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**Everybody has a Happy Place**  
**By Shelley Brown**

"Tell me about it!" she pleaded.

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He remembered it like it was yesterday. When he closed his eyes, all of his senses were awakened. He could see it; the beautiful ebb and flow of the Atlantic Ocean. He could smell it; that soothing scent of his surroundings. The air was rich with the smell of grass and salt and seaweed, somehow all mixed into one. He could hear it; the crackle of the handcrafted campfire, and the crashing of the waves followed by the sound they made when they pulled back out to sea, like a sigh in the distance that echoed in his ears. He remembered the feeling of his toes in the sand, and the way his hands rested on the warm stones behind him as he leaned back to feel the sunshine on his face. He could even taste it. He licked his lips. They were dry and cracked from the heat, and they were salty from the spray of the ocean. There was nothing he loved more than the rush he felt when the icy water from the white caps showered over him.

Here, he was at peace. In this place, he could be himself. Safe from the world that was falling apart around him. Safe from the feeling that he just couldn't get anything right, no matter how hard he tried. He had always thought that he had stumbled upon this place by pure luck, but now he knew it was something more than that. Because, over the years, from first loves and heartbreaks, the losses of loved ones, and every triumph and defeat in between, he had found his own little piece of heaven. In doing that, he had also found himself.

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"Tell me about the bird!"  
He knew the one she meant.

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His grey eyes had scanned the length of the shoreline, finally coming to rest on the seagull that was playing in the waves. It had been there all day, providing company and comfort in a weird way as he sat there watching from his spot in the shade. He eyed the white bird bobbing up and down with the motion of the water. "Not a care in the world," he thought to himself. All of a sudden, the bird disappeared. Martin held his breath, as though he were the one underwater. After a few seconds, it popped back up, resurfacing with a fish clenched tightly in its beak. "At least somebody is eating good tonight," he called to his oblivious little bird friend. His stomach rumbled. Dinner was a good idea.

He reached for his knapsack- the one he carried over his shoulder, tied to the end of a stick. He pulled out the potatoes he had "borrowed" from his mother's pantry, sending a wish out to the universe that she wasn't even more upset with him now.

He felt like nobody understood how he was feeling. He worried about everything! He loved his family- of course he did! They had always been close, just not in the traditional way. His father never sat Martin on his shoulders and paraded him around town. He didn't pack them a lunch to spend the day sitting and talking together, the way some other fathers did. But he was a good man. A hard worker in the 1920s who provided for his family to be sure they always had a roof over their heads and a meal on the table. Martin had everything he'd needed to be happy- a safe home, and parents who loved him no matter where his free spirit and stubborn tendencies would take him.

He loved his mother with all of his heart. He couldn't stand the thought of disappointing her. He sighed as a loud squawk from the bird brought him back to reality. He shook a dessert bar out of the bag- a Caramel Log, his favourite! He cracked a piece off and tossed it to the bird. "Thanks for the advice."

He was so relaxed, he'd almost forgotten why he was there. Huddled for the night in his makeshift lean-to, he thought about his options. He was about to make the biggest decision of his life.

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“Are we almost there??” she pulled on his hand. He looked into her eyes, and felt his heart bubble over. In spite of everything he’d been through these past 25 years, he never once doubted the decision he had made that night.

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“I’ll sleep on it,” he had thought, as he licked the caramel from his fingers and the corners of his lips. He said a silent goodnight to his one friend, that same seagull who was still hanging around, long after the sun had gone down. Martin drifted off under the silence of a thousand twinkling stars, with the knowledge this could be his last peaceful sleep for a long time.

In the early morning hours, he knew. He just knew. He gathered his belongings and started up the long dirt road to get back to the highway. It was a difficult terrain but Martin was athletic. Having hiked every path and trail he could find in his youth, he loved this type of challenge, and he did it with ease. He hitched a ride with a man in a big truck who was heading back to Glace Bay with a delivery. They exchanged pleasantries and small talk. “I’m going to miss this,” Martin thought.

As he got closer to home, that old familiar feeling was creeping into his chest. It was a tightness that made it hard for him to draw a full breath. His eyes tingled with the threat of tears- not because he was sad or scared, but because he had no control over it. He was sweating.

“Here’s good!” he said to the truck driver. “And thanks,” he added as he dropped a treat down on the arm rest. Who didn’t love a Caramel Log?

He walked the rest of the way home. His mother was sitting in the sun porch when he arrived. “There you are! I was worried sick. You’re not still upset about what happened?”

Of course he was.

“Of course I’m not. I just needed some time,” he said, as he dropped his hand on her shoulder.

“I hope you enjoyed those potatoes,” she said, looking over the top of her glasses. “They were the last ones in the bag.”

He winced. “I’ll replace them,” he said.

They had a nice supper that evening. The last one they’d ever have as a family. He didn’t know then, but his mother’s time was not long for this world. He kissed her on the top of her head as he tiptoed out the next morning. On the table, he’d left a note, “Gone to earn those potatoes. I love you.”

He’d wanted to tell them, but he just couldn’t find the words. He’d been sullen ever since he came back from the barracks last Tuesday. That was the day they’d told him he was too old to enlist in the forces. The Second World War had descended upon them, he’d thought they’d need all the help they could get. He could only hope his mother would understand what he was about to do.

How could he sit by with all of the chaos and heartbreak and tragedy happening all around him in the world? The mere thought of harm coming to his family was more than he could bear to think about.

So, here he was on a train, travelling clear across Canada, determined to do his part for his country. He leaned his head against the cool side of the boxcar. Though a crack in the structure, he saw a seagull, flying alongside. He smiled and thought of how he would enjoy his happy place, if he was blessed enough to make it home some day.

At 35 years old, Martin arrived in Winnipeg and was welcomed by an infantry unit, only too happy to enlist him as a member. For the first time in his life, he felt confident that he’d made the right choice. That feeling, the one he’d never know as “anxiety”, was nowhere to be found.

He served his country and made his family proud. He experienced things he could never put into words, even long after he’d stormed the beaches of Normandy, and returned home as only one of a handful of surviving soldiers from his regiment.

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He was a hero. But to her...he was just Daddy.

“Are we there yet? Can we sit so we can talk? I can’t wait to see your favourite spot!”

“What do you want to know?” he asked, hoisting her on to his shoulders, as his eyes searched the horizon. They were almost there.

“It’s so pretty! Is that why you love it so much?”

They found their way to the clearing and settled down on the hollow log in the shade, so he could pull the goodies out from his backpack. The bottle hissed as he opened a Pepsi and placed it in her tiny hands. Next, two Caramel Logs- one for him and one for her. In the distance, he spotted a seagull, riding the surf in the choppy waves. He’d made it back. He was happy. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and enjoyed the feeling of peace that washed over him.

“Everybody has a happy place.”

## **A Day I Will Never Forget**

**By Jessie Smith**

Any day that marks a major event in one's life is a day you never forget, and as such, this day I'll never forget.

I was sitting on the beach in the company of my friends, while our children played contentedly by the water's edge. I thought this day couldn't be more perfect. Thirstily, I drank in the beauty of my surroundings. It was the height of summer. The soft summer breeze carried the scent of wildflowers, as lupins danced softly, their purple gowns shimmered in the warmth of the afternoon sun. A squirrel looked sassily down from a nearby tree, as the sun filtered through its leaves.

On a day such as this who would suspect that danger might be lurking only minutes away, greedily awaiting its unsuspecting victim.

Perhaps it was a mother's natural instincts, to this day I really can't explain, but I was overcome suddenly by a feeling of unease. I looked to where the children were playing their exuberant voices rang with excitement as they laboured industriously over their sandcastles. The green clad figure of my three year old daughter was nowhere to be seen. Where was my little girl?

