

Alex loved to visit his Great Aunt Heidi because she had a library filled with books. The library's shelves held books on every subject. There were books on rocks and books on clocks. There were books on mountains and books on fountains. But the one thing that made Aunt Heidi's library really special was the library's elves.	15 28 41 55 57
Library elves are rare little creatures. Most people think they are extinct, but a few still exist. Many of them live behind the books on the shelves of Aunt Heidi's library.	71 87 88
Alex discovered the elves one blustery winter afternoon when he was searching the shelves for a book about airplanes. He'd climbed all the way to the top of the library ladder and was straining to reach a thick book, when suddenly he heard a voice. It was a warm and friendly voice.	100 117 132 140
"Here you go," the voice said, and Alex felt the book he'd been reaching for pop into his hands. Alex tumbled off the ladder. He would have hit the stone floor with a hard thud had it not been for the library elf's magic. The elf cast a magic spell that stopped him an inch from the ground and then set him down gently.	156 173 191 204
"Thanks," Alex said to the little elf. "I owe you one."	215
The elf peered down from his shelf at Alex. He wore a felt cap and a sweater knitted in several colors. "Yes, you do," the elf said. "I would like you to read that book to me."	232 249 252
Alex looked at the book in his hands. He'd forgotten all about airplanes when the elf first spoke to him.	267 272
"Okay," Alex said. Then he sat down in a cushy chair in front of the fire and started to read. He read several chapters without looking up. When he finally looked up, he saw a dozen library elves sitting on the braided rug in front of him. All of the elves were listening intently.	289 302 320 326
"Don't stop," they told him. "Read, read, read."	334
Alex read to them long into the night. He finished the book and looked up to find the library elves were gone. They had vanished as soon as he had read the last word on the last page.	351 367 372

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Brandon is an outer space expert. If you ever want information about the sun, planets, sky, or stars, Brandon is the boy to ask. He knows more about the solar system than anyone I have ever met. He's a walking, talking, breathing outer space computer.	14 30 44 45
Brandon reads every book and article about space that he can find. He says that he has read eighty books, and he has just gotten started! He enjoys reading both fiction and non-fiction stories. Brandon's sister just bought him the newest magazine on rocket travel, and he is very excited to read it.	60 75 88 99
Brandon is a great space artist. He recently completed a picture of the night sky using blue, black, silver, gold, and white glitter. He makes models of the planets out of clay. Right now he is painting a huge poster depicting the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper.	114 129 145 147
Brandon talks about outer space. He creates songs about outer space. He will watch any show or movie about outer space. I bet he even dreams about outer space when he's sleeping!	160 175 179
Someday Brandon would like to be an astronaut. He wants to blast off in a space shuttle that lands on the moon or on Mars. He would like to walk in space. He imagines floating and being weightless in the air. He thinks somewhere in the solar system aliens truly exist. He wants to explore Mars and hunt for water. He wants to see what kind of life might live there. He doesn't know if he would find plants or animals or learn why it is called a red planet.	194 211 225 240 257 269
If Brandon could live out his greatest fantasy, he would help design, build, and live in a giant space colony. He'd invite people from different countries all over the world to join him in settling a new frontier. Throughout the galaxy, there would be peace, harmony, and people jetting around in flying saucers.	283 298 313 322
Brandon believes that outer space is full of wonderful sights, sounds, and life.	335

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Chuck was an excellent student. He was attentive to his teachers and kind to his fellow classmates. He sat quietly on the bus and held his sister's hand when they crossed busy intersections.	15 30 33
Chuck and his family lived next to an airport. At night, Chuck would lie in his bed and listen to the huge planes fly overhead. One night while Chuck was trying to fall asleep, he got an idea.	50 66 71
The next morning, Chuck put his idea into action. He found a big, thick piece of paper and folded it several times. When he was done, he didn't have much more than a crumpled paper ball. He got frustrated and threw it toward the trash. It flew through the air, but it didn't soar. Chuck wanted to make something that soared.	87 102 118 132
At school, Chuck was the first one to sign up to visit the library when the teacher asked. At the library, Chuck loaded his arms with books on airplanes and flying machines.	149 163 164
The rest of the afternoon, Chuck hardly listened to his teacher. Instead, he looked out the window and daydreamed. He imagined he was in a jet that could fly faster than sound. He imagined he was the bravest and most daring pilot in the history of the world.	177 193 208 212
While Chuck was daydreaming, his teacher called on him. Chuck looked up and started to blush. He had to admit that he hadn't been paying attention. When the final bell rang, the teacher asked Chuck to stay after class.	225 240 251
"I'm worried about you, Chuck," she said. "You always pay attention." Chuck told her what he'd been daydreaming about.	263 270
"So, you want to learn how to construct a paper airplane?" she asked with a smile. Then she reached over and lifted a piece of paper off her desk. Chuck watched as she did some fancy folds and a few clever twists. When she was finished, she held a beautiful paper plane out to him.	285 300 315 325
"Go ahead and try it," she said.	332
Chuck threw the airplane. It soared across the room, out the door, and down the hall. It flew further than even Chuck would have imagined.	347 357

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Fanny Jenkins had no patience. She couldn't wait for the butter to melt on her potatoes at dinnertime. She couldn't wait for the tub to fill with water at bath time. She couldn't wait for the sun to shine on a cloudy day.	15 31 43
"Now! Now! Now!" she would shout as she stomped her foot. "I want it sooner, not later! I want it now, not never!"	58 66
Fanny's mother was at the end of her rope. She was losing her patience with her daughter. One morning Fanny had wet hair, and her mother wouldn't let her walk to school until it was dry. Fanny had a sore throat, and Fanny's mom was afraid the cold air would make her feel worse.	82 97 113 120
"I don't want your sore throat to turn into a cold, Fanny," she told her pouting daughter. "You can't get sick. That's the last thing we need around here. You're always so impatient to get well."	136 150 156
Fanny stomped her boot. Sure, her hair was a little wet, but not wet enough for her to catch a stupid cold. "I want to walk to school now," she told her mother. "I want to get there sooner, not later."	172 190 197
With those words, she stomped out the door and down the sidewalk to school. It was a wintry day. The winds were blowing from the north, and they were carrying sleet and snow. By the time Fanny got to class, her bright red curls were icicles.	212 227 243
Sure enough, the next morning Fanny woke up with a stuffy head. "I'm not sick," she told her mother when she came in the room with a thermometer and a bottle of medicine. "I'm never sick. I don't have time to be sick. Sick people are wimps."	258 275 290
"Now, Fanny," her mother said in a calming voice. "You are sick, and you're going to have to stay in bed until you get better." Then she made Fanny take a huge spoonful of horrible tasting medicine.	304 322 327
"Yuck," Fanny complained, and then she sneezed. "I want to be better right now. I have things to do, places to go, and people to see," she told her mother.	340 357
"Oh, no you don't," said Fanny's mom. "For once, you have to be patient and wait for your body to get well. Now take a nap, Fanny."	372 384

