangled fur, look at that one dear eye. I hug him warmly. He shakes his tail to say he forgives me.

Overall, I'm lucky because I got away from the witch who cooks children by the water they boil. But now I have a new problem. How can I get home? Rocky barks at a light on the tree. In the middle of that tree, my street appears. I hold Rocky and go to my house. The boy says goodbye to me and gives me his address, which isn't far away.

"I'm Jaco," he blinks. "See you tomorrow?" A new friend!

Rocky and I come back to my room and mom is still calling me for dinner. When I come to the table she asks, "Why did you take so long?" Like nothing happened, I reply, "We just went for a walk, mother!" •



twelve tales



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