The older children were jumping and diving from the dock close by. I turned to ask if they had seen Sheryl, but before I could voice the question, my eyes fell upon the tiny figure of my little girl, her chubby little legs carrying her toward the end of the dock. Around her middle bobbed a white Styrofoam ring.

For one heart stopping moment I stood rooted to the spot. Then I began to run, hoping I would reach her before she went off into the water. I had just one foot on the dock when she jumped over the end. I jumped in after her, praying that I would get to her on time. A cold fear propelled me. When I hit the water, panic set in, and irrationally I tried to walk in the water. Now, if you ever tried to walk in deep water, you can appreciate that it is indeed, a very difficult and slow process. Finally I realized what I was trying to do and I



began to swim. Although I had swam only a few feet, I felt exhausted as though I had been swimming for hours. All I could see was the white Styrofoam ring floating mockingly on the water.

My heart heavy with fear, I pushed on to where I thought she would come up. I had just reached the area, where her little blonde head emerged. I shakingly reached out and grabbed hold of her and made my way to the dock, where we were given assistance. When I was sure that she was alright, I gathered and gently cradled her in my arms. Sheryl. Her navy blue eyes opened wide said,  
"Mommy, I swim."

The tears flowed freely as a wave of emotions washed over me. This day will remain with me until the minute when I draw my last breath, and yes! even to eternity.

## Coffee Girl

By Atanu Das Gupta

Hands are freezing as my waiting time for the bus finally calls off. Nature adorns herself with the winds of spring when summer is about to say, "see you soon!". Yellow, green, orange - leaves are singing farewell songs to summer too. No definition can obviously define nature's awe-inspiring beauty! The tiny town Sydney will certainly fall under that category. Surrounded by hills, situated at the vicinity of the marine Atlantic & with a mind blowing landscape - it's Cape Breton Island's Sydney!!

Here she comes - bus number one! I'm heading towards my shift to Walmart, North Sydney! It's not obvious that my eyes are searching for someone's presence but close to Davenport Road her unexpected appearance isn't something I'm anticipating, Harpreet - my classmate & colleague. Two ponytails on both sides of her head, wearing a gray colored jacket & a blue winter hat. Dark red lipstick on her lips. My quick text makes her smile as she looks at me and points out to move from my seat to next to her.

We move to bus number five to reach North Sydney from Dorchester. Harpreet is talking about last night's story and my job is just being a listener for now! It's a nightmare for her riding on a bus. Her head goes spinning all around when it goes down from high to low & again from low to high! Way from downtown Sydney to North Sydney, the roads are bumpy - some places are flat, and some are downhill. Not at all a big deal for me as I feel like a flying bird when she goes down from way up to downwards and reverse her way. Our conversation consists of tiny stories, full of momentum.

The scenario from the bus on our way back to Sydney from North Sydney is something that obviously takes your breath away! Those far houses with a yard in front, a puppy is playing with a kid, the greenish fields at Munro park where kids are having fun, playing soccer and the pottle lake with its waves looks like it coincides with the never-ending sky! Everything is so soothing for my eyesight. No matter how many times I'm watching the same

landscape, I will never get tired of seeing the same awe-inspiring view again and again! Harpreet was somehow scared of the pottle lake saying "the sideways of the pottle lake scares me! Especially when the vehicle turns its way to the side of the lake, I felt like falling deep in the crater." I promptly assured her saying, "we are in a bus, it has more shelf life than a car. So, no worries!".

While returning from North Sydney, the bus returned to Dorchester early. I just randomly ask Harpreet to go for Tims. She readily agreed and here we go.

The coffee world - the entrance is not very spacious. Right through the doorway of Tims just a short distance, we will find the front desk where anyone can place their order upon entering there. On the left side, they have tv screening attached to the walls and a tiny seating arrangement for the customers. Right side being the wider in length and multifaceted ways of seating capacity. On the far-right side close to the second entrance, amenities for group seating. Not far away from there, that's a perfect place for couples to have a seat and enjoy their sips. And we are not actually seated in a couples seating because we don't want to spoil their dating time. Currently we are seated after giving our order. It is a table where a group of four people can sit but we keep our belongings on the spare chair! Harpreet wants French vanilla with espresso shot, strawberry muffin while mine was hot chocolate and chocolate chunky cookies. She is recalling her childhood days - one night of summer when three sisters were in a competition of who's going to sleep more closer to the fan as it's a little bit far away. They were making noises and suddenly the father of three girls came and slapped the one who's unfortunately laying close to the doorway - Aman, her elder sister. From her understanding, Harpreet quickly moved to the other side of the bed to escape from the thunderous slap of her father! While her poor elder sister was crying, the little sister Raman suddenly shouted, "papa, fatso is here!"

Riding on her scotty was a fun part of her life. She's always on full swing with her bike whenever she's hovering around the city. However, one sudden day wasn't her best as she almost hit a puppy on her way back to home. Shouting helplessly, it went away while there's nothing much Harpreet could do

because she's having an emergency. Quickly enough our topic changed to relationships when she abruptly whispered "chutiya"!! I was really surprised, and she was trying her best to avert the topic for the day. Upon insisting, she revealed herself as being a former member of the school basketball and volleyball team. Slangs are quite common if you are in a group of reckless team members.

Being born & raised in a Punjabi family never resists her to become a girl who's fun loving and really amiable to most of those who come her way. Harpreet's father was an army engineer by profession. So the family had to travel all over India starting from West Bengal to Gujrat, Rajasthan to Jammu - Kashmir. In her chat with me she also mentioned the government quarters where she came across with people hailing from Tamil Nadu. She used to play with the kids who talked in Tamil, Malayalam. In general, our conversation continues in Hindi but sometimes I use Bengali, my mother tongue. She learned some of it, especially "ulta palta bokbe na!!" (means don't talk trash!). Most interesting fact about my peers here is whether they are from Punjab or Gujrat or Tamil Nadu, they never made any mistake saying "ami tomake valobashi" (I love you!)

Right through the windows of Tims where we are currently enjoying our sip, I can see the huddle of the bike riders. It seems they are really having a fun time there. Last summer when I was having my summer classes at C.B.U, I often noticed them while returning from the University and I was asking myself, "Why aren't the cops arresting these goons?" Later I came to know that it's their hobby and they are just having jolly time out there in summertime. Enjoying the scorching sunbeam! Our meeting for the day ended soon when it's almost nine.

Time is around 7 pm and the location is at the Tims on George Street. Harpreet changed her menu to crispy wrapped chicken and French vanilla while I took tea and just a muffin. Have my lunch quite late. Usually we happened to sit around the same place closer to the window facing the right hand side. On the other side, there was an old couple who didn't seem to have a good time here as their conversation is getting louder!

"That's kind of your after-marriage life!" See, how steamy they are getting! Suddenly she replied back, " I'll marry someone who doesn't know much about me. So, there will be less chances of conflict".

I couldn't agree with the coffee girl anyway. From my perspective, the less you know someone, the more there will be disagreements. Why would someone agree with you if he/ she doesn't even know what you want?? How your way of thinking swings? In order to accept someone, you have to at least know that person to some extent. Otherwise, the afterlife marriage could become chaotic! I didn't say a single word to her! It's always soothing to listen to her rather than talking.

Me - "Any planning after graduation? What about permanent residentship?"

Harpreet - "Not yet. Thinking of trying in call centers alongside working in Walmart. I have literally no tension about my P.R now! What's your plan?"

M - "Don't know! I didn't decide yet. Things will come around. And then.... marriage? boyfriend??"

H - "No, none of my business. My father will decide."