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First Street School is holding its eighth annual carnival. It will be held on March	15
third from four to nine o'clock. Everyone in town is invited to join the fun, excitement,	31
and thrills.	33
The fifth-grade students will decorate the hallways at the school. They will hang	47
up colorful streamers, bright balloons, curly ribbons, and tiny lights. Each hallway	59
will be decorated in a special theme. The main hallway that passes the principal's	73
office will be done in a western style.	81
The carnival will offer over thirty games. There will be a cakewalk, a miniature	95
fishing pond, and a giant ring toss. A new game called "Tower" will be introduced.	110
Players will build towers out of straws, cotton balls, and pipe cleaners. The children	124
who build the tallest towers that don't fall down will win.	135
One room will have strobe lights, mirrors, and music for dancing. Another room	148
will have face painting. Choices for pictures will include a glittered butterfly, a	161
Martian, a variety of flowers, clowns, and superheroes.	169
The gymnasium will have a maze racetrack set up. Racers will wear gunnysacks	182
and use scooters to navigate through the maze. Students can go on a treasure hunt	196
in the music room. Partners will work together to locate and collect hidden objects.	210
One partner will wear a blindfold while the other partner gives clues for finding items	224
written on a list.	230
Students can win great prizes during the games and activities. Contestants can	242
win stuffed animals, yo-yos, wind-up cars, whistles, beaded jewelry, key chains,	255
plastic insects or dinosaurs, glow-in-the-dark neon sticks, comic or joke books,	269
magician kits, and all other sorts of cool prizes.	278
People can eat a snack or dinner in the cafeteria. Foods on the menu will	293
include fruits, popcorn, hot dogs, hamburgers, carrots, pickles, salad, juice or milk,	305
cookies, and fries.	308
The kids at First Street School can hardly wait for the carnival to begin. It'll be	324
the best carnival ever!	328

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It was October, and the leaves were falling from the trees. Ducks and geese were flying south. Bears were preparing for their winter slumber. The cool wind blew smoke from chimneys, and people were wearing sweaters and coats.	14 27 38
Squirrel was storing acorns for the season ahead. He knew winter would be long and cold, and he had to be ready. His fur was growing thicker, his body was storing fat, and he was storing acorns in his nest for winter. He had to hurry. Eventually it would snow, and it would be hard to find acorns then.	52 69 86 97
Acorns were Squirrel's favorite food. He liked to eat them for breakfast. He liked to eat them for lunch. He even liked to eat them for supper or for an afternoon snack. Squirrel needed to store many acorns for the winter!	111 128 138
Squirrel ran down his tree trunk and searched the grass under his tree. Tasty acorns were hidden in the grass. He found an acorn, put it in his mouth, and ran back up the tree. He dropped it in his nest, which was a little hole in the tree. His nest would keep him warm all winter. When he was done, he ran back down to look for more acorns.	152 169 188 205 208
Squirrel spent the whole day finding acorns. Sometimes he found them lying on top of the grass. Sometimes he found them still hanging in the trees. He looked for acorns that he had buried earlier in the summer. Over the year, he had buried hundreds of acorns, but sometimes he forgot where he buried them. He would dig a little hole where he thought he had buried one. When he didn't find an acorn, he would dig a little hole in another place. Then he'd find a juicy acorn. He'd scurry up the tree with his newfound treasure and put it in his cozy nest.	221 237 252 267 283 300 313
Because he worked so hard, Squirrel's tasty acorns kept him well fed all winter.	327

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It was raining outside, and there was nothing for Norman to do.	12
"I have the most boring life," he moaned, as he plopped down on the couch. Just as he switched on the television, the power went out. Watching a blank television was not something Norman wanted to do. He looked around at the four dismal walls that kept him out of the rain.	28 42 57 64
"Now what am I going to do?"	71
"You could tidy up your room," his mom suggested, "or organize your closet. Your closet is a disaster, Norman. I'm actually frightened of what you might find in there. You haven't cleaned it in a decade."	84 99 107
There was nothing Norman could say after his mom had made up her mind. He was going to have to clean out his closet.	122 131
The only problem was that Norman couldn't even open his closet door. He had it held closed with a large wooden block. There was so much junk in there that it wouldn't stay shut on its own. To push aside the wooden block and open the door would mean doom for Norman. He'd be crushed by falling trash as soon as he turned the knob. He decided that he would only pretend to clean his closet, but his mother came into his bedroom.	146 162 178 193 209 214
"Well," she said, placing her hands on her hips, "let's see you get to work."	229
Norman put both hands on the doorknob and tugged. The entire doorframe gave a mighty CREAK. There was a loud rumble as Norman was pushed back by the wave of forgotten junk he'd jammed into his closet. When the loud noise faded, Norman was lying on his back under a mountain of broken toys, dirty socks, and books. With a groan, he lifted himself to his feet.	242 257 271 286 296
There was an awful smell wafting from somewhere inside. Norman looked into the depths of his closet. It was dark, dreary, and mysterious. Anything—absolutely anything—could be hiding in there. Maybe trolls, ghouls, or gnomes, Norman thought. This job could be an adventure! Pushing up his sleeves, Norman got to work.	308 321 333 347 348

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Kirby never had any money for candy, but his friends always did. Every	13
afternoon on his walk home from school, Kirby would follow his friends down the	27
sidewalk and across the street to the candy shop.	36
There were trays of candy set up in rows in the front display window. There were	52
chocolate kisses and licorice sticks. There were jelly beans, salted peanuts, and	64
candy corn. There was so much candy, but Kirby could never afford anything.	77
Sometimes his friends would give him a piece of candy corn or a chunk of chocolate,	93
but most of the time they forgot to share.	102
One afternoon, Kirby was standing at the counter of the candy store with his	116
friends when the old man who made all the candy and owned the shop spoke to him.	133
"How come you never buy any candy for yourself, young man?" he asked.	146
Kirby shoved his hands in his pockets. He didn't want to say that he didn't have any	163
money, so he told a little lie instead.	171
"Umm, I don't have a sweet tooth, that's all," Kirby said. "I've never really liked	186
candy very much."	189
The old man smiled at Kirby. He was practically bald but had a mustache that	204
curled up on the ends. "Then you are the perfect person to work in my shop," he	221
told Kirby with a smile. "You will start tomorrow. I will pay you for your work, and	238
since you don't have a sweet tooth, you can buy something salty with your wages."	253
The next day Kirby started his new job. He stretched taffy and bagged hard	267
candy. He dusted shelves and swept the floors. He also watched the old man as he	283
worked. Sometimes the old man would insist that Kirby try one of his sweets.	297
"Here," he would say while shoving a piece of fudge at Kirby. "Try this fudge,	312
and tell me if your friends will like it. Do you think I should add more marshmallows	329
or more sugar?"	332
Kirby would take a bite of fudge, and it would melt in his mouth. "I think they'll	349
love it just the way it is," he would say.	359