M- "Father? You don't have any personal choice. Did your elder sister get married like this?"

H - "My sister? She is yet to get married. No, she has a boyfriend. After having seven years of affair with my brother in law, she went to meet the family members for the first time & her experience ended up pretty gross."

M - "Why?"

H - "My sister went there in a casual dress. Her future mother in law asks her, "Do you always dress up like this?" She went there from her office, so didn't really get time to change. And she didn't really think that it was necessary! After all, it's the person that matters, not her get up!"

M - "Hmm... that was really bad! Okay, back to your point of choice. So, you mean to say if someone ever falls in love with you, he will be rejected.

Harpreet - Means I will definitely make sure that won't disappoint him! I will not do anything that hurts him."

Me - "ok, that's understandable. But still if he remains committed to you, then what are you gonna do?"

H - "I will let him know that's not possible! I will make sure he understands me! My father always says one sentence very firmly, 'your one wrong step is good enough to untie my turban!'

Harpreet's family believes in Sikhism. To identify a sikh, you will have to know about five "K" - Kesh (hair), kara (One kind of bracelet for right hand), kirpan(a small sword), kashera (type of underwear), kang ( comb or hairbrush). In Sikhism, one of the preceptors named Guru Govind Singh ji made it mandatory to use "Singh" for man which means Lion which signifies bravery and courage and "Kaur" for women means princess to avert caste discrimination from society.

Any Sikh man will always wear a turban and that becomes a part of his entire life. Also, they never cut off their hair once they decide to keep it (situation could be different if someone has any health issues). They believe that's a way to obey the Almighty. They wear a pagri or turban that also protects their hair from dust, dirt. Different types of colour any sikh individual will choose for their turban - most of the time it's blue, black or any other colour that matches with their clothings. Red coloured turban is a choice of colour for marriage. My first roommate was a Sikh guy and he usually took about half an hour to wear his turban. Doesn't matter if it's a party or outing or shopping and even on the day of exam. The kind of respect he has for his turban is a clear sign of dedication towards his religion.

Our conversation swings from one way to another. Some moments stay forever with us, no matter how many moments pass away! Harpreet's presence in my life happened to be something I was desperately looking for at that period of time! And my presence in her life will be the same! In the current time, it's pretty hard to achieve trust from someone and even if you achieve it, be prepared to face tough time! Also, we really can't control someone's loyalty. No matter how good you are to them, doesn't mean they will treat you the same. No matter how much they mean to you, again doesn't mean they'll value you the same. Life is a circle of mystery and each part of our life has its own riddle that needs to be solved! Returning back home feeling really tired and thinking about our last coffee meeting while laying at bed

feeling utterly sleepy! Feels like all those precious moments are knocking at my window and want me to have a chat with them.

Southbar, Whitney Pier. The speciality of this place lies in that anyone can see the part of Sydney port and North Sydney port at the same time from this point. Doesn't look like any other place can give you an outstanding view like this! Let's see, next time if I can accompany the coffee girl! My 8.5-megapixel camera is ready to capture the picturesque view of the dusk. And I'm thoroughly enjoying the sip of french vanilla. Out of curiosity I dingle the coffee girl but with no avail. Tried a few times. She might be busy with her job! Thinking of that, suddenly there's a call from her but the voice is utterly unfamiliar! On the other side of the phone, a baritone voice says, "I'm inspector Railey McNeil. May I know who are you?? Certainly, the entire situation sounds gloomy to me!

Me - " I'm Harpreet's friend".

Inspector - "May I know how you know her?"

Me - "She's my classmate and we also work for Walmart."

Insp. - "Can you come to the police station near Mayflower. I just need to speak with you!"

M - "I can but what happened?"

Insp. - "Along the road just beside of Pottle lake there's an accident today at around 3pm. A white coloured Hyundai car lost its way to the lake while coming back to Sydney."

M-" What?? Where is she?"

Insp. - "I am really sorry to say that nobody of that vehicle survived!"

Within a second, the darker side of the Sunless sky becomes dimmer to me! I replied back, "okay" and hung up! I could barely talk as it looks like I'm losing my voice. Suddenly I felt like a thirsty traveler who lost his way in the desert! Knowing that there's nobody to give water to quench his thirst. When we tend to lose our voice, our eyes start to speak. Recalling her panicky voice that once did say, "the sideways of the Pottle lake scares me! Especially when the vehicle turns its way to the side of the lake, I felt like falling deep in the crater." Reminiscence those sweet memories we spent together! Harpreet's

sweet yet innocent smile and the shadow of the dark red lipstick while taking her sips is slowly getting more clearer and deeper on the corner of my memoir! Why did these dear yet adorable girl leave me! What life wants from me by snatching someone who was so close to me? Time is showing its utter cruelty towards me!

Thinking about all of these makes my t-shirt sweaty! Suddenly my phone dingles and waking me up from a long night sleep and here she is asking,

H-"Good morning! kothay ache tumi?" ( in Bengali- means where are you?)

Replied, "fine! I am at home. what's up?"

H -" I have shift from eleven today. Could you please drop me?"

M - "yah, sure! I'll be there."

I should take a shower immediately; my t-shirt is dam cold sweaty!! And someone is eagerly waiting for my drive to North Sydney!



## **LAGARTIJA**

**by Devin J. Meaney**

It was a glacial January morning and Jack Lagartija was sipping on his first espresso of the day. The buzzing of the heat lamps that were placed all through the studio was almost inaudible, but their warmth attempted to permeate Jack's bones.

God damn! Jack thought to himself as he clasped his icy hands together, rubbing one against the other vigorously. I have lived in this wretched city for seven years now, and this winter bullshit never gets any easier!

Jack hated the cold. Every winter, he would always wish he was sitting on a hot rock under a blistering sun, or maybe in a sauna at one of the fitness centers downtown he was known to frequent. He basked in the hotness of the nearest heat lamp for about thirty seconds, but he knew it would soon be time to start his work day.

Jack had three minutes before the cameras would start rolling. He reported the news at the crack of dawn every day, but the last few minutes before he would be on screen always seemed a bit hectic to him. He downed his espresso, and with one last coat of 'beautifying' makeup, he was now ready to let the earth know what has or has not been happening in the last twenty four hours. The countdown to air time was just about to begin, and Jack quickly adorned his brimming sickly-sweet smile that was well known throughout Metropolis.

Lights. Camera. Action!

"Good morning, and thank you for choosing Metropolis News. Today, the city braces for a blizzard, and as far as snow goes, it seems as if there will be no end in sight until late Thursday. High winds and traffic congestion can be anticipated, as the looming storm is expected to pummel the city, breaking last year's record snowfall by a considerable margin."

Jack licked his lips, preparing to continue his spiel. This had been his routine for the better part of a decade, but it never did cease being a chore.

Monotony seemed to be an ever present aspect of Jack's life, but he managed to push forward with an increasing loathing for his profession

The show must go on. Within an hour I will be out of this shit hole!

"Emergency crews will be on standby to assist anyone caught out in the weather. Both the police and the fire department are urging folks to stay indoors, as icy roads and downed power lines may limit available transport. Medical professionals will be working overtime at Metropolis General, as serious injury and ailment may become a factor within the next two days."

The daily news continued for a few moments as Jack droned on with false ardor. He finished up his weather report, longing in silence for the work week to end. He really wished that he was stationed somewhere else. Maybe down south where he could put his feet up, relax, and indulge in a stiff martini when his day came to a close. A place where heat waves were rampant and the intrusion of snow was a foreign concept.

Jack licked his lips once again, and the glimmer of his forked tongue evaded notice on screen. The slightest hints of scales were beginning to emerge on his face, as his makeup was slowly starting to run down his cheek. The majority of the citizens of Metropolis failed to notice, though. Most of them were too dull to fathom the reality surrounding Jack Lagartija. Only those firmly planted within the higher echelons of society were privy to the complete truth behind his gleaming smile. Only a select few had the capacity to stop him.

"In other news, recent UFO sightings have been dismissed by NASA as weather balloons, leaving some locals disheartened. Mayor Martin Reptil has addressed claims of visiting extraterrestrials as pulp-grade fiction, sparking chaos amongst true believers. Conspiracy theorist Zachary K. Candor insists there will soon be an alien invasion, but the majority of Metropolis has concluded that he should trade in his degree for a tinfoil hat. Still, there are some who wish to believe little green men have come upon the city, and are now disguised as high profile figures and politicians. They expect malevolence."

Jack froze as he read the text on the prompter. He tried to maintain his composure as the veracity of this report sunk into his brain.

Fuck! I assumed they were all too dumb to figure out the truth. There may only be a handful of them, but that is still too many!

Jack's eyes glared vacantly at the camera. He never expected even a single person to unveil his plot. He loosened his collar, his hands starting to tremble as he pondered his current situation. Jack's temples were pulsing and he now had a headache that could be likened to a train wreck within his cranium. He needed to urinate badly, as his cloaca was responding poorly to the recent news. The veritas of his mission needed to remain confidential. The public needed to be kept in the dark.

After many thousands of years of evolution, his species had now made it to earth in a hunt for clean water, air, and other resources. They had destroyed their previous planet from centuries of neglect, and now they planned to claim this terra as their own. Jack refused to be thwarted by the lowly scum that called themselves humans. After seven years of preparation, they had come too close to fail now. Nothing would stop Jack and the others from achieving their one goal. Their plan called for the eradication of the human subspecies. There were not enough resources for both to thrive. This was survival of the fittest.

Keep it together Jack. Damn it, keep it together!

Jack was nervous now, but the broadcast needed to continue.

"Nearing the border, migrant detention centers have been springing up rapidly in what is assumed to be an attempt to quell illegals from gaining access to the country. Government officials have been silent on the topic, but some surmise that a shadow corporation known only as MONITOR is responsible for their construction. Thousands of asylum seekers have been detained. Once again, Zachary K. Candor has been present with his theories, but as always, most refute his claims as nothing more than vibrant fantasy."

Jesus, they are even trying to steal the food right out of my mouth!

"Up next, sports columnist Jade Iguane interviews hockey legend Don Matthews about his recent signing to the Metropolis Rhinos. Please hold for a brief commercial break."

As a slew of commercials began to roll, Jack decided that now was the time to give Martin Reptil a call. Something needed to be done about Candor.

He was getting too close for comfort, and without the intervention of MONITOR, Jack feared that he may just be the wrench in the gears that would halt production at the migrant facilities. Within minutes, Martin was on the phone, and Jack could tell by the tone of his voice that something was afoot.

"Martin, we need to put a muzzle on that conspiracy loon Candor. He is going to fuck up everything!"

Jack waited for a response, and after a few brief seconds, Martin replied.

"I know Jack, but don't worry about it. It has been taken care of. He won't be a threat much longer. MONITOR has already been notified. Very soon it will be as if he never existed. Our time is coming, Jack. But I need to go! I have business to take care of."

Martin hung up the phone. After an ample sigh and a trip to the lavatory, Jack retreated back to the newsroom. Jade was now in the middle of interviewing Matthews, so he decided it was time to have something to eat. He pulled his lunch box out from under his desk, removing its contents delicately. Jack took a whopping bite out of his 'mystery meat' sandwich, quietly contemplating Candor and his prying ways. Jack was still worried, but the hurried chat with Martin calmed him down immensely.

Outside, the weather was reaching whiteout conditions, and Jack was unsure if he would be able to leave the studio when his broadcast was over. Braving the squalls was probably not an option. This was no big deal, though. He had spent many a night hunkered down at the studio. He would just confiscate one of the heat lamps to keep his office nice and sultry.

After a few more minutes, Jade finished up her interview, and it was now time for Jack to continue his reports.

"And that's all for now! Back to you, Jack!"

"Thanks, Jade. Great interview! This week, students of Rising Star High will be raising funds for their renowned hockey team, The Rising Stars! In their gymnasium on Friday, there will be games, treats, and the chance to win three V.I.P. seats at the Rhinos game Sunday night. Tickets for this contest are five dollars each or twenty dollars a book. The hype is on, and Rising Star high is hoping for a great turnout! Let's all hope we can dig our cars out by then, because right now, it's a rager out there!"

Jack smiled at the camera, the majority of his viewers looking on in blissful ignorance.

"And speaking of contests, The Story Forge Writers Collective is now accepting short story submissions for their upcoming anthology. Writers everywhere are flocking to the Wilfred Oram Centennial Library to get their works read. Only stories ranked within the top tier will be printed, but thousands are hopeful that their tales will be chosen. The Story Forge Writers Collective produces the best fiction and non-fiction in all of the land, and this is expected to be the competition of the year!"

Jack chuckled internally.

Good. Good! This will keep their minds off Zachary and MONITOR for a bit!

He pushed on with his reports, the minutes passing at a sluggardly pace.

Jack was elated that the citizens of Metropolis had something to occupy their witless minds. Like dogs chasing their tails, the locals would continue to busy themselves with insipid endeavors, the bulk of the masses ignorant to the encroaching invasion and the soon-to-be reptilian uprising.

The conspiracy theorists were still out there, though. MONITOR would need to continue stifling their painfully inquisitive probes. Their numbers were minimal, but even a single person speaking against MONITOR was one too many. They needed to be removed from the limelight. Their silence was essential to the fate of the new world, and Jack would do his best to make sure they were quickly nullified.

Jack continued to beam with pseudo enthusiasm, his brilles glistening in the mild glow of the camera.

"Moloch Avenue and Calotes Drive are now closed due to the weather. Only local traffic will be permitted to enter, as city workers are struggling to remove snow from the area. A few trees have also been uprooted, making travel increasingly laborious. Metropolis- wait. Hold on, we are now receiving a breaking report."

Jack's thoughts began to swirl. What the hell could this be?

He braced for the worst, as anything was possible within the city of Metropolis.

"It is with our deepest sympathies that we announce this breaking coverage. Zachary K. Candor has just been found dead in his upscale loft on Stratagem Street. Police are now investigating, but foul play is not believed to be a factor. His newest journal *The Reptile Agenda* was just about to hit the press, but sadly, fans and admirers of his work will now have to look elsewhere for their conspiracy needs. Funeral arrangements will be announced at a later date."

Yes. Yes! That beautiful bastard Martin has done it again!

Jack's heart made a jump, almost bursting from his chest with spastic delight. Martin had come through with flying colors, Zachary now 'magically' erased from view of the public eye. With Candor gone, there was now nobody to front any rebellion against MONITOR. The contest for The Story Forge Writers Collective would also aid in the cover up, and with Rising Star High having a contest of their own, Jack knew that there was now nothing stopping him and his associates.

Jack thought with mild ecstasy. Nothing can stop us now. This terra will be ours within the month!

Although Jack now felt like it was time to party, he was still on screen and needed to remain calm. He pushed on for a few more moments, knowing soon it would be time to read his final report. Within ten minutes he would be sipping a martini in his office with his true face turned to the warming glow of one of the heat lamps. Within the grand scheme of things, very soon the streets of Metropolis would flow red with human blood... and Jack was now riddled with extreme anticipation.

We're in the home stretch now, Jack!