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Maria made beautiful clay pots. Her pots were big and round and smooth.	13
She glazed them with a black glaze to show off their perfection. Maria liked that her	29
pots were perfect, but she cared more that they were useful. She made her pots for	45
cooking and carrying water. She made them for everyday use and was pleased to	59
see people eat and drink out of them.	67
Maria worked with clay every day. She saved a special time in the afternoon	81
each day just for working. During this time, she sat in the cool shadows of her	97
house and rolled the damp clay in her hands.	106
The clay Maria used for her pots came from the red cliffs in the nearby desert.	122
Whenever she ran out of clay, she had to hike for several miles to get more. Then	139
she carried it back on her shoulders. Maria made every pound of clay count.	153
Maria made serving bowls so delicate the shadow of a hand could be seen	167
through their sides. She painted clever black and white designs on her jugs and the	182
shapes of birds and animals on her bowls and plates.	192
As the years went by, Maria became an old woman but still made many pots.	207
People came to visit her just to see her work and learn from her. She became	223
famous in places hundreds of miles from her home. Still, she never put much stock	238
in what other people thought of her work.	246
Maria continued to make her pots, bowls, and jugs out of the red desert clay	261
even as an old woman. Year after year, she smoothed them with stones and	275
polished them with bits of leather until they glowed. She taught the children who	289
showed interest in pottery how to smooth the lumps from a piece of clay and how to	306
fire up a kiln in the earth to bake the pots. She taught them how to paint delicate	324
snakes, spiders, and dancing men and women on the sides of their pots. But most	339
of all, she taught them how to live a life filled to the fullest with art.	355

Maria made beautiful clay pots. Her pots were big and round and smooth. She glazed them with a black glaze to show off their perfection. Maria liked that her pots were perfect, but she cared more that they were useful. She made her pots for cooking and carrying water. She made them for everyday use and was pleased to see people eat and drink out of them.

Maria worked with clay every day. She saved a special time in the afternoon each day just for working. During this time, she sat in the cool shadows of her house and rolled the damp clay in her hands.

The clay Maria used for her pots came from the red cliffs in the nearby desert. Whenever she ran out of clay, she had to hike for several miles to get more. Then she carried it back on her shoulders. Maria made every pound of clay count.

Maria made serving bowls so delicate the shadow of a hand could be seen through their sides. She painted clever black and white designs on her jugs and the shapes of birds and animals on her bowls and plates.

As the years went by, Maria became an old woman but still made many pots. People came to visit her just to see her work and learn from her. She became famous in places hundreds of miles from her home. Still, she never put much stock in what other people thought of her work.

Maria continued to make her pots, bowls, and jugs out of the red desert clay even as an old woman. Year after year, she smoothed them with stones and polished them with bits of leather until they glowed. She taught the children who showed interest in pottery how to smooth the lumps from a piece of clay and how to fire up a kiln in the earth to bake the pots. She taught them how to paint delicate snakes, spiders, and dancing men and women on the sides of their pots. But most of all, she taught them how to live a life filled to the fullest with art.

My best friend Jeff and I decided to explore my attic one afternoon. We used to	16
go up there when we were younger and pretend to be soldiers or cowboys. The attic	32
is a creepy place. There's a bookshelf, a bunch of old junk, and tons of spider webs.	49
When we got up there, Jeff bumped the bookshelf, and a stone hallway came	63
into view. I couldn't believe it. It was a trap door! Jeff went in and motioned for me	81
to follow. It was very dark, and as we walked along the hallway, it got darker and	98
darker. We came to a large room with a golden chair in it. We continued exploring	114
and suddenly bumped into something. Again, I couldn't believe it. It was two other	128
kids about our age.	132
"What are you doing here?" we all shouted at the same time. What were these	148
strangers doing in my attic? We had never seen them before, and their clothes were	162
unusual. One of them was wearing a gown, the other was wearing a tunic, and both	179
of them were wearing crowns.	183
We stared at each other for a long time. It was uncomfortable just standing	197
there. Finally one of them asked, "What are you doing in our kingdom?" Jeff and I	213
gave each other a strange look. We both turned and looked toward the bookshelf. It	223
was gone! Where were we? Could it be that we somehow traveled in time to a	244
medieval world?	246
We must have looked scared because the boy wearing the tunic said, "Take it	260
easy. We'll show you around, and of course, we'll show you the way out."	274
Even though I would much rather read about an adventure than have one, that	288
afternoon turned out just fine anyway. Our newfound friends were very hospitable.	302
We met the other members of their families and learned a great deal about what life	314
was like during the Middle Ages. The time passed quickly, and before we knew it,	330
we had to say goodbye. That afternoon was one attic adventure we would never	345
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On cold winter mornings, Jane would get up at 4:30 a.m. when it was still very dark. She was always still sleepy, but she knew what was waiting for her was worth it.	16 32 33
After Jane dressed in her warmest shirt and wool sweater, she would tiptoe into the kitchen where she would find her dad sitting at the table. He would be reading the morning paper and eating breakfast. Jane would have her breakfast too, and they'd linger in the warm kitchen for a few extra minutes.	47 63 76 87
Then Jane would pull on her red snowsuit, and her dad would button up his heavy jacket. They would walk outside together into the crisp morning air. It was often so chilly that Jane could see her breath in clouds in front of her. It was usually so chilly that a sparkling layer of frost would cover the fence posts and her dad's tractor.	102 116 134 150 151
All the barn cats would sleep in a pile of hay just inside the door to the barn. They learned they could keep each other warm that way. Jane and her dad would go into the cozy barn that smelled of hay and warm animals. As soon as the baby calves would see Jane and her dad, they'd start to bawl. It was Jane's job to feed the calves, and they learned that when Jane showed up, they were about to get something good.	169 184 201 218 233 235
Jane's dad would help her fill big plastic bottles with warm milk. The baby cows would watch her with their big brown eyes as Jane carried the bottles to them in the back of the barn. Jane would prop the bottles up against her hip as she fed each calf. Sometimes a little calf would buck, and Jane would jump back and laugh. She wouldn't stop feeding them until every calf drank all the milk it needed to grow strong.	250 267 284 299 314 315
Jane had many jobs on the farm. She milked cows, fed chickens, and sometimes shoveled manure. But feeding the calves was by far her favorite job.	328 341