Jack's beaming sickly-sweet smile now radiated with genuine contentedness.

"To finish off for the morning, we now bring you a heartwarming tale. Just under an hour ago, a kitten lovingly named 'Mittens' by her owners had managed to climb a tree, getting herself stuck on the highest branch. Her owners feared that she was lost to the storm, but the bravery of the Metropolis Fire Department knows no bounds. Fire chief Susan Lucertola and her colleagues rushed to Mittens' aid, and after a few attempts, she was

brought safely back to the warmth of her home on Chuckwalla Street. This story is one of dozens we have received today, proving once and for all that the city of Metropolis is in good hands. My name is Jack Lagartija, and thank YOU for choosing Metropolis News."

The credits began to roll, and Jack took no time rushing from his desk. He waved a goodbye to Jade and the other people working at the station, grabbed the nearest heat lamp, and quickly made off to his office on the third floor. He could not wait to take his makeup off and shoot a few martinis. The blizzard was still raging outside, but everything was set in motion.

The mother ship was so close now...

## **A Childhood Lesson Learned**

**Based on true events.**

**By Leone Brown**

Could it be true? Leone and Martha burst through the door with great enthusiasm, sweat dripping from their foreheads, for it was a long, hot, sultry day.

“Mom!” they exclaimed. “We have exciting news! The Russell Theatre is having a contest and it is going to be easy to enter. The cost to see a movie is 25 cents, but if you collect five empty bags of Hatfield Chips, you get in to see the show “Jack The Giant Killer” for free!”

“Wow!” Mom said, as she wiped the sweat from Martha’s brow. “That is great news! When is this happening?”

“Next Saturday!” Leone said.

“Let’s go,” interrupted Martha. “We’ll go to bed so we can get up early! We’ll call for Cora and Kathleen and go looking for chip bags.”

The next morning, the sun shone brightly into the girls bedroom, as dust particles danced in the air. “Rise and shine, Leone! It’s time to go on our chip bag hunt!” Martha shouted, as she searched for her warm sweater. Leone forced her eyes open and tried to adjust to the blinding sunlight.

“I don’t want to go. I’m tired! I want to go back to sleep.”

“You’ll be sorry and you won’t be able to go to the show!” replied Martha.

“I don’t care, I’m sleepy. Close the bedroom door.”

Martha walked down a long, dusty path. She stopped to smell the purple lupins and examined a little ladybug that had settled on a bright green blade of grass. She kicked a pebble halfway down the path and came to a clearing by a babbling brook. She put her hands in the stream and welcomed the clean, cold water that danced around her fingers. Reality set in, and she jumped up quickly. She had to meet her friends Cora and Kathleen!

They greeted each other excitedly- their adventure was about to begin!



The wind rustled through the trees as the girls scurried about looking for their treasures. It was like a scavenger hunt, as they rummaged through garbage bins, drains and neighbours yards.

“Look!” announced Cora. “I found three!”

“I found two!” Martha yelled back.

“I’ve hit the jackpot!” cried Kathleen. “I’m finished! I have five! But I will still help you look.”

By this time, the sun was sinking behind the shadows of the trees, and the hot summer breeze was slowly turning cool. It was time to go home. The girls were tired and so focused on their task, they had lost track of time.

“Guess what?” Martha screamed as she burst through the door. “We almost have enough chip bags for the show!”

“That’s wonderful!” Mom echoed in the same tone. “Your supper is cold and you’re late.”

“Sorry, Mom. Where’s Leone?”

“She is out with your father. They’ll be home soon.”

The rain pelted against the windows at the house on John Street. It was a cozy home with eight little children and two loving, caring parents. They allowed their children a freedom- one that generations to follow could only dream of having! Freedom to roam the streets without worry of danger, free from predators and the worry of locking your doors at night.

“Leone! Leone! Get up! You have to catch up to the rest of us. Let’s go looking for those bags!”

“I am going to Catalone with Dad and Aunt Marg. I want to go to the ocean.”

Martha threw her hands up in frustration. “I am done with you! You are not coming to the show with me because you have no chip bags. Cora, Kathleen and I are all set to go, we only need a few more bags.”

“Will you get mine?” Leone asked.

“Not a chance!” Martha shot back. “What would I be teaching you if I did?”

Martha hurried to meet her friends. The day dragged by and the girls were drenched. The rain had not let up for hours. Back on John Street, though,

Leone was snuggled on the couch with Barney the orange cat on her lap. Tomorrow was the day of the movie and she had not looked for one chip bag.

The next morning, Martha, Cora and Kathleen gathered in Cora's backyard. They were filled with excitement- the big day was finally here! Martha and the girls could not settle down. Each minute seemed like hours as they waited for 2 o'clock. Meanwhile, back on John Street, Leone was a sad little girl. She had not been a busy bee like her sister- she was a drone. "A drone," her father had told her, "was a bee who did not work." She finally realized that she had done nothing to earn her place at the movie.

Leone bowed her head in remorse. She realized that her sister Martha- whom she adored beyond belief- had been right all along. Hard work did pay off. As she stood there in shame, her Dad walked in. "What's wrong?" he asked his daughter.

"Dad, all week long, my friends were looking for chip bags so they could get into the show for free. I wouldn't go searching with them because I was lazy. Now they are going and I am not...and it's my own fault!"

Dad walked across the kitchen and plopped down in his favourite rocking chair. There, he pondered the problem presented by his youngest daughter.

"Have you learned anything from this situation?" he asked.

"Yes, I did, Dad. From here on out, I will do my part to work hard when faced with a challenge."

"Good enough for me!" He said, "I have an idea."

Relief rushed over Leone like a tidal wave as her father jingled the change in his pocket. He withdrew a quarter and handed it to her. Leone tingled with excitement, because she knew she was going to see the movie now, too.

Outside, Martha and the girls were skulking around, trying desperately to find some chip bags for her little sister. But inside, their father had another idea. He went to the fridge and emptied the apples into the crisper, retrieving the large bag they'd been in.

"Come here, pet," he said with a huge grin on his face. "Take your quarter and go to the store. Buy five bags of Hatfield Chips and pour them into

this apple bag and voila! There you go! You have the bags to get in, and a big bag of chips for you and your friends. Problem solved!”

Leone stood there in amazement. She couldn't believe what her father had suggested! Tears welled up in her eyes as she rushed to her Dad and hugged him tightly.

“Wait! Wait for me! I'm going with you!”

Leone explained the plan their father had concocted, and all four girls raced off happily to the store and then to the Russell Theatre.

## **Memories Are Treasures**

### **By Louise McIntyre Caines**

I was born the youngest of seven children. We had two wonderful parents, plus one; our grandfather, who we called Pa. My father and grandfather were both coal miners who were very dedicated to their faith and family.

Mom and Dad were our disciplinarians, and Pa was our go-to person, whenever we needed him to run interference with a given situation that required a moderator. With seven children in the family, it could be a full time job!

Our Pa was happy with his life. He would sit in the rocking chair in the midst of all the confusion of kids running around. He would read the newspaper and look up to make sure nobody was getting too rough. Everyone at this time of day was waiting for supper, and Mom always made sure there was something Pa liked.

My brother Tommy would look at Pa, and say he was taking a trip around the Cabot Trail, without ever leaving the living room. Pa would respond and say "It's the best trip I ever had and it never cost me a dime!" Then, he'd laugh until his belly shook.

Pa was a very gentle man. He would never raise his voice to anyone. If he had change in his pocket, he would give it to the kids, and of course I would always get extra! There were days he didn't have too much to go around, but he still managed some for me. He would say, "Hide that, now! Make sure the robbers don't get you on the way to the store."

In the evenings, we would sit and play the piano- all the old war songs! How we loved to hear him play. I would always sit down on the piano bench next to him- that was my spot. The windows would be open and the flow of air was so cool and fresh after a hot day. It seemed to carry the notes on the piano with it as it arrived and blew back out. Everyone in the neighbourhood could hear. They also called him Pa.

My friends and I at times would sit at the piano and bang those keys until we would hear, "Heavens! That's enough! You're giving me a headache. If I give you some change will you go to the store and get some treats? But please...leave the piano alone!"

Pa always did what he could for us. Once, Mom was in the hospital for a few weeks. He was the main cook and bottle washer, as Dad was still working at the time. Every day we had beans for lunch. The boys would tease and say it was the only thing Pa could make. He'd just laugh and say "They're good for ya!". Mom recovered and returned home feeling much better. Everyone was happy, especially Pa who had always said, "I can't wait for your mother to get home."

In the cold winter, Pa always kept the coal furnace going when Dad was at work. We were always warm and cozy. Pa used to take our boots and mittens and put them on the back of the coal stove in the kitchen to make sure they were warm and dry for the morning. He would wash and dry the dishes, too, if Mom had a lot of work to do.

I remember summers when we would spend a week in Big Pond at our Aunt Cecilia and Joe's. They would come to the Bay and load up the whole family. Even Pa came! But then we were always eager to return home, where we spent time picking blueberries and swimming at the shore. Pa would pick a large container full of blueberries. I'd pick a dozen and then take a break. I'd lie down, have some peppermints and Iron Brew. After all, it was tiring waiting for him to finish up! Then, he'd take my cup and fill it up for me.

Four o'clock was suppertime. Everyone would gather at the table, and of course, first thing was Grace. Then we'd dig in. When supper was over, Mom would clean up and Dad and Pa would retreat to the living room to hear the news. The kids would gather around the table to do our homework (or pretend to do it!).

There was one time when the report cards came home and brother Tommy's wasn't the greatest. He knew Mom would be mad so he decided what she didn't know wouldn't hurt her, and he asked Pa to sign it instead. After much persuasion, Pa agreed and Tommy returned it to the school. When

all of the reports were passed in, the teacher asked Tommy who'd signed it. "My mother," he said.

"Your mother? Oh, I see. Then who is Patrick Ryan?"

Well, as Pa would say, the pig was out of the bag! When Tommy returned home from school, Pa met him at the door. "Your mother knows! You better hide...you and I sure are in big trouble!"

After a few days, things returned to normal. As normal as they could be. As time went on, the family began to thin out, some making their way to Ontario to start their own lives. The three youngest remained at home. Pa was still in his rocking chair. He missed the ones that had left, but he was still quite content with the ones who were there. Mom and Dad were his best companions. He will forever be our Pa. He had a never ending love and devotion to those crazy kids. We couldn't have loved him more!

When I look back after all these years, I can still feel the love that lived inside of that little white house I think of as home. Funny, when you get to where you're going and life is passing you by, think back to those days that seemed so difficult- they really are treasures in the field!

## **The Loving Miss Daisy**

**By Chad F. Green**

Every so often you'll drive deep into a horrifying story, or bite into a mystery so in-depth it engulfs your very soul. Other times you read for the pure joy, a happy feel good story of friendship and love, or embark on an adventure so grandiose that every page fills you with inspiration and motivation. Well, unfortunately this isn't any one of the above-mentioned stories, this story is about the loving Miss Daisy, a rambunctious poodle, a brand-new couch and a mess of epic proportions.

As always, when it comes to the loving Miss Daisy, I swear she ain't crazy. As I arrived home, I began with dusting off my boots on the back step after a long sixteen-hour shift underground. I took a much-needed breather as I untied my boots, and stripped off my coveralls before entering the house. This was a precautionary step to prevent dragging coal throughout the house. That is the struggle with a dirty job and attempting to keep the house clean. I took my rag from my pocket and cleaned off my forehead then dusted off my once red lunch pail and sorted the contents between the green bin and the garbage bin. Another preventative measure so the loving miss Daisy would have no reason to fight with me that evening.

The cardboard box of a new couch she ordered sat fully intact but empty in our driveway. I inspected the box for any hint at how much this unexpected new piece of furniture cost me, with no luck. Every possible clue to its purchase price cleverly removed or scratched off. I smiled knowing it would be nice to kick off these old boots and kick my feet up on a brand spanking new couch. As I reached for the door I had only a few things on my mind, seeing my loving Miss Daisy, the warm greeting I'll receive from our rambunctious and clumsy poodle, a hot shower, and that new couch.

As I walked into the back door, I was greeted by the smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, and our poodle jumped to greet me. The loving Miss Daisy advised me that once I was done in the shower that supper was in

the oven, the cookies were cooling on the window sill, and she would be stepping out for tea with a friend and would be back shortly. As I raced down to hop in the shower I was excited to say the least about the scoff ahead of me. Still though, if you're at all familiar with coal dust, you are in the shower for just a bit longer than normal to ensure you get it all. A quick towel dry and off I went towards the kitchen, sore and tired from the days' work, but feeling quite fresh.

When I turned the corner into the kitchen, I noticed a small amount of stuffing on the floor, a common trend around here when the dog gets a good hold on one of its stuffed toys. My tunnel vision skipped sweeping that up right away for the cookies which were perfectly ready for consumption. Though it's usually ill advised to eat dessert before supper, the loving Miss Daisy was gone, and the poodle wasn't going to tell anyone. After having a quick bite to eat, I was sure ready to try out that brand new couch, the perfect time for a 20-minute nap. As I approached the living room, I noticed a bit more stuffing on the floor, and as I turned into the living room there it was.

The stuffing was everywhere, at least half a foot deep, and covered every possible surface, the coffee tables, the staircase, our fireplace. There was foam and stuffing on top of the television, the lamps, and it had completely buried our other dog, all that was visible of him was his sad eyes poking out from the sea of foam. You see, our poodle decided it would be a great idea to tear our brand new couch to absolute shreds. I imagine she had started with the zippers for easy access, ripping the fabric viciously beyond repair, ensuring she actually ripped the solid foam stuffing apart to maximize the carnage. All before moving onto the next cushion to calculate her time ensuring the damage was unrepairable. After the cushions were a thing of the past, she decided it was prime time to rip at the wood frame of the couch. As I stood in disbelief, my eyes took aim on the innocent looking poodle, with a couch leg in her mouth. I feel as though she could sense my blood was boiling and she was in trouble because just as I was about to open my mouth, she decided to pee on the floor.

I reached for my phone for video and picture evidence of course. I calmly let the dogs out on their leashes and stood in the field of foam and



stuffing for a moment just contemplating on how someone would even begin to clean such a colossal mess. Tired, sore and flustered I began cleaning up. The loving Miss Daisy arrived home shortly after the last piece of foam was being swept up, just as I sat down for the first time after work. As I sat on the uncomfortable kitchen chair, I picked up the flyers to check on any upcoming deals for a new couch.

Though she was in trouble, grounded for sure, our fun-loving rambunctious Poodle has served her time in puppy prison, and is once again free to roam the halls of our home. As for the loving Miss Daisy, as always, I swear she ain't crazy, and me? Well, let's just say I have a lot more stories to tell.