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One day Fern was collecting herbs in the forest when she heard voices in the glen just over the hill. Fern knew that all the land that stretched for miles around belonged to her father. She knew that only outlaws and criminals would dare trespass on her father's land. Her father was very wealthy, and he forbade people to walk on his land without his consent.	15 31 44 59 66
Fern had her father's permission, so she wasn't too worried about trespassing. She was, however, worried about the voices she heard. The owners of the voices might try to kidnap her. After all, she was the daughter of a rich man. Still, Fern couldn't stamp out her curiosity. She had to see who was trespassing on her father's land.	78 92 109 123 125
As quietly as she could, Fern crept up the slanting slope and peeked over the top. There was no one there to listen to. The forest was silent. The only sounds were those of tree branches swaying gently in the breeze. Fern tipped her head and listened.	140 156 171 172
"You're not hearing things are you, dear?" a voice asked. The voice came from high up in the trees. As soon as Fern heard it, she knew it wasn't a human voice and she started to back away.	186 204 210
"Ah now, don't be scared, dear," the voice said. Just then a tree branch swooped down and blocked Fern's retreat.	225 230
"I wouldn't dream of hurting you, lovely Fern. You're named after a plant. How could one plant hurt another?" asked the voice.	244 252
Fern was confused for a moment. What did the voice mean by that? Then she realized it was a plant that was speaking to her. In fact, it was a colossal oak tree.	267 285
The tree opened its branches so Fern could make out the ancient face of an old woman carved in the bark. Her eyes appeared wise.	301 310
"I was talking to myself," she told Fern. "Sometimes I get lonely. Tell me about yourself, dear girl."	325 328
"My name's Fern," Fern stammered.	333
"That I already know," said the tree. "It's warm today. Would you like me to fan you with my branches? It's been a while since I could do something for a friend."	349 365
"Okay," said Fern as she enjoyed the breeze.	373

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One morning June was certain she'd seen a unicorn outside her bedroom window. She had just woken up from a deep sleep and was on her way down to the kitchen when she saw a streak of silver and white whiz through her backyard.	12 30 44
She hadn't been dreaming. Oh no, June Joy Jones didn't just dream things up. She was a very practical little girl. She was extremely smart and clear-headed.	58 72
Throughout all her grade-school career, she'd gotten all As and never a B. She was a good student, but what she didn't have was a very keen imagination. She never made stuff up. She didn't believe in magic, make-believe, or luck. That's how she knew she wasn't imagining the horned horse. June Joy Jones wouldn't have seen a live unicorn if a live unicorn hadn't really been there. Still, June didn't tell her parents about the unicorn over breakfast.	87 102 117 131 148 152
Both her parents were scientists who wouldn't believe anything unless they saw it floating in a test tube. June knew that if she told them about the unicorn, they would simply raise their eyebrows and tell her she'd been dreaming. So she didn't say a word and vowed to look for the unicorn herself as soon as she got a chance.	165 182 197 213
That chance came thirty minutes later when June was waiting for the school bus. She knew she had exactly five minutes to spare before the bus stopped at her driveway, so she slipped off her backpack and stepped into her backyard. June found rabbit and squirrel tracks, but no unicorn tracks. June was never one to give up though, so she kept searching. She became so caught up with her search that the school bus came and left without her.	227 242 255 270 285 293
"Maybe I didn't see a unicorn," June murmured to herself.	303
Suddenly a branch snapped behind her. June spun around. There was a beautiful white unicorn with a silver mane and golden hooves!	315 325
"You missed your bus," the unicorn said. "I could give you a ride if you'd like."	341

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"I cannot fall asleep," Ned said to himself quietly. The stars outside were shining brightly through his window, and the starlight pooled on his bedspread, giving off a silver glare against his shut eyelids. Ned pressed his eyes closed very tightly, but that didn't seem to help.	14 28 42 47
Finally Ned sat up and peered out his window. The stars were gorgeous tonight. Ned was sure he could see just about every constellation in the universe. He knew from school that a constellation was a group of stars that formed a picture in the sky. Out of all the constellations that were out tonight, the Big Dipper glowed the brightest. It was so bright, its light made Ned squint.	61 76 93 107 117
Since Ned was very curious about the night sky and he wasn't sleeping anyway, he crept from his bed. He went outside and stood on his lawn. He was barefoot and in his flannel pajamas, but he didn't care how he looked because everyone else on his block was sleeping.	131 148 163 167
He tipped back his head and looked up. He watched the stars for a long time. He watched for so long that the stars seemed to move right before his eyes. A cluster of stars that looked like a horse galloped across the sky and hurdled the moon. A man walked along with a sword, swinging it at other stars as if they were baseballs. Then, to Ned's surprise, the Big Dipper dipped down and picked him up. It lifted him high up into the dark sky.	183 199 214 231 245 254
"This is great," Ned hollered, clinging to one of the corner stars. "Yahoo! Let's go to Jupiter!"	268 271
The Big Dipper must have heard him because the huge constellation abruptly turned and soared toward Jupiter. Ned was able to study the huge planet up close. He even got to poke his finger in the huge storm that brewed on one side of the planet.	283 298 316 317
Ned soared around the sky all night. Finally at dawn, the Big Dipper dipped down and dropped Ned off on his front lawn. Then all the stars faded from the sky. What an exciting night of star gazing!	331 348 355

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One of my favorite things to do during the holidays is to walk around my neighborhood at night. Almost every house is decorated in some way. Most houses have lights strung around their windows. The colors usually vary from house to house. On my street, one house shines with all green lights, while another sparkles with lights of many different colors.	15 28 41 55 61
Just a block from my house sits a cottage on a corner lot. The house is small and the owner is an older woman. You wouldn't think she would be able to decorate it much, but she always does.	78 94 100
The house is wrapped in lights all season long. Strings of bright lights cling to its eaves and porches. Mounted on the roof is a big silver star. You can see the star from all the way across town. In the front yard, the trees are all trimmed. Some of them are decorated in lights. Others are adorned with popcorn, berries, and pinecones. At night, candles in colored glass bowls line the sidewalk and cheery holiday music fills the air. If you're lucky, the old woman will ask you to come inside for a cup of hot cocoa. I've been that lucky a few times.	116 133 152 162 175 192 205
The house is just as pretty on the inside as it is on the outside. There are soft couches and even more decorations in the living room. In the kitchen, cookies fill every available space on the countertops. A pot of hot cocoa is always sitting on the stovetop. Each of the old woman's cats wears a golden bell. She has many cats, and when they all run around, the bells make a beautiful sound. The old woman herself has long gray hair that she wraps in a bun. She has wise, green eyes.	223 237 252 267 282 298
"Sit down and have a cup of my hot cocoa," she'll say to you. "It's my great grandmother's recipe."	299 316
The cocoa warms you as it trickles down your throat. When you empty your glass, the old woman will look at you and ask, "Another?" You won't be able to refuse.	318 333 349

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"Sit down and have a cup of my hot cocoa," she'll say to you. "It's my great grandmother's recipe."

The cocoa warms you as it trickles down your throat. When you empty your glass, the old woman will look at you and ask, "Another?" You won't be able to refuse.