## Soulmates

By Martha Green

This story is about 2 soulmates determined to celebrate their past, present, and future life. To take you on this journey, we must go back in time where it all began. A young girl began a search for her soulmate. The journey began at a popular dance in her hometown. A young man was also on a mission, that same night to find his soulmate. He was at the same dance where his journey also began. In those days, at the dance the girls lined up standing side by side as the music played. The boys encircled the outside of the girl's line. Round and round they went looking to connect with one of the young ladies. The girls stared ahead not making eye contact. Thoughts began swirling through their minds "Pick me". Sometimes a few young men would leave the circle and pool in a small group. One particular group stood in front of some of the girls. This was not acceptable to the girl who was eagerly searching for her soulmate. Her view was now blocked by a tall thin man. She tapped him on the shoulder and stated: "Excuse me, you're blocking my view, I am looking for my friend". (she dared not say soulmate) He turned and in one moment of time, their eyes locked and something special took place. The girl knew in an instant she had found her soulmate; thus, her search had come to an end. The boy knew his search was also over and he too had found his soulmate.

After dating for several years, he bought her a beautiful diamond ring. He planned a special proposal for his soulmate and safely locked the diamond in the dash of his 1970 corvette. That special evening never came. The couple had their first fight at the A&W drive-in parking lot when sipping on a root beer. The girl, knowing the dash was locked, expressed her suspicion about her soulmate's motives. What was he hiding? Why was the dash locked? She became extremely upset and began questioning him. The boy tried to come up with several excuses. Not wanting to upset his mate further, as to why the dash was locked, he opened the dash. The root beer slid down from the dash,

hit his mate's knee and splashed over her long black hair. He retrieved the ring, popped the question and she accepted. He placed the diamond on her finger. He was relieved and euphoric. She was sticky, thrilled and embarrassed. They vowed from that day on that their lives together would be filled with many celebrations and it was!

Continuing on their journey, the couple went to the jewelry store to pick out their wedding bands. As the young man entered the jewelry store, his eyes were fixated on a set of fancy wine glasses. The sun was streaming through the window as bright orbs surrounded the wine glasses. An overwhelming essence of peace embodied the man's soul. He would not or could not look away. His partner snapped at him. Shortly afterward, the couple married and began to celebrate their lives together. His partner never knew about the wine glasses that were hidden safely away in the rafters of their home.

Time passed as the couple continued to celebrate their lives, celebrating the birth of their beautiful daughter, the arrival of nieces and nephews and time spent with family and friends. As the firemen surveyed the situation, the husband looked around horrified by their loss. The abundance of their daughter's charred stuffed animals, the couple's memorabilia which could never be replaced and the wedding dress stuck frozen to tree with long sleeves pointing to the sky.

As the husband sifted through the rubble, the firemen on the scene exclaimed: "There was an explosion that caused the fire. If your family had been home, you would never have made it out." Kicking over some rubble, the firemen discovered a black locked box. He picked it up and handed it to the husband. The husband opened the box and "alas" the wine glasses were intact in perfect condition just like the day he hid them away. He knew he must be his family's rock and help them through this tragedy and that he did.

Continuing on their journey, the couple built their new home. The husband found a new hiding spot for the anniversary glasses. Although their lives were surrounded by family and friends, they always found time to be with one another. Whether it was travelling down south, having a picnic on the beach or driving together with no known destination, to them this was their special time.

This couple set out to fulfill their destiny. A couple who are the essence of true soulmates. They celebrated life while living in the past, they continued to celebrate in the present and are now looking forward to celebrating their future. The universe had lined up a series of events to bring this couple together.

## **Bonds are Better than Bucks**

**By Salman Uzair**

In the small, well developed town of IncorpIncorp, the place of green peaceful neighborhoods, lived three brothers: Albert, Ernie and Elmore who were in a current financial crisis. They had recently gotten into a legal case, a month after they graduated, causing the loss of their college diplomas. They were looped in with cheating and misbehaviour with other students, even though they were not participating in this mayhem. They even tried to reapply for college, but they could not afford it. As of now they were working at the local park for minimum wage.

Each of the three brothers had unique personalities and appearances: Albert was skinny, well dressed, wore a collared shirt with a yellow sweater and dress pants. He loved political discussions, art, playing his clarinet and collecting things which his brothers found boring and what is called “lame”. His voice was difficult to understand because he had a nasal voice. Ernie was the foodie of the three, he loved to cook. He had a tremendous appetite and was great at economics. He was overweight and fat, and wore an orange turtleneck and jeans. As well his voice was deep. Elmore was the wimp of the three, skinny and he loved to play video games. In fact he bought a four thousand dollar gaming PC with loans which made Albert very mad so he sold it online. He thought he was cool and he wore an athletic t-shirt and shorts.

“Wake up, wake up Elmore! We're late for work!” said Albert. Elmore and Ernie followed Albert into the minivan where they drove to work at the park.

“It's about time you showed up! You're late for work, next time you're late, you're fired.” Said Donald, their boss. “Go sit down! Then I'll assign you some tasks.” This isn't the first time Donald scolded them, he does it all the time to everyone. What makes it worse is that his voice is hard to understand. “Okay Griff, Peter, Ivan, Warren, William, Patrick, Albert, Ernie and Elmore, we need to mow the entire park, repaint the shed and plant some trees according

to this plan designed by the park owner!" Yelled Donald. Then Donald left to do some office work and all the employees started to get to work.

Unfortunately, Warren and William, the troublemakers did some pranks and shenanigans while everyone was working. Albert, Ernie and Elmore were assigned to plant some trees with Warren, William, Griff and Peter.

"Okay guys we have to get the trees from the shed to start," blurted out Ernie.

"Who's in charge here?" asked William.

"Uuuuhhhh, you are of course," said Ernie.

"But since you insist, we'll get the trees from the shed." said Warren and William. While they were getting the trees out William said "I wish there was a way we could get the day off early."

"Maybe there is!" said Warren.

"Oh, you mean like we could travel forward in time?" William asked.

**"NO!** We can change all the clock signs two hours ahead." Said Warren.

"Brilliant! I'll go put the trees there and you go put the plan into action.

**"GOT IT?"** Asked William.

"Okay" said Warren and then he left. Warren manually changed all the clock signs in the park two hours ahead, 23 clocks were changed in fact. Meanwhile William helped plant the trees. Warren came back to help, after ten minutes he got a notification on his phone. "Okay, it's time for our phone break." Said Warren.

Warren and William went behind Albert's minivan for their break. Warren took out his phone and saw the time. "Oh no! We have to change the time on the phones!" said Warren.

"What are we going to do?" Asked William. "I don't know! Wait, I do know," said William.

"Didn't you take that hacking course?" asked Warren.

"Yeah I did." said William.

"Well, just hack the phones!" exclaimed Warren.

"Well to do that I need a laptop." said William.

"I stole a few from the local tech store," said Warren. "They're in the truck."

William took one of the laptops and changed the time on the phones using hacking software on his laptop. He used the bluetooth connection to interfere with the time zones of all nearby devices, William was a pro hacker because he had taken hacking courses from the same college as Albert, Ernie and Elmore, but he and Warren had also lost their diplomas. Now that William hacked the network time zone, he and Warren decided to head home.

"Okay let's go, William." said Warren, eager to leave the park.

"Yeah, Donald will be so confused!" William said. They both started laughing and asked Donald if they could go home.

"What! But the time is only... 3pm already." Donald checked his phone.

“The sun hasn't even hit its peak yet!” said Donald, who was very confused. “Oh, well, ummm..., I guess you can go home then. Wait hold it, it's still 1pm, my watch is never wrong. Just to prove it to you!”

Donald then walked outside the park to the local bus stop where the clock had the same time as his watch. “Hmmm someone must have changed the time in the park!”

“Uh oh!” muttered Warren.

Fortunately for Warren and William when Donald found out about their little shenanigan, he got one crucial fact wrong. Donald thought it was Albert, Ernie and Elmore who did it so he fired them. He thought it was them because Albert was dusting the clocks in the park apartment and Elmore was on his laptop during lunch break. He fired Ernie because Donald was very unreasonable and Ernie was their brother.

“But, but, but we didn't do it!” said Albert, trying to convince Donald that he and his brothers didn't do it.

“I don't want to hear it! All I know is that you three cause the most mischief in the park so get out! You're fired! Get it? So leave!” yelled Donald. So Albert, Ernie and Elmore left the park and were also fined a couple thousand dollars.

The trip home was silent, eventually they arrived home. “I didn't do it so it must have been one of you two!” said Albert in an angry voice. “And in my guess it was you Elmore!” he yelled in Elmore's direction.

“Hold it, Albert you think i'm the one who's responsible for getting us fired?” asked Elmore in a slightly angry voice.

“Yes, yes I do Elmore. I really do!” shouted Albert. “Well in that case I'm



leaving!" Elmore yelled back at Albert while leaving the car.

"Come on guys let's avoid another fight." said Ernie in a calm but still scared voice.

"Nonsense Ernie. There's absolutely no reason to stop, he won't last a day out there without us!" Albert told Ernie in an angry voice.

That night rain poured on Incorpincorp as Albert was applying for loans and trying to find a new job for himself and Ernie, while Ernie was trying to call Elmore. After ten failed attempts he found out that Elmore's phone was on the kitchen counter. "Why won't you just come back home, Elmore," whispered Ernie to himself.

"Albert thinks he's so smart. I could become twice as successful as him," said Elmore to himself. Elmore had no plan but he knew one thing: he had to find a home and the only place he could live in was the shady neighborhood next to the boat dock called Port Rocktoad. One thing Elmore didn't know was that this place had a high crime rate.

"Well, here I go, all alone." Elmore whispered to himself. Elmore went to the local Real Estate agency to find a home. The houses here were cheaper than lawn mowing services. Elmore found a poorly maintained, but livable apartment and it was already furnished. Elmore was able to move in immediately.

Meanwhile Albert was denied almost all loans he applied for and the bill was due soon. "Ernie, we can't afford to live here, we have to do something quickly or we will lose our house and have to move to someplace else," said Albert.

"No Albert, we have to work hard to find a job that will get us to stay here! Our entire family has lived here for 3 generations and this house was even renovated six years ago. We can't give up now! We should apologise to

Elmore! We don't know if it was him who did this or someone else! Now is the time to act, but in order to act we need to work together with each other! Lets get Elmore back and work together! After all, even if it was him, he's our brother," said Ernie to Albert.

Back at Port Rocktoad, Elmore was not aware that criminals were breaking into his home at this very moment.

"Come on, be quiet and don't wake him up. Just steal everything he's got and if he wakes up, kidnap him," whispered a criminal to his fellow robbers. They started with some of Elmore's furniture.

"Remember to lift the bookshelf together or else it will just fall down," whispered the lead criminal. But his fellow robbers were not that smart and only one of them lifted the bookshelf. Because of that it fell down with a huge crash.

"I just told you to lift it together!" yelled the lead criminal. "Huh? What's Going On? Robbers!" yelled Elmore.

"Looks like we'll have to do this the hard way," said the lead criminal and then he hit Elmore with a baseball bat.

The next day, Elmore woke up to the sound of bickering. "What if we just leave with the bed and the bookshelf and just dump out all the books and the bed sheet," said the lead criminal.

"No Brandon we can't just leave all those books and that bedsheets," said Gary.

"**No!** Gary we don't have to take the worthless stuff!" yelled Brandon at Gary. Elmore noticed that nobody knew he was awake. He found out that only

his legs were tied together so Elmore hopped over to a table they had stolen. He found a phone on the table and a thought rushed to Elmore's mind: I've got to call Albert and Ernie. He thought about calling at first but then thought about texting them. "Guys, I need your help. I've been captured by robbers in Rocktoad. From Elmore."

Back in Incorpincorp, Ernie got a message from a stranger. "Hey Albert I just got a message from a stranger. It says Elmore is captured in Rocktoad." Said Ernie.

"Let me see that Ernie!" shouted Albert. "I don't believe that." said Albert.

"Well I do, so I'm going, are you with me or not?" asked Ernie.

"Well Ernie, the answer to that question is no! I have to apply for loans to get us money," yelled Albert.

"Well Albert, he's our brother. What's more important: family or money?" asked Ernie while leaving the house.

"What's more important: family or money?" whispered Albert to himself.

"Besides Albert, taking so many loans will result in greater debt, it's better to find a job to earn real money!" Ernie explained logically .

Meanwhile, Ernie took a cab to Rocktoad. Where he snuck into the town. He saw something horrible, Elmore was tied to a pole.

"So you thought you could call for help. Huh? Well you can't!" Brandon yelled at Elmore.

"Sort of... um can I come down now?" asked Elmore.

“What. No, no you can’t!” shouted Brandon, expecting Elmore to know that.

“Hey... that's my brother! You mess with him, you mess with me!” yelled Ernie. Fortunately, Ernie had taken martial arts classes. Ernie started to fight the robbers one by one until he found out they had weaponry and protective equipment equipped.

Minutes later, Ernie was tied to another pole. Right at the moment when they were going to cut the poles and let them fall into the ocean, Ernie hoped something would happen but, nothing did and they fell into the ocean. Ernie opened his eyes and saw that Elmore was free! Even though Elmore was the wimp of the three he managed to pull Ernie and himself out of the water and onto the other side of town. When they got up they sneaked around until they arrived where the robbers were. But then Ernie caught sight of Albert.

“Let go of them or else I'm going to take you down!” shouted Albert.

“Oh really? How?” Brandon asked, smirking.

“Because I have you outnumbered, I have an entire army! Errr, soon I will have an entire army!” mumbled Albert. Albert called the police and expected them to come but there were no police stations in port Rocktoad. The nearest police station was back home, and Albert called too late anyway.

“You and what army?” shouted Brandon.

“Ummm, it doesn't matter, I will take you down myself!” yelled Albert pointing to his hands. After Albert shouted, he charged at the robbers but Albert didn’t even last a second, and in one second Albert was tied to a pole. Then Elmore saw some of the robbers weapons in a crate next to the wall.

“Ernie, do you want to use these guy’s weapons against them?” asked Elmore.

“Yeah!” answered Ernie. Elmore and Ernie took some weapons and started stealthily taking out the robbers one by one.

“Okay Gary! Cut him down! Gary? Where'd you go?” shouted Brandon.

“They're all right here!” said Elmore and then he and Ernie stepped to the side revealing the robbers tied together. Gary noticed Brandon was scared so he told Brandon to “Rrrrruuuuunnnn!” But Brandon just ran in circles and in a few minutes Brandon was also tied up and Albert was down.

“Thanks for saving me guys, but what are we going to do with them?” asked Albert.

“I know exactly what to do with them!” said Elmore and he threw them in his apartment. The robbers were trying to get out while Albert, Ernie and Elmore were in their minivan driving home.

Once they got home they found a letter in their mailbox. “It says that... we are very sorry for falsely accusing you and wrongly firing you. We soon found out from security footage that it was Warren and William who changed all the clock signs, and also caused all the mayhem at the community college, so you are free to work at the park again. You will also get your diplomas back, and we are lifting the fine.” said Albert reading the letter aloud to his brothers.

“Well guys it looks like everything is normal again” said Elmore.

“Yeah guys we should never fight like that ever again,” said Ernie.

“Yeah!” said all three of them. So, Albert, Ernie and Elmore learned an important lesson that Bonds are Better than Bucks!

“We still have to pay the loans Albert.” Ernie said.

“Well if we work hard together then we'll pay them off” said Albert.