One weekend both my parents had to work, so I went to visit my Great Aunt Viola. Auntie lives in a stone cottage covered with mosses near the shore of a winding stream. Despite the fact that her nearest neighbor lives five miles away, Auntie has many friends.	16 31 44 48
When I arrived, one of her dearest friends, Jack Raspberry, was on her roof cleaning out her chimney. Auntie was standing in her driveway with her hands on her hips and her head tipped back laughing at him. Jack was covered with soot and ash, but he was good-natured enough to wave at me as I climbed out of my parent's car.	62 76 92 110 111
"Why, good morning, Velvet!" he said.	117
He stopped what he was doing and did a little dance. Everyone gasped because he bobbed and nearly tumbled off the roof. Luckily, he caught himself just in time and bowed as we clapped. Aunt Viola clapped the loudest.	131 146 156
"Great, green crickets!" Aunt Viola shouted out. "Remember when I was just a girl, Jack? Back then I did the jitterbug on Sissy Johnson's roof."	169 181
"You sure did," said Jack as he climbed down the ladder. "I've never seen anyone dance better than you, Viola."	195 201
Auntie grinned and invited us in for tea. She served the tea in her bright yellow parlor on her finest Queen Anne china. Viola chipped her teacup, but she only shrugged and took another gulp.	217 231 236
"So," she said looking at me. "What are we going to do with ourselves this weekend, Velvet? I figured you could help me weed the garden, and then we'll get ourselves all dressed up and go to a show. When it gets dark, we can chase fireflies."	251 266 282 283
Jack Raspberry looked at Auntie Viola and asked, "Don't you think you're a bit old for those activities?"	297 301
"Jumping jelly beans, child," Auntie exclaimed. "That's the point. I invite Velvet over here on the weekends because I want to feel like a young girl again." She glanced over at me and winked.	313 329 335
"On Sunday," she whispered, "I'll teach you how to ride a horse bareback."	348

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It was an especially hard winter in Alvin's village. The only wood the village people collected that fall was wet and moldy, so their fires were half-hearted and smoky.	14 29 30
Alvin's uncle was feeling the strain of having an extra mouth to feed. Since Alvin was that extra mouth, he sometimes went without breakfast or dinner.	45 56
"Go and find some firewood for us," Alvin's uncle would command. "Then maybe I'll let you eat."	69 73
Alvin made his way deep into the forest in search of wood. He walked for many miles. Sadly, there was no dry timber on the ground, and he had forgotten his uncle's axe.	89 104 106
Snow started to fall on Alvin's shoulders. He staggered as far as he could, but he was tired and hungry and he finally fell to his knees. He would have fallen face first in the snow, but a glimmer caught his eye. The glimmer came from a silver ax leaning up against a massive oak tree. The tree was the biggest thing Alvin had ever seen in his life. Its branches stretched far above the other trees and seemed to touch the distant stars.	122 139 155 170 186 190
From the depths of the forest, a gentle woman's voice spoke to him. "If you can cut me down, you are worthy of my wood, Alvin the Great."	206 218
"Who's Alvin the Great?" Alvin asked, but the forest around him was silent. Alvin picked up the ax and stared at the tree. He was crazy to think that he could chop it down, but he had to try. If he didn't try something, he would surely starve.	232 251 266
His first swing of the ax sent its blade deep into the bark of the tree. A strange music filled Alvin's ears. He pulled the ax free and swung again and again. Wood chips flew, and sweat gathered on his brow. With a sound like thunder, the tree tipped and fell to the ground. Alvin stared in amazement at what he had done. The tree lay on its side. He did it! With the help of the people of the village to carry the wood back, no one would be cold this winter and Alvin's uncle would let him eat.	284 299 314 330 350 366

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On summer evenings, Pedro would join his father out on the back porch to gaze through his telescope and examine the stars above.	15 23
It was Pedro's dad's job to study the stars. He worked at the observatory just down the road, peering through a gigantic telescope all night long. On his nights off he worked on the back porch of their house, and he didn't mind if Pedro joined him.	38 53 70
Most nights, Pedro and his dad just sat out there looking up at the millions of stars. Pedro loved it when his dad would point out distant galaxies and asteroids.	86 100
"Pluto is the farthest planet from the sun," Pedro's father would tell him," and it is the coldest planet in our solar system."	116 123
"Mercury is the hottest," Pedro would say, and his dad would smile and nod his head.	138 139
Last summer, Pedro and his father were lucky enough to watch a comet shoot across the sky.	153 156
Pedro knows it has always been his father's dream to discover a comet of his own, so whenever Pedro goes outside at night, he searches the sky for a comet that no one has ever seen before.	171 187 193
Pedro's father was telling him all about Jupiter one night, when Pedro caught a flash of white out of the corner of his eye.	207 217
"Dad, look!" Pedro said and pointed. "Do you see that?"	227
Pedro's dad jumped up and went to look through his telescope. "I don't believe it," he said, "Pedro, come here. Look at this."	241 250
Through the lens of the telescope, Pedro could see the night sky. He could see thousands of stars and galaxies that were millions and billions of light years away. He could also see a small streak of white that belonged to a comet with a tail of ice.	265 279 298
In the morning, Pedro's dad called observatories around the world to tell them about this discovery. No one else had seen the comet. The next night, however, people from all over were looking. It was agreed that a new comet existed. Pedro and his Dad had found their own comet.	311 325 340 348

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Oscar loved waking up on mornings when snow was falling steadily. He would hurry through breakfast and quickly brush his teeth so he could go outside. Oscar would walk to school and try to catch snowflakes in his mouth.	13 27 39
Oscar wasn't a very graceful boy. It was hard enough for him to walk down the sidewalk without tripping when it wasn't snowing. But when he tipped his head back and held his mouth open, Oscar was a walking disaster. He would run into light posts and parked cars. He would run into fire hydrants and other kids walking to school. So far, Oscar had not managed to catch a single snowflake in his mouth.	55 69 84 99 114
Once he caught somebody's hat that had been swept away by the wind. Once he caught a mouthful of car exhaust and coughed all the way to school. Once he caught an acorn falling from an oak tree. But he never caught a snowflake.	128 144 158
Oscar watched the other kids have a grand time catching snowflakes on their tongues. They laughed as they twirled under the falling snow, catching snowflakes every time they opened their mouths.	171 183 189
"I wonder what snowflakes taste like," Oscar said to himself. "I wonder if they taste salty or sweet or maybe even sour?"	203 211
One afternoon at recess, Oscar stood in the middle of the playground with his head tipped back and his mouth wide open. Someone threw an eraser in his mouth and everyone laughed. Oscar merely spit it out and resumed his stance. Minutes passed and a million snowflakes fell on his face and slid past his nose. Some snowflakes got caught in his eyelashes, and he had to blink them away. But not a single snowflake landed in his mouth. Then the bell rang and Oscar sighed.	225 240 253 268 284 297
"Drat," he said, and just as he said it, a snowflake landed on his tongue.	312
"Mmmmm," said Oscar, and he kept his mouth open as he walked toward the door.	326 327

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Reginald the rabbit wanted to travel. He sat in his hovel reading books about trains and planes. He read books about far away lands. He wanted to travel around the world.	14 29 31
Reginald packed a bag. His bag held clothes, food, and money. He said goodbye to his friends and hopped off.	44 51
"I'm off to see the world!" he shouted. "I'm sure I'll have a very exciting journey."	67
"See you later," replied his friends. "We hope you have a good trip. We will miss you!"	83 84
Reginald wasn't sure how much he would miss his friends. They were just regular friends, and they were always there. He wanted some different friends. He wanted some interesting friends from different places.	97 110 117
Reginald was ready to see the world. He wanted to travel around the world as much as possible. His first trip was to the bus stop. He planned to take a bus to the airport. The bus driver was surprised to see a rabbit get on the bus. The bus was comfortable, and the people were very nice to Reginald. They said rabbits should ride buses more often.	132 151 168 181 185
Reginald got off the bus at the airport and went straight to his airplane. He quickly hopped on his flight, and the plane took off. He was the first rabbit to fly in a seat and not in the cargo area with the suitcases. He was a real passenger. The plane took him across an ocean. He looked out the window and saw nothing but water below. "The world is a very big place with many different people," Reginald thought. "It is not like my home with my friends and my comfortable hutch."	200 219 235 250 264 278
The plane landed in another country where the people spoke a different language. Reginald didn't understand the people. He got off the plane, carried his bag through the airport, and found a taxi. The taxi took him to the train station. He rode the train for several days. Reginald enjoyed the train ride. When the train ride was over, he was bored. He liked visiting other countries, but he missed his friends. He took a boat home, and his friends were happy to see him. "I like to travel, but I think I like home best," said Reginald.	290 303 320 335 350 369 376

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Santo and his family lived at the base of a great mountain. The top of the	16
mountain was ringed with clouds. Its flanks were covered in tall trees and grasses.	30
The mountain protected them from the fierce winds that swept the land. The lake in	45
the mountain's shadow provided them with fresh water and fish. Santo, his family,	58
and the people of the village believed there was no better place in the world to live.	75
The mountain was their protector, and it would stand forever.	85
Every year the village had a great feast to celebrate the mountain and give	99
thanks. People ate until their stomachs were full and danced until their feet ached.	113
Everyone went to bed happy and slept well into the next day. At least, that's what	129
they'd done every other year.	134
Santo knew that something wasn't right when he woke up on the morning of the	149
feast. He was still sleepy, but he knew he had felt the earth tremble, for just a	166
moment, under his feet. Nobody else felt the quiver. They laughed and told him the	181
ground would tremble that evening while they were dancing. Santo left the room to	195
stand outside. He began talking to the mountain as he sometimes did.	207
"I know I felt the ground move beneath my feet just a moment ago," he told the	224
great swell of rock. "I wasn't imagining things."	232
Santo thought the mountain understood him, as he watched a curl of smoke	245
escape from its tall peak. Santo shook his head. Now, he most certainly was	259
imagining things.	261
Just then he heard his sister squeal from inside the house. "Yuck," she said,	275
"this water tastes like rotten eggs. We can't have our water tasting like rotten eggs	290
for the feast tonight. It will ruin everything."	298
Santo continued to watch the mountain. He didn't know when, but he knew	311
something was going to happen.	316
"Santo, come and eat your breakfast," his mother called from inside the house.	329
"We have a big day ahead of us."	337

Santo and his family lived at the base of a great mountain. The top of the mountain was ringed with clouds. Its flanks were covered in tall trees and grasses. The mountain protected them from the fierce winds that swept the land. The lake in the mountain's shadow provided them with fresh water and fish. Santo, his family, and the people of the village believed there was no better place in the world to live. The mountain was their protector, and it would stand forever.

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"Santo, come and eat your breakfast," his mother called from inside the house. "We have a big day ahead of us."

Susanna was the happiest girl in her whole town. She had long, pretty hair, a sparkling smile, and twinkling eyes. She loved to venture outside on sunny days.	15
On cloudy days, Susanna would telephone her best friends to join her for a delightful afternoon tea party inside the house. They would set a table with their best china and invite some of their dolls and teddy bears to be their guests. They would act like ladies and pretend to sip their tea and have a clever discussion. Having guests at her tea party pleased Susanna.	28
"One lump or two?" she asked the teddy bear seated to her right one afternoon. The teddy bear asked for two. "Lemon with that?" she asked. The bear didn't want lemon. Susanna's friends, Elizabeth and Brenda, helped her serve the guests. After finishing their tea, the teddy bears and dolls got sleepy and took a nap. The young ladies began to discuss the events of the afternoon.	43
"Oh, that bear can be so silly," said Elizabeth. "He never sips his tea. He always slurps it."	58
"And Miss Debbie," said Brenda. "She never brings anything for the tea party. In fact, I'm not sure who invites her."	75
Susanna leaned over to her friends and whispered, "I think she hears about it from Mr. Bear and invites herself."	90
Just then, Susanna's mother came to the tea party and said, "Susanna, there is a little girl at the door. Her name is Shelly. Why don't you invite her to play too?"	95
"Oh, Shelly," said Susanna. "Shelly is quite a bother. She just wouldn't fit in with our tea party, Mother."	110
Elizabeth turned up her nose and said, "Not the right type." Brenda agreed with Susanna and Elizabeth.	125
Susanna's mother frowned and said, "Young lady, I did not teach you to treat people so rudely. You must love and accept all people. You should be kind to Shelly."	137
The three girls felt bad. They were treating Shelly the way they treated Miss Debbie. They agreed to invite Shelly to play with them.	153
Shelly became one of their best friends, and they started remembering to invite Miss Debbie to all of their tea parties.	162
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There was a creek that ran through the bottom of Susan's family's pasture. The creek was filled with frogs, fish, and flowers. It was shallow, shady and very inviting on hot summer days with the weeping willows growing along the edge of it, hanging their branches down over the water.	14 29 44 50
Susan and her sisters spent a lot of time down at the creek during the summer. They would pack picnic lunches and eat them on the banks of the creek as they watched the cows in the pasture and their father on his tractor.	66 82 94
When they got hot, they would roll up their pant legs and wade in the water. They looked for pretty rocks and snail shells. They made fishing poles out of fallen branches and safety pins. They also hunted for frogs with their bare hands. They snickered at the cows when they waded in for a drink, and they splashed each other every chance they got.	110 125 139 155 159
"This creek is the most beautiful place in the world," Susan declared to her sisters one afternoon as they soaked their feet. "The water is clean and clear, the rocks are smooth and tiny, and the frogs are quick and clever. The pasture is green, and the cows don't bother us much. I want to stay here forever and not go back to school."	173 188 204 222 223
"The creek freezes in the winter, Susan," her youngest sister reminded her. "You can't stay here year round."	236 241
Susan sighed. "Yeah, but I wish I could."	249
"No, you don't," said Susan's other sister. "If you were here all the time, you wouldn't have time for anything else. It's not as if you don't get to spend plenty of time here. We know you love to skate on the creek in the wintertime, look at the pretty leaves floating on it in autumn, and see the lily pads and the willows bud in the spring, but there are other things you would miss doing."	264 281 298 316 326
"You're right, both of you," Susan agreed. "Sometimes I get carried away."	338
Just then a fish took the bait on the end of her line, and Susan jumped up. She spent the rest of the day laughing with her sisters.	356 366

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The sky was clear blue when Alicia began her walk. Alicia liked to explore the forest right behind her house. Since Alicia was ten years old, her parents didn't mind if she walked alone in the woods, as long as she stayed on the path. All of the trees and plants were like old friends.	15 29 48 55
This afternoon something in the woods seemed different. The bird songs, which were usually so cheerful, seemed nervous. Then a sudden movement in an oak tree caught her attention. It was a gray squirrel she knew well. He'd come close to her on several occasions.	67 80 96 100
Now he was chattering anxiously at her, and he seemed to be trying to tell her something. He leapt from one tree to another and looked back at her. "He wants me to follow him," Alicia said to herself.	116 131 139
She went after him, walking farther into the woods, but when his trail led off the path, she hesitated. She didn't want to get in trouble or get lost. His calls were so insistent, however, that she continued after him.	155 172 179
Finally, he stopped on a birch tree and ran up and down the trunk. His tail twitched furiously. Alicia started looking around, knowing he wanted to show her something. Then she saw it. A fragile, tiny baby bird was huddled on the ground under the tree. Looking up, Alicia saw a nest almost completely hidden by leaves.	195 207 222 236
Alicia bent down to inspect the baby bird. Its bright eyes were unafraid. She scooped it up and gently placed it in her shirt pocket. Fortunately, the tree had many branches, and Alicia had a lot of experience climbing trees. She climbed up carefully, and once she was high enough, she looked into the nest. The nest held three other tiny birds identical to the one in her pocket.	250 265 279 294 305
She gently pulled her bird out and set it with the others. It nestled in and seemed happy to be home. As she walked back, the squirrel followed her, chattering the whole way. Alicia could tell he was thanking her for her help.	322 336 348

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The summer before fifth grade, Alex waited for the milkman every morning. He didn't wait because he had a special fondness for milk. He waited because he was sure the milkman was a spy.	13 28 34
It all became clear to Alex one damp morning in late June. He stepped out onto the side porch to get the morning paper, and he ran into a man delivering milk.	50 66
The milkman had a rather large nose and black eyes. After they collided, a note slipped from the milkman's pocket. The note landed at Alex's bare feet, so he bent down to pick it up.	81 96 101
As soon as he glanced down at the strange markings on the piece of paper, Alex knew right away that the words were a secret code. That meant only one thing—the milkman was a spy.	117 133 137
The milkman was probably a secret agent who spied on people up and down the block. He most likely delivered milk to the president's house and spied on him too! Alex knew he had to do something. He knew the fate of the whole world rested on his shoulders.	152 167 184 186
After that morning, Alex built a fort in the bushes next to the side porch. He peered through his binoculars every morning as the milkman made his rounds. He was sure the milkman shoved top-secret messages in the bottles he left behind.	202 215 229
One morning the milkman saw Alex crouched among the bushes. He stopped suddenly. Then he held out the milk bottles he carried.	241 251
"I guess I'll give these to you," he said. "You're closer than your back door." As he was about to walk away, a slip of paper fluttered down on the sidewalk between them. Alex froze in shock. With a smile the milkman picked up the piece of paper, folded it, and put it back in his pocket.	267 283 299 308
"I better not lose the grocery list my wife gave me this morning," he said with a wink. He walked away whistling.	325 330

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The tallest tree in the forest stood in a clearing filled with clover and delicate moss. Its shadow was so huge and thick that only low grasses and flowers could grow beneath the tree.	15 30 34
Ever since Charles first saw that great tree, he'd wanted to climb to the top. Its branches started out low to the ground and swept right to its very tip like the rungs of a ladder. Charles thought it would be a good challenge for him to climb the tree.	50 68 84
One morning Charles arose early and sprinted to the base of the great tree. He told no one about his plans. He hoped to surprise his family over breakfast when he walked through the door with a bough from the top of the tree in his hands.	99 115 131
"Today is the day I will touch the sky," Charles proclaimed as he spit on his hands and rubbed them together. Without much thought, he heaved himself up to the first branch. The branch was thick and gently curved. Charles could have relaxed there all afternoon, but he chose to pull himself up another branch.	147 160 173 186
The next branch was sticky with sap and dried needles. The sap coated Charles' trousers and got stuck in his hair, but he kept climbing. Twenty feet above the ground, Charles paused to catch his breath. He glanced down at the ground and felt his stomach roll. His heart jumped in his chest. "It's a long way down," Charles thought, "but it's an even longer way up." Charles chose to keep on climbing.	200 215 230 245 259
Now the branches of the great tree grew closer together. Charles had to shimmy between them. He made the mistake of looking down again, and he had to close his eyes and count to one hundred before he was ready to climb again. The crown of the tree was still out of his reach.	273 289 305 313
Charles pondered his predicament. He looked up, and then he looked down. With a sigh, he started back down the tree. Not all things were possible. "Some things," Charles thought as he looked up at the colossal tree from the ground, "should remain a challenge."	325 340 354 358
Charles went home and washed the sap out of his hair. Tomorrow he'd think of a new challenge.	374 376

The tallest tree in the forest stood in a clearing filled with clover and delicate moss. Its shadow was so huge and thick that only low grasses and flowers could grow beneath the tree.

Ever since Charles first saw that great tree, he'd wanted to climb to the top. Its branches started out low to the ground and swept right to its very tip like the rungs of a ladder. Charles thought it would be a good challenge for him to climb the tree.

One morning Charles arose early and sprinted to the base of the great tree. He told no one about his plans. He hoped to surprise his family over breakfast when he walked through the door with a bough from the top of the tree in his hands.

"Today is the day I will touch the sky," Charles proclaimed as he spit on his hands and rubbed them together. Without much thought, he heaved himself up to the first branch. The branch was thick and gently curved. Charles could have relaxed there all afternoon, but he chose to pull himself up another branch.

The next branch was sticky with sap and dried needles. The sap coated Charles' trousers and got stuck in his hair, but he kept climbing. Twenty feet above the ground, Charles paused to catch his breath. He glanced down at the ground and felt his stomach roll. His heart jumped in his chest. "It's a long way down," Charles thought, "but it's an even longer way up." Charles chose to keep on climbing.

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As the white rabbit was getting ready to turn in one winter's evening, there was a knock on his door. He had already put his fire out and his ears were cold, so he answered the door with a groan.	16 34 40
"Who is it?" he asked as he pulled open the door and shivered in the bitter wind.	57
The rabbit didn't see anyone at first. He was ready to slam the door in anger, but he stopped when he noticed a fuzzy lump at his feet that he'd almost mistaken for a crumpled leaf. The lump, however, wasn't a leaf. It was a skinny caterpillar, half-frozen and half-crazed from the cold.	74 91 105 112
The rabbit didn't say, "Oh my poor dear, let me help you inside." He didn't say, "Why you look cold, let me warm you up with a cup of carrot soup." In all truth, when the rabbit found the caterpillar tied in a frozen knot on his front step that night, he almost shut the door and let it turn into an icicle.	128 147 164 175
The rabbit was not known for his kindness. He was known for his selfishness, his greediness, and his downright rudeness.	189 195
"What else am I going to have to put up with this winter?" the rabbit muttered as he picked up the caterpillar and carried it into his house. "The mice have already come begging for food. The badger already owes me twenty carrots for all the firewood I gave him."	212 227 241 245
The rabbit wrapped the caterpillar in his shabbiest blanket and started to rekindle the fire. It didn't take long for the caterpillar to thaw. When it did, it looked up at the rabbit with gratitude.	258 277 280
"Thank you very much," the caterpillar said. "I thought I'd freeze to death out there."	294 295
"What's your name, fuzzy worm?" asked the rabbit. "I want to know who I have to thank for disturbing my sleep."	310 316
The caterpillar smiled. "All my friends called me Ginger," it said.	327
"What shall I call you?" asked the white rabbit.	336
The caterpillar looked around the rabbit's dreary house, then at the rabbit himself. "I imagine you'll be calling me Ginger before long."	349 358

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Vincent woke up on the morning of May twelfth to clear skies and puffy clouds.	15
Today was his birthday, and he was expecting the best birthday party ever. When he got downstairs, his mother was sitting at the table pouring a cup of tea.	29
"Will you fetch some lemon and sugar for me, Vincent?" she asked. When he returned with her lemon and sugar she said, "What are you going to do today? Are you going to ride your bike into town?"	44
"What game was she playing?" he wondered. She must have remembered today was his birthday. He was her only son!	58
"Off you go then," his mother said after Vincent was finished with his piece of toast. "Have a wonderful bike ride."	74
Vincent was very sad as he walked out to his bike. Every other year his mother had jumped up and given him a hug as soon as he came downstairs on the morning of his birthday. She must have forgotten this year. Vincent was about to climb on his bike, when he noticed there was a note tied to the handlebars.	82
The note said, "A birthday boy as smart as you will soon realize this note is a clue. Follow the dirt road over the hill and ask for your next clue from a man named Bill."	95
Bill Watson was Vincent's next door neighbor, and he lived just down the road and over the hill. Vincent hopped on his bike and pedaled like a madman to Bill's front door. Bill answered the front door with a wry smile. He didn't say a word to Vincent. He simply handed him a slip of paper, and shut the door in his face.	108
Vincent received ten more clues. The clues took him all over the neighborhood. The last clue told Vincent to return home. When he got there, he wandered into the dark kitchen.	109
"Mom," Vincent called out. "I've got a clue that says I'm supposed to..."	124
Before Vincent could finish what he was about to say, his mother and all of his friends jumped out of the shadows.	130
"Surprise, Vincent!" they shouted. "Happy Birthday!"	146
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A boy named Jonathan Davis lived in a town called Windset. Windset was also	14
home to a group of daring boys. The leader of the group of boys was a grumpy and	32
burly thirteen-year-old boy named Seth. Jonathan didn't hang around with Seth's	45
crowd. Seth and his friends constantly teased and picked on Jonathan.	56
There was only one way to get into Seth's group of friends. It was simple. All	72
you had to do was walk down to the railroad tracks that ran straight through Windset,	88
wait for the train to come roaring along, and place a penny on the tracks. If the train	106
ran over your penny and flattened it, you could join Seth's group of friends.	120
Jonathan thought it sounded so easy, but putting a penny on the train tracks was	135
dangerous business. You must place the penny on the tracks an instant before the	149
train comes thundering by. If you put the penny on too soon, the vibrations caused	164
by the oncoming train would wobble it off the tracks. If you put the penny on too	181
late, you were in danger of getting hit by the train. If you missed putting the penny	198
on the track at the exact moment, you had to wait for the next train.	213
Rumor had it there was always a group of cowardly boys waiting down at the	228
tracks with pennies in their pockets. So far, Seth and his two thug friends, Zach and	244
Rusty, were the only ones brave enough to place a penny on the tracks. They	259
always carried the flattened pieces of copper around in their pockets to prove it.	273
Jonathan was sick and tired of being pushed around by Seth and his friends.	287
Just last week they stole his lunch and his cap and pushed him into a ditch full of	305
slush. Jonathan decided he was going to show them. He'd place a hundred	318
pennies on the tracks.	322
Jonathan angrily walked down to the railroad tracks. He paused when he noticed	335
the group of cowardly boys. Then an idea struck him. Maybe they weren't cowards	349
at all. Maybe Seth and his gang just thought up a dangerous game that no one	365
really wanted to play.	369
"Hey," he called out to the group of boys. "We don't need to prove ourselves to	385
Seth. Let's go to my place for a game of football."	396

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In school, Zachary learned that polar bears lived in the Arctic Circle. The Arctic Circle was very far from Zachary's house, so he figured he would never meet one.	14
Then one evening as Zachary was pulling his sled home from the sliding hill, he came face to face with one.	29
"Oh my stars," Zachary said when he saw the furry white bear. He dropped his sled and stood there, staring at the large polar bear. He knew he should run or do something, but at that moment, he couldn't move.	44
"Oh my stars," he repeated.	50
The polar bear stood up on his hind legs and bellowed at Zachary. Zachary was so frightened, he bellowed back. The polar bear was very tall. He towered over Zachary.	65
"Oh," the bear said stepping back with a clawed paw on his burly chest. "I didn't realize humans could shout so loud. I haven't seen very many humans. May I take a closer look at you?"	82
"Oh my stars," Zachary said.	90
"Oh my stars," the polar bear repeated as he bent to Zachary's level. "What in the world does that mean?" As he spoke, the polar bear pushed back Zachary's cap, touched his hair, and poked at his ears.	95
"Human's have very tiny ears," he told Zachary. "They aren't covered with fur or anything. May I try this on?" the polar bear asked as he pulled off Zachary's cap and stretched it over his own head. The polar bear got it on, but it only covered one of his ears.	110
"Well, that's neat," the polar bear said as he put the cap back on Zachary's head.	124
"Hey," he said looking at Zachary's sled. "What's that?"	125
Zachary couldn't answer the polar bear. He could only stare.	141
"No, don't tell me," the polar bear said. "I think I know."	156
With more grace than Zachary would have imagined a polar bear could possess, the bear picked up the sled and carried it to the edge of the sliding hill. Then he daintily tucked his tail and climbed onto the sled.	161
"Oh my stars!" the bear cried as he whizzed down the hill.	161